

The Disciplined Life

Studies in the fine art of Christian discipleship

- **Discipline the Key to Power**
- **Discipline the Mark of maturity**
- **Discipline and Holiness**
- **The Perils of Discipline**
- **The Cost for Imposed Discipline**
- **How to Become a Discipline Person**

The Disciplined Life

The discipline life is the goal of all great leaders. Every true Christian finds that his spiritual success is by way of the rigors of discipline. It was St. Paul who said, *“I keep my body under, and bring it into subjection.”*

In a day of easy living, when cult of comfort yeans for luxury and ease, here is a forthright treatment that is vitally needed by everyone who names the name of Christ.

Young people leave home – students quit school – couples seek divorce – Christians neglect services – employees walk out on jobs – All in an attempt to escape “*discipline*,” camouflaged by a hundred excuses, but are the hard core of *distaste to restraint*. This restlessness, and instability can be traced to the basic fault in our modern character, dislike to control. Our overflowing asylums, hospitals and jails are but symptoms of an undisciplined age!

The kind of discipline that is needed is far deeper than alarm clocks, time cards and exercise. I am speaking of the *discipline* that embraces self-restraint, and inner quality of the soul.

Many nervous and emotional disorders are the accumulated result of years of self-indulgent living. I am not referring to the person who lives an unrestrained, immoral life, but of respectable Christians, who would be horrified at the thought of indulging in gross immorality, but are nonetheless *undisciplined*. They will find that this fatal weakness will be unmasked in the day of trial and adversity.

A lifelong pattern of . . .

- running away from difficulties,
 - avoiding unpleasant situations,
 - keeping from incompatible people,
 - seeking the easy way,
 - quitting when the going gets rough,
- . . . will show up in one’s life.

Lack of discipline will show up in numerous symptoms, neurotic, even, semi-invalidism and incapacity. One may seek prayers, consult doctors, psychiatrists, even make religious commitments, but *the only cure* is to become a “*discipline person*!”

Proverbs 24:10 states, “*If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small.*” Days of adversity are bound to come. Those who are weak will faint! Only by consistent-disciplined living can “*Strength of Character*” be developed, that can face adversities without fainting.

The flood of moral looseness in the world is directly related to *self-indulgence* of our age! The years of plenty and *easy style* of living has seeped into the church as well and produced flabby saints.

In a land of bulging supermarkets and attractive restaurants, God help us to disciple our appetites.

The alarming tide of problems in Christians lives is without question the result of inner softness that is born of undisciplined, self-indulgent living. Some argue that what is needed is some experience of dedication, commitment or entire sanctification, however, Jesus teaches that what is needed in the Christian’s life is not just some emotional experience, but rather, *daily* rugged self-denial – “*taking up one’s cross, daily, and following Him!*”

“*And Jesus said to them all, ‘If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me’*”
(Luke 9:23).

The plight of the modern church is that it is striving for the way of least resistance. The idea of self-sacrifice, self-discipline, or self-restraint is hard to come by in this “*Age of Ease*.”

One of the disclosures that came out of Russia in past years is the revelation that Communist youth are subjected to far more intensive, exacting training than most in the Western nations. America has accentuated the way of relaxation, and recreation, striving (not for self-improvement) but, rather, having “*good times*.” This may be good, up to a point, but when television and sports consume a large proportion of one’s time, it is a mark of a Decadent Age, a Badge of Softness.

Theodore Roosevelt once said, “*The things that will destroy America are: prosperity at any price – peace at any price – safety first, instead of duty first – the love of soft living – and the get rich theory of life.*” Seems the lack of discipline is turning Roosevelt’s warning into prophecy.

In April of 1941, the world famous violinist, Fritz Kreisler, was forced by an accident to lay aside his violin for many weeks. When finally he turned his instrument again, he said, “*My fingers were so stiff that playing seemed impossible, but my desire was so intense that I told my fingers, you are my slaves. I am the General and I order you to play. You know they played!*” The discipline of years paid off!

The power of disciplined character is seen especially in great crises, times of sickness, bereavement or financial adversity.

“*Disciplined Character*” belongs to the person who achieves balance, by bringing all his faculties under control. There then will be order, consistency, and purpose in his life. The end result is poise and grace that will not panic, nor indulge in “*self-pity*” when tossed into crosscurrents. A disciplined person rises courageously, heroically, to meet life and to conquer it. He has inward resources and personal reserves that brings adversity under control and compels it to serve him.

Many have ambitions never realized – goals never reached – aspirations for usefulness never fulfilled – and – visions that never materialize. While, of course, there may be other reasons such as limited ability, but all too often the deficiency is not lack of natural ability, but lack of discipline. The reason many do not achieve is that they will not buckle down to demanding discipline. Their ambitions are not beyond their capacity, but beyond their *discipline!*

Discipline shows up in “*little things*,” like: picking up your cloths, washing the bathtub out, and being habitually prompt for appointments.

