

### **Lesson 8 – Personal Discipline (Chapter 10)**

As we left off in the previous lesson, there is no point in praying for "victory" over temptation if we are not willing to make a commitment to say no to it (Titus 2:11-14). That is where personal discipline comes in. The concept of discipline seems harsh to the traditional emphasis on "freedom in Christ" and carries with it the negative association with legalism and harshness. However, Paul stresses the importance of discipline – we are to train ourselves to be godly (I Timothy 4:7, I Corinthians 9:24-27).

Discipline and training toward holiness begins with the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16) and requires a disciplined plan for regular intake of the Scriptures and a discipline plan for applying them to our daily lives.

#### **Time**

First we need a planned, consistent time each day for reading and studying the Bible. Every Christian who strives to make progress in holiness is a person who has disciplined his/her life so that they spend regular time in the Bible. And Satan will always battle us at this point – trying to convince us we are too sleepy in the morning, too busy during the day and too tired at night. We must discipline ourselves to set aside/provide this time in our daily schedules.

#### **Method**

So we do not become lazy or unproductive with our time in the Word, it is important to establish a method. Traditional methods include:

- **Hearing** the Word taught by our teachers and pastors (Jeremiah 3:15)
- **Reading** the Bible ourselves (Deuteronomy 17:19)
- **Studying** the Scriptures intently (Proverbs 2:1-5)
- **Memorizing** key passages (Psalm 119:11)
- **Meditating** on what you have heard, read, studied and memorized

Meditating on the Word is not some mystical or eastern religious practice. To meditate on the Scriptures is to think about them, turning them over in our minds and applying them to our life's situations. The practice of meditation on the Word of God – simply thinking about it and its application to our lives – is a practice we develop through discipline.

#### **Objective**

The objective of our meditation is *application* – obedience to the Scriptures. Obeying the Scriptures may require a change in our patterns of life. Because we are sinful by nature, we have developed certain sinful patterns...habits. To break those habits requires discipline.

As you read or study the Scriptures and meditate on them during the day, ask yourself these questions:

1. What does this passage teach concerning God's will for a holy life

The Pursuit of Holiness\*  
*“Be holy, because I am Holy”*

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2. How does my life measure up that Scripture or principle – and specifically where and how to I fall short?
3. What definite steps of action do I need to take to obey?

We must be careful to avoid a vague, general commitment to obey – we must be diligent in applying the Word to specific areas in our lives. We deceive our souls when we grow in knowledge of the truth without specifically responding to it (James 1:22) which can lead to spiritual pride (I Corinthians 8:1), and yet not produce any real progress toward holiness.

### **Perseverance**

One necessary ingredient in developing a disciplined life toward holiness is *perseverance*. Any training – physical, mental, or spiritual – is characterized at first by failure. We fail more often than we succeed. But if we persevere, we gradually see progress until we are succeeding more often than failing. If it seems like we are making no progress, Satan uses that to discourage us and make us think that we can never overcome a particular sin. Jonathan Edwards, a preacher, missionary and theologian in the 1700s made this resolution – *“Resolved, never to give over, nor in the least to slacken, my fight with my corruptions, however unsuccessful I may be.”* Proverbs 24:16 tells us - *“For though a righteousness man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity.”*

### **Progress**

The truth is, the more we see the holiness of God and His law/Word revealed to us, the more we recognize how far short we fall. But, as we grow in the knowledge of God’s holiness for our lives, we are also growing in the practice of holiness in our lives. It may seem at times that the gap between our knowledge and our practice actually gets wider. This is the Holy Spirit’s way of drawing and progressing us to more and more holiness.

As we progress in holiness, we come to hate sin (Psalm 119:104) and to delight in God’s Word (Romans 7:22). We come to the realization that “his commands are not burdensome” (I John 5:3) but are “holy, righteous and good” (Romans 7:12). But also during this time, we see our own inner corruption and our frequent falls into sin and we cry out with Paul “What a wretched person I am” (Romans 7:24) and we just want to give up. But, by remembering the love of our Savior, the promises in His Word and the power of the Holy Spirit, we must persevere in spite of failure for “we can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!” (Philippians 4:13)