

Articles and Sermons :: A DISCIPLINED LIFE by Richard S. Taylor

A DISCIPLINED LIFE by Richard S. Taylor - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2013/2/5 16:39

"God has given us a spirit of discipline" (2 Tim.1:7)

"The fruit of the Spirit is self-control" (Gal.5:22,23).

Discipline is what modern believers need the most but want the least.

Much of the restlessness and the instability in the lives of many Christians can be traced to the basic fault of an undisciplined way of life. There may be other secondary causes, but somewhere behind all of them is a fundamental need for discipline.

The discipline I am speaking of is far more than just the use of alarm clocks. It involves self-restraint, courage and perseverance as the inner armor of the soul.

Many emotional disorders among believers are the accumulated result of years of self-indulgent living. I am not thinking of backsliders who drink and commit adultery, but of respectable Christians who never do such things, but who are nevertheless undisciplined. A lifelong pattern of running away from trials, of avoiding difficult people, of seeking the easy way, of giving up when the going gets rough, finally produces sick believers, who are incapable either of fulfilling God's perfect will for their lives, or of functioning as useful members of the body of Christ.

The Bible says, "If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small" (Prov.24:10).

Days of adversity will come to all of us. Only by consistent, disciplined living can that strength of character be developed in us, that can enable us to face those days of adversity without fainting.

DISCIPLINE - THE KEY TO POWER

Many Christians go through an emotional experience of "the baptism in the Spirit", that seems to be totally unrelated in their thinking to any form of rugged self-denial.

No-one can become genuinely holy, whatever experience he may have had, unless he is disciplined in all areas of daily living. The advantage that a man with a disciplined life has will be seen not only in greater holiness and spirituality, but also in greater efficiency and effectiveness in everything that he does for the Lord.

The strong disciplined character of Madam Guyon enabled her, even when imprisoned in a filthy French prison for many years (in the 17th century), to rise above her surroundings in her spirit, and to write:

"My cage confines me round;
Abroad I cannot fly.
But though my wing is closely bound,
My heart's at liberty.
My prison walls cannot control
The flight and freedom of my soul."

There is tremendous spiritual power in such a life.

The advantage that the disciplined person has over the undisciplined one shows up in many ordinary matters of daily life.

The disciplined person picks up his clothes; the undisciplined one lets them lie around.

One wipes clean the bathroom sink that he uses. The other leaves it dirty for someone else to clean.

One plans his work and works to his plan. The other works haphazardly.

One is always punctual in keeping his appointments. The other is notoriously late. One is always on time for the meeting

s of the church. The other is never on time.

The difference in all these cases is not one of character, but of habit.

The believers who get God's best in life are the ones who are thoughtful, systematic, thrifty, punctual and neat.

DISCIPLINE - THE MARK OF MATURITY

No-one can reach full maturity unless he is disciplined in daily life.

Our Physical Appetites

Discipline includes the subordination of the body's physical appetites to the Lordship of Christ.

Paul said, "Like an athlete, I punish my body, treating it roughly, training it to do what it should, and not what it wants to. Otherwise I fear that after enlisting others for the race, I myself might be declared unfit and ordered to stand aside" (1 Cor.9:27 - Living).

This begins with discipline in our eating habits and the ability to say at the dining table, "No, thank you. I won't have any more."

It also includes discipline in the sexual area. The sexual urge has to be fully controlled in one's unmarried days. But there is a place for discipline in this area even in married life. The man of disciplined character does not have to have a warm responsive wife, who caters to his every desire, in order to keep himself pure. It is by the grace of God that he keeps himself pure. If his relationship with his wife is happy, he is grateful. If it isn't, and he has to practice total abstinence all through his life, he simply seeks for more grace from God, and experiences the keeping power of God. This has nothing to do with natural temperament, but with discipline.

