

SESSION TWENTY-FIVE

SEEING DISCIPLINE AS A POSITIVE BENEFIT

Heb 12:1-13

I. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 11 is a beautiful picture that points us to the mindset we should have . . . *a commitment to enduring by faith*. This was obviously written with the author's audience in view . . . the very ones who were sluggish and immature (5:11-12) and who stood in danger of jeopardizing their eschatological "rest" and opportunity to reign with Christ. Chapter 12, on the other hand, is written to help them understand the value of occasional testings and sufferings (discipline), and to warn them once again of the danger in rejecting the message of this book.

Chapter eleven launched us into the third and final major unit of the book. This unit is developed in four primary sections:

- A. Models of Faith (11:1-40)
- B. The Benefit of Discipline in the Christian Life (12:1-13)
- C. A Final Warning to be Faithful to the New Covenant (12:14-29)
- D. New Covenant "Sacrifices" to Offer Up (13:1-17)

II. THE BENEFIT OF DISCIPLINE IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (12:1-13)

This section is developed in three parts: (1) vv 1-3 with a call to endurance; (2) vv 4-11 with instruction about the positive value of discipline; and (3) vv 12-13 with a call to respond submissively to discipline and help one another.

A. A Call to Endurance (12:1-3)

The author likens the Christian pilgrimage to a race that must be *run with endurance*. This obviously is linked with the closing of ch 10.

10:32-39 - Need expressed for **endurance** to obtain reward (faith required)

11:1-40 - Examples of God's people who "gained approval" by faith and could anticipate the reward/promise

The Old Testament characters of chapter 11 are described as a "great cloud of witnesses surrounding us." The readers should try to imagine that they are in the midst of an "Olympic stadium" (as it were) with these great heroes of the faith sitting in the stands to observe them. These heroes have had their moment on the playing field, and now it is the turn for the present audience. Yet it is not enough to mimic their faith. They may inspire us and set a

good example for us, but the object of our concentration must be Jesus Himself (vs 2). We must fix our eyes on Him, for He is the "leader" and "perfecter" of our faith. The idea of "leader" (ἀρχηγὸν - see 2:10) "suggests that Jesus 'pioneered' the path of faith Christians should follow."¹

In calling our attention to Jesus, the author points out three things to keep in mind:

1. He endured the cross

Jesus also needed endurance, and it was a supreme endurance . . . the cross of Calvary. Endurance is not an easy thing, but our Lord did not exempt Himself from it. In fact, the endurance He had to undergo was far greater than anything you or I may ever be called to undergo. His was not only in the physical realm but the spiritual realm as well (being separated from the Father in order to bear our sin).

2. He despised the shame

In being obedient to the will of the Father, Jesus had to undergo the most shameful treatment imaginable for the Son of God. The author's readers also faced shame and humiliation (especially from the unbelieving Jewish community), yet they are not alone. Jesus did not allow the "shame" to deter Him from what He knew to be right.

3. He sat down at the right hand of God

This is another allusion to Ps 110:1, which the author had pointed out earlier in Heb 10:12-13. This reminds us that Jesus' sacrifice was a perfect atonement for our sins . . . a once and for all accomplishment. To turn back to the Old Covenant and its repeated sacrifice of the Day of Atonement would be futile. This thought of "sitting down" also reminds us that Jesus was faithful to His mission and fully accomplished God's purpose for His life. Henceforth, He is assured of victory and a triumphal destiny as His reward.

Why did Jesus do all this? What motivated Him? The author tells us that it was for "the joy set before Him." The thought of joy reminds us of what was said in Heb 1:8-9 about Messiah's eternal throne, for in His kingdom He shall be anointed with the oil of gladness above His companions. The Apostle Paul also writes of the joy that shall characterize His kingdom:

"For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Rom 14:17)

Indeed, it is a joyous thought to think of redeeming sinners and having them follow you in faith so that they eventually have dominion with you over God's created order. The book of Hebrews has looked forward to the return of Christ and the fulfilling of eschatological salvation (1:14; 9:28). Messiah's kingdom will indeed be a time of great joy, and even Jesus Himself was looking forward to this time. Likewise, each of us should keep in view our

¹Hodges, "Hebrews," *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 810.

share in that eschatological joy!