The term “discipline” carries a variety of meanings:

- To a child it means compelled to do something undesirable and punished if he rebels.
- To a soldier it means a conformity to regulation, instant obedience to orders
- To a student it means a course of instruction, specific requirements, rule and examinations.
- To a Christian it means discipleship – following Jesus, denying self, willingly carrying his cross.

There are all correct descriptions, however, there is something more. One must consider the aim of discipline. Whether it is a child, military, academic or religious discipline – a disciplines ***character*** goes beyond the *minimum* demands of these specific disciplines and permeates the whole life.

IMPOSED DISCIPLINE MUST LEAD TO SELF-DISCIPLINE

It is impossible to be a *sincere, devoted* Christian, regenerated and following Jesus, yet remain undisciplined in certain facets of our character. Self-discipline means the ability to regulate conduct by principle rather than impulse, desire or pressure from social customs.

1. DISCIPLINE OF OUR APPETITES

Discipline must include the ability to subordinate the body and bring its physical appetites to the service of the will of the mind. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:27, “*I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection.*” – or the Contemporary Version renders this verse – “*I keep my body under control and make it my slave.*” **The finest display of discipline is not some spectacular achievement, but rather, the permanent adjustment of a living pattern!** Don’t think that food is the only physical appetite. For instance, the Greek word, “*eros*” means “*a love that is a passion of physical attraction.*” This is a God-given love, created in man (and woman) for procreation and pleasure. However, if this God given desire is humored it can become *abnormally* excitable. This normal urge, if not disciplined, can grow out of proportion in its demands until it cries out, “*I can’t help myself!*” There is a danger of cultivating this God given yearning until it becomes increasingly domineering in its demands. Lack of discipline here brings a grave danger. In times of domestic stress, long illness, separation, there is a grave danger of succumbing to temptations outside of marriage. Many say, “*There marriage is not romantically ideal,*” however a person of disciplined character is able to face the strain, and by the grace of God is able to keep to the path of virtue. 1 Corinthians 10:13 tells us that “*God will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able.*”

The undisciplined person is a poor risk, regardless of how warm their mate may be, but a disciplined person, even if it means a life of total abstinence, will keep himself pure. It is not a matter of being “*made a certain way,*” but rather, it is a matter of discipline! The disciplined person will use every situation to rise to new spiritual heights, and a Christ-like stature – nobler and spiritually taller.

We need to take a new look at 1 Corinthians 7:1-5.

“Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.”

Perhaps the Living Bible renders this passage closer to our English understanding:

“Now about those questions you asked in your last letter: my answer is that if you do not marry, it is good. But usually it is best to be married, each man having his own wife, and each woman having her own husband, because otherwise you might fall back into sin. The man should give his wife all that is her right as a married woman, and the wife should do the same for her husband: for a girl who marries no longer has full right to her own body, for her husband then has his rights to it, too; and in the same way the husband no longer has full right to his own body, for it belongs also to his wife. So do not refuse these rights to each other. The only exception to this rule would be the agreement of both husband and wife to refrain from the rights of marriage for a limited time, so that they can give themselves more completely to prayer. Afterwards, they should come together again so that Satan won't be able to tempt them because of their lack of self-control.”

There is no excuse to give in to abnormal strain, or to be undisciplined or allow temptations to overpower us. This sound, sane advice will to a long way in helping married couples live disciplined lives. If some peculiar circumstance makes it impossible to carry out these instructions, there is no ground for undisciplined living. We need to heed this advice. A disciplined life will make one morally triumphant. We can rise above “*what is written*” and maintain a disciplined life even when that which “*ought to be is not,*” when the practical application of 1 Corinthians 7 is shaped by the blunt facts of reality.

2. DISCIPLINE OF OUR EMOTIONS

Friendship, when based on mutual respect and understanding, is a beautiful gift, however, one must be on guard lest it become a matter of increasingly deepening affection. Ripening affection can be a dangerous problem. Two friends gradually become so thick, they become possessive and exclusive, that is unwholesome and detrimental to the development of their personality and character. It is a perilous thing when an unmarried Christian develops to close a friendship with an unsaved person of the opposite sex. Up to a point, this is perfectly natural and a legitimate relationship. There is no thought of love. The Christian may even be motivated by an honest desire to help spiritually. They are thrown together more and more and gradually, before the Christian realizes it, there steals into the heart a spark that lights the eye and quickens the pulse. The Christian is brought face-to-face with a terrible emotional struggle, to be extricated from the situation or enter in an unscriptural marriage.