It is true that Paul warned married couples against subjecting one another to abnormal strain in this matter (1 Cor.7:5). But what can a man do when difficult circumstances make the carrying out of this instruction impossible? Then the disciplined man still lives in triumph, for he knows that God will not allow him to be tempted beyond his ability (1 Cor.10:13).

That great man of God, F.B.Meyer, once said in this connection (to someone who was struggling with sexual temptation), "I have had a cross to bear in this area in my life, and it has made me the man I am."

Emotions

Our emotions too must be brought under control. God certainly wants us to be warmhearted. But the warm heart must be wise. Otherwise it can end up doing and saying many foolish things, that can be regretted later on. We must always distrust our sudden impulses to say or to do something.

"A good man thinks before he speaks; the evil man pours out his evil words without a thought.....There is more hope for a fool than for one who is hasty in his words or his matters" (Prov.15:28; 29:20 - Living Bible, and KJV margin).

Emotional attachments to friends must also be disciplined. Two friends may gradually become so "thick" that they become possessive and exclusive. Such inordinate affection is both unhealthy and harmful.

In conversations with the opposite sex, a certain reserve and distance must be preserved at all costs - for friendship can become affection, and affection can lead to lust - to the shock of both involved. That which began innocently may end disastrously.

The rugged advice of Jesus to pluck out the offending eye, and to cut off the offending hand or foot, is never more appropriate than in such situations. Our soul, our home, our happiness and our testimony can all be saved, only if we take drastic action in such situations, and put our feelings to death ruthlessly.

Don't let Satan make you say, "I couldn't help it." Your emotions may not immediately obey your will. But your actions must.

In due course, your emotions also will follow the lead of your disciplined purpose and your decisive stand.

Don't ignite fires that you will later have to fight feverishly to put out.

Moods

Disciplined character also means the mastery of our moods.

A certain amount of the swing of the pendulum is unavoidable here, as long as we are in the flesh - for sometimes, a failure in our work or study, or physical weariness can bring a temporary cloud of discouragement quite easily. But we can by discipline, ensure that our moods don't hinder our work, our behaviour, or our relationships with others.

When we are slaves to our moods, we can make foolish decisions, spend money unnecessarily, neglect our duties, and alter our behaviour to people around us. At first people may be puzzled. But gradually they will begin to say, "Just one of his moods" - with a hint of scorn. And they will then learn to be careful in their relationships with us, because they never quite know what mood they will find us in. All of this makes for a very poor testimony for our Saviour and for the salvation we profess.

A disciplined Christian however behaves just as well when he "feels bad" as he does when he "feels good". He never complains that he doesn't feel like doing something.

A consistent work for God can be done only by those who have learnt to conquer their moods, and to work even when they "don't feel like it".

Speech

No-one can qualify for the high rating of a truly disciplined man unless his tongue is restrained by wisdom and directed by love (James 1:26).

A man may have a disciplined body, mind, and will, and even disciplined emotions, appetites and habits, but a loose tongue betrays a fatal fault in his armour.

Frankness in speech is not necessarily a Christian virtue. Only a fool expresses everything that comes to his mind. Frankness is a virtue only when it is coupled with intelligent, loving tact and discretion. But it can become an evil thing when it is the uncontrolled expression of opinions, without regard to time, place or human feelings.

It often takes a far higher display of discipline to refrain from speaking than it does to speak.

Forbearance and patience are the virtues that we all need to develop.

Priorities

A truly disciplined person is wise enough to subordinate less important things to the more important ones. Herein lies the most crucial problem that we face in our day and age.

We must learn to give first priority to the kingdom of God and His righteousness in practical daily living. This requires the discipline to reject day by day, that great list of activities that clamour for our attention and time, but that would hinder the doing of more important things.

Selection - selection - selection! This is the law of life.

We cannot do everything. So we must select. We cannot read everything. So we must select. Our spiritual stature will be determined exactly and entirely by our discipline in selecting our priorities.

