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Sermon Notes

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The Lord Disciplines Those He Loves

Hebrews 12:4-11

I. Our Struggle Against Sin

A. The “Struggle” is a Bitter Warfare

1. Two Greek words give a sense of this bitter warfare with sin
2. “Struggle” = Greek word from which we get “antagonist” ...powerful word, a struggle to the death

John Owen, the great Puritan theologian, likened it to a wrestling match with a poisonous snake... imagine wrestling with a King Cobra, and the snake is long and powerful and hissing and snapping at you... it wants to kill you

Owen: “Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you!!”

3. Other word “resist” = to take one’s stand against; picture the Alamo, or Gandalf on the bridge of Kazad-Dum saying to the demonic Balrog, “You shall not pass!” The French slogan at Verdun in WWI: “None shall pass!!”
4. Biblically: David’s “Mighty Men”

2 Samuel 23:11-12 Next to him was Shammah son of Agee the Hararite. When the Philistines banded together at a place where there was a field full of lentils, Israel's troops fled from them. ¹² But Shammah took his stand in the middle of the field. He defended it and struck the Philistines down, and the LORD brought about a great victory.

B. The Enemy: SIN

1. “In your struggle AGAINST SIN...”

2. A Christian has come to recognize indwelling sin as the most bitter foe of our lives
3. We actually have a TRIO of foes... the world, the flesh and the devil
 - a. We are depicted in Scripture as having a fierce battle against all three
 - b. Satan: the mastermind of the evil in the universe... we have a STRUGGLE against him... we are to RESIST him
 - c. The world: Satan's evil concoction... the alluring mix of enticements to sin and assaults on us so that we do not do righteousness
4. The "sin" the Epistle has been addressing is APOSTASY from Christ... but the apostasy happens by the attacking and deceitful power of sin

Hebrews 3:13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

5. The struggle of Romans 7

Romans 7:15-24 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹ For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do-- this I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. ²¹ ¶ So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²² For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³ but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

- C. This "Struggle" Against Sin is Essential to the Christian Life

1. Non-Christians are “slaves to sin”... they are totally under the sway of the Evil One
2. Thus, while they have freedom to choose how they will sin, they have no power to stop sinning
3. Christians have been liberated forever from the power of sin and never need to sin again
4. BUT the “body of sin” or “body of death” constantly opposes us at every moment
5. A genuine Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit who RELENTLESSLY fights the sin
6. The Spirit DAILY leads the true Christian into battle with the deeds of the flesh

Romans 8:13-14 For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

7. If this warfare is NOT going on, the person is not indwelt by the Holy Spirit... the person is NOT a Christian

D. Not Struggled or Opposed to the Point of Shedding Blood

1. The Author is saying that these Hebrew Christians, despite the fact that they were struggling against sin... AND were being persecuted, were not yet MARTYRS for their faith
2. Also, it points to the fact that our commitment not to sin is LESS THAN THAT OF JESUS

Philippians 2:8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!

3. Jesus would RATHER DIE THAN SIN
 - a. Gethsemane: Great drops of blood flowing down His face

Not my will but yours be done!

- b. Arrest:

How then would the Scripture be fulfilled that say IT MUST HAPPEN IN THIS WAY

4. So also OUR COMMITMENT TO HOLINESS must increase!!

a. The essence of the arduous Christian journey is this:

Luke 9:23-24 Then [Jesus] said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.

b. So we must be trained that we would rather have our blood shed than to sin

II. What Is the Lord's Discipline?

Hebrews 12:5-6 "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶ because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

Hebrews 12:7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?

Hebrews 12:8 If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.

Hebrews 12:9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!

Hebrews 12:10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.