The finest discipline is not that that struggles out of a near tragic situation, but rather, the discipline that foresees the situation in the first place and adopts certain basic principles, respecting friendship, avoiding making intimate alliances with the unsaved.

Another dangerous peril can be the friendship of two married Christians of opposite sex that are thrown into each other's company. We cannot avoid such situations. Duty often demands such co-working. Working together can bring respect, mutual confidence and comradeship, bringing about a friendship that is holy and beautiful. However, if the relationship is undisciplined it can grow into deep affection. Discipline of our affections must be preserved at all cost. The rugged advice of Jesus of "*plucking out the offending eye, cutting off the offending hand*" was never more apropos (Matthew 5:29-30) than under the stated situation. The child of God, who desires to do God's will, can only be saved by drastic, even ruthless, action. Feelings must not be spared. The disciplined person will not tolerate the "*I can't help it*" philosophy.

It has been said that one cannot always control their feelings, which is true, at times, however, the "*feelings*" (emotions) of the Christian must be trained to submit to the will. *Emotions may not immediately obey the will, but actions must, and in due time, by God's help, emotions will follow the lead of the disciplined will!*

Man's mind serves the purpose of devising excuses for doing what the heart wants to do, unless the mind is disciplined. Therefore, the heart needs to be kept on the "*leash of discipline.*" Then it will be co-partner of the mind in living according to fixed principles established by God's Word. Only then can one trust their impulses.

This does not mean the disciplined person is cold and calculating. He, of course, should be warm and sympathetic, however, he has learned to mature "*into Christ.*" He will not allow himself to be tossed to and fro, carried about by every wind of impulse, or fanciful feelings. The disciplined person will face moral hazards of life and rise to heights of strength and nobility. That person will not have to battle with his desires and affections later on, but is alert to the perils that beset and will not ignite fires that he will have to fight feverishly to put out later.

3. DISCIPLINE OF OUR MOODS

Changes in feelings are inevitable. A failure in work can effect how one feels. Physical weariness, the weather, a letter from home, personal misunderstanding are little things that play on one's spirit and produce variation in their feelings. One gets strange impulses to take a trip, make unwise purchases or, in general, just neglect duties. One excuses it by saying, "*It was just one of my moods.*" The tendency to exhibit moodiness is a great weakness. A disciplined person learns to apply himself to tasks consistently in spite of varying "moods," he is temperamentally even. He has disciplined himself to be reliable, however he might "*feel.*" He is always cheerful and cooperative regardless of feelings, circumstances, or weather.

Do you master your moods? The attitude of "*I don't feel like it, so I won't do it,*" is a trait of an undisciplined person.

4. DISCIPLINE OF OUR SPEECH

Regardless of how carefully controlled a person is at all of these points, he cannot qualify as a truly disciplined person unless his tongue is bridled, directed by reins of love. James 1:26 states, "*If any man among you seem to be religious and bridles not his*

tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain." A loose tongue betrays a defective character.

See the study on "The sins of the Tongue"

Some pride themselves on their "frankness" and say, "I say what I think." So does a fool. Proverbs 29:11 says, "A fool uttereth all his mind." Frankness can be a virtue ***when it is coupled with loving tact, and discretion***, but it is nothing more than a sadistic vice, merely unbridled erupting of opinions without regard to time, place, or feelings of others when vocalized without love. Proverbs 12:18 states, "Some speak rashly like the piercing of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing." The Bible has an astonishing amount to say about the control of the tongue. James 3:2 states, "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body."

5. DISCIPLINE OF OUR PRIORITIES

On our solution of this discipline hangs success or failure of our Christian walk. It is not enough only to know that God and the church should hold first place in our lives. Most will concede that heaven is infinitely a richer goal than earthly position. If given a choice between persons and profits, improvement of soul or entertainment, most will agree that character has more value than pleasure. When Christians are confronted with these alternatives they know which to choose. The problem is – not know **how** to give first place to these *in practical daily living!* It is primarily a problem of character.

My prayer is that God will give us the ability to reject day by day the army of activities that clamor for our energy and time, but hamper us from doing the more important things. All of us are confronted by a thousand claims upon our time, talent, money and loyalties. These claims are loud and insistent. To attempt to satisfy even half of them results in frittering life away to nothingness. If life is to be fruitful and purposeful we must heroically put the knife to activities that will clutter every single day.

Selection is the law of life!

We cannot participate in every good cause or give to everything. We cannot go to every interesting meeting, or read everything we would like.

