

Whom The Lord Loves He Chastens (Part 2)

How God Disciplines His Children

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I am going to begin by telling a story about my daughter. She was three years old at the time. She would not eat her green beans for anything. She sat at the table and clenched her mouth, and would not put a bean in there. I was at my wits end, fairly new in the childrearing experience, so I decided to try some psychology on her. I said to her, "Stacey, those are the best tasting beans that there ever have been, they taste almost like candy." I went on, and I built the story about how great they were, and then I took them from her. I told her that she could not have them because she did not appreciate them. Then you could see the mind cranking away, and she thought about it and thought about it. I kept laying it on thick about how great they were, and I stuck my fork in her beans to eat them, and she burst out crying. She wanted them so badly at that point, and so I gave them back to her, and she finished them off. That was one of the few times that reverse psychology worked on my children.

Quite often, God handles us in a similar way. When we refuse to accept, or be thankful for the things He gives us, He has to take them away from us. We have to learn the hard way.

In my last sermon, we looked at the chastening of the Lord in principle. In this sermon, I hope to show how Hebrews 12:5-11 applies that principle, and how we should apply it to ourselves.

Hebrews 12:5-11 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

What we see is a general picture of how God sanctifies by various things that He does to us. He deals with us in ways that exceed the positive instruction that He gives us in the scriptures. If we do not respond to His written teaching, God will deal with us by chastisement, or through discipline.

The main point of these verses, is that if we do experience this treatment of discipline, it is a proof that we are God's children; but that if we do not, then it raises very serious questions about whether we are God's children or not.

In my last sermon, we considered the reason why God chastises His children, and we came to the conclusion that He does it in order to safeguard us from certain temptations that are always threatening us. There are certain dangers all around us in this physical life and we need to be kept from them. God does His discipline, or His chastening, in order to protect us from those things, and in order to remove us out of them.

For example, there is the danger of pride, self-satisfaction, and smugness; the danger of drifting away and becoming worldly, without realizing it. These are some of the devastating dangers that are constantly threatening us in this life, and in this world.

On the positive side, we saw that He does it so that He can stimulate within us the growth of the fruit of the Spirit. There may be nothing as good for the promotion of humility, as chastisement. So we need it, if we are to be humble and meek.

The teaching is that God as our Father, in His infinite grace and kindness, disciplines us in this way: "He scourges every son whom He receives," and "Whom the Lord loves He chastens."

Now having laid down that principle last time, we will continue our consideration of Hebrews 12:5-11, because that is not the complete picture.

The chastisement of God does not work automatically. The mere fact that we are chastised, does not mean that of necessity, we will benefit by it. The apostle Paul's point is, that it is only as we understand this teaching concerning chastisement, and apply it to ourselves properly and truly, that we will receive any benefit from it.

This is an important point, because if we think that our sanctification is something that takes place automatically, while we remain in an entirely passive condition, then we are denying the essence of Paul's case, and the whole point of his advice.

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Chastisement does not work automatically; it is not something mechanical. But it means that it is something that is tailored to the individual. God chastises us with a clear goal in mind of what He wants to accomplish in each and every one of us personally.

So God's discipline, which is one of the methods that He uses to sanctify us, is tied in very closely with His inspired written word. Our sanctification is, "by the word of truth," as Christ says in John 17.

It is by the application of the Word in every step, in every aspect. And, that is especially true with regard to this whole issue of chastisement. That means we benefit ultimately "by the word of truth."

James 1:18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

Sanctification is a process; it is incremental. So, sanctification is a matter of maturing into adulthood and no longer being a child, and that is an important principle to remember. It is a matter of growing up—of growing in grace.

There are times when the process is abundant in spiritual growth. The apostle Paul prayed that the Philippian members would abound more and more in godliness, and increase and abound in love; and he told Timothy to help the members to become, "rich in good deeds."

The process of sanctification can also be slow and methodical. Paul tells us, in Romans 5:3-4, that one virtue produces another, "We also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope." Through a process of imitating what is good, we produce more good. One good deed builds on another.

