

The Disciplined Christian Life

We have not advanced very far in our spiritual lives if we have not encountered the basic paradox of freedom ... that we are most free when we are bound. But not just any way of being bound will suffice; what matters is the character of our binding. The one who would be an athlete, but who is unwilling to discipline his body by regular exercise and by abstinence, is not free to excel on the field or the track. His failure to train rigorously denies him the freedom to run with the desired speed and endurance. With one concerted voice, the giants of the devotional life apply the same principle to the whole of life: Discipline is the price of freedom. Elton Trueblood

2 Timothy 2: 1 – 7

1) The need for a disciplined Christian life

- Before coming to Christ we lived in rebellion to God and lived for ourselves.
- Now that we follow Christ our life belongs to Christ but the change from living self-centred lives to living Christ centred lives takes effort and discipline
- Living a disciplined life isn't the goal but the means to the end:
 - To glorify God in our lives
 - To be fruitful
 - To live lives of peace
- 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.
- Before anyone exercises self-discipline he is disciplined by someone else
 - We need to note that discipline is not punishment but rather a moulding of ones life, character, thinking and beliefs into a certain way.
 - Whilst we are growing to become Christ like we still need God to discipline us into His ways until we are disciplined enough to walk in them ourselves.
 - When we raise children we teach them – or discipline them – in the way that they should go and trust that they will walk in the ways that we taught them when they are adults.
 - When someone joins the army he goes through tough 3 months of basic training where discipline is rigorously instilled into him. When he goes into battle that discipline could save his life and the lives of others
 - A talented but lazy football player needs a strict coach to discipline him so that he can play up to his full potential
- Most people don't fail because of incompetence as much as not being disciplined enough to do what they have to do to succeed.

2) The Christian disciplines are spiritual and practical disciplines

- To know the mechanics does not mean that we are practicing the disciplines. The spiritual disciplines are an inward and spiritual reality, and the inner attitude of the heart is far more crucial than the mechanics for coming into the reality of the spiritual life. Richard Foster
- Spiritual disciplines
 - Prayer – Individual & Corporate (Matthew 6: 5 – 9; Acts 1: 14)

- Fasting (Matthew 6: 16 – 18)
- Bible study (1 Timothy 2: 15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God)
- Worship (John 4: 24)
- Fellowship (Acts 2: 42)
- Witnessing (Matthew 28: 18 – 20)
- Giving (2 Corinthians 8: 7)
- Loving God and others (Matthew 22: 37 – 39)
- Perseverance (Hebrews 10: 36)
- But the disciplined Christian life is more than practising these spiritual disciplines – it is being disciplined to practise godliness in every aspect of our lives wherever we may be and whatever we may be doing
 - We need to be disciplined to utilise our time more constructively than to waste our time on stuff that isn't beneficial to us or to anyone else – e.g. watching TV endlessly
 - Some need to be disciplined to work more and others need to be disciplined to work less and learn to take breaks.
 - It takes discipline to get up early in the morning to pray but it also takes discipline to go to bed at a reasonable time at night so that we can wake up early to pray.
 - We need to be disciplined to turn away from evil when faced with it
- It is discipline that makes us do the right thing even when we don't feel like it.
- We need to identify the undisciplined areas of our lives that are causing us to spiritually weak and work on them.
- Living a disciplined life itself is not what makes us good Christians but it develops a lifestyle that gives us the time and energy to develop our relationship with God and to carry out His purposes in our lives.

3) The benefits of a disciplined life

- It builds our relationship with God as His children
 - 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
- It brings life
 - 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!
- That we may share in God's holiness
 - 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
- It produces a harvest of righteousness and peace - fruitfulness
 - 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.

Are we lacking in our spiritual lives and being unfruitful. Maybe we ought to check our lives to see how disciplined we are and whether we are allowing God to discipline us i.e. mould us as individuals and as a church to be all that He has planned for us to be