Goals are reached only by the sacrifice of the "lesser." Our spiritual growth will be determined by our skill in selecting. If we give top priority to that that should have low-priority, if we give first rate dedication to second rate causes, if we allow our friends, impulses, convenience of the moment to dictate our priorities, if we drift with the tide of daily circumstances, the end result will be a shabby, mediocre ineffective life.

6. DISCIPLINE OF GRACE

The final "Hallmark" of the disciplined character is the ability to assimilate imposed discipline with grace. It is not easy to subordinate one's life to discipline and legitimate authority. If we want God's maximum happiness, usefulness and maturity, it requires both to submit to the discipline of life *graciously* and with mature understanding and cheerful good will. Whatever value a colt has is based on the assumption he will not remain unbroken. If we are to find our true place and worth in life, there are flutes, codes

of ethics and regulations that we must adhere to. There's always someone to that we must submit to – whether it is employer, parent, manager or superintendent. If we are constantly kicking, and chafing we will be unhappy. I'm not suggesting blind, unthinking submission to the wishes and opinions of those around us, but a proper submission to scriptural legitimate authority.

EXTREMES ON BOTH SIDES

We must find our way between extreme non-conformity, and extreme subjugation. We have to draw the line between proper discipline and private, personal opinion. This is a mark of maturity, without which, we will remain undisciplined.

To build up the virtue of discipline, and then speak of its perils, may seem to appear contradictory. Like the antibiotic drug that is hailed as a “*miracle drug*,” only to prove to have deadly side effects, there can be damaging side effects of discipline. However, these hazards are not inevitable. They can be avoided. If these dangers are to be avoided, doesn't it make sense that we should know what they are?

1. THINKING DISCIPLINE IS THE SUPREME VALUE IN LIFE

A right relationship with God is the greatest treasure. Divine grace – forgiveness – divine presence – love – faith – these are all indispensable! ***Never elevate discipline to a place of honor reserved for Christ!*** Discipline must be used to show us how we can be more valuable in the kingdom of Christ. Our servant must never be our Savior!

2. PRIDE

Discipline can make a man feel better, even superior. There is a legitimate sense of satisfaction in self-mastery, but it can become just self-satisfaction. We must give glory to God, not self. We can begin to admire the character we have fashioned. Feelings of snobbery, even disdain, are “*common rubble*” to those seeking a disciplined life. We can feed the vice of pride! Virtue can become a snare! This was the self-deception of the Pharisee, who prayed, “*Father, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are*” (Luke 18:11). A disciplined person can become a repugnant character, proud of his handiwork.

EXTREMES IN DISCIPLINE

1. IMPOSED DISCIPLINE CAN BECOME UNCHRISTIAN SEVERITY

Those who exercise authority may fall into a danger of severity to a point of cruelty. It is possible to clap on prison-like rules that harden without strengthening, to force one into a mold for which they are not fitted. One must avoid unwise severity. Those who are inclined to be a Spartan with them self, need to avoid unchristian harshness with others. One does not necessarily reach a higher spiritual state by rigorous self-discipline. One can cultivate self-control to the point where rigor is unwholesome – “*counterfeit discipline*.” This kind of discipline becomes showy instead of a developing Christian character. It does not lead to the warm, vibrant, nobility of Christian character that should be our goal. Asceticism calls attention to itself, true Christian discipline does not. Extreme regulations fasten its prohibitions and rules on petty objects, while Christian discipline deals with that that is ethical. Extreme rules tend to despise the good things

of life, and denies the joys that God intended for man. It says, “*All is evil, life is a misfortune, the body is shameful, and holiness consist of complete denial of all that is enjoyable.*”

True Godly discipline does not despise earthly blessings, but rather, consecrates them to spiritual ends. Biblical discipline permits the use of God’s earthly blessings, but not their abuse. This true Christian discipline sanctifies earthly blessings, by restraints and direction, offering them to God for sacrifice and service. Christian discipline will not bow in slavery to the senses, but neither will it destroy them by labeling them as evil. Christian discipline does not abstain from God’s gifts, but more accurately, by self-control, brings them into complete dedication to God. It may at times deny itself of good gifts, but such denial is not a means to holiness, but rather, it is a means of service. A thing is sacrificed, not because it is believed to be evil, but because it is helpful in achieving something greater.

1 Corinthians 7:32-34, for instance, states:

“But I would have you to be free from cares. He that is unmarried is careful for the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord: but he that is married is careful for the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and is divided. So also the woman that is unmarried and the virgin is careful for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married is careful for the things of the world, how she may please her husband” (American Standard Translation).

Note this passage tells us that some were willing to sacrifice marriage in order to be free to be of greater service in the Lord’s work. It does not cast reflection on marriage itself – and certainly not rejecting marriage, per se! It simply states that the celibate life, while neither a mark of holiness or a means *to* holiness, but, because one is free from the cares of family life, *can* give greater liberty in doing the Lord’s work. The Apostle Paul repudiated those who forbade marriage.