This process of sanctification is also pictured in scripture as pressing on toward a goal, as something that is not yet perfect, but the progression is toward perfection. Since it is a process, God will eventually sanctify a person wholly.

I Thessalonians 5:23-24 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.

We see there that God will do it, but we have our responsibility in helping that process.

There are wrong ways of reacting to chastisement. Chastisement may come in many forms. It may come through circumstances, it may take the form of some financial loss, or as a problem in our business or profession; it may come as anxiety about something that causes us to be troubled, confused and insecure.

It may come through some personal disappointment—the deceit of a friend, or the crashing to the ground of some desperate hope. It may come as an illness.

Now I am not saying that God necessarily produces all these things. Often we bring trouble on ourselves.

By means of circumstance, the things that happen to us in this life and world, in our careers, by the passing or failing of an exam, by health or sickness—by all these things God uses them to bring His purpose for us to pass in our lives. If we are children of God, all these things have significance for us, and we have to learn how to examine them in order to discover what they mean.

In the gospels, the link between sin and illness is made by the account of the healing of the paralytic, in Mark 2:1-12. Rather than attend immediately to the physical problem of the man brought to him, Jesus begins by assuring him that his sins are forgiven. It is no surprise then, that Christ prioritizes spiritual problems over physical problems.

First, He addressed the forgiveness of sins, then the physical affliction. Most people want it the other way around though, and that is what they expect when they pray. Often people put a lot more emphasis on healing the physical ailment than fixing the spiritual problem. Proverbs 18:14, tells us, "The spirit of a man will sustain him in sickness, but who can bear a broken spirit?" From God's perfect perspective, spiritual needs are always more important than physical ones. Jesus said, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?"

In the miracle of the healing of the paralytic, forgiveness came before healing. Jesus said to the paralytic, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you." Jesus offered simple encouragement, with His first words to the paralytic—"Be of good cheer." This comforting support referred directly to the forgiveness of the sufferer's sins.

The paralytic was troubled with sin which had caused, or was causing, this man's suffering. Being forgiven of our sins always brings a deep-felt relief and joy, even if the

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physical affliction has not been healed. So we see in this, that the state of mind is far more important than the physical illness.

We can be of 'good cheer' without being free of physical affliction. David's Psalm 32, regarding the joy of forgiveness is tremendously comforting in this light, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit."

This link between sins and forgiveness is made obvious by James,

James 5:14-15 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

There again we see the priority, how important the spiritual side of things is, compared to those physical afflictions. On the other hand, it is a mistake to assume that there is always a connection between disease and a specific sin in the life of the individual sufferer, as John 9 shows:

John 9:2-3 And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him."

So we see there, a different reason why sickness may come upon a person. It may be that God's will, and God's glory, may have to be shown in the healing.

The Bible does not teach that God sends every thing that every one suffers, but God does chastise us sometimes by means of illness, as well as by those various circumstances.

God may use any of these things, but obviously these things happen to everyone and therefore we should never say that every unwelcome happening is necessarily a chastisement from God.

There are, then, wrong ways of reacting to trials, tribulation and chastisement. One of those ways, as I just mentioned, is blaming God for it.

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So, what are those wrong ways? In Hebrews 12, Paul exposes three wrong ways. The first is despising.

Hebrews 12:5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him."

That is pretty clear, you cannot get more direct than that. That is the first wrong way of regarding chastisement, to look at it casually, to pay no attention to it, to shrug it off as something light, and to not take it very seriously. Often in the midst of a trial we put on a bold face, in a sense, by not allowing it to visibly affect us.

There we are, going along somewhat thoughtlessly, and one of these things happens to us, but instead of weighing and considering it and allowing it to do its work, we try as hard as we can to shake it off and to get rid of it—to laugh it away as if it were nothing and meaningless.

That is probably the most common reaction to trials and tribulations today. We are living in an age when people are afraid of true feeling, or showing their true feeling. There is a hardness that has gripped this society that manifests itself in such forms as divorce, illegitimate pregnancies, abortion, and euthanasia.

In Matthew 19:8, Jesus said to the Pharisees, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so."

