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## *Conversion of Saul: A Lesson on Suffering, Pt 3* **Acts 9:23-31& Hebrews 12:4-13**

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**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.
  - 1. We saw in Acts 9 how suffering for the name of Jesus Christ is something God specifically called the apostle Paul to as a life. But it is also the call of all Christians, though the level of suffering and the length may differ in each.
  - 2. Then we considered the cause of all suffering—the presence and dominance of sin in this age in which we live and act. The whole of creation is groaning under the weight of sin and we see the effects on all things and people, whether a Christian or a pagan. So this sort of suffering is common to humanity.
  - 3. Finally we looked at how we are to respond to a suffering as a direct result of sin and folly. For the one suffering the consequences of their actions God expects them to accept the consequences and bear up under them. He offers no praise to anyone who does so, it is simply expected. And the Bible makes it clear that the Church-at-large is to offer little sympathy to those caught in their sin and disobedience.
  - 4. Today we will now turn our attention to another common aspect of suffering: discipline by the hand of the Lord.
- 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.

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- a. Usually it goes in one of two extremes, God wants you happy and prosperous **or** God is uncaring and maybe even a bit nasty and mean.
  - b. We must grasp that suffering is part of God's will and purpose for us. The bible is not shy about that statement. And we must remember that though we might feel alone in the moment, the promise of our Lord is that He walks with us through the valley of the shadow of death. The Holy Spirit prays on our behalf in the midst of much groaning.
  - c. Take your burdens and cast them in prayer to your Heavenly Father, for He care for you. The Psalmist says it so beautifully, *"I have set the Lord continually before me; because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken"* (Psalm 16:8)
  - d. Or, *"Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me; You will stretch forth Your hand against the wrath of my enemies, And Your right hand will save me"* (Ps. 138:7).
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.
  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.'

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- a. In light of those faithful witnesses we now see the call in 12:1-3 to make the ultimate focus of our faith be Jesus Christ.
- b. It is framed in the idea of a race we all run. Note the details of this race:
  - (1) We are to remember that we run a race many others ran before us.
  - (2) We are to strip away all that entangles us, both sin and simply extra weight. And the hand of the Lord in discipline is often a way we are helped to untangle ourselves.
  - (3) We are called to run with the long view in mind. It is not a sprint, it is long distance.
  - (4) We endure by fixing our eyes of Jesus.
    - (a) Author.
    - (b) Perfecter/finisher.
    - (c) He kept His eyes on the joy that was on the other side of the Cross. That joy was being again with His Father at the throne in heaven.
- c. So vs 3 tells us to keep Him forefront in your mind (consider).
  - (1) He endured . . . [what?] hostility by sinners.
  - (2) “so that” **if** you keep Jesus’s faithfulness and endurance at the top of your mind, **then** you will not fail in this race.
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.
      - (a) NOT just your own sin, though that is a major part of your race. Putting to death deeds that belong to this sinful age.

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- (b) BUT also sins done against you. As you learn to properly respond to sins done to you. Such a hard lesson for so many to learn.
  - (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.”
    - (a) In fact in Deuteronomy 8 God tells Israel when it is that they will forget Him. Listen and let it sink into your hearts. *“when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery”* (Deuteronomy 8:12-14).
    - (b) The danger of comfort and wealth are that they help you to forget to trust in God. Your trust subtly begins to shift to your strength, your skills and your money and the Lord moves to the background, at best.
  - (3) And so, in vss 5-6 we have the writer quoting out of Proverbs these words of exhortation. He quotes them to show the people what they have forgotten. They have allowed the truth of the Word of God to be pushed aside into the realm of the forgotten.
  - (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. You see His discipline as meaning nothing and so you move on in your life.
  - ii) The second is fainting or becoming worn out and giving up. It is making the discipline to be worse than it really is and trying to become a victim rather than one being disciplined.
- (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. So when you regard it lightly or act as if you are dying of mistreatment, you are actually rejecting both God and His love for you.
  - ii) The reason He disciplines you is because He has welcomed/received you into His household.
    - a) Give that some thought. It is the sovereign God who takes a rebel and enemy and so changes him so as to adopt him.
    - b) Metaphorically speaking, the very hand that strikes you to discipline you does so because He first has welcomed you into His life and household.
    - c) And do not miss the severity of what that discipline looks like. He scourges every one of them.
    - d) *mastigóō* which refers to the whipping received by Jesus at His trial. It is promised to His followers

