Hebrews 12:1-14 (James Butler Stoney) 87981

Food for the Flock: Volume 7, Discipline (12:1-14)

I PLACE discipline after service, for in the very service itself God makes the servant fit to carry it out. A person is first disciplined for service, and then in the service he is made fit by it for the character of it. God has not servants ready made. He makes them fit for His own service in connection with the race they have to run. The word " chasten" is the same as that used in Ephesians with respect to bringing up the children: it is 'nurture. We attach too much the idea of severity, of retribution, to it.

In service there are three kinds:

1. Moral influence.

2. Works.

3. Gifts.

In moral influence the body is light, and this is a testimony to God. For instance, the wife in 1 Peter 3 the husband to be won without a single word.

The subject before us this evening, discipline, is almost too large a one to grasp; but, as the Lord enables me, I will just point out the principal lines God works in from passages of Scripture.

God has us in hand all through from babyhood. Look at Moses. You get the character of what his life is to be from the very first; when a babe in the ark of bulrushes, we read, "the babe wept." He was a man of sorrows all through his course, and a man peculiarly cared for-an object to God all through. Even when a babe God had a thought about him, and in the same way God never takes His eye off you (I am not speaking of conversion), He has had you in training all through. He has a different line of things for every one, and each of us has been sent into this world for some special mission. It is not a question whether it is great or small; it may be only a flower to shed fragrance; though this is really the greatest of all.

There is nothing higher than moral influence; " the body full of light;" and this, of the highest moral order, is within the compass of all. The apostle Paul speaks of it in Phil. 1 as the very highest thing to attain to: " Christ may be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death." What works are there in death? None, but to be an exhibition of what Christ was.

In Psa. 78 it says: "He chose David also his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance." The great thing to remember is, that every one has to be taught, to be prepared. You do not come forth ready to hand for God's service. Man has not instinct as animals have; he requires to be educated in natural things; and if he has to be educated for common things, how much more for God! how much more does he need to be suited to His hand! And it is not mere education of mind, but the vessel must be made and prepared by God for Himself.

There are two great lines of discipline. The first is scourging-a thorough breakdown. A man will never get on until he gets a thorough breakdown. It is not a question of being true, but of being broken.

Look at Jacob. God wrestles with him, for he is not broken down yet, though he has been twenty years in Syria, and has come back to the land, and now God wrestles with him to break down his will. All of us have to be broken down. It is very happy when it is not because of failure like Peter. He was broken down when he found by failure what a wretched creature he was. Jacob had been twenty years in banishment; he was a deceiver himself, and he was ten times deceived: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

But when he is broken down, he gets the blessing. What a blessed thing! He is fit for blessing now; he was not before. Look at this very active man. When the sun was up that man halted. At the rising of the sun-the very thing that would call out all his latent energies -he has to halt. I am crippled, he says, I cannot go on; I am a crippled man. He is sensible of his own inability. A broken man is a blessed man. It is most acceptable in God's sight. It is not that He likes my suffering, but He makes me suffer in order to bless me. The blessing is more than equivalent to the suffering; much more. Jacob, though he halted, had the right side of the thing. I am crippled, he says, but now you will bless me.

Turn to Gen. 35:8, where there is discipline of another order. We get discipline under different heads. In Gen. 35 the discipline is of the order of Heb. 12 Jacob has at last come to the right spot, Bethel. Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, dies. The last remnant of his mother must go. It is the oak of weeping. There is discipline of this kind now, in order to be more fit for service.

Afterward he loses Rachel and Joseph, the two he cares for most. These two, God says, I take from you, and the result is that his is the most distinguished death-bed we read of in Scripture except Stephen's. He has the threefold blessing, the wonderful combination of being a worshipper; of having no hope as to earth; and of being free to think of others. He says, "As for me Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan." I have not a link to earth. God is his object, and his heart is so free that it can flow out to others. He blessed the children of Joseph, and declared the mind of God for them.