A. Greek word: Paideia... also verb forms, "to train..."

1. Powerful Greek word... well-known in classical Greek for the education given to the young to train them up and prepare them for adulthood

2. It involved instruction and training, but also chastisements and punishments as needed to shape minds and bodies
3. Overarching concept: God's commitment to take you on, train you, shape you, mold you... do whatever is necessary to achieve His final goal for you

Illus. Like an Olympic athlete who hires the toughest coach in the world, one who has trained over twenty other Olympic gold medal winners; this coach is known to be extremely strict, sometimes almost brutal in his training techniques; but the results are obvious... Olympic champion after Olympic champion born from those tough training methods

Perhaps even better, is a DRILL INSTRUCTOR who whips a lax and defeated army into shape by extreme training methods... the legendary "Baron von Steuben" who was recruited by General George Washington to train his army at Valley Forge in the winter of 1778; he was a tough Prussian who helped train the undisciplined and green army into one that could face the British with a better chance of success

The fight that is coming requires the strongest possible training

4. What is that goal??? TOTAL CONFORMITY TO CHRIST... which is to say LIKE HIMSELF... to be made LIKE GOD

Romans 8:28-29 ²⁸ ¶ ***And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*** ²⁹ ***For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.***

5. God's ACTIVE DISCIPLINE of His children is a direct application of the "God causes everything to work together for good" verse... God is in active control of daily life to shape us into the IMAGE OF HIS SON

B. Here: Not Merely Discipleship... But a Subset of It

1. God is not merely teaching and encouraging and nurturing here as He does generally in discipleship

2. This is speaking of God's DISCIPLINE FOR SIN... harsh things God brings into your life to train you to HATE SIN and TURN AWAY FROM IT

C. Strong Words

1. Context: STRUGGLE AGAINST SIN... RESISTING IT
2. Words used for discipline
 - a. Vs. 5 Chastening: (paideia) already described
 - b. Vs. 5: Rebuke: strong correction for sin... involves showing you your sin and proving that you're guilty of it; related to the word used in Hebrews 11:1

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

- c. Vs.6: the Lord **scourges/punishes/chastises**: Greek word also refers to flogging or whipping... a very strong word, the same word used for what Pilate did to Jesus

God's discipline for sin can be like that kind of a chastisement... it can be quite severe!!

Remember a few weeks ago, when I preached on the Lord's Supper... the Corinthian church was disrespecting the Lord's Supper, even to the point of getting DRUNK at it:

1 Corinthians 11:30 That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.

God actually put some of His children to sleep (death) to discipline the church for sin; others were physically WEAK or SICK

- d. Vs. 11: "painful" not "pleasant":

^{ESV} Hebrews 12:11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant

3. Summing up: the Lord's discipline

D. God's Providential Control Brought to Bear for Our Good

1. God is sovereign over every single tiny detail of our lives

Matthew 10:29-30 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

Proverbs 16:33 The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.

2. Nothing is beyond His notice or power to do with as He sees fit

3. Everything is “fair game”:

a. Physical health: our own or our loved ones

Psalm 32:3-4 my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.

2 Samuel 24:15 So the LORD sent a plague on Israel from that morning until the end of the time designated, and seventy thousand of the people from Dan to Beersheba died.

b. Material goods: our livelihood, our possessions: house, car, clothing, mementoes, electronic devices, luxury items

c. Relationships: friendships, neighbors, co-workers

d. Success: at church, on the job, in school, on the ballfields, in life...

e. ANYTHING YOU PLACE VALUE ON IN THIS WORLD is “fair game” for the Lord’s Discipline

4. Consider the case of Jonah

a. He tries to flee from the Lord’s command to preach to Nineveh

b. God sovereignly controls the wind, the sea, the ship, the sailors, the lot that is cast identifying him, the large fish that swallowed him, the fact that he vomited him up, the plant that grew over him, the worm that chewed the plant, the east wind that scorched him

c. GOD RULES OVER EVERYTHING... He is able to bring pressure to bear on us so that we will repent of sin

5. Sometimes, the discipline may be as simple as His withdrawal from us relationally... He becomes silent, hard to find in prayer; the Christian loses peace and joy, struggles to experience Christ in daily life

Psalm 10:1 Why, O LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?

Psalm 13:1-2 How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? ² How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?

Psalm 22:2 O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent.

E. The Wisdom of God in Applying Discipline

1. God is very wise... He does not overwhelm us as He trains us
2. He is mindful of our weakness and of His purposes toward us

Psalm 103:13-14 As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; ¹⁴ for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

3. Jesus is VERY GENTLE with His loved one

Matthew 12:20 A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory.

