

Robert R. McLaughlin Bible Ministries

The TREE OF LIFE weekly teaching summary from the week ending March 08, 1998

Tree of Life 03/0898

The Doctrine of Suffering and Solutions.

Tree of Life for 03-08-98

Last week we noted, under our doctrine of suffering and solutions, the law of volitional responsibility which brought us to this week's study of the different categories of divine discipline. God will only allow the believer to go so far in his self-induced misery then He steps in with divine discipline to cause the believer enough pain to stop and reconnaissance the direction his life has been taking. God will not stand by while members of His royal family sink into the depths of degeneracy. Divine discipline then is God intervening man's self destructive process in order to alert the believer to the seriousness of his situation and encourage him to get back in His plan!

God knows the most effective way in which to confront us with the fact that we are dependent on his grace. We are never to hold to the opinion that the discipline God places upon us is from anger or for the purpose of payment for sin. On the contrary, divine discipline is administered from someOne who loves us and is acting on our behalf. Divine discipline, by way of definition, is the sum total of punitive action taken by the justice of God in grace to correct, admonish, encourage, train, and motivate the believer's free will toward God's plan for his life. Hence, divine discipline is for believers only, Hebrews 12:8, and occurs only in this life, Revelation 21:4. It is a warning that the believer is operating outside the boundaries of God's plan residing therefore in harms way. Predestination cannot be executed outside the boundaries of that which God provides, i.e., divine power by way of the filling of the Spirit and inculcation of His accurate word, through the deployment of the 10 problems solving devices, and by way of the believer's invisible assets. 2John 1:9 informs us

that no one has fellowship with God who keeps on advancing out of bounds and does not remain on the playing field of God's plan. This is not to say that when the believer sins per se, God disciplines him! God does not discipline the believer when he sins, but when he remains in the cosmic system and does not rebound and recover. Under prolonged residence in Satan's cosmic system the believer's arrogance eventually blossoms into antagonism toward God and he therefore multiplies his own unhappiness and incurs the discipline of God. Like parental training, divine discipline is designed to inculcate humility which orients the believer to reality and authority. Psalm 25:8-9 tells us that only the humble believer is teachable.

Once Bible doctrine has been ignored over a period of time, God must resort to pain in order to gain the believer's attention. Such knowledge encourages us by explaining that divine discipline is tailored to our individual lives, Hebrews 12:5-15. It is tailored to induce us to evaluate ourselves (1Co 11:31) and rebound (1John 1:9). If we do not evaluate ourselves, divine discipline enforces humility on us, teaching us to see ourselves as we really are in relation to God and His marvelous plan. Divine discipline is not what we deserve as in the law of volitional responsibility but is designed to make us hurt to cause us to consider our need to rebound and recover.

There are three categories of divine discipline:

- 1) Warning discipline, which is a mild knocking as noted in Rev 3:20. And if the believer refuses to respond to this the next stage is...**
- 2) Intensive discipline, which is even more severe pain and even physical sickness, and if the believer still does not respond the last stage is brought in...**
- 3) Dying discipline, in which the believer dies the sin unto death.**

It must be noted that God is never unjust in His administration of discipline, **Act 10:34; Col 3:25**. The combination of warning discipline along with the already existing self-induced misery adds up to a significant shock in the life of the believer. Under warning discipline the believer's heart is not yet hard and can still respond to God's word. But once the heart is hardened, intensive discipline is needed. In the warning stage God can catch the believer's attention in a relatively mild manner. If the believer continues in habitual negative volition toward doctrine he dulls his sensitivity to truth and warning discipline is no longer sufficient. Intensive discipline is then administered in an attempt to startle the believer out from his rebellion toward God. And remember, the grace of God in the distribution of divine discipline is not designed to make the believer pay for his sins and negative decisions, but is designed to offer the hope of reunion to fellowship with Him! Intensive discipline by itself

is worse than self induced misery and warning disciplined combined. Its' pain is extremely severe and is designed to be unbearable. With each rejection of God's gracious appeal to return to His plan the Christian renders himself less capable of making positive decisions. This leads to hardness of the heart as described in such passages as **Heb 3:7-14; Jer 49:19**.

Hardness of the heart or scar tissue eventually locks the believer's volition into the negative position. In having almost traveled past the point of no return the believer then arrives at the third and final stage of divine discipline, the sin unto death, **1Jo 5:16**. In ignoring doctrine, death for the believer becomes a terrifying plunge into the unknown. And though such a rebellious believer will enjoy happiness in heaven according to Rev 21:4, he receives no eternal rewards with which to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ, 1Co 3:15! His tailor made blessings for time and eternity are never delivered to him but remain permanently on deposit in the record section of heaven as a memorial to his lost opportunity and to God's perfect justice, Ephesians 1:3; 1Peter 1:4.