Paul uses this same principle in the eating meat that had been offered to idols. If it make my brother to “*stumble*” we must avoid it. However, Paul says that this does not mean that the meat – in, and of, its self – was evil. But rather, Paul teaches that, if it causes my brother to be offended (to stumble) then I should discipline myself to do without it – at least in his presence.

2. THE DANGER OF UNDISCIPLINED DISCIPLINE

Does that sound confusing? It simply means that we must develop certain basic habits that safeguard the soul [our mind, will and emotion], however, but once habits are established, we must never allow them to become our tyrants. Our “*habits*” must be kept in the role of servant, not master! A growing soul is ever changing. Discipline must not embed our life in the concrete of fixed routine, but rather, there must ever be “*new shoots*” of fresh life – new undertakings! Christian discipline must bring life, shading its old forms like unproductive suckers. New challenges must be seized, and exploited to the full. Christian discipline must never be like the *rigid* discipline of Pharisees, who were betrayed by their own virtue. What should have best fitted them for the kingdom, kept them out (Matthew 23:13 – the whole 23rd chapter should be read).

Even discipline must be subordinate to discipline! The highest form of discipline is one that grows, adjusts and expands as one matures in his Christian walk. There will be times when one must scorn the tyranny of petty rules, and bring his habit patterns under subordination, learning to absorb the interruptions of life – turning them to doors of opportunity for accomplishing good.

There is a need to create fixed patterns and routines – there will be unexpected events! Life is made up of constant adjustments. The problem is that some refuse to face reality. They charge right through the unanticipated incident, hurting others in the process. And, while doing so, they, themselves, become disorganized, demoralized, and can't seem to get back on track.

We have two extremes:

- (1) Unbending steel backbone, and
- (2) No backbone at all. Neither one is a display of true discipline.

Discipline is not merely a matter of rigid rules, routines and habits, battering one's way through at any cost, a bull-headedness. *Intelligent flexibility is the word.*

Some struggle to bring a semblance of order into their lives, to cultivate a healthy respect for discipline. They feel that only by rigid regimentation can they reach maximum disciplinary accomplishment. So, when they achieve a certain measure of control, they feel they must keep a tight grip on the reins. They expect the world to stand aside and allow them to drive their well-ordered chariot through undisturbed. If anything jostles their carriage, slow the horses down, or rocks their chariot, they whip the horses right on through, brushing aside intrusions, riding, rough-shod, over all obstacles. They think this is a mark of strength – ***but there is a higher strength*** – and, it is the ability to adjust without being deflected, to pause without stopping!

We must ever remember, “*People are more important than one's little system of discipline.*” The highest objective of discipline is helping people. We, of course, must discipline to whip our life into shape. This is heroic and admirable, however, it is only a means to an end, and not *the end* in its self. If it is just for the sake of being disciplined, it can be as vain and useless as any *undisciplined* person. Our purpose must be a larger usefulness. We must never ignore people and their need in order to protect our little program of discipline.

CONFUSING “DISCIPLINED-LIVING” WITH “HOLY-LIVING”

1. HOLINESS IS A RELIGIOUS REALITY

Holiness transcends self. Holiness is our relationship with a holy God. Holiness is our moral state in the sight of God. Discipline can begin and end with “*self-interest.*” ***One can achieve discipline and by pass God altogether!*** Athletes follow rugged self-regimentation and denial that puts the average Christian to shame. Paul said, “*They discipline themselves for an earthly crown, but we discipline our self for a heavenly crown*” (1 Corinthians 9:25).

When discipline is linked with heaven as its aim, it becomes linked with holiness, but, not until then!

A businessman may deny body and soul in his total consecration to mammon. One may live purely, and simply, only because such a life serves his aim better. Jesus

tells of the rich man who said, “*Soul, now take life easy.*” The story implies he did not “*take it easy*” before. He worshipped at the “*Shrine of Hard Work.*” He was diligent, industrious, rising early, working hard until late in the night. He is presented as sober and, due to a disciplined life, was prosperous. ***He had discipline – but not holiness!*** God called him a “*fool!*” Statesmen, politicians, teachers and scholars can readily be found who have reached the top through dint of discipline over long years, but who are far from God.

Discipline in itself is not holiness!

2. ALLOWING DISCIPLINE TO BE A SUBSTITUTE FOR HOLINESS

One under control of discipline is apt to be satisfied. Proving “*self*” to be master – by discipline achieved by sheer willpower, may cause one to feel that no other master is needed. There are those who see the value of well-regulated, implacable lives, and are content with respectability, wrapped in garments of *self*-righteousness and do not realize their lack.