4. BUT... He will do whatever is necessary to make us HOLY

III. Two Wrong Reactions to Discipline

A. Making Light of It

1. This means to “think little of it”, “blow it off”, scoff at the concept that the Lord disciplines sin

2. At one level, it means that it never enters your mind... you HAVE FORGOTTEN this whole idea

Hebrews 12:5 And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons

3. So, when hardship or adverse circumstances come into this person's life, it doesn't seem to enter their mind that they might be being disciplined for sin
4. They are acting like practical DEISTS... thinking God has little to do with the ins and outs of every day life; or maybe it's just "bad luck" or you're having a "bad day"
5. Or they think God would never do this kind of thing: HEALTH, WEALTH, PROSPERITY gospel people say God only means to give you blessings; if you have any trouble in your life, it is definitely SATAN who is doing it!!
6. How else do we MAKE LIGHT of the Lord's discipline?
 - a. By being callous concerning it: you grit your teeth and plow your way through the hard times, not reflecting on any sins in your life that may be causing these adverse providences
 - b. By complaining under it and criticizing God: you complain bitterly against the Lord and wonder why He's not protecting you better or why He's making your life so miserable these days; and you never stop to ask, "Lord, are you disciplining me for a sin?"
 - c. By carelessness: you deal lightly with sin or not at all... your only desire is to get back to happy times again, so you deal lightly with your own sin
 - d. Like the false prophets of Jeremiah's days:

Jeremiah 6:14 They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace.

- e. So, these people are disciplined for sin, but they deal quickly and lightly with it and move on

B. Losing Heart Because of It

1. On the other end of the spectrum, some people are CRUSHED IN THEIR SPIRITS by the Lord's discipline
2. They "lose heart"... they become DESPONDENT and DEPRESSED and think God has abandoned them
3. They go too far in dealing with their sin so much so that they forget Jesus' death and blood shed for them and that they are JUSTIFIED BY FAITH
4. They feel God has cast them off because of the sin and can never forgive them again
5. They give up all exertion in the Christian life; they have little energy and little hope; "God has forsaken me because of my sins" they may feel
6. They question whether they really are God's children; they say, "If I were God's child, He would not be treating me like this, so I must not be God's child"
7. Ultimately, they give way to unbelief

IV. The Encouragement of Discipline

A. That "Word of Encouragement"

1. The whole letter is called the same thing

Hebrews 13:22 ¶ Brothers, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written you only a short letter.

2. This is that great Greek word (paraklesis) from which the Counselor (the Holy Spirit) gets His name in John 14... "One called alongside to help"
 - a. It means to "encourage" or to "exhort" or to "warn" or to "rebuke" or to "beg" or to "console"
 - b. The idea is one of earnest love in a caring relationship... and words given to someone in dire need

B. God is Addressed as Sons... and He's Doing it NOW!!

1. This "word of encouragement" comes from Proverbs 3:11
2. Much of the wisdom of Proverbs is given as from a father to a son
3. King Solomon wrote most of them... perhaps he was giving his advice to his son Rehoboam... but God the Holy Spirit inspired him and they were written down as Holy Scripture
4. Scripture is ALIVE and SPEAKING NOW!!!!

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

5. This word of encouragement from Proverbs then comes to us really from the LIVING GOD, our heavenly Father, to us as beloved SONS and DAUGHTERS

C. Simply Put: The Discipline Proves We Are His Children

Hebrews 12:6 the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son

1. The Lord's wise discipline for our sins proves that he LOVES us and that he ACCEPTS us or RECEIVES US as His sons and daughters
2. It is not a mark that He hates us, but rather that He loves us when He spans us for our sins
3. The author reasons at length along this same point

Hebrews 12:7-8 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? ⁸ If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.