Paul warned those who judge harshly,

Romans 2:4-6 "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who 'will render to each one according to his deeds.'"

We are also cautioned by Paul to hold our confidence firmly to the end and not, like the ancient Israelites, harden our hearts as they did in their rebellion in the wilderness.

Hebrews 3:12-15 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart

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of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, while it is said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."

Verse 15 is quoted from Psalm 95:7. The psalmist states that God's people could be cut off from the covenant, if they refused to heed it. Paul warns us, in verse 14, that we become sharers in God's Kingdom only if we persevere to the end. A person cannot despise something, and continue to persevere in it. Perseverance is rooted in confidence in God.

Faith requires perseverance, because the world hates Christians, and works to discourage us from finishing the race. In perseverance, strength comes from God, and God is glorified by it. He notices our perseverance, and rewards us with his compassion and mercy. Perseverance is very, very important in the development of a Christian.

Today, people are always trying to steel their nerves and feelings and they regard it as weak to feel things. We steel ourselves and put on this bold front and the result is that when things do go wrong and when God chastens us, we do not pay any attention to it. Instead of paying attention, we deliberately ignore it, and do not allow it to bother us. That is not persevering, that is despising.

There is very little that is more dangerous to the human mind, especially the converted mind, than to cultivate this impersonal attitude towards life that is so common today. In this society it is so easy to fall into it, and to adopt or fall back into that impersonal attitude.

It is because of this, in great part, that people become loosely attached to husband or wife, loosely attached to their own family. It is because of this that they can walk out on their responsibilities, on their families, on their friends, and on their jobs. If we are not careful, it is possible for that attitude to creep into our lives, and cause us to despise even the chastising of the Lord.

Secondly, another wrong reaction to chastisement is discouragement.

Hebrews 12:5 "...nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him..."

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This reaction is one where a person feels weak and doomed to failure under chastisement; it is the danger of giving up and giving in; it is the danger of feeling hopeless. We can all relate to this somewhat. Something troubling happens to us, and we say, "I just cannot take it anymore."

The heart gives in, we feel overwhelmed and we become completely discouraged. That leads to a tendency to wonder why it happened and, is it fair of God? We grumble and complain, and have a feeling of resentment. That was the condition of the Christians when Paul wrote Hebrews 12.

They thought that when they became part of "The Way," or "The Truth," that they were going to enter into some wonderful life, but look at what is happening to them. Why did these things happen to them? Was it really the right faith that they had? They were suffering persecution. The apostles at that time were being martyred, and things were looking pretty dismal.

The Hebrew Christians were beginning to turn back to what they were familiar with in the world, and their old religion. They were discouraged by trials. They were fainting because God had tried and tested them by their trials. Jeremiah expresses a similar situation in this way,

Lamentations 5:15-17 The joy of our heart has ceased; our dance has turned into mourning. The crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us, for we have sinned! Because of this our heart is faint; because of these things our eyes grow dim.

That kind of despair comes in and we say, "That is enough! It is all too much for me. I cannot go on."

Is that the way we react to the chastening of the Lord, instead of facing it as Paul teaches us to do? Jeremiah states the right approach perfectly:

Jeremiah 10:23-24 O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps. O Lord, correct me, but with justice; not in Your anger, lest You bring me to nothing.

Maturity is seen in the person who can take correction without letting it destroy him.

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Look at what God promises, through Isaiah, to those who wait on Him with humility and patience. They will mount up with wings like eagles.

Isaiah 40:27-31 Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel: "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my just claim is passed over by my God"? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, The Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

This is a very encouraging passage. Verse 31, is not implying inactivity, or a lack of personal exertion. Our hope of aid and salvation in God requires a faith that is as consistent in severe trials, as it is in everyday life. No one can wait on God in the right way, who does not use what God has already given him to work out his own salvation.

To wait on God without making any effort to gain his help, is to tempt Him. To expect miraculous intervention without effort on our part is unfounded, and will end in disappointment.

The farmer, who would wait for God to plow and sow his fields, would not only be disappointed, but would be guilty of provoking God. And so, the man who waits for God to do what he should do himself, will not only be disappointed, but will provoke God's displeasure.

