

Our Heavenly Father's Discipline

1 Corinthians 11:27-32 on August 8, 2021

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One of the things that I like to do for my personal daily devotions is to just slowly work my way through reading the entire Bible. It's actually pretty doable to read through the entire Bible in a year, but I tend to take a LOT longer than that. I like to SLOWLY work my way through one book at a time, not necessarily in any particular order. So, this summer, I decided that it was time to re-read the OT book of Jeremiah: 52 chapters. I've read through Jeremiah before, but to be honest, I was REALLY DREADING it. (Is it ok for a pastor to admit that?) The reason I was dreading reading through Jeremiah is that I know what's in there! Jeremiah had arguably one of the very TOUGHEST preaching jobs ever assigned. He had to go tell God's people that they were going to be taken into captivity in Babylon. But the Babylonian captivity itself, is NOT why I DREAD reading Jeremiah; it's the REASON behind the captivity. I DREAD reading Jeremiah because it records such a STRONG indictment against sin, specifically the sin of God's own people: Jeremiah records God's DISCIPLINE! ¹ ² If you're anything like me, it's much easier to avoid the topic of "God's Discipline," than it is to set aside time to carefully consider it. But that's what we're going to do today. The fact is, God's discipline is a topic we CAN'T afford to ignore.

In 1 Corinthians 11, the Apostle Paul is writing to the Corinthian Church about the Lord's Supper. In 1 Corinthians 11:27-32 he says, "So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being DISCIPLINED so that we will not be finally condemned with the world."

¹ Have you ever Googled a picture of the prophet Jeremiah? If not, I'll give you a hint, he's not very happy and he's usually weeping over the sin of God's people.

² God's discipline: just about every pastor I know would rather preach about something else. Something EASY like money or circumcision, or something SIMPLE like politics or racial reconciliation.

This is a VERY challenging Scripture to hear.³ Much like the Old Testament book of Jeremiah, I'd just as soon avoid this part of the Bible. However, the fact is, we need to read the whole counsel of God's Word, the complete collection of God's written Words. This text has two key considerations that we should note. First of all,

1) This is being written to believers, NOT to unbelievers. These are SAVED people, people in the church, who are being warned about God's discipline. Second of all,

2) This is about God's DISCIPLINE, NOT His condemnation. Now, this passage DOES use the word "judgment," but it's NOT judgment in terms of God's final judgment of eternal condemnation. We know from Romans 8:1, that "...there is now NO condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." So our salvation is absolutely secure, even when we mess up and stumble into sin. That said, "Our Heavenly Father's Discipline" is a very real thing. Therefore, we should carefully consider this warning that we find in 1 Corinthians 11.

Now, we're not going to take time today to dig into verses 27-29. If you'd like to learn more about that, I've put some extra notes in the footnotes of this week's written transcript.⁴ For today, let's zero in on 1

³ Not to mention, challenging to understand.

⁴ **1 Corinthians 11:27** told us, "So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord." **The obvious question here is what does it mean by an "unworthy manner?"** The "unworthy manner" in **verse 27**, refers specifically to "the unloving and self-centered way that some of these Corinthian Christians were behaving." (*The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1939 footnote on 1 Corinthians 11:27.) You see, the Early Church didn't just share a small cup of juice and a cracker, they enjoyed an entire meal together, each time they celebrated the Lord's Supper. **For this meal, some were going ahead with their own private suppers while others were going hungry.** Those with greater means were being selfish and discriminating against the poor. (*The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1939 footnote on 1 Corinthians 11:33.) Now, this particular example is not necessarily the ONLY way of behaving in an "unworthy manner." There could certainly be other ways of dishonoring the Lord's Supper, or of behaving in ways that are directly opposed to what it represents. The fact is, any attitude or behavior that fails to rightly honor the significance of this table, might be considered "unworthy" of the sacrifice that it symbolizes. **One author notes: "In reality, no one is worthy to take the Lord's Supper.** We are all sinners saved by grace. This is why we should prepare ourselves for Communion through healthy introspection, confession of sin, and resolution of differences with others. These actions remove the barriers that affect our relationship with Christ and with other believers. Awareness of your sin should not keep you away from Communion but should drive you to participate in it." (*NIV Life Application Bible Studies: 1 Corinthians*, Tyndale, Wheaton, IL, 1991, pp. 22-23 footnote on 1 Corinthians 11:27-34.) In other words, if WE were worthy, we wouldn't need Jesus in the first place! **1 Corinthians 11:28-29 go on**, "Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves." **This is a call to make sure that we don't make light of the Lord's Supper, but rather are fully aware of what it represents.** It represents Jesus actual physical body that was sacrificed for our sin. And, it also represents the church body of which every believer is a part. "Examine themselves" is a call to check ourselves to see if our own attitudes and actions, match up with what the Lord's Supper represents. **Now, admittedly, the immediate context of the struggle at the Corinthian Church, suggests that not "discerning the BODY" most directly refers to not discerning the CHURCH as the body of Christ.** (Note that verse 29 is the first verse that doesn't specifically mention the "BLOOD" of Christ in unison with His BODY. *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1939

