

BEYOND THE SERMON – Monday, June 1, 2020

“Does Satan have too much access to us?”

My son, Solomon writes, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.

Recently, in thinking about welcoming in our lives God the Father's discipline, I shared the story of Gordon “Gordie” MacDonald, one of the great evangelical pastoral leaders of my generation. As unpacked in his book *A Resilient Life*, at Stony Brooke Preparatory School, Gordie ran track and cross country over 3 years for Coach Marvin Goldberg.

But it was at Coach Goldberg's home, one evening after dinner, where young Gordie came to understand what kind of coach he actually had. A coach who had a notebook with his name on it. A notebook with all the races he *would* run over 3 years, and even the projected times which were slotted to improve with every race.

When young Gordie gazed at all that advance planning, he could only say to his coach, “Sir, those times are impossible.”

But Coach Goldberg reminded him that he had 3 years to get there. “Watch,” the coach said as he turned the pages of the notebook from the back to the beginning. Goldberg had designed a plan for every month of his prep-school running career. Each month called for continuous improvement. It was like a flight of steps, each new step an improvement over the last one.

“Now Gordie,” Coach Goldberg said, “The key to this plan is to trust in your coach and your willingness to discipline yourself, to work hard. I am very convinced that we can reach these goals if you are prepared to do that.”

“I was,” MacDonald remembers, “just 15 years old when Marvin Goldberg showed me that notebook. That was my picture. By a man who cared enough, believed in me enough, to sketch out a plan of almost 40 months of athletic development.”

I think when you open your Bible to consider Proverbs 3:11-12, and read again about our Father's loving discipline in Hebrews chapter 12, we realize we have a coach who plans our improvement through His discipline. Our Father's discipline

involves the intentional challenges He designs in the circumstances of my life both to correct what is wrong and to train me in what is right, for my best and His glory.

So, what's the Coach's plan for your life going forward? Are you experiencing His loving discipline? Are you welcoming it?

Someone submitted a question that referenced what happen to the Old Testament figure Job. God allowed some heavy discipline into Job's life, and he allowed Satan to deliver them mail. So someone asked, **WHY IS SATAN GIVEN SO MUCH POWER OVER US?** It seems it is too easy for Him to have access to us.

Let's try to figure that one out.

We get the idea that Satan "is given" power over us from the opening chapters of the Old Testament book of Job. If Job's opening scenes describe something that happens regularly – that the "sons of God" (an O.T. expression for angelic beings) present themselves before the Lord, and also Satan is included in that presentation – it seems God monitors and sovereignly limits what the angelic beings can do, and what Satan can do on the earth.

In his helpful book *Against the Darkness: The Doctrine of Angels, Satan, and Demons* (p.98), Trinity Evangelical Divinity School's Dr. Graham Cole offers this when thinking about the scene in Job chapters one and two.

In the setting of the divine council, the Satan (or adversary) reports of his roaming the earth, and God responds by drawing attention to the outstanding person of Job. It is then that the Satan raises the question of Job's motivation (1:9) "Does Job fear God for no reason?" You've protected him too much, Satan is arguing. I can't get to him. You've built a hedge around him. He believes in you because you protect him. Withdraw your hand. Let me at him. I'll show you that the only reason he believes in you and follows you is because you've made his life great!

Interestingly, the Satan cannot see into Job's heart, whereas the NT's testimony is that Jesus did have such insight. The Satan afflicts Job mightily in two phases. Job loses family—except his wife—and servants and flocks. In the second phase, Job's own body is assaulted with afflictions. In the second phase, his life is to be spared (2:6)

Then Dr. Cole adds,

This is no metaphysical dualism of equal forces of good and ill opposed to each other. What takes place does so within the sovereign control of God. This is the God who can take away, as Job declares (1:21), and who can restore, as the last chapter shows (42:12-17). God is the one who gives permission that Job suffer, rather than afflicting him directly, and by portraying Satan as the one who acts out of malice, whereas God mercifully sets limits on the harm he can inflict.

Graham Cole's book, like so many others by those familiar with both Scripture and the condition of our world, can be helpful in keeping our perspective healthy. Here are just a few I've found immensely helpful

Dr. James Dobson *When God Doesn't Make Sense*
Os Guinness *Unspeakable: Facing Up to the Challenge of Evil*
Dr. D.A. Carson *How Long O Lord? Reflections on suffering and evil.*

So why does God allow Satan to battle with us and we with him?

Scripture gives us at least two reasons for this.

First, because we live in a world still under the curse of God because of Adam's choice to sin, **God allows us to experience the battle so what we join Him in hating sin rather than simply becoming complacent with it.** Sin is a violent destroyer of everything good, and only in the battle with sin and its author, Satan, do we long even more deeply for the Lord's righteousness and coming day of justice.

Second, we are called with the Lord **to complete the experience of His victory over sin and evil.** In talking about the reality of our spiritual warfare with God's enemy, Graham Cole spoke of Oscar Cullman's analogy:

In June 1944, the Allies landed on Normandy's beaches on the coast of France. This was D-Day. It was the turning point in the European theater of World War II. However, victory did not come until 1945 with the death of Hitler and the German surrender on May 7 in France and May 8 in Germany. This was V-E Day. Dr. Cullman argues that the Christian lives between D-Day and V-E Day. The cross of Christ was decisive, but much remains to happen before evil is finally extinguished.

God, for purposes of displaying His glory that may not be fully understood by us, calls us to understand that Jesus' death and resurrection has assured the victory, but the experience of victory is yet to be fully realized. We live by faith. We run a race that is tough at times. We put on our armor and we stand in the will of God. And we do all of that anticipating the promised return of the Lord of Lords and King of Kings, the picture of which we gladly read in Revelation 19.

We live, we run, we stand and battle all with the assurance that Satan's activity is monitored and measured by a Sovereign God whose glory and purposes will be fully accomplished.