

## The Positive Side Of Discipline

Professing Christians agree that being a disciple of Jesus is a good and positive thing. Yet we often have a very negative association with the very thing that is required of every faithful disciple: discipline. Discipline is “training that corrects, molds or perfects the mental faculties or moral character;” “instruction having for its aim to form the pupil to proper conduct and action;” or, “correction, chastisement, punishment inflicted by way of correction and training.” Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). Unfortunately, rather than hearing Jesus’ call for self-denial as a gracious invitation full of hope, all too many of us perceive self-denial as a negative thing.

Was Jesus’ self-denial in going to the cross a negative thing? While having some negative associations and implications from an earthly perspective, from the divine perspective Jesus’ crucifixion was ultimately glorious in what it accomplished (Hebrews 12:2). When we glory in the cross of Jesus Christ, we find no pleasure in its cruelty and brutality; we do find joy and hope in what it meant and what it accomplished (Galatians 6:14).

This, then, is the nature of discipline. “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11). We love and admire the fruit of good discipline. Every parent envisions his/her child growing to maturity with strength and success. Yet, if that vision is to become reality — it will require discipline, for “a child left to himself brings shame to his mother” (Proverbs 29:15).

Instead of practicing discipline, many people want their undisciplined lives to be not only tolerated but affirmed and validated as legitimate. They label any discipline in the form of correction as being judgmental. Many people misapply Jesus’ condemnation of unrighteous judgment (Matthew 7:1-5) as a means of deflecting any application of the Word of God being made to their lifestyles. So, while we affirm the practical importance, need, and long-term value of discipline — we may still seek to avoid it for as long as possible.

We must keep the goal of discipline fixed in our minds. That picture of the “peaceable fruit of righteousness” must be ever before us in order to motivate us to exercise self-discipline. A church in fellowship focused on the salvation and growth of “one another” will submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21) and discipline one another through instruction and correction from the Word of God (1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Timothy 3:16-4:2; Hebrews 10:24-25, etc.). Yet, of all the realms of discipline, parental discipline is primary. The failure of parents to instruct, train, correct, chastise, and punish their children in the fear of the Lord is the primary cause of a lack of self-discipline in the lives of individuals and our families, communities, and churches. No nation, no school, no family, and no church can be expected to instill in children the self-discipline which parents fail to provide in the crucial formative years. People may blame the media, the

schools, the churches, the culture, their children's friends, etc.; but, generally speaking, the failure of parents to teach and exemplify self-discipline is the source of our societal woes.

We need to change. We need to make a conscious decision not to react negatively to the word, concept, or action of discipline. Discipline must become a positive word in our minds and vocabulary so that we will not flinch when we hear it. The potential fruit of good discipline should motivate us to be eager and diligent in pushing past any momentary unpleasantness. That's what Jesus did for us. That's what we should do for ourselves, our children, and one another.

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