

May 22, 2022

“The Discipline of the LORD”
Leviticus 26

FCF: Confusion about God’s discipline

PROPOSITION: (anchor) The LORD desires for us to know the blessing of walking with Him.
(magnet) We must then heed His discipline.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

There is a dog, Oakley, that lives next door to us. He’s young with a friendly demeanor. From what I’ve observed, his training has come mostly through a shock collar. And that’s been effective in keeping him from wandering out of the yard. But sometimes when I hear him yelp, I can’t help but wonder what goes through his head. “Who did that? And why did they do it?”

Oakley’s confused response to the collar reminds me of my own. “Who did that? And why did they do it?” I know more than Oakley. I know God is there. So what’s going on? Why the pain? We’re going to wrap up this series in Leviticus by considering the discipline of God.

We’re in Leviticus 26. The text is simply too long to read in its entirety this week. So we’re going to have to cut some out. But, not to worry, we’ll sum up those portions as we go.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Leviticus 26:1-20, 40-46](#)**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Some shocking news from last week. The black box from a China Eastern Airline jet that crashed earlier this year suggests that the Boeing 737 took an intentional nose dive. Data recovered shows that someone in the cockpit sent the plane into a descent that killed all 132 people aboard. You may know that when such crashes happen, one of the first things that investigators look for is the black box. It holds two components - the flight data recorder and the cockpit voice recorder. With those in hand, it’s often possible to piece together what happened. The cause is not always obvious. There are often several possibilities in the case of a crash.

The same is true for our difficult seasons, the hard things. There are several possibilities, different factors we should always consider. To start, there is the deep brokenness of creation, the hostile assaults of Satan, the negligence or malice of other people. And there is still one more - our own foolishness, our waywardness and rebellion. That can lead to a crash of sorts as well.

For what is God’s response when He sees such things in the hearts of His people? We read from Hebrews 12. He disciplines those He loves. That’s not pleasant. But it’s real. For God desires for us to know the blessing of walking with Him. That’s what brings His discipline.

What do we know of this discipline? Our text shows us three things. First, the pattern of God’s discipline. Second, the necessity of His discipline. Third, the purpose of His discipline.

I. THE PATTERN OF GOD’S DISCIPLINE

First, the pattern of God’s discipline. We see this in vv.14-39. What’s going on here?

A) A Striking Contrast

Note the striking contrast between the blessings and the curses set forth.

1. The blessings

We read of the promised blessings in vv.3-13. Material provision and protection. Even more, enjoyment of relationship with the Lord, the greatest good we can experience. (READ **Leviticus 26:12**) Haven't we heard this before? The land of Israel would be like the Garden of Eden.

2. The curses

In stark contrast to this are the curses of vv.14-39. Point for point, they are the polar opposite of the blessings - not Eden but a living hell. We were not made to turn from the Lord and life.

B) A Building Intensity

Besides the striking contrast, as we read through this, we see also a building intensity.

1. The stages

There are stages to the curses listed here - growing insecurity, terrible drought, wild beasts, war and famine, and then finally exile. All vestiges or external signs of God's favor finally gone.

2. The rationale

The rationale? To put increasing pressure upon hard stubborn hearts that refuse to yield.

But the Lord is determined. He will not relent. Such is the pattern of His discipline.

Illustration:

There is a Men's Ministry hiking trip next weekend. Let me offer some advice. Don't feed the bears. And don't come between a mama bear and her cubs. The fury of her attack is the mark of her love. And she loves greatly. So she will come at whatever threatens what she loves.

Application:

So does the Lord. Which means He will come at our sin because it threatens the one He loves. That is well worth considering. In fact, it makes it quite reasonable to ask Him, "Is this suffering, this difficulty I'm going through, because of something you are trying to save me from?" That's certainly not to say that's the cause of all suffering. But in some cases it can be.

The Lord desires for us to walk with Him. And to know the pattern of His discipline.

II. THE NECESSITY OF GOD'S DISCIPLINE

Which brings us to the necessity of God's discipline. Remember the audience here, what they had seen and experienced in the Exodus and at Sinai. Yet God felt the need to say this.

A) The Sobering Symptoms

And that's borne out in the sobering symptoms set forth, the signs of a dreadful disease.

1. The particulars listed

Listen to the particulars listed here, to the warning, to the verbs (READ **Leviticus 26:14-15**).

2. A summary stated

The summary given is no better (READ **Leviticus 26:21**). To "walk contrary to me" is to remain hostile to Him. It's used four times of the people and then also three times of God in response to the people. What's being described here? His people have walked out on the marriage.

B) The Deep Source

These are sobering symptoms traced back to a deep source (**READ Leviticus 26:41b**).

1. The ideal

An “uncircumcised heart” is an interesting image. Circumcision was the sign of the covenant in the Old Testament. It implies an acceptance and an embrace of the covenant. That is the ideal.

