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## *Conversion of Saul: A Lesson on Suffering, Pt 3*

### **Acts 9:23-31& Hebrews 12:4-13**

**Keywords:** Paul, Conversion, Suffering, Affliction, Discipline, Hebrews 12

**PowerPoint Presentation included:** none

**SermonAudio Blurb:** In this extended series on suffering and trials we explore the nature of God's discipline upon sinning believers. This is often a misunderstood aspect of our relationship to our heavenly Father and yet the bible is replete with examples and instruction regarding it.

#### **I. Introduction.**

- A. Turn to Hebrews 12.
- B. We are focusing upon a key and normal part of life for Christians, that of suffering and struggle.
- C. A good theology of suffering flows from a good theology of both God and Man.
  - 1. The weaker and more vague you understand God to be the less you will understand suffering.
  - 2. You also must remember that mankind is considered weak and transitory due to the power of sin in this age.
    - a. It is written in the book of Job, *"For man is born for trouble, as sparks fly upward."* (Job 5:7).
    - b. Or, *"For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he labors under the sun? Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity"* (Eccl. 2:22-23).
- D. If suffering and hardship is part of this fallen age, what are other ways we might see this as Christians? And more importantly, how should we view and respond to suffering?
  - 1. Discipline from the Lord.
  - 2. Instruction in holiness from the Lord (next sermon).

#### **II. God's hand of discipline.**

- A. Hebrews 12:4-13.

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1. Context is the great cloud of witnesses in chapter 11 who believed God existed and that He rewards those who trust Him. Also, starting in chapter 10 through 12 is a key word—‘endure.’
  
2. The writer now begins to move from the broad image of running the race to the methods used by God to build that endurance in vss 4-13.
  - a. For those who are talking about how tired they are or how hard their lives are, the writer simply brings everything into perspective (4).
    - (1) Notice where he puts the emphasis on. It is not the enduring of insults or hardships. Those are common to all.
    - (2) Rather, it is about striving against sin.
    - (3) Bottom line, he gives little sympathy to you. In fact he chides the readers in the next verse.
  - b. The complaints about enduring as a believer flow from a common source. What is it? It is forgetfulness (5-6).
    - (1) Forgetting and remembering are two things about which the bible speaks much.
    - (2) In Deuteronomy we find God telling Israel, “Do not forget YHWH who brought you out of Egypt.” “Beware you don’t forget YHWH by not keeping His commandments.”
    - (3) And so, in vss 5-6 we have the writer quoting out of Proverbs these words of exhortation.
    - (4) Because these are proverbs they are actually parallelisms which help us when we seek to understand them.

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- (a) The first is simply the admonition to not reject God's discipline. This is explained in two different ways:
  - i) By treating it lightly.
  - ii) The second is fainting or becoming worn out and giving up.
- (b) The second proverb gives the rationale behind the first one. In essence the discipline is for your good.
  - i) God loves you as His child and therefore He disciplines you.
  - ii) The reason He disciplines you is because He has welcomed/received you into His household.
  - iii) Divine discipline is part of belonging to the family of God.
- c. Vss 7-11 is application of what we just learned.
  - (1) 7-8 shows why it is good and necessary to embrace the discipline of God.

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- (2) vss 9-10 shows us the right attitude to have in the midst of discipline.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- (3) vs 11 shows us the fruit of discipline.
  - (a) So how do we respond? What will help us to be found faithful and not regard it lightly?
  - (b) First, accept that it hurts. It is not designed to be fun or joy-producing. A common error I see in parents is that they hate discipline because it hurts them to see tears. This is terribly short-sighted and bear terrible fruit in the lives of their children
  - (c) When you are under the discipline of the Father in heaven you hurt and weep. There is no human tough enough to bear up with a smile and a chuckle when God steps in.
  - (d) But it is training you. Notice in vs 11 when do you see the fruit of that training. It is afterwards. There is no short cut. You must endure. You must be patient while under discipline. And this will only happen when you keep the God's goal and purpose in the front of your mind. To bear the fruit of righteousness.
  
- (4) Vss 12-13 then talks to the congregation who sees one who is under God's discipline.
  - (a) You gather around that one. You encourage. You strengthen.

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- (b) This is not a time for the Body of Christ to walk away and abandon. It is a time to show them the way of wisdom and endurance.
  - 3. This is the key passage for understanding suffering when it is because of God's discipline. But there are other passages that we need to consider as well.
- B. 1 Corinthians 11:26-32.
  - 1. Background:
    - a. In vs 2 Paul starts out with a word of praise that they are holding to certain traditions which he had taught them. However, there are also problems in some of the outworking of the details of those traditions and one of them has to do with the roles and behavior of the men and women when they are together.
    - b. He then, in vss 17-18, begins to transition from headcoverings for women to the Lord's Supper. And notice that now there is no word of praise and the reason has to do with love for one another and unity of the brethren in the church.
    - c. There is a play on words going on in vss 17-18.
      - (1) The church comes together but they are not truly together. There are divisions among them.
      - (2) What are those divisions? They are not theological as much as relational. The division is between the wealthy and the poor.
  - 2. He then gives a reminder of what is happening when they take the Lord's Supper together.
    - a. It is a declaration of the Lord's death ((26 emphatic position).
    - b. And so he gives a very strong warning in vs 27.

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- c. Now, in vs 30 we see the discipline of the Lord.
  - (1) “many” is a shocking statement if you think about it. But it is also limited.
  - (2) “weak and sick” speaks of mental or physical affliction that may be part of their life. If you are one who practices arrogance and a lack of care for the needs of the others in the Body of Christ, this might be you.
  - (3) Then notice the shift, “a number” sleep.
    - (a) Not as many are in this category. Which is hopeful.
    - (b) “sleep” is a euphemism for death. But it is directed toward believers. The body rests in the grave awaiting the day of resurrection.
    - (c) But do not miss the point. God slays some who stubbornly hold onto their social standing or lack of care for other believers in the church.

## C. Revelation 3:19.

- 1. This is a church close to destruction. More unregenerate professing believers than actual believers.
- 2. They are rich and comfortable so they falsely interpret their comfort for blessings from God. But vs 17 we see Jesus telling them that they are naked and blind.
- 3. But why is there this rebuke? It is because our Lord loves the Church
- 4. The result is reproof and discipline. The goal behind it? Repentance.
  - a. When you discipline the goal is not to remove the person, but to remove the sin, the evil.
  - b. Will some fall away? Yes. Apostasy is not a strange and occasional thing. It is common as many start out with a profession of love and

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faith, but then sin entangles them to the point that the true state of their heart is revealed and off they go.

c. But what discipline does it help bring to the surface what is truly in the heart of a person.

5. And this is what is meant by knocking at the door in vs 20. He knocks by way of reproof and discipline. To the one who listens and repents there is fellowship. But built into that is that if you do not attend your heart to His discipline, there is no fellowship.

### **III. Conclusion.**

- A. We cannot ignore the possibility of discipline when trials and hardships, especially sickness, strikes us. A humble heart will slow down and consider this possibility.
- B. But we cannot become paralyzed with it either. If you are certain that you are being disciplined, then bear up under it with humility and wait for the time that the Lord raises you back up.
- C. But if, after careful introspection and seeking counsel from godly people (key that they be godly) you conclude that is not the case, then it is very possible it is simply a normal time of testing that the Lord has brought into your life.
- D. We will focus on that next time I preach.

### **Benediction**

**Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever.  
Amen.**