You may say, well I know lots of permanently negative believers who have not yet died the sin unto death. Well, God may keep such negative believers alive longer in their state of intensive discipline as agents of momentum testing in the lives of advancing believers. Though these cosmic Christians are enemies of the cross according to **Phiippians 3:18 & James 4:4**, they are eternally saved. **Psalm 76:10** tells us that God can even use the wrath of man to advance His purpose and His plan. The Christians who are suffering under intensive discipline may administer people testing, thought testing, system testing, or even disaster testing to those spiritually adult believers who are advancing in God's plan. Under the concept that God uses the negative believers to train positive believers we must realize our focus is never to be on man but on God. The issue is, can you still love them impersonally and treat them as members of the royal family of God? If so your spiritual strength will gain muscle. Growing believers who can see through the negative believer's facade will discern the evil of self righteousness and avoid condescension thereby accelerating their own spiritual growth.

God's genius is wonderfully displayed as He permits a negative Christian in Satan's cosmic system to ambush a positive Christian. It is by the grace of God that negative believers and enemies are left in our lives since through their negative volition toward God's plan they become a means of building the advancing believer's spiritual strength. Now of course this is not the highest Christian calling to aspire to, that is, to become a thorn in someone's side, but whether these people are used by Satan or by God,

they are in our lives for our own benefit and must therefore be recognized as such. **Ephesians 6:12** tells us we wrestle not against blood and flesh (man) but against the powers which are at play in the angelic conflict. Point being, divine discipline may incidentally help someone besides the one being admonished. Hmm, perhaps the advancing Christian owes thanks to the obnoxious Christian.

Now, the points of doctrine that the negative believer refuses to accept will be learned the easy way or the hard way through divine discipline. Divine discipline offers the limited way of learning in life whereas the word of God offers unlimited knowledge of God's plan. Discipline can only motivate the believer to return to the plan of God and resume learning the right way through Bible doctrine. Therein, divine discipline has a limited objective, it teaches the believer how to rebound and recover, not how to execute God's plan. Once the believer is restored to fellowship he is then in a position to utilize divine assets and the problem solving devices. This is not to say that once a believer rebounds all effects of discipline disappear.

When a believer rebounds his discipline may cease altogether, diminish to a degree, or continue with the same intensity, but which ever course it takes, it is designed for our benefit and spiritual growth. God never makes a wrong decision! God only gives us that which contributes to our happiness and blessing. Divine discipline trains God's children to obey His plan.

That which brings on more discipline than any other Christian offense are the sins of the tongue. The sins of the tongue (SOT) originate from a bad mental attitude. The minute we gossip it reveals that there is something wrong with how we are thinking. Yet people are generally quite stupid in that they don't look at the motivation behind the SOT but rather listen to the gossip. Hence the stupid get deceived, **Romans 16:18**. It is mental attitude sins which cause the believer to exalt self and put down others by way of the sins of the tongue. For such destruction of the believer's privacy there is what is known as triple compound discipline. God does not take lightly the intrusion upon the privacy of any believer! Triple compound discipline deals first with the believer's decision to commit the mental attitude sin. The Bible teaches that whether or not the accusation is true, it is of no consequence since it is no one's business!!! There is no excuse for repeating something negative about another. To even hint at another's sins or weakness is a direct violation of the grace of God. 1Co 13:4 informs us that love thinks no evil.

God has granted to each believer-priest the right to conduct his life before the Lord, **Romans 14:4**, and it's before the Lord we stand or fall and Him

to whom we answer. Hence SOT is one of the most devastating forms of self induced misery. Triple compound discipline is administered to the believer for the mental attitude sin, for the verbal sin, and then for the sin mentioned in your slanderous report! Yet even if others vilify and hurt you **Luke 6:36** tells us your attitude toward them should be one of mercy and forgiveness. If you cannot forgive others then throw away rebound! God will not accept your plea for forgiveness if you do not forgive those who offend you.