Moses is another interesting case. It took forty years to break him down, though at the start he made a very great sacrifice for the Lord. He was brought up as Pharaoh's son, but he chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." You might say, That man will get no discipline; he does not want it. But no; he thinks he can do the work of the Lord in a human way, and he must get forty years of discipline in the wilderness, and after that he is quite timid about himself, too timid indeed to speak. Now the Lord starts him as His servant, and another kind of discipline comes in; for he is disciplined for a servant and as a servant; the discipline is in the service to fit him for the service; and it continues all through his course; his own family find fault with him; the people murmur against him; one thing after another until at last he dies on mount Pisgah, and does not go into the land at all.

God says, I want to get rid of every shred of the flesh in you. That is the object of discipline. He purges on the principle of " we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus sake." In service you are sure to find some kind of pressure on you. It may be on your body, and often is; or it may be persecution; but you will hardly ever have an interesting field of service before you, unless you are crippled for it. " He purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit."

Look at Jonah the servant of God. First he is a broken man, and then he is a man made fit for God to use. Jonah at first tried to evade God's path; he was afraid of it; and he was brought into the depths of the sea. The thing you are trying to avoid you will fall into. If you strive with God He takes from you what you want to keep. Samson's wife told his secret to save her father's house, and her father's house was burnt. God brought Jonah out, but it is as a man who is sensible of the plight he has brought himself into. People think they learn that when they learn Rom. 7; but long after Romans vii. you may have to learn that you are worth nothing; a dog, like the Syrophenician woman.

Jonah comes up out of the sea, and the Lord says to him: "Arise, go up to Nineveh that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." Is he done with discipline now? No; there is a new kind now: the gourd dies. This is to make him more fit for God's service. The Lord uses it as an occasion to acquaint him with His heart. He says, You felt for that gourd; do you not think I feel for the people? The moment God explains His mind we hear no more of it. Peter was self-confident; he said he would follow the Lord to prison and to death, and he broke down from fear. People break down when they are most self-confident. In the end Peter died for the Lord. What kind of discipline is that? The entire clearance of everything. Stephen was thus disciplined in the very act of dying; those stones, as one has said, liberated him from the last shred of the flesh; and he goes into what Christ's work has won for him.

In Heb. 12 The object of discipline is that we may be partakers of God's holiness. In the Father's discipline we suffer in all circumstances. In the Lord's chastening we suffer in the body; the body is the Lord's. There are two lines of discipline: the first is, that you must be broken before you can serve truly; the second is the discipline which fits you for running the race. There are four kinds of suffering in discipline. The first of these is governmental. For instance, a man suffering in health, on account of his ancestors. In this suffering the person knows it, because he gets sympathy from the Lord. The Jewish remnant suffer because of what their fathers did, and they receive the sympathy of Christ. They inherit the penalties of the nation, and that entitles them to Christ's care, and they participate in the wonderful sympathies of Christ's own heart. A man may suffer governmentally who has a poor weak constitution on account of his ancestors; he may suffer in health, property or the like.

The second kind of suffering is of a painful character. Christ chastens us because of our indifference in calling to mind His death. How do I know that I am suffering for this? I believe that, if we are suffering on account of levity at the Lord's table, there will be a sense of reserve on the Lord's part. Would not a child know if its parent rebuked it? If I suffer for levity at that sacred moment when my heart ought to be occupied with Christ's sufferings on my behalf, I get censure. The Lord has a controversy with me, which He would not have were my suffering governmental, for then I should on the contrary get His sympathy.

The third kind of suffering is for my profit, and then I get God turning that suffering to good account for myself, to help me on in the race. When you get rid of the gourd like Jonah, or of the nurse like Jacob, you get on better. It is God's way to help you in the race.

The fourth is when you are actually suffering in the Lord's service, like Epaphroditus in Phil. 2 " For the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life." You get honors for this: " If any man serve me, him will my Father honor." John in Patmos, Joseph in prison, are instances of this. Here suffering is not for having done anything wrong, and not to enable them to run the race, but simply for serving the Lord. You may get a cold in service or an illness of any kind, and the Lord will use it for an opportunity of making known to you how much He thinks about you; so that instead of its being lost time when you are shut up in your room, you will find it is a time when He will give you communications from Himself which make it worth getting that cold or that illness. Paul, when he was shut up in prison for the Lord's service, was given communications of His mind, and when you are suffering in body for His service you will find that He has communications to give you which will make you praise Him for the suffering.