They have no vices therefore feel no need to repent. They

- avoid extravagance,
- are correct in every department,
- are honest,
- their habits are well ordered,
- their life is tidy and well arranged,
- they have no bad habits,
- know when to stop eating,
- when to go to bed and get up, and
- are always precisely proper.

However, they are never torn by the profound questions of death and immortality, sin, truth or duty to God. They are never haunted by a sense of guilt or ever beset by a life that hungers after righteousness. Their only obsession is to avoid such distressing notions, and wish for nothing more than to be left alone. Their biggest dread is painful intrusions into their life. It is almost impossible to penetrate the defenses of these smugly content self-assured people. It is almost as if their discipline is of the devil himself, because it has become their damnation, snubs God and shrivels their soul into a neat little ball of respectability. It is like a juggler that captivates your attention, while he picks your pocket. Discipline can open to door of hell – and bar the gates of heaven.

3. DISCIPLINE IS NOT THE “MEANS TO” HOLINESS

Disciplined living is necessary in *maintaining* holiness, to consolidate a firm character and for effective living, however, no amount of discipline will make a sinful heart holy! Paul asks the question in Colossians 2:20, “*Why do you submit to regulations – such as, do not handle, do not taste, do not touch, according to human percepts and doctrine?*” Then Paul puts his finger on the danger in verse 23, when he writes, in essence, “*These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting rigor of devotion, self-abasement and severity to the body, but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh.*”

Holiness, when it comes by way of discipline, can take a sort of glee in progressively multiplying rules, prohibitions about pettier and pettier things. Those who attempt holiness in this manner can feed their pride – and can have their spirit crystallized into harsh legalism. In the meantime they may not achieve holiness at all.

The Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul in Romans 7 gives the psychology of sin. This chapter of Romans tells us that sin is a deep-seated perversity that cannot be eradicated by self-culture or, even, the enforcement of the Law. It is an irrational twist that baffles the moralist and eludes every attempt at dislodgment. It is “*a thing*” deeper than an act (Romans 7:15-25). It is a persistent tendency in man’s total nature. It is an alien quality, but beyond man’s power to remove. It cannot be removed by imposed law or self imposed discipline.

4. SUFFERING DOES NOT SANCIFY

Some poets seem to assume all that is needed to make us more pious is pain. They seem to forget that while suffering softens and strengthens some – it hardens and weakens others! Suffering may produce a refined, gentle, saint, but it also can produce a critical haggard, complaining person. Chastening and holiness are linked in a cause and effect relationship. The Living Bible, speaking of the chastening of the Lord, states in Hebrew 12:10-11,

“Our earthly fathers trained us for a few brief years, doing the best for us that they knew how, but God's correction is always right and for our best good, that we may share his holiness. Being punished isn't enjoyable while it is happening--it hurts! But afterwards we can see the result, a quiet growth in grace and character.”

“*Righteousness is a peaceable fruit of suffering*” as the King James renders Hebrews 12:11. This is God’s hope and purpose in allowing suffering (chastening), however, suffering is *not* the purifying agent. Suffering should drive the soul to God. Suffering should serve one great purpose – to show us our helplessness, littleness, insecurity and our need of God. Like the law, suffering shows us our self-will, rebellion, and provide us with wisdom enough to yield to God in contrition and brokenness, allowing His grace transform us.

Holiness is wrought by the Holy Spirit and not suffering! Holiness is the result of our faith, not tears. Holiness is the result of God’s power, not our discipline!

5. HOLINESS IS THE FOUNDATION OF DISCIPLINE

Holiness is the secret of successful Christian discipline.

- (A) Discipline is easier when the resistance to discipline has been removed from the heart. One may outwardly submit and be inwardly seething.
- (B) Holiness will impart an impulse to self-discipline and the desire for orderliness, efficiency and improvement.

(C) Holiness will provide the dynamic for sustained discipline. It is not just an impulse, but the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit to keep on, when all natures cries out in gusty winds of temptation.

There are other reasons for discipline. Jacob submitted to the yoke of labor for 14 years, sustained only by his love for Rachel. Some have stopped the use of tobacco simply on doctor's orders. But the dynamic of true discipline is not the desire to save one's skin, but the love of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Holiness is needed to purify one's motives in seeking a disciplined life. Paul says, "*They do it [speaking of athletes disciplining themselves] to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible, lest I should be a castaway, and becoming a castaway I should dishonor God*" (1 Corinthians 9:25). Paul's underlying passion in wanting to serve God, was seeking the glory of Christ.

The motivation for discipline becomes healthy when the believer is filled with the Holy Spirit. Holiness becomes, not the goal, but the foundation!