In Heb 12:3, the author underscores this matter of endurance in the face of trials and hardships by reminding the readers again that Jesus faced the hostility of sinners against Himself. By reflecting on this, the readers will be helped not to "grow weary and lose heart." Notice once again, by the way, that the author's concern is not for their personal salvation from sin, but for being able to faithfully endure . . . not giving up before reaching the end.

B. Instruction about the Positive Value of Discipline (12:4-11)

Beginning with vs 4, the discussion shifts from that which Jesus Christ has undergone to the experiences of the readers. The Christian pilgrimage may at times be quite "rough," but that is not an indication that one is outside the will of God or that pursuing the New Covenant was a mistake. Many of the "rough" experiences of the Christian pilgrimage are part of God's discipline, and they are beneficial if we perceive them appropriately and respond to them obediently.

1. Trials Must Be Put in Perspective (12:4-6)

While it is true that the audience to whom the author wrote had indeed suffered for their Christian faith (10:32-34), their sufferings need to be put into perspective lest they overreact to this matter or draw the wrong conclusions. The author calls two things to their attention to help put their trials into perspective.

- a. In vs 4, the author reminds them that though they had suffered, they had not yet done so to the point of martyrdom. The Lord Jesus had suffered to the point of martyrdom in His pursuit of the will of God, but this audience had not. The mention of "striving against sin" reminds us of the call for mutual encouragement in Heb 3:13 lest anyone "be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."²
- b. In vv 5-6, the author reminds them that *difficulties* in the Christian life are not necessarily out of place. Perhaps the readers were prone to think that if they were really following God's will by adhering to the New Covenant and faith in Jesus, then they would surely be blessed and not suffer. Such is an immature conclusion, for a fundamental spiritual principle is that God *disciplines* His own children out of love. To affirm his point, the author draws upon Proverbs 3:11-12 from the LXX. Though discipline may sometimes be an indication of God's displeasure, it should be seen first and foremost as a *mark of sonship*.

The word "discipline" (Gk παιδεία) has the idea of *child training*. By calling attention to Prov 3:11-12, the author is reminding the readers that troubles often need to be seen as a training ground. Through such experiences, we learn the kind of lessons that help us to move ahead and mature in the Christian life.

² Lane thinks that "sin" speaks of the hostile opposition by sinners. However, the following context focuses on our lack of righteousness and holiness.

Submission to such experiences not only leads to maturity, but (since faith and obedience are involved in true submission) to eventual reward as well.

2. Discipline is a Good Sign (12:7-8)

- a. In vs 7, the author reminds his readers that "it is for discipline that you endure" (εἰς παιδείαν ὑπομένετε). Here the author shows a relationship between "endurance" and "discipline." The value of enduring is the discipline we receive, i.e., the training. If we give up and do not endure, we will miss out on the discipline-training that we so desperately need.
- b. Discipline is a mark of sonship, and need not be taken negatively. Discipline may or may not be related to sin in our lives. The purpose of discipline is "training," but this is not always brought on by sin. On the other hand, sin in our lives may bring on times of "instruction" for us so that we will learn to obey God. Whatever the occasion, discipline is something that all God's sons are expected to become participant's in (μέτοχοι). The play on the word μέτοχοι reminds us that if we are to be μέτοχοι of Jesus and His future kingdom, we must be willing to also become μέτοχοι of discipline.

In the Old Testament, God brought discipline for disobedience (this was called the "curses" in Deut 28–29). According to Lev 26:14, God took the people through various *levels* of discipline. Initially, his discipline was mild (e.g., withholding rain), but if that did not produce the desired effect, then a harsher discipline was administered. Eventually (if they persisted in disobedience), He would even remove them from the promised land altogether and scatter them among the gentile nations. We who are under the New Covenant should expect God to work in a similar way with us.

3. Appreciation of the Benefits of Discipline (12:9-11)

Earthly fathers gave us discipline, and we received that without losing respect for them. How much more should we do so in regard to our Heavenly Father. Furthermore, they were not perfect in their administration of discipline, whereas the Heavenly Father is. All His discipline is perfectly administered, and with a particular goal in mind: "that we may share His holiness."