Corinthians 11:30-32, “That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment.

Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world.” Verse 30 seems to be saying that some of the people in the Corinthian Church were already under God’s discipline. That is, they were already weak and sick, and a number had fallen asleep, which is another way of saying they had died. This seems awfully harsh; it feels REALLY intense. But the reason it SEEMS to be saying these things, is that it IS saying these things. That’s exactly the point of this warning in 1 Corinthians: “Our Heavenly Father’s Discipline” should get our attention. Verse 31 compels us to be “more discerning with regard to ourselves.”

Now, it’s vital that we’re CRYSTAL CLEAR on something here: ***Not every illness is the result of individual sin, but some illness may be.***⁵ The Old Testament figure Job is a good illustration of an illness that was clearly NOT the result of an individual sin: Job 1:1 begins, “...[Job] was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.” And yet, as Job’s story progresses, he loses all of his possessions, all of his children die, and then he’s afflicted with painful sores from head to toe. All of this happens, despite the fact that he’s committed no particular sin. We find another example from the life of Jesus. John 9:1-3 says, “As he (Jesus) went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.” Not every illness is the result of individual sin, BUT individual sinful actions CAN sometimes lead to sickness and death.^{6 7} This is what 1 Corinthians 11 is saying: God disciplines those He loves; He disciplines His

footnote on 1 Corinthians 11:29.) But, we can also understand this more broadly, to refer to Christ’s actual physical body, in addition to the church as the body of Christ. In other words, it’s good for us to discern that this meal represents the body of Christ in two ways: our vertical relationship with God which was purchased by Jesus’ BODY dying on the cross, and our horizontal relationship with our fellow believers who make up the church, which is called His BODY. (See *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2347 footnote on 1 Corinthians 11:29.) (“The “unworthy” eating of verse 27 that brings judgment is now described as eating “without discerning the body,” meaning the church.” Gordon D. Fee, *The New Int. Commentary on the NT: 1st Epistle to the Corinthians*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1987, p. 559.)

⁵ *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1939 footnote on 1 Corinthians 11:30.

⁶ *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2347 footnote on 1 Corinthians 11:30.

⁷ Consider James 5:14-16.

redeemed children. He chastens us, and reprimands us, BECAUSE He deeply cares for us.⁸ Our Heavenly Father wants the sin OUT of our lives!

We actually see this pattern all throughout the Old and New Testament Scriptures. In fact, Hebrews 12 demonstrates this by referring back to Proverbs 3, creating a bridge for God's discipline between our two testaments. Hebrews 12:5-6, quoting from Proverbs 3:11-12, asks us, "...have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens⁹ everyone he accepts as his son." In other words, we can IGNORE God's discipline by "making light of it," or we can "lose heart" and become DISCOURAGED by God's discipline, BUT, what we SHOULD do, is RECOGNIZE that God's discipline is motivated by His love for us. Hebrews 12:10-11 goes on to clarify, "...God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. 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." In other words, God is working for our good, for our increasing holiness. It doesn't feel very pleasant, but, if we submit to our Heavenly Father's leadership, it will be beneficial to our lives.¹⁰ It will bring greater righteousness and peace to our lives, IF we allow ourselves to be trained by God's discipline.

