

Study 13: Chapter 12

The writer now focuses the attention of the readers on Jesus – *keep your eyes on Jesus* (12:2). The great cloud of witnesses have given us the example of faithfulness that is not just embraced by their lives - it is their lives.

The Hebrews must not slip back, for that would subvert the perfect sacrifice of Christ. The way forward is to keep focused on Jesus.

What does the writer call the Hebrews (and us!) to do?

Why and how does God discipline us?

So, just how does God discipline us?

What should our reaction be to God's discipline?

How should we interact with other people?

How is christian living contrasted with Jewish life?

Because of all these things, what should we do?

Homework:

Read the notes, as a review of the study.

- *What are some of the practical ways that we can help others?*
- *What can we do to allow others to help us?*
- *When have you “stepped out in faith” and allowed God's discipline to work in your life?*

Read Chapter 13 in preparation for next week.

Study Notes for: Study 13 – Chapter 12

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The Hebrews must not slip back, for that would subvert the perfect sacrifice of Christ. The way forward is to keep focused on Jesus.

What does the writer call the Hebrews (and us!) to do?

“...let us run with patience the race that is set before us,...” We cannot just sit around on the side bench and watch the game. We have to be a part of it – we have to run. That is one of the major points that he has just made with the great cloud of witnesses – they were all people of action. But not only must we run, but we must have patience – endurance – we have to keep on keeping on. Once again, this was part of the great examples from Faith’s hall of fame – consider Abraham – his faith was strong and sound, yet he did not receive the promises straight away.

But not just running the race, we need to “...look to Jesus as the author and finisher of our faith...” Throughout the letter, the author has positioned Jesus as the great example, the great prophet, the great King, the great High Priest, and the great intercessor. When we understand the exalted position of Jesus at God’s right hand, and that He existed before the world began this was not some afterthought by God bringing Jesus on the scene – this was the eternal plan formulated before the world began – then we can see how Jesus was the author of our faith. He was there at the beginning. And He is also the perfecter of our faith – it was through Him that our faith is made complete.

The writer has discussed this last point almost as a theme through the book. The Law through Moses was not able to bring perfection – it was not able to make us free from sin. But Jesus did. And just when we think that we are facing hardships and trials, think about what Jesus went through. He endured the cross. Not only the physical suffering of the nails, and the cruelest method of execution, but also the pain and suffering of the night before. All night with no sleep, six trials, flogged (scourged) smitten, spat upon, humiliated. Then there was the mental anguish.

On top of all of this, there was the shame of the cross. A public execution. Even many of his closest friends had turned against Him, betrayed Him, and denied Him. He had to face the suffering alone. And yet, He did it because of the joy that was on the other side. The two thieves who were also crucified that day saw the cross as final. It was the end of their lives. But for Jesus, it was the beginning. He knew that once He had been through that pain and suffering, that His mission that had started before the foundation of the world would be completed. **NOTHING** could prevent the reconciliation of man to God once the work of the cross was completed. Yes, the cross was final, but it was not the end. On the other side lay the joy of eternity with God, and those who find reconciliation to God through Jesus.

And when we think that we are suffering, or have problems and trials, then just look at Jesus.

Why and how does God discipline us?

When we sometimes find that our lives are troubled, we think *why is this happening to me – what have I done wrong?* We need to realise that these things are not (necessarily) because of what we have done. Our growth depends on us “pushing the limits”. Imagine that you grew up in a house and never went outside. You would be very comfortable within your environment, but had never experienced the beauty of the fresh air, felt the grass, or the warmth of the sun, or felt the rain. Even to experience such in our backyard, we need to *go beyond our field of experience – to push the limits*. And then when we are comfortable in the backyard, we need to explore further – to discover the sea, and the mountains – or even the city. If we never ventured anywhere, we would not grow in our knowledge and experience.

In our christian life, we also get into a sheltered existence. We need to get out and find things that are beyond our current experience (*I am **NOT** suggesting that we go beyond the things that are written (1 Cor 4:6) – ie that we go into areas for which we have no authority*) Sometimes the things that we engage in can lead us into sin. Sometimes we just need to grow. But God can see the entire picture, not just the small part that we are engaged in right now. And so, God brings about events in our lives that enable us to grow.

The caring nature and position of God was seen in the lives of the people in Faith’s Hall of Fame, and was also foreshadowed in Prov 3:11-12. The language of Solomon in this passage reflects that of God looking after us and causing us to grow – to move out of our comfort zone.

But the Hebrew writer goes much further than just having God deal with our circumstances occasionally. He says that it is a test whether we truly are the people of God. We might *look* like the people of God, we might *say* that we are His people, and we might even *do* many of the things that they do. ***BUT***, if we are not growing in our relationship with Him, then we are not truly the sons of God, but are illegitimate children pretending to be sons.

Our human fathers guided us (and even occasionally gave us a spanking!) so that we might learn the boundaries in our behaviour. They even took us out of our comfort zone at times (like going into the water to learn to swim), but these things were for our benefit. Yet at the time they might not have seemed like it. We have respect for our human fathers *because* of the discipline that they brought to us, so how much more that of God.

So, just how does God discipline us?

We often think of discipline in terms of punishment and reward. We get rewarded for doing right, and punished for doing wrong. But that is not what is being taught here *at all*. Rather, it is the idea of God guiding us, and controlling events around our lives that allow us to grow, or stop us from doing things that we be to our detriment (particularly our spiritual detriment).