If we "major in minors" and show "a first-rate dedication to second-rate matters", if we allow our friends, our impulses and the convenience of the moment, to dictate our priorities, we will drift weakly with the tide of daily circumstances, and will end up as shabby, mediocre, carnal Christians - useless to God and useless to men.

At the same time, if we merely give lip-service to the priorities of the kingdom, and allow them to remain forever in the realm of "good intentions", without rigidly adhering to them right now, the end result will again be zero character growth!!

Discipline in this area will push a man out of bed early in the morning to seek God, instead of rolling around for another half an hour, while wide awake.

Submission to Legitimate Authority

Another mark of the disciplined person is the ability to submit to legitimate authority gracefully. In most of life's normal relationships, rebellion is both stupid and destructive.

Habitual rebellion is the mark of carnal Christians, not of spiritual ones. It does not require either intelligence or character to assert loudly, "No-one can tell me what to do." But it requires both to submit graciously and with cheerful goodwill to authority. Insubordination is invariably the result of selfishness, and leads to misery and uselessness.

This does not mean that we are to blindly submit to the wishes and opinions of our authorities, if such submission violates our conscience. No. We must retain our individuality and our convictions, and know when to stand against authority, for the sake of truth.

THE DANGERS OF DISCIPLINE

Among the dangers there are in the pursuit of a disciplined life, the greatest one is imagining that discipline is the supreme value of life. It is not. A right relationship with God is the greatest of all treasures, and discipline must be seen as a servant, not a saviour!

A second danger is that of pride.

There is no doubt that discipline does make a man superior. If he is not watchful, the danger is that he will begin to feel superior too. There can be a sense of satisfaction in self-mastery, that ends up taking the glory to oneself, instead of humbly giving it to God. The most repugnant character of all is the disciplined Pharisee who is proud of what he has made of himself.

A third danger in the pursuit of discipline is that of going to the extreme of unChristian asceticism.

Christian discipline is far removed from pagan asceticism. Asceticism calls attention to itself; discipline does not. Asceticism says, "Touch not, taste not..."etc., (Col.2:20-23), whereas discipline deals only with those matters that affect our spiritual life.

Asceticism believes that all physical matter is evil, and tends to despise the good things of life. It denies joys and experiences that are the gifts of God, and believes that holiness consists of complete denial of everything earthly and physical. In contrast, Christian discipline never despises earthly blessings, but consecrates them to spiritual ends. It uses material things, but is not taken up with them, and does not abuse them (1 Cor.7:29-31). It does not abstain from physical enjoyments, but is self-controlled in the use of them, and uses them all for the glory of God.

It is true that Christian discipline may at times deny itself even God's good gifts, but then such self-denial will be done not in order to be holy, but to serve God and others better - even as Paul gave up marriage in order to be more freely available to serve the Lord and the churches.

A fourth danger is that of undisciplined discipline!

We must not allow discipline to become our god. We must be willing to accept the interruptions of life, with an intelligent flexibility. Helping people - and not discipline itself - must be the supreme goal of all our self-discipline.

The discipline of the Pharisees was so rigid (the old wineskin) that it was incapable of holding the new wine of the kingdom of God. So their virtue - their discipline - became their downfall. That which should have fitted them better for the kingdom of God kept them out of it!!

DISCIPLINE AND HOLINESS

We must not confuse disciplined living with holy living. The two are not the same.

True holiness begins and ends with living for the glory of God, whereas discipline can, if we are not careful, begin and end with living for the glory of Self.

We must also avoid the age-old monastic mistake of assuming that discipline alone is the means of holiness.

Disciplined living is certainly necessary in maintaining holiness and in consolidating it into firm character. But no amount of discipline can make the sinful heart holy. Discipline may tie down certain bad habits, and restrain them. But it cannot create a clean heart. Only partaking of God's nature in Christ can do that.