- a. By the discipline and training that God gives us as sinners, he is actually showing his love for us
- b. Every true son and daughter is trained by his/her father

c. God is proving that you actually are sons and daughters

i) The word “treating” in verse 7 is a strong word...

ii) God is bringing these things to bear upon you as sons of God

D. The Lord Disciplines EVERY ONE of His Children

“everyone undergoes discipline”

Literally: everyone is a PARTAKER of discipline; God measures it out to each of His children as they need it

1. This is a powerful concept... there is not a single child of God in all of redemptive history that has not been disciplined by God!!
2. “Perfectionism” is completely false!!! We are ALWAYS under need of discipline for indwelling sin
3. The choicest and godliest saints have been disciplined by God... and so also have been the average and below average child of God as well!

E. The Lord Disciplines None of those who are Not His Children

Hebrews 12:8 If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.

1. Everyone sins, and does so every single day
2. When it comes to dealing with sin, the big difference between the children of God and those who are not is that God allows non-Christians to sin more and more and does not interfere but “GIVES THEM OVER” to their sin... in so doing, God is hardening their hearts and they are storing up wrath against themselves
 - a. Three times in Romans 1, it says that God gave them over:

Romans 1:24 ¶ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.

Romans 1:26 ¶ Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts.

Romans 1:28 ¶ Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.

- b. This is the WORST THING GOD CAN POSSIBLY DO to someone while they live on earth
- c. This is the judicial HARDENING of their hearts

Romans 9:18 Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

- d. These people are constantly storing up wrath by their sins

Romans 2:5-6 But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶ God "will give to each person according to what he has done."

- 3. If you are lost, the best thing to do is come to Christ... NOW!!!
- 4. Conversely, the best thing God can do wrt our sins is to INTERFERE and STOP US from sinning!!

F. Our Earthly Fathers Did This... How Much More Our Heavenly Father

Hebrews 12:9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!

Hebrews 12:10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best

G. So... it is INCREDIBLY ENCOURAGING to us to be disciplined by God for sin

1 Corinthians 11:32 When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

V. The Purpose of Discipline

***Hebrews 12:10* God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.**

***Hebrews 12:11* No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.**

- A. Simply Put: God is Carrying out His Plan to Conform Us to Christ
 - 1. Our indwelling sin is the greatest enemy to this pattern
 - 2. God loves us too much to allow sin to run roughshod over our souls
 - 3. Indwelling sin wages war against our souls
 - 4. God desires for us to SHARE IN HIS HOLINESS
- B. God Is Training Us to Fight Our Sin by His Power
- C. God Gives us Time to Crush Sin by His Holy Spirit

***1 Corinthians 9:27* I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.**

***1 Corinthians 11:31* But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.**

- D. God Knows Sometimes He Must Intervene and “Up the Ante”
- E. He Does this Very Wisely

VI. The Proper Response to Discipline

- A. Don't Fall into those Errors: Making Light of the Lord's Discipline or Losing Heart
 - 1. Accept the doctrine that God disciplines every son and daughter
 - 2. Expect to be disciplined by God

3. Don't be a practical deist, thinking the events of your life happen only by chance

B. Submit to Your Heavenly Father

Hebrews 12:9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!

1 Peter 5:6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

C. Be Trained by the Discipline

Hebrews 12:11 it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

1. Allow the discipline to have its way with you... yield to God, submit to what He's doing in your life
2. When adverse circumstances come up in your life, ask God the hard questions:
3. "Lord, are you disciplining me for sin?"

Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

4. If anything comes up in your conscience, repent of that sin... confess it to the Lord
5. Follow the steps of James 4:

James 4:6-10 "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." ⁷ Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

6. Deal seriously with sin... KILL IT powerfully by the Spirit

D. Seek the Harvest of Righteousness and Peace

1. Look to the joy that comes from having that sin crushed and dealt with in your life
2. Think of the peace that comes when you are no longer characterized by selfishness or bitterness or gossip or unforgiveness or lust or greed or idolatry in specific ways
3. God's discipline leads to a much more peaceful and blessed life

E. Fear the Lord's Loving Discipline

1. This is a healthy fear of the Lord that develops
2. His "rod and staff" comfort us... they enable us to walk in paths of righteousness for His name's sake
3. We should fear sin, and what repercussions there will be if we do sin
4. We should trust the loving gentle patience of God... not walking in fear that God's "gonna getcha" every time you mess up; He clearly doesn't