Does a holy person need discipline?

Can discipline now be laid aside, like scaffolding removed after the building is finished? Is it consistent to profess that one, "*is holy,*" and, then also, to admit his continued need for discipline?

Unwholesome discipline will drop off, as will extreme and unnatural discipline. Discipline that is petty and prudish to a point of being morbid, quick to criticize others, afraid to laugh lest it be guilty of levity – has no place in the Christian's life. A disciplined Christian is a full, happy, adjusted, relaxed, acting naturally, normal human being. A strait jacket is not needed!

Due to the above description of some so-called disciplined people, some have dispensed with discipline altogether, however, discipline in a life that is truly holy does not require "*a muzzled the gun,*" but just that one "*holds the aim steady and shoots straight.*" Paul says of his disciplining his life, in 1 Corinthians 9:26, "*I do not run aimlessly, or box as one fighting the air.*" Discipline directs the flow that springs from the heart to where it does the most good, preventing it from overflowing aimlessly in every direction.

DISCIPLINE IS NEEDED

Jude, verses 20 and 21, says, "*But ye beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, **keep yourselves.***" It is by the Holy Spirit enabling that we can put to death the deeds of the body. The Spirit imparts His power and our *will* is turned into steel by praying in the Holy Spirit. It is by the Spirit, that we put to death the deeds of the body – but it is **WE** who do it! The Holy Spirit gives the power, but the action is **OURS!** Our daily life is kept subservient to the spiritual life,

Holiness is not an existence in which we keep certain requirements, but rather, holiness is the equipment needed to meet such requirements. Holiness is living God's Laws – glorifying God – using our lives, and living them in harmony with God's will. Holiness purifies the heart,

but does not instantly mature. Holiness neither give us trained minds or hands. We can be holy, but be spiritually ignorant, awkward, blundering through our Christian life. Discipline helps in tying loose ends of our personality and brings all of our powers under control. We may have buried talents that need to be dug out and used for the Lord that only discipline can bring out.

Peter once said, “*Supply your zeal with knowledge.*” That takes time! We may be holy, but have incredibly poor judgment. One may be motivated by love, but that does not mean that he will always exercise common sense in practical situations, so there is a need for restraint of rules and guidance.

Good intentions does not mean that one always knows how to conduct ones self, so instructions and rules of discipline are needed. When guidance is lacking, Satan preys on one’s inexperience. One may be deeply spiritual, their life and spirit Christ-like, and sincerely desire to do what is right – and still be undisciplined. It takes discipline to save one from complete failure and keep them from becoming a useless Christian. One may be “*fit*” for heaven and “*unfit*” for earth! God can use us only if we are tempered. We can be holy, and still need discipline to bring our life to tempered steel. In Psalm 66:12, David said, “*God, You sent troops to ride across our broken bodies. We went through fire and flood. **But in the end,** You brought us into wealth and great abundance.*”

The goal of disciplining children is *self-discipline* – *self-reliance* – *self-control* – and – dependability. These are essential character traits for maturity and usefulness. The burning question is, “*What is the best method for helping achieve these traits?*” In this day and age a child is allowed to express himself. We are told, “*Guidance should be given by example, suggestion and redirection of attention, tantrums ignored, disobedience should not be punished, simply shown something interesting so he forgets his rage. One should not be hemmed in, sewed up by rules, regulation will dwarf one’s unfolding personality.*”

The college student takes any subjects he chooses, dates as he pleases, goes and comes when he things best. We are told, “*Let him find himself.*” If these assumptions are true, the home with least restraints would produce the sanest teenagers, and schools with the fewest rules would produce the highest type of disciplined citizens. We all know hat this has not proven to be true!

This is not to suggest rigid disciplinarians, lives that are regimented from cradle to adulthood, where decisions are made for the children, and their sole duty is obedience to a certain set of rules. Rigid discipline without love, understanding will develop a character that resists the tyrant’s yoke. This assertion of the guardian’s will, out of harmony with other characteristics, will deprive children of a will of their own. When they are out from under the guardian’s control, they, with all probably have their own fling at life, not having the protection of their own strength. Their will having been perverted by the strong will of another. This controlling others by a strong will, is the very thing that Communism tried and failed at so miserably. If any exploit that sort of individuality, it will sever tender family ties and cause others to despise Godly virtues.

Along with a strong will must be developed a sense of Christian values and balance of love and discipline. One must seek to expound in the lives of those in their charge, the ability to think of others, their feelings and rights – a respect the property of others, and the realization of the dignity of toil.