Even the discipline of suffering cannot make us holy. Suffering itself never purifies anyone. Suffering is meant to drive us to God Who alone can sanctify us entirely. True holiness is imparted to us and inwrought within us by the Holy Spirit, not because we have suffered, but because we have surrendered to Him in the midst of our suffering.

We are sanctified not by our tears, but by faith in Christ's blood, and by submitting to the power of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. These are the secrets of a clean heart.

The work of holiness is an inward work. Discipline makes that work to be manifest in our external lives.

God's grace alone can help us to discipline ourselves, and give us continual power to keep on denying self, even at times when all of our flesh cries out for an easier path. And God's light alone can purify our motives in our search for a disciplined life. And without Christian motives, no discipline can ever be called Christian discipline.

False holiness is often seen in an extreme and unnatural self-discipline, that is practiced by restless Christians who whip themselves in order to conquer sin and to please God.

Such Christians live a life of tremendous strain. They are overscrupulous, legalistic, petty, quick to criticize others, afraid to laugh (lest they become lighthearted), and unnatural. Such behavior is often an attempt to compensate for some hidden sin, or to overcome some beast of lust within.

These are heroic efforts, no doubt; and so we do not despise them. But they do not lead anyone to true holiness.

It is through an honest confession of our sin, being cleansed and broken, and being filled with the Holy Spirit, that we partake of that "holiness which is no illusion" (Eph.4:24 - J.B.Philips). Then we can relax, breathe freely, act naturally and be normal human beings.

We will still put to death the deeds of the body - but the power for this will be given to us by the Spirit (Rom.8:13).

HOW TO BECOME A DISCIPLINED PERSON

1. Reinforce your motivation for a disciplined life. Think often of the disappointment that you will be to God if you fail to be the man or woman that He wants you to be, just because you are too lazy.
2. Begin with the simple things. A disciplined Christian will always seek to avoid making unnecessary work for others. So hang up your clothes. Make your bed promptly and neatly every morning. Keep the washbasin clean, and put your shoes in their proper place. Clean the tools that you use, and put them back where they belong. Don't despise these trifles as being irrelevant to becoming spiritual. They are the very essence of it. They indicate that extra touch of foresight, carefulness, and thoughtfulness that makes the difference between a spiritual Christian and a carnal one.
3. Show respect to all men - even to the poor and lowly. When speaking or listening to someone, develop the habit of looking at him, as if no-one else mattered to you at that moment. When in a meeting, discipline yourself to keep your eyes on the speaker, instead of allowing your eyes to wander here and there. To gaze around at people, or down at your feet is rude and discourteous, both to the Lord and to the speaker.
4. Tackle the difficult tasks promptly. Do first the things that you would rather do last. Sit down right now, and write that letter (or that article), that you have postponed for so long.
5. Be punctual for the meetings of the church and for your appointments. The habit of being on time will never be acquired, unless you are convinced that Christian courtesy demands it, and unless you plan ahead and allow yourself a sufficient margin of time to get to the appointed place.
6. Don't waste your time in idle daydreaming. Bring every thought into captivity to Christ. Make use of your spare time to read Christian books, or to fellowship with someone, or to help others.
7. Don't be agitated when unexpected events throw your well-laid plans into confusion - for that is only foolishness. Believe on the other hand, that what seems to you at that moment to be nothing but human blundering, may be the gentle steering of God for your very best (Rom.8:28) - and so give thanks to the Lord for His orderings.

8. Love your critics. Cultivate an attitude of sincere gratitude for all correction. This is also a discipline. Getting offended when corrected is a mark of immaturity. Be willing to learn from the lowliest.

9. Be restrained in the areas of curiosity, prejudice and dogmatism. Don't be a busybody in the matters of others. Don't have a bias against any person or community. And don't be stubborn in insisting that you alone are right. Watch yourself constantly in these areas.

10. Conquer gluttony. Eating is not a sin, but gluttony is. Paul said, "All things are lawful for me; but I will not be mastered by anything. Food is for the stomach, and the stomach is for food; but God will (one day) do away with both of them...The body is for the Lord" (1 Cor.6:12,13).