Application: The *attitude* we need when we discern that we are under discipline is to think "God, help me to learn" (not just get out of it). Cf. Jam 1:2ff.

Any athlete knows that you have to be willing to accept some pain in order to excel in sports. You pay a price in terms of pain and grueling workouts so that you can become faster, stronger, etc. But eventually this pays off. The same principle is true in the spiritual realm: we tolerate the short-term pain for gaining the long-term benefit. In this case, however, the long-term gain is the sharing in His holiness and gaining "the peaceful fruit of righteousness." This may be what the author means by "live" in verse

nine.

C. The Call to Respond Submissively to Discipline and Help One Another (12:12-13)

The word "Therefore" (Διὸ) need not be regarded as a "major divider" (i.e., starting a new major section). Note the use of this in 11:16, 12:28, and 13:12. This often shows an inference derived from what preceded. Vv 12-13 seem to be looking at the mutual care and concern New Covenant believers should be giving one another (compare 3:13; 6:9-12; 10:19-25). There will be a temptation to give up under discipline, but mutual encouragement will help. We have a responsibility not just for ourselves, but also for helping others—especially the "sluggish" (recall 5:11 and 6:12).

The mention of weak hands and feeble knees should be understood in light of the opening verses of ch 12 where the metaphor of an athletic race was used to depict the Christian pilgrimage. Lane (2:426) explains,

"The thought of training through disciplinary sufferings in v 11 suggested the metaphor of an athletic contest requiring flexed arms and strong knees. The members of the house church, however, are characterized by listless arms and weakened knees. The appropriate response to divine discipline is a renewed resolve to engage in a demanding contest. The necessity for endurance is clearly implied in the pastoral directive to ready themselves for the contest, bracing their drooping hands and weakened knees. They must keep on running, moving straight toward the goal without wavering. The appeal is ultimately for the community to endure in the struggle, with a genuine concern for the weakest of their number."

Application: How easy it is in working in team situations to become frustrated and irritated at those who "lag behind" or who may be a drag on the rest. What differentiates the Christian race is that the objective is not on being an *individual winner*. In this race, we must be concerned to see that all our brothers and sisters cross the finish line successfully!

1. Vs 12 seems to be an allusion to Isa 35:3. Notice that the order of terms is reversed and that the position of the verb is changed from the beginning of the sentence to the end.

Heb 12:12 Drawn From Isa 35:3

Verb	Isa 35:3 - ἰσχύσατε, χεῖρες ἀνειμέναι καὶ γόνατα παραλελυμένα	Verb
	“Strengthen the hands that have gone slack and the weakened knees”	
	Heb 12:12 - τὰς παρειμένας χεῖρας καὶ τὰ παραλελυμένα γόνατα ἀνορθώσατε	
	“Strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble”	

The context of Isa 35 is the depiction of millennial blessing and restoration. In 32:1, we are told that King Messiah will rule righteously, whereas in ch 34 God executes judgment upon the nations. Isa 35:3-4 are meant to be words of encouragement, just as they are in Heb 12:12. In Isa 35:3-4, the encouragement is offered in light of "the eschatological salvation" that will follow the Lord's "day of vengeance" (34:8):

Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble.
 Say to those with anxious heart,
 "Take courage, fear not.
 Behold, your God will come with *vengeance*;
 The recompense of God will come,
 But He will save you."

2. Vs 13 may be an allusion to Prov 4:26. If so, we seem to have once again a deliberate reversal of terms, though the verb ποιέω remains in the center.

Heb 12:13 Drawn From Prov 4:26

Prov 4:26 - ὀρθὰς τροχιάς ποιῆι σοῖς ποσὶν καὶ τὰς ὁδοὺς σου κατεύθυνε
 “~~Watch the path of your feet, and all your ways will be established~~”

Heb 12:13 - καὶ τροχιάς ὀρθὰς ποιῆῖτε τοῖς ποσὶν ὑμῶν
 “and make straight paths for your feet”

The context of Prov 4:25-27 deals with a single-mindedness of purpose in remaining committed to the will and way of the Lord. Likewise, we must not swerve from the track of faithfulness, if we are to finish our race well! In so doing, we help the "lame" (the weak and sluggish brethren) to not be further weakened. Instead, they can even be "healed" (moving on to maturity and enduring by faith).