Here is an interesting point about the "wings like eagles," in verse 31:

Anciently, it was observed that the eagle would plunge itself into the sea and cast off its old feathers, and new feathers were encouraged to grow. Because of this it was believed that the eagle was able to live longer, often to a hundred years. At the end of its life it would throw itself in the sea, and die. In light of this, the Septuagint renders this passage, "They shall put forth fresh feathers like eagles."

What we see is a renewal in a sense. So a hidden meaning, in verse 31, may be that those who actively and patiently persevere on the faith and hope of God, are

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strengthened by Him, and through the stripping off of old character flaws, are strengthened to face life with soaring eagerness.

The third wrong reaction to chastisement that Paul gave is bitterness.

Hebrews 12:15 "Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled."

Some people react to the trials, troubles and chastisement of life by becoming bitter. It is so sad to watch the effect of trials and troubles on the lives of some people who, before hard times came upon them, seemed to be very nice and friendly, but when these things happen they become bitter, self-centered, difficult, and inward. They become difficult even with people who try to help them, and who are anxious to help them. They turn in on themselves and they feel that the whole world is against them. You cannot help them, no matter what you do. The bitterness enters into their heart and mind. It appears in their faces and in their appearance. A complete change seems to take place, and it is not a good change.

We often unconsciously proclaim what we are, by the way that we react to what happens to us. These things test us, they test us to the very depths of our being, and they show whether we are truly children of God or not. Those who are not children of God are generally made bitter by hardships.

Sometimes, temporarily, even the children of God may be affected in this way, and we need to be cautioned against this reaction to God's chastisement and trouble—sometimes we need to be warned against a root of bitterness springing up.

If we are guilty of any one of these three dangers or reactions—of despising, of discouragement, or of bitterness—the things that happen to us will not help us. Even the chastisements of God will not do us any good if that is the way we react. If we shrug it off, if we faint under it, if we become bitter because of it, it will not benefit us.

We have looked at the wrong way to react to God's chastisement, so what is the right way to receive chastisement or discipline from God?

Hebrews 12:5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;

The first thing Paul tells us is that we have to learn to conduct ourselves as sons and not as infants. This is an important distinction at this point, because the King James Version used the wrong word here, in verse 5, "And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children." (KJV)

It should be, as it is here in the New King James Version, "And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons." The English Standard Version, and New International Version also have it correct, as do many others.

Now you may be thinking that a son is a child, and that therefore the word "children" is perfectly correct, but Paul actually used a word that should be translated as "son" and is translated as "son" later on.

It is an important distinction. What Paul is really saying is that, "You have forgotten the exhortation that speaks to you as grown men—as sons. You are no longer children, you are no longer babes, and you are no longer infants."

Every babe or infant misunderstands chastisement. When we are children we always think that we are being dealt with harshly, that it is unfair of our parent, and that we do not deserve it. That is the child's reaction, and spiritually, some of us remain children.

But Paul says, "Now remember that you are not children. You are men; you are sons; and you are adults." And his exhortation is, "Pull yourself together; do not behave like a child."

Notice the way that the scriptures approach this: "You are men. Okay then, stop fainting, stop whimpering and crying, stop acting like a child and sulking. You say you are men, but you still act like babies, by behaving in this way."

What are we to do, then, since we are men?

Let me qualify something. In this context Paul is speaking figuratively and spiritually of "men," which means women in the church are included. We could easily insert "girls," "daughters," and "women."

In verse 5, we are given a number of exhortations. Paul begins with a negative, in the form of a rebuke. He says, "You have forgotten the exhortation."

So, obviously, the right thing to do is to remember the word exhortation.

What Paul is saying, in effect, "Here you are, you Hebrew Christians, and all others like you, you are falling into these traps, but you are entirely without excuse. If the Gentile Christians did that, there would be some excuse; but there is no excuse for you. You have the Old Testament. If you only read the Book of Proverbs alone, and really considered it and applied it, you would never react the way you do."

"Remember the word of exhortation."