One should eat heartily and with enjoyment. But we should know what is good for us, and how much, and have the self-control to stop when we should. The best exercise for health is the 'push-ups' from the dining table. Excessive overweight always leads to under-productivity in the work of God, and can also shorten our lives considerably.

If our lives are shortened, because of exposure to difficult climates in the Lord's work, or other unavoidable factors, or because of persecution, we can die with honour. But if our life is shortened because of overeating, what will we say when we stand in the presence of our Lord?

11. Learn to wait. To grab something before God's time is to spoil it. There is a time in God's timetable for all things - for example, in the matter of marriage. Wait for that time, and don't rush ahead. If you would be a disciplined person, learn to respect the time-tags that are found on life's joys and responsibilities and privileges. We don't help God by opening a rosebud - we simply spoil the blossom.

12. Welcome the difficult tasks in life. Cultivate a sense of responsibility in doing them faithfully. Ask yourself these questions:

Can I be depended on to fulfil any task assigned to me?

Am I quick to help when a job needs to be done, or do I find myself slipping away quietly?

Do I accept responsibility for my decisions, and also for my mistakes?

Can I be depended on in money matters?

13. Be systematic in prayer and Bible-reading. This is essential for a disciplined life. The discipline of determining to spend a fixed amount of time for this, at any cost, every day, will by itself bring rich rewards.

14. Avoid unnecessary luxuries and don't be wasteful in spending money. "Suffer hardship as a good soldier of Christ" (2 Tim.2:3).

There are dangers in times of ease and prosperity that can be avoided only by some deliberate acts of self-denial on our part. "When the nest is feathered too well, the eaglets do not learn to fly". This is where fasting has a real value. Our goal in life is Christlikeness, not a comfortable life.

The Christian life is serious, challenging and demanding. Following Jesus will lead us, not to a picnic, but to a battle. And let us remember that our Captain "never pleased Himself" (Rom.15:3).

As His disciples, let us then:

- have a passion for improving the quality of our Christian life;
- have a sense of stewardship towards life, to fulfil God's will;
- be ready at all times for sacrifice or for service;
- apply ourselves faithfully at all times to the task at hand;
- ALL FOR JESUS' SAKE!

Re: A DISCIPLINED LIFE by Richard S. Taylor - posted by PQ (), on: 2013/2/6 4:24

Amen! Great teaching.

pq*

Re: - posted by mama27, on: 2013/2/6 9:20

This article resonates with my soul...yet, judging by the number of views and comments, it is not a popular topic. In fact, the "American way" is counter to this in our day. When I was growing up in the 50's and 60's, it seemed that discipline was a way of life for most in the culture. Now, my children (who I thought I brought up to be disciplined in many areas) call me "OCD" for wanting to not have dirty dishes stacked up in the sink. I hadn't thought about it before, but I think this is another of Satan's subtle tactics to keep us from reflecting Christ to a lost world. And all the social media avenues certainly don't help, as we have simply too much to choose from in the buffet of life. Oh that we would take heed to what has been said here!

Re: A DISCIPLINED LIFE by Richard S. Taylor - posted by makrothumia (), on: 2013/2/6 11:37

Thank you so much brother Greg, it is articles like these that others have discovered and passed along that keep me coming back again and again.

I am old enough to have suffered the effects of lack of discipline and fortunate enough to have also begun to reap the first fruits of repentance unto this discipline described by brother Taylor.

For those who have ears to hear, this article has truth that all of us will learn one way or another, either by the good fruits of taking heed, or by the consequences of neglect.

makrothumia

Re: - posted by Compton (), on: 2013/2/6 12:07

Thanks Greg,

Today we seem to have more good ideas than actual know-how. This is a wonderfully detailed article, with useful specifics on practices and patterns.

It's reminiscent of Jonathan Edwards's Resolutions.

MC