2. What is described

But what is described here is a heart that has rejected the covenant, engaging in external rites of a relationship with God without any reality behind it, living no differently than the other nations.

These symptoms and their root - that makes for the necessity of God’s discipline.

Application:

This is what can call for a severe mercy, a treatment from the Divine Physician so severe the patient may well think it’s going to kill them. Of course, our sad presumption is that we have no need of such treatment, of God’s discipline. But such pride, hidden from sight, is deadly.

Illustration:

Think of it this way. In Southern Mexico lies the Cueva de Villa Luz, or Cave of the Lighted House. As you make your way to the cave, you walk through a paradise of tropical birds and a lush rain forest. Underwater, the cave is fed by twenty underground springs, flowing watercourses which teem with tiny fish. The cave itself is home to spectacular rock formations and beautiful ponds. The environment seems so very inviting. But if you accept that invitation, you’ll soon be dead. Why? The Cueva de Villa Luz is filled with hidden but poisonous gases.

I wonder. If we were warned to stay away, would we? Would our curiosity get the best of us? Would we think we were immune? Thinking in terms of God’s discipline, can we admit we may have aims and agendas needing correction, paths and priorities needing straightening?

The Lord desires for us to walk with Him. And to know the necessity of His discipline.

III. THE PURPOSE OF GOD’S DISCIPLINE

Which brings us to the third point, the purpose of God’s discipline. What is He after?

A) The Breaking of Pride

Frightening as this may sound, the breaking of our pride (**READ Leviticus 26:18-19**).

1. A deadly sin

Pride is a deadly sin, the root of the rest. It makes us think we have no need of God or His ways.

2. The common cause

A common cause for pride are God’s blessings in our lives. How? We come to believe that such things come not from His hand but from our strength. And God stands greatly opposed to this.

B) For the Sake of Return

So He sets out to break our pride. All with a greater aim in view - our return.

1. For restoration

He longs for restoration, to see us home. And so He disciplines us. But we need to be clear. He is not punishing us. Yes, the pain may feel like punishment. But for the follower of Christ, all punishment due to us has already fallen on Him. Christ has drained dry the cup of God's wrath.

2. With assurance

Restoration is what He has in mind. And with that, we have an assurance. Which is so needed, given how hard such an offer of mercy can be for us to hear. In vv.40-42, we are told that with our confession comes His remembrance - not that He would forget but that He will fulfill His promises. Then in vv.43-44, He assures us He will not do to us as we have done to Him. And then comes v.45 (**READ Leviticus 26:45**). Let these words sink in. The covenant is conditional in terms of our experience. But it is unconditional in terms of its fulfillment. No matter what.

God is so determined to bring us back to take us home. And He will go to great lengths.

Illustration:

Archeology is a fascinating field of study. A good deal is involved in any dig - surveying, excavating, recording the site. Both old school trowels and high tech tools are used. The point is to find what's been buried. Imagine you know the spot of a great find - something of tremendous value. It's down there deep. But whatever approach it takes, a good deal of effort will be spent.

Application:

Do you know the Lord will take such effort with you? Such is His determination and devotion to you. What would your life look like if you knew that? What would start to change?

The Lord desires for us to walk with Him. And to know the purpose of His discipline.

CONCLUSION:

The twice delayed long awaited Inklings Abroad trip for Sarah and me is finally on so we will be gone the next few weeks. With that, as we wrap this up, I want to leave you with some timely and helpful insight from C. S. Lewis. It's from his book, *The Problem of Pain* (**READ**):

We are, not metaphorically but in very truth, a Divine work of art, something that God is making, and therefore something with which He will not be satisfied until it has a certain character. Here again we come up against what I have called the "intolerable compliment." Over a sketch made idly to amuse a child, an artist may not take much trouble: he may be content to let it go even though it is not exactly as he meant it to be. But over the great picture of his life—the work which he loves, though in a different fashion, as intensely as a man loves a woman or a mother a child—he will take endless trouble—and would doubtless, thereby give endless trouble to the picture if it were sentient. One can imagine a sentient picture, after being rubbed and scraped and re-commenced for the tenth time, wishing that it were only a thumb-nail sketch whose making was over in a minute. In the same way, it is natural for us to wish that God had designed for us a less glorious and less arduous destiny; but then we are wishing not for more love but for less.

What do we make of our trials, the hard things and difficult times? Child of God, disciple of Jesus, is that proof or a sign He has abandoned or forsaken you? No, not at all. Not in the least.

It may be the intolerable compliment fleshing itself out in your life, part of the endless trouble the Lord is taking with you. It may be His discipline. If so, it's only for your benefit. It proves your true status as His child. It calls for perseverance and, where needed, repentance.

The Lord desires for us to walk with Him. Let us then heed His discipline.

PROPOSITION: (anchor) The LORD desires that we would know the blessing of His rule.
(magnet) We must then heed His discipline.