Now, applying that to ourselves, we can take it that anytime anything of a trying nature happens to us, we are never just to look at the thing in and of itself. As Christians, we have to take everything, and put it immediately into the context of the Bible.

"Remember the word of exhortation."

That is one of the great differences between the non-Christian and the Christian. When anything goes wrong in the life of the non-Christian, what has he to fall back on? He has nothing but worldly wisdom, and the way that the world reacts, and that does not help.

But, we are in an entirely different position. We have the wisdom of the inspired written word of God—the Bible—and we weigh everything against its context to help put things in the right perspective. We do not react to events as the world does. We ask ourselves, "What do the Scriptures say about this?"

"Remember the word of exhortation."

Are we ever guilty of acting as the world does, and not as Christians? Sadly sometimes we do, but it is only temporary. We have to remember that we are adults, that we are sons of God, that we have God's Word; and we have to put everything, whatever it may be, in the context of God's Word.

The next part of what Paul is exhorting, is also found in Hebrews 12:5, "And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons."

We must listen to, and follow, the advice of the Word of God. The word "speaks" is not wrong, but it is not quite strong enough. A better translation would be, "You have forgotten the exhortation which reasons with you as sons." Or, "Which explains to you," or "That you meditate and contemplate it."

The word of God does not only give us comfort, it also always gives us advice. People

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who read the scriptures in a purely sentimental way, are cutting themselves short. They are in trouble, and they do not know what to do. They decide to read the psalms because it is so soothing. "The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want." And, there is no doubt, that it is always good to read the Bible.

But they make it a kind of incantation sometimes, and they take the psalms as another person takes a drug. That is an incomplete way to read the scriptures. The word of exhortation reasons with us, it advises us. So we should follow the logic of it, and be intelligent in our reading of them. They are not merely meant to give general comfort and soothing, we are to follow the advice, and act on the advice.

We have to let God, through the scriptures, give the advice as we reason through it. God wants people who think and analyze; He wants His children to be able to apply in their lives what they learn from God's truth. So that we can teach it to others, and that we can rule in the millennium.

The next step obviously is, "What is the advice?" We have already touched on this so let me summarize briefly. The great advice is that it is God who is doing it to us, because we are His children. Paul puts it several ways here, in Hebrews 12, but the clearest is in verses 9 and 10.

Hebrews 12:9-10 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.

God is our spiritual Father. He is the Father of the new life that is in us, not the earthly, not the fleshly life any longer, but the spiritual. So it is God doing this to us, and He is doing it for our good because we are His children. So that is the advice, and the truth, that we have to comprehend.

So we do not merely react in general, we do not faint; we do not try to shrug it off. Our whole attitude is changed. It is essential that we follow the advice and the reasoning, with respect to the way that God deals with us.

Hebrews 12:11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

The secret is in this phrase, "trained by it." The only people who are going to receive benefit from the treatment, Paul says, are those who carry out the exercise—those who are exercised, those who submit to God's treatment.

If we shrug it off, the treatment will not do us any good; if we faint under it, it will not do us any good; if we become bitter, it will not do us any good. It only does us good if we submit to the process.

So, what is the process? Paul tells us that God is going to do these things to us by putting us into a fitness center. That is the original meaning of the word that is translated as "exercised," in the King James Version, and "trained" in the New King James Version. What a wonderfully clear picture that begins to form for us.

The original Greek root word used here for "exercised," or "trained" is the word from which we get our English word 'gymnasium.' It is a word that signifies, "being stripped naked." God feels like He needs to start from scratch, and we have to agree with Him on that. So the picture that we have here, is of ourselves being taken into a gymnasium and there we are told to strip. Just the sheer thought of that makes us all very uncomfortable.

I saw a movie years and years ago, regarding when they first began the Olympics in the modern era. They just gave the written instructions to the athletes, and sent them on their way to prepare for it. So there they were with the crowd in the stands, and the athletes came running out. There were gasps in the audience. The athletes were stark naked. They had followed everything to the letter of the original Olympics. That was the way they were done back then. I do not think that any Christians would go in them.