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- to be done to them by those who hate the gospel and Jesus.
      - e) This is completely different than the current trend of “gentle parenting” but it is also not one of abuse and domination that characterizes too many parents.
      - f) This sort of discipline flows from the fact that you are loved, welcomed and now are being trained to live in such a way that reflects your Father in heaven.
    - 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.
      - (a) Why do you endure it? Beloved, only a true Christian will endure it all the way to the end of their life. So why?
      - (b) Because you understand it is evidence that you are His child. You see that He is dealing with you as with a son or daughter. No true father refuses to discipline his son, most certainly not God Himself.
      - (c) To not be a person who knows and experiences God’s discipline in your life is to be a man or woman who should question whether they are truly saved.
      - (d) And when that discipline comes it will hurt but you should embrace it for it is evidence of His love for you.
      - (e) God is not content to leave you as you are. He is always bringing you into a greater conformity to Jesus your Lord.
    - (2) vss 9-10 shows us the right attitude to have in the midst of discipline.

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- (a) This one is a stunning rebuke to our current culture. The reason is that the appropriate attitude when disciplined is respect.
  - (b) Our earthly fathers discipline us and we respect them. The argument is from lesser to greater, if we respect our fathers for doing that, then how much more should we respect our heavenly Father.
  - (c) It is worth noting that our earthly fathers also discipline us as seems best to them. This means there are a lot of mistakes because we don't always know what is best. But we discipline our children regardless because they are our children.
  - (d) But God does so only for good. No guess work. He desires us to share in His holiness and this will only come through 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 disciple. 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.

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- (a) You gather around that one. You encourage. You strengthen.
    - (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.
    - (c) It is like a grandmother or grandfather sitting with a sad and discouraged grandchild who is being disciplined. You give them no sympathy but you do show them kindness. You speak into their hearts. You let them know they are loved. And you admonish them, as only a grandparent can do, to not lose heart.
  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.
      - (3) The wealthy can arrive early and they enjoy the food and drink but to excess. There is no concern for the poor who cannot come until their masters release them. And so Paul says in very strong words in vs 22 . . .



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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). They are NOT to be thinking of the food or drink. They are to be remembering the death of the One who brought to them salvation and forgiveness.
  - b. And so he gives a very strong warning in vs 27.
    - (1) What is meant by unworthy manner? Many ideas are given but it is rather simple. It is taking the Lord's Supper more like a social event rather than a recognition of what it represents.
    - (2) By being all about their own appetites and not the care and love of the whole church, especially the poor, they show that they despise the death of Christ. Why? Because He offered His body to reconcile them to God. And the Church is now His body and yet they treat one another like dogs and not treasured brothers and sisters.
    - (3) so vss 28-29 tells us that if we do not rightly consider the meaning and purpose behind the Lord's Supper then we invited God's judgment on ourselves. Please let that sink in.
  - 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) It is sort of like watching a son hit his little brother thinking he is really funny. And so the father hits the son and asks him if he thinks that is funny too. We treat lightly others in the church and then we find out God treats us in the same way and it can serve as a real wake up call.
    - (4) Then notice the shift, "a number" sleep.
      - (a) Not as many are in this category. Which is hopeful.

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- (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.
  - d. There is so much we could talk through on this passage in light of how churches function today in America. The marketing to a specific demographic. The method of manipulation and entertainment to keep it growing. The lack of a fear of God and a sobriety in worship. But time will not permit us, yet you might let your mind wandering into those areas for your own help.
- 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.
    - a. What a word of encouragement for us today. Here is a messed up church that has lost its way, yet though many of the people have given up on Jesus Christ, Jesus has not given up on them.
    - b. There is great mercy in this rebuke. This is a fleshing out of what we learned in Hebrews 12, “whom the Lord loves, He disciplines. . .”
  - 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. It is not merely to get a pound of flesh. It is to save a soul, to guide them back to the narrow path that leads to life.
    - c. 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 faith, but then sin entangles them to the point that the true state of their heart is revealed and off they go.

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- d. But what discipline does is it helps 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.**