Now, also under the category of the suffering incurred by divine discipline is the concept of collective suffering. There is a staggering amount of human suffering that lies beyond one person's responsibility. For example, how do mass historical disasters such as wars, famines, epidemics, and economic depressions fit into the biblical doctrine of suffering? Well, widespread historical suffering always comes from one of three sources, Satan, man, or God. Even in his fallen state Satan is a genius of executive ability and the cosmic system (the world system as we know it) is his brilliant strategy for ruling his kingdom on earth, **Ephesians 2:2; 2Co 4:4; John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11**. Remember, Satan's ambition noted in Isa 14:14-16 is to be equal to God, but no creature can ever stand independent from God! Therefore, much of the world's suffering is caused by the devil's inability to execute all that he has designed. Suffering is a fact of life in the devil's world but God has designed a power sphere for us to reside in while in this world, His plan known as predestination, discovered in His word. If we chose for His plan we are protected by His wall of fire, Zech 2:5 cf Rom 8:28. In spite of the collective suffering brought on by Satan, man's self-induced misery, and that suffering which God allows, our comfort is in knowing that Jesus Christ controls history, **Psalm 2; John 5:22; Revelation 1:5,18**.

God disciplines the believer and judges unbelievers who reject truth and violate His plan. Such divine retribution not only affects the believer in view but it also overflows to those in his periphery. An example of this would be the decline of a nation under the weight of its own degeneracy. Isa 1:18-23; Nev 9:37; and Psa 106:41 tell us that the nation who rejects God will be governed by wicked rulers. Our part in the scheme of things is to reach spiritual maturity and bring blessing upon our nation. Divine retribution of the client nation intensifies through the five cycles of discipline including social disintegration, economic collapse, and political chaos, Lev 26:14-17. And, the 5th cycle destroys the nations sovereignty through the horrors of military conquest, reducing the population to poverty, barbarism, and slavery, Deu 28:49-67. On such collective suffering Hos 4:1-6 gives us great insight. It's lack of knowledge of God which is what destroys a nation and it starts from within! Our job is to prepare for collective suffering through our own spiritual advance.

Another topic noted under the collective suffering aspect of divine discipline is the third and fourth generation curse documented in Exo 20:5; Num 14:18-19; Exo 34:6-7; Deu 24:16. The fourth generation curse deals with a group of people, be it a family, a nation, or specific group, defined not only as they extend over a geographical area but over a period of time. **2Peter 3:9 tells us that God is not impulsive but is patient and longsuffering.** Okay then, how can a God of grace, justice, and love "**visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children and on the third and fourth generations of those who hate him**"? Notice that such a curse is visited upon generations who consistently hate him. It is not incurred on a positive generation related to the past generation who hated God. This curse speaks of three of four consecutive generations who reject God. In such, God is never unfair. The divine policy of the fourth generation curse punishes the guilty while protecting the innocent and thereby guarantees the future freedom of each individual to express his positive or negative volition.

While He treats an individual as a person God does not neglect to deal with the collective guilt of a group, family, or nation. Patterns of sin, habitually repeated in a group of people become the foundation for ingrained characteristics of evil. Therefore, God must step in. When negative volition runs so rampant as to threaten His plan, God does not leave the guilty unpunished. God must send a catastrophe to devour the evil group. This form of discipline allows evil patterns to develop in the course of human history but destroys them before they can jeopardize God's plan. Each generation in view has willfully chosen to commit the sins of the generation before them. This curse can be broken by the choice to execute God's plan. Therefore, none suffers apart from their own volition. The sins of the fathers have to be repeated by the next generation and the generation after it for the culpability to arise and warrant divine punishment. But, God promises that obedience to His plan will break the curse.

It must be understood then, under the principle of the third and fourth generation curse that we are never punished by being involved with the wrong group but rather by not loving God. The fourth generation curse then, furnishes a principle which aids our understanding of the interpretation of history. Historical disasters are often divine discipline sent to break up destructive trends and give the next generation equal opportunity to fulfill the plan of God. The first sign of a degenerate generation is disrespect for parents, Exo 20:12, after which this arrogance culminates from there to the point in which it devours its victims.

In closing, the fourth generation curse teaches us that rejection of God's plan can become the accepted, ingrained tradition of a family or nation.

Opposition to God leads to terrible suffering personally and to disaster for the nation. Also revealed is God's marvelous grace and patience in giving ample amount of time and options. This curse is never to imply that the guilt passes from parents to children but that parents who oppose God's plan will influence their children to follow the same pattern of opposition. Even under such influence the believer is always free to express his own volitional decisions. But if rejection of God is continually chosen, the fuse of destruction will burn its course. The solution to the fourth generation curse requires severe punishment of criminals but emphasizes instructing children in the laws of divine establishment and in Bible doctrine! As always, the solution rests in what the word of God has to say!

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