Why are we told to strip? This is for two main reasons. Obviously, the first is so we can go through the exercises and the training, unhindered by our clothing. (Please do not take this literally.)

Hebrews 12:1 "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us."

But there is another reason why we should be stripped. We do not go into that gymnasium on our own to take our training exercises. The Instructor takes us in, and the Instructor looks at us and examines us. He is looking at us to see if there is balance

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and symmetry in our physical form.

The Greeks were very interested in this. They were very comprehensive about the culture of the body, and the symmetry of the physical proportions.

I found an interesting article that deals with this somewhat. It is entitled, *Why is Symmetry Important?* It was by Mark Thompson, a medical and chiropractic doctor with experience in treating over 10,000 personal, accident and athletic injuries, and he writes:

Symmetry is essential for a body to function correctly and avoid injury. When a body is held out of symmetry for months or years, the stresses associated with weight and movement are directed unevenly and thus accumulate in certain joints and soft tissues. Eventually these stresses will create uneven wear on some joint surfaces and the associated muscle contractions will start to limit the flow of blood and the drainage of waste products from the area.

Most injuries sustained by performers occur in these areas of predisposition. Unaware of their mal-alignments and the stresses they create, most performers constantly accumulate predispositions such that injury is simply a matter of time. Unaware of these asymmetries, they also constantly battle against inefficiencies of movement; and therefore limitations in their physical and mental performance.

To conserve energy, most forms of human movement are rhythmical. The body has large amounts of elastic tissue imbedded into the end range of each joint, so that one side of a rhythmical movement can bounce into the next and thus minimize energy expenditure. [At maximal efficiency a human body when walking can reuse over 90% of the energy of one stride for the next.]

But to properly make use of this elastic tissue, the body has to be able to access its full range of movement, i.e. it has to be flexible. When the body is in correct alignment, the muscles become more relaxed and movement becomes more fluid. The joints are thus able to move to their full potential and the elastic recoil mechanism is properly utilized.

Now back to our discipline process.

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So the Instructor, and we all know that is Jesus Christ, strips us in order to see where a little extra exercise is needed to bring up a specific group of muscles, or to correct a defective stance or posture. That is the picture that is presented here, by Paul. We are in a gymnasium of Christian living, a training center, with the Instructor looking on, telling us what to do, and putting us through the exercises. When you look at your trials and tribulations, and injuries like that, you only come out of it looking at it positively, and with a certain amount of joy at what God is forming in you.

We can look at this picture in two different ways. We can think of it simply in terms of a man who needs to be exercised. He has been neglecting his body, so the Instructor takes him, and puts him through his exercises so that he can become a fine specimen of manhood.

But there is also another perspective of the picture that is suggested by the context.

Hebrews 12:12-13 Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

Looking at the context here, we get the sense that there is also a picture of a person suffering from some kind of joint disease. We notice here that the knees are feeble, and that there is lameness. This person has become somewhat diseased, troubled in the joints; and when that is the case you generally find that not only is the knee itself weak, but the muscles around it have become flabby.

So we see here an accurate picture of what is called physiotherapy. More than just the disease in the joint has to be treated; the patient has to be put through various exercises and movements, as well. Massage alone is not enough. The patient also has to do his part in making active movements.

This Instructor is putting us through certain exercises and training in this spiritual gymnasium. He has stripped us, and He is examining us. He knows exactly what we need. Now all we have to do is submit to Him, and do exactly what He tells us, just as we would if we had a physical trainer putting us through physical exercises. We have to listen to the Instructor, go through the exercises, and if we do this, it will give us the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

What does all this mean? The first thing we have to do is to examine ourselves, or submit ourselves to the examination of God's Word. The moment something seemingly

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negative happens to us, we have to say to ourselves, "I am in the gymnasium, and I am working out. Something must be wrong, because I feel pain. Where and what is the problem?" That is the way we, as Christians, should always react to any one of these things that happen to us in our lives; whether it is: an illness, an accident, a failure, or a disappointment, it does not matter what it is.

On the basis of this principle, the first thing we should say to ourselves is, "Why has this happened to me, have I been going astray somewhere?"