**THESE HIGH IDEAL OF STANDARDS AND LAWS
MUST BE WOVEN INTO THE VERY FABRIC OF OUR SOUL**

We must develop a sense of social responsibility, appreciation of common decency, an intense regard for human life, a capacity for warm loyalty and heroic self-sacrifice. These are qualities of character that will stand against ideological vampires – that fatten on deceit, suspicion and cruelty.

Parents who bow to the will of their children, allowing them to go unstrained, boasting, “*I can’t do a thing with them*” will never achieve these qualities in their young. Lack of discipline does not produce the kind of strength of character desired. Allowing a child to do as he wishes – have his own way – cry over nothing – eat what he wants – and – throws on the floor what displeases him – goes into a tantrum if obstructed – slaps his mother – kicks his father – while they chuckle at how “*cute*” he is – will not strengthen his character, but will strengthen selfishness and self indulgence.

Those who attempt to raise their brood in such a manner are bringing the will of their offspring into bondage to their own appetites, conditioning them to want what they want, when they want it. They have no capacity for deferment or denial. The result will be not a strong character, but a pathetically weak one.

UNYIELDING WILL IS NOT STRENGTH

It may be strong to defy, destroy and last out, but it is not strong to adjust to life’s realities, to create beauty out of ugliness, to achieve over obstacles, to control self when frustrated, to work patiently and perseveringly in face of difficulties.

World history has shown that the undisciplined are the first to succumb to siren song of dictatorship. One has only to provide these craven beings – whose souls are so domineering – with a crust of bread, and they come running. They cater to their appetites, and when promised an abundance of things, quickly barter their liberties.

The undisciplined know nothing of spiritual value, but sacrifice freedom to think, speak and worship for bread. If this is the end of undisciplined children, and parental pampering, isn’t high time we alter tactics and vote for a democracy with a rod as well as a ballot. The rod won’t hurt their budding personalities. The rod is not only an outward stimulus, but it is also an inward tonic. One lad, after a sound whipping – after the tears were subsided – and reconciliation achieved, said, with a glow of gladness, “*I feel like I’ve had a bah on the inside.*”

Discipline will not destroy a child’s capacity to have a will of his own. Correct discipline will conquer the *will* without breaking the *spirit*. God help us to enforce *gentle*, but *firm-determined* rules and the occasional penalties involved. [The end result will be – our friends will be glad to invite the whole family over] The sober truth is there are many brokenhearted parents who have discovered too late that humored, coddled children – do not love their parents more, but less. Mother and father become slaves, not even given a grunt of thanks. Their hearts broken in sorrow, and anxiety, driven almost to a point of collapse through overwork and strain, but the child is too self-centered to care. Many a youth’s character had putrefied before it has reached maturity. The salt of discipline is needed if complete spoilage is to be avoided. He may desire to lead a Christian life, but faces almost insurmountable weaknesses, and handicaps, that makes

adjustment difficult. Children do not appreciate freedom from restraints, but come to chides with their parents, and wish they had been better disciplined.

Pampering does not feed love. A national magazine article by the Pennsylvania Bureau of Correction discussed an analysis of almost 500 juvenile offenders. It points out similarities and differences in each case:

“Absence of home discipline is the factor that transcends differences of class, economic status, and race. If there is any remedy for disrespect for the law, dearth of moral values, and absence of religious guidance, the family circle must assume the primary responsibility.”

Christian parents should take this charge seriously. If we could see the disastrous consequences that wait both our children, and us and that our weakness is a sin against society and God, we would then to the task with strong purpose and unwavering consistency.

The habits of obedience and regularity are formed in the first four years of a child’s life! As Dr. Philip S. Clapp points out, it does not necessarily demand *extreme physical measures to accomplish the desired end, if the training is begun soon enough*. He says, *“It will not require cruel punishment, possible nothing more painful hand a slap on the hand, to teach a small youngster that no mores no and that he’d better cooperate with family rule and regulations. The secret is in having him learn as early in the game as he is able to, that he cannot have his way at the expense of others’ rights and well-being.”*

A three year old feels impelled to strike his sister, but restrains his hand out of the fear of consequences. He had learned a lesson ins self-control! There is time later for love and intelligence to replace the motivation. The ability to control one’s impulse to physical action has been achieved. That ability is the foundation of all worthwhile character.

WHAT IS MATURITY?

Mature-self-restraint is a yielding to sanctions within, imposed by our conscience and judgment. This is the goal of discipline. But the first step is learning to yield to authority *“without.”* When we do not discipline, we fail to lay this first step of the foundation.

The Philadelphia Youth Study Center states, *“The young criminal, vandal, ruffian, or pervert obeys the impulse of the moment, he seeks selfish advantage, despises authority and rule, and cares for no will but his own. The self-discipline, that inhibits such actions, must come from within – but that is impossible unless it is first enforced from without.”*