The focus here is on developing right behavior and right attitudes, which are rooted in the sanctifying work that Christ has already accomplished.¹¹ I was struck by this idea during another one of my devotional times. I've been SO blessed to read the book, "Gentle and Lowly," by Dane Ortlund. Chapters 8 and 9 in particular, focus in on Jesus as our ongoing intercessor and our advocate. Let me ask the question that Dane asks in his book: "What is Jesus doing now?"¹² As in, RIGHT NOW, today? Dane suggests that many of us Christ-followers today, tend to think of Jesus as not really doing much of anything these days.¹³ He's just sitting up in heaven,

⁸ Our Heavenly Father is fully invested in our journey of sanctification. God disciplines His redeemed children, just as earthly parents discipline their children, although imperfectly. *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1939 footnote on 1 Corinthians 11:32.

⁹ Quite notably, in Hebrews 12:6, the Greek verb for "chastens" means "to whip." Consider Job 13:15.

¹⁰ *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2083 footnote on Hebrews 12:11.

¹¹ *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2519 footnote on Hebrews 12:10.

¹² Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly*, Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2020, p. 77.

¹³ See discussion by Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly*, Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2020, p. 77.

because His one-time atoning work of salvation was completed at the cross. Jesus said it Himself, “It is finished.”¹⁴ And that’s good theology, Jesus saving work was fully completed in His death and resurrection. We have no need of further sacrifice from Him.

However, this doesn’t AT ALL mean that Jesus is no longer participating in our spiritual growth and maturity. Hebrews 7:24-25 assures us, “...because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.” “What is Jesus doing now?” He is interceding for us EVERY DAY in the very presence of God!¹⁵ Romans 8:34 agrees, “Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.” Dane writes, “The atonement accomplished our salvation; intercession is the moment-by-moment application of the atoning work.”¹⁶ “One way to think of Christ’s intercession, then, is simply this: Jesus is praying for you right now!”¹⁷

Jesus not only INTERCEDES for us though, but He also ADVOCATES on our behalf. And, as amazing as INTERCESSION is, ADVOCACY might be even better! 1 John 2:1 reminds us, “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.” Dane shares why advocacy may be even better than intercession: “An intercessor stands between two parties, an advocate doesn’t simply stand in between the two parties but steps over and joins the one party as he approaches the other.” In other words, Jesus takes our side! He stands right next to us because “He cannot bear to leave us alone to fend for ourselves.”¹⁸ So as much as “Our Heavenly Father’s Discipline” might be hard for us to bear, we are most certainly NOT left alone in our struggle against sin. Brother or sister in Christ, sometimes a reminder of “Our Heavenly Father’s Discipline,” is EXACTLY what we need.¹⁹ It’s what we need so that we’ll humble OURSELVES, before God has to humble us, through His discipline. Let’s

¹⁴ John 19:30.

¹⁵ *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2075 footnote on Hebrews 7:25.

¹⁶ Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly*, Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2020, p. 79.

¹⁷ Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly*, Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2020, p. 84.

¹⁸ Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly*, Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2020, p. 91.

¹⁹ We can spend our time and energy wrestling with the difficult theology of all of this, OR, we can respond to the clear call to examine whether we are living our lives rightly before the Lord.

call on Jesus, our intercessor and our advocate, to help us turn from our sin and grow in Christian maturity and holiness. Psalm 32:3-5 says, "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD." And you forgave the guilt of my sin."²⁰

In the spirit of honestly acknowledging our sin, pray this prayer out loud: "Dear Heavenly Father, I confess my sins before you today. I know that You are a Holy and Righteous God and that You desire for me to be holy and righteous. God of Truth, I have wandered from Your ways like a lost sheep. I have followed the desires of my own selfish heart and I have disobeyed Your good and holy commandments. I have done things that I shouldn't have done. I have left things undone that You have called me to do. Lord God, have mercy on me, remove my heaven burden from me, and come and rescue me from the place where my sin has caused me to drift away from You. Forgive me as I confess my faults. Restore me to a right relationship with You, as I humble myself with a repentant heart. Heal me from my sin-sickness, according to Your great promises given through Jesus. And for Your Name's sake, grant me a life that from this point forward, is completely committed to You. Help me in this journey of becoming a more fully devoted followers of Jesus. I pray this to the glory of your Holy Name."²¹

²⁰ 1 John 1:8-9, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

²¹ Based loosely on the Book of Common Prayer pp. 41-42 @ <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/>