All too often people try to blame Satan for their trials, and that may be the case sometimes. He certainly takes advantage of our weaknesses. But people often tend to shrug off any short-comings of their own, and put all the blame on Satan, or even on God, as if they feel lily-white themselves. That is a very destructive view to take, because it relinquishes personal responsibility to someone else, when often the problem began by our own doing.

James 1:12-15 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God;" for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

That is a process, but it is not the process that we want to be in. We want to be in the process of sanctification. From the beginning of man's history it has been man's first instinct to blame others for his own sin. He has excelled as an expert in evasion of responsibility. James warns us not to fall into this trap. In effect, he sees the natural man saying that his conduct is as it is, because God made him as he is.

James knows that what is responsible for sin is man's own evil desire. Sin would not be able to exist in man if there is nothing in man to appeal to. Desire is something that can be encouraged, or overcome. It can be controlled and even eliminated if it is dealt with immediately, with God's help. God has given us His Holy Spirit, that great and awesome power, to deal with these things.

It is the unexercised mind, and the uncommitted heart, that are vulnerable. When this is the case it is necessary for the Instructor to use hardship or affliction, to set us on course.

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Read Psalm 119, and you will find the psalmist says, "It was good for me that I have been afflicted," and, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I have kept Your word.

Psalm 119:65-71 You have dealt well with Your servant, O LORD, according to Your word. Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe Your commandments. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word. You are good, and do good; teach me Your statutes. The proud have forged a lie against me, but I will keep Your precepts with my whole heart. Their heart is as fat as grease, but I delight in Your law. It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes.

He says there, "the heart is as fat as grease." That is what actually happens to the heart when a person becomes extremely overweight. The heart is actually so surrounded by fat that it suffocates the organ.

The person did not realize that he had slipped away, and neither do we sometimes. So we should always examine ourselves first, and ask, "Have I been negligent in my spiritual life, have I been forgetting God, have I become somewhat self-satisfied, have I sinned, have I done anything wrong? Why am I afflicted in this way, have I gone astray?" When we examine ourselves, we try to discover the cause, and we do it thoroughly.

Next, we have to acknowledge our sin and confess it to God. If we find the sin, if we find the fault, if we find slackness or anything that is wrong or unworthy, we have to deal with it right away, and confess it honestly and completely to God. We do not go into the booth and confess it to the Catholic priest, we confess it first to God. And if necessary, it may need to be confessed to another individual, who we may have wronged or something of that sort. Confessing it to God is a vital part of the exercises, and we will not get well, or get in good spiritual shape, until we face it head on.

Dealing with it may also involve going to somebody else, it may mean apologizing, and it may mean confessing something. It does not always require this, but often it does.

Listen to the voice of the Instructor in the training center—the gymnasium—the voice of God; as we examine ourselves we have to say, "I will change whatever is necessary, whatever the cost." We have to perform the exercise in detail. That means confessing and acknowledging the fault, the failure, the sin against God.

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What next? Well having done that, is a kind of loosening-up process; we now begin to do positive exercises.

Hebrews 12:12 Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees.

This is Paul's way of telling us to pull ourselves together, to brace ourselves, to stand erect, to tone ourselves up. This illustration of the joints fits perfectly at this point. Anyone who has ever had rheumatism or arthritis, in any shape or form, knows that instinctively we all tend to nurse and protect painful parts. If I have a pain in my knee, I try not to bend it. We protect it. We shield the painful parts. And, we do exactly the same thing spiritually. Paul exhorts us, in verse 12, to stop nursing our painful joints! Movement is the best thing for them at a certain stage.

"Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees."

But we often say in effect, "I do not have the strength or the power to do it." The Instructor replies, "Lift them up, stand up straight, and be ready to move; the more you move the better it will be." That Instructor is talking about action, doing something in our own lives.

This is something that is literally true on the physical level, and you will find that you will always be given that instruction by one who knows His business. Keep moving, do not let yourself get stiff, keep the joints moving; keep them as flexible as you can. Walk it off!