There are a couple of great examples in Acts 16 of how God guided Paul, Silas, Luke and Timothy on the second missionary journey. Firstly they were *forbidden* to preach the word in Asia (16:6), and then they were *not permitted* (hindered) from going into Bithynia. Finally, they get a vision to come to Macedonia – and they “...***concluded*** that the Lord called (them) to preach the gospel unto them.” (16:9). Immediately they then

found a vessel that would take them to where they wanted to go, and they had a straight journey there that only took 2 days (on another occasion it took 5 days).

Here we see how God was influencing the events around the life of Paul, to bring Paul to where God wanted him to be. But Paul had to respond. We also note that they had to stop and figure out what the events could mean – it wasn't given in black-and-white, but there was sufficient information that given their trust in God they could work it out.

In like manner, God controls events in our lives to bring about His good. He can take away some of our possessions to stop us getting too materialistic – but then we can reject the discipline and just go and replace them again anyway. He can cause us to have to move locations – and control the circumstances that lead to that – and test how we respond. He can put us into situation that we don't want to be in, so that we can learn to deal with things (and people) that are beyond our comfort zone. We need to remember that God will not allow us to be tested beyond what we are able to bear (1 Cor 19:13).

And most importantly, we need to learn not to rebel against God's discipline, but learn to grow by it, and become "...*perfect and complete lacking in nothing.*" (Js 1:2-4)

What should our reaction be to God's discipline?

We recognise that we don't enjoy discipline. It can be tiring, and unpleasant. It is after all taking us out of our comfort zone – it makes us uncomfortable. We feel weary. We don't want to go there. Sometimes we just walk away – but that doesn't make us grow – we are still in our comfort zone.

The writer says that we need to hold up our tired hands and our feeble knees. He is no doubt recalling Is 35, however there is a wonderful example of the children of Israel in the battle with the Amalekites at Rephidim (Ex 17:10-13). Whilst Moses held up his hands, Joshua prevailed in the battle. But he grew tired and his hands grew tired, when he lowered his hands the Amalekites prevailed in the battle. Moses could not do this alone. Aaron and Hur brought him a seat to sit on, and then each one held up one of his hands ALL DAY so that the battle was won by Joshua.

When we grow tired in the battle of sin in our lives, and in growing in God's grace, then we need help from others to fight the battles. Christians can't survive in the world alone. We need our brethren to help us. It's like a hot coal trying to survive outside of the fire – it soon grows cold.

We also need to see the discipline of God for what it is. When we face the challenges that take us out of our comfort zone, we should embrace them with joy. This is an opportunity for us to grow in our christian lives. Sometimes it is an opportunity to meet new people, sometimes to learn how to deal with people, and sometimes to challenge the things we believe and practice.

How should we interact with other people?

The writer again confirms that we need to *resolve* the issues that arise. Yes the trials will come, and they may come in the form of problems between ourselves and others – even between ourselves and other brethren! We have a choice – one option is denial, another is to walk away, another is to fight. We must not lose sight of the objective – that of not only attaining heaven ourselves, but also helping others to get there as well.

Importantly, we should also be looking out for difficulties and trials that others are experiencing. How can we help them to attain and maintain a right relationship with God? Aaron and Hur had a choice with Moses. They could have walked away – after all, it was not *their* problem, or they could have criticised him for not doing what he needed to do – after all, he was letting the whole of Israel down! But instead, they *saw* the difficulty that he was having, and then they *did* something to help him.

The Hebrews are exhorted to keep their eyes on Jesus, and keep things in perspective. There are so many sinful activities that could draw us away from God. Some examples are those who would commit fornication, and for a “night of pleasure” lose their place in God’s kingdom. Esau was just like that, because he sold his birthright for one plate of beans. We need to help one another as we continue on to faithfulness.

How is christian living contrasted with Jewish life?

Jesus has already been comprehensively demonstrated to be better than anything under Moses. But the writer now contrasts Mt Siniai with Jesus as a matter of how we live. It was a physical mountain. It could be touched. It represented the God of fire. The people could not keep the words that came forth from the mountain (ie the Law of Moses). The mountain was holy, terrifying, and “removed” from the people, so that even if animals that went near it were to be put to death (Ex 19:13).

But Jesus is not like that. We can be in such a relationship with Him that He knows and feels everything that we are going through. Rather than the terrifying Mt Siniai, we have come to the city of God – the heavenly Jerusalem. Jesus has gone there *to prepare a place for us*. This is where our *spiritual family* is. This is *home*. And the people who share our home are *our brethren* – our brothers and sisters.

Because of all these things, what should we do?

Throughout the chapter, the writer is pointing us back time and again to Jesus:

- Look unto Jesus (vs 2)
- Consider Him (vs3)
- (Jesus has “been there” (vs 3- 5))
- We have come to God through Jesus (vs18-22)
- Jesus the perfect mediator (vs 24)
- Do not refuse Jesus (vs 25)
- Jesus will come again to bring us home (vs 26-27)

If we refuse Jesus, and do not obey what He says, then where are we? We are worse than those under Moses who despised his law. If we do that, then how can there be any escape from the righteous judgement of God – righteous because it is exactly what we deserve. Jesus will come again. His promise is sure and secure.

Therefore we must serve God with all humility, and with reverence.