There is some suffering which is retributive. God never remits what a man deserves, though He may meet him in it. When the thief on the cross is converted, he does not get off the gibbet. He is going to paradise truly, but that does not remove the judgment that is on him here; his legs are broken; it but sends him the quicker to heaven, but still he had to bear it. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." If you expose yourself indifferently to climate you get ill. If you are unkind to a person, some one will be unkind to you: " With what measure ye mete it will be measured to you again." " He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption."

In Heb. 12 The apostle accounts the race as a practical thing. Self-denial is not self-vexation; it is denying yourself the thing that you like. If you would like to say a sharp thing, do not say it; deny yourself. That is the true mark of a person that is broken, denying himself the thing that he likes.

In Peter we read, " Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin: that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God." I have a new study now. Everything that is put aside in the cross I am not to allow in me; the old thing is not to be allowed to work in me; I have a new thing in me, the rose, and that is only fit for the sunlight. What am I to do with the briar? I am not to allow it to grow at all.

When a man is thoroughly broken he never forgets that he is. The way to break in a horse is not to wound his mouth, but to bring a pressure on the nerves, and the whole system yields to the pressure; every nerve is under hand, and he has the sense that he is controlled, not

wounded. To carry this out, I deny the flesh. The flesh would like that, then I will not have it. I "cease from sin." It may be some pet inclination: I should like to go to some place. Shall I gratify it or deny it? Peter gratified his inclination, and the devil was in it. He did not see the devil in it, but he was there. " Stolen waters are sweet." You may say, I was led there providentially; but you may always be afraid of the thing that proposes gratification; the foolish woman proposes something that pleases.

In running a race every single thing of the flesh hinders, and must go. Whether it be a river or a wall, or anything that comes in the way, I must go the road that Christ went, like a dog following his master. Whatever the difficulties of the race may be, I can go through every single thing that opposes me, because He went through it; He has gone before. You are never right in the race if you do not start in this way. Give up everything of self-gratification. I am not occupied with the suffering, I am occupied with a much more wonderful thing, I am going on with divine enthusiasm in this wonderful pathway that is marked out for me.

In running the race that is set before us, there are two things to be laid aside. The first is every weight; the second is sin. The first is outside; the second is inside. Is it any particular sin? No; it is not your besetting sin, but sin is there, ready to come up. It ought not to come up, and therefore God helps us. "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood striving against sin." I have not died yet, and sin is there; it is what is in the flesh.

If you ask, What weight am I to put off? I cannot tell you. Begin to run, and then you will soon find out what clogs you. God keeps us and chastens us all through. It is nurture. He is not hard, He wants us to be partakers of His holiness. How do I know it is this kind of chastening? It is if I am exercised about it. It is " unto them which are exercised thereby." I am looking to the Lord about it. I ask Him, What is this for now? I am exercised as to it, and " Afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness." It is a remarkable passage.

It is because of the. hindrance in me that I get the chastening. I am put in possession of the fruition of righteousness. It may be the nurse to Jacob, or the gourd to Jonah, or Jerusalem to Paul. Whatever it is, it is taken out of the way; and if we are exercised we get the peaceable fruit of righteousness. Jerusalem is gone; Paul's heart was set on it once, but it is gone now, and he longs to depart; his heart is set on Christ; it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

We run the race looking unto Jesus, therefore there must be faith. That is the actual support I have; everything depends on faith. People in the right path have light, plenty of it, but not faith; therefore they turn to human arrangements. Lot was in the right path, and the ten spies, but they had not faith. You may be in the place of light and not have faith, and if so, you will be always attempting to get the clue through the arrangement of circumstances. The man of faith uses circumstances, but is not influenced by them. Exercises makes the heart turn more to God.

The only power in the race is faith. Chapter 11 is not examples of faith, but traits of faith. The heart understands what a wonderful power it is set on. I may have to die on the road, but it only finishes the race for me.

He adds, " Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, my son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him." These are two things very important. I am not to despise the chastening, like a duck in the rain, indifferent to it, braving as it were everything; neither am I to " faint when rebuked of him," like a hen in the rain, which is a miserable object. I am neither to be miserable nor indifferent, but thoughtful and exercised.

The Lord lead our hearts practically to know what it is to be under His hand, and to answer to His desires for us. Amen.

(J. B. S.)

clickbible.org