And this is equally true, in the spiritual realm. We have all seen people who, when trials come, adopt a kind of pose. They are feeling sorry for themselves, and they want everybody else to feel sorry for them. Paul says in effect, "Get out of that pose, shake it off, lift up the hands that hang down, straighten the feeble knees, and hold yourself up. Realize you are a man, pull yourself together."

This is the time to do this, not at the beginning of this whole process. We do it after we have received instruction, and after we have gone through the loosening up phase, when we know what to do, or where to go.

What else should we do?

Hebrew 12:13 And make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame

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may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

Make straight paths for yourself. Why? The answer is reasonable. If the path is not smooth and straight the diseased joint may be dislocated, but if you make a straight and flat road for the lame to walk along, it will help him to be healed. So we see the importance of the straight road. What does it mean spiritually? It means that, having done all we have considered, we have to say to ourselves, "I have gone astray; I have to come back to the straight and narrow road." So we map out again the way of holiness, we come back to the highway of God, we realize once more, the need of discipline, we decide to stop doing certain things, and we make a straight path for our feet.

And then, as we walk again along this road of holiness, we find that our feeble knees are being strengthened, and the whole of our system is braced up and stimulated as by an energizer. That energizer is the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 12:14 Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.

Again, this word "follow" in the King James Version, is not strong enough. What Paul actually said was, "Pursue," as in the New King James Version. "Pursue peace," and "Pursue holiness," or even more strongly, he says, "Hunt" for peace, and, "Hunt for holiness." The English Standard Version, has "strive,"—"Strive for peace," and "strive for holiness." It all adds up to a lot of work, and a lot of perseverance. Paul tells us to pursue it, to hunt for, to strive for peace and holiness with all our might, and for peace with other people. We are to strive to be holy, and to be like God.

Those are the exercises that God puts us through in the gymnasium; that is a major part of the process of making us truly His children. He treats us as His precious children.

For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields 'righteousness' to those who have been trained by it. The persevering Christian does not think only of his present reaction, but considers its ultimate benefit.

As we read earlier, Hebrews 12:11 contains a specific promise for persevering through it, "Nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness." It all takes time. Fruit does not appear as soon as the tree is planted. If life's adversities and God's discipline produce both inward peace and righteousness, we cannot possibly have

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suffered in vain, it has all been for our benefit.

Sanctified conduct is pictured as fruit that is produced by a renewed nature. Sanctification is an equipping with everything good to do God's will; and God will complete this process in us.

Do not worry about the pain; keep on moving those stiff muscles and you will find that they will soon become flexible. Keep learning and exercising patient endurance because, "Afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness."

The more we are put through this training in the gymnasium the better, because God is preparing us, not only for rulership, but for service in His kingdom. Physical exercises are only for a while, and discipline by our earthly parents is for only a few years; but our short life in this world is a preparation for eternity.

Remember the One to whom we are going, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." If we want to see God, we had better do the exercises in the gymnasium very thoroughly.

If you and I do not pay attention to this treatment that God is giving us, it means that we do not realize who we are, or it means that we are not truly children of God. If we really want to be in God's kingdom we have to submit and do exactly what He tells us, because He is putting us through all this treatment to promote holiness. It is all for our benefit so we may become sharers and partakers of His own holiness. It is not our holiness, but it is His, that is attributed to us.

Finally, and beyond all else for our encouragement, look at the One who subjected Himself to it all, though He did not have to, "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame."

He knows what it means to be the Son of God, the Child of God. It means to do God's will!

He fell on His face and said, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." He endured it all for the joy that was laid before Him, and for our salvation.

So when you may feel that the chastisement, and the discipline is too much, and that it is too painful, look to Christ, keep looking at Him and follow Him.

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And as certainly as we do, we will find that this pain, that is temporary in the whole scheme of things, will eventually produce fruit, even in this life and world, and still more in the Kingdom.

To know that we are in God's hands, and that He so loves us, and is so determined to bring us to holiness and into His kingdom, gives us hope beyond anything earthly. Take the exercises, hurry to the gymnasium, do what He tells you, examine yourself, practice it all whatever the cost, however great the pain, and enter into the joy of the Lord.

James 1:2-4 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.