

Weekly Devotions: THE REFINING FIRE OF TRIALS 7

Are Trials God's Punishment?

Charles Spurgeon believed that God never punishes those who belong to Him but He will discipline us that we may turn from sin and grow in maturity. Spurgeon believes there is a difference between punishment and discipline for wrongdoing.

Like in every country when someone breaks the law, those in authority would need to punish the law breaker. This is justice. However, in a home when a child breaks the rule, e.g. steals something or gets into a fight, the parent out of love for the child will discipline him / her so that the child may learn to be upright.

Like the parent who disciplines the children so that they will become man and woman of integrity, God will also discipline us. God's discipline comes out of His love for us and is mitigated with grace; He does not mete out what we deserve. His chastisements are meant for us to turn away from our sin and to come back to Him. CS Lewis said pain is the megaphone God uses to speak into our lives and to get our attention. If our trial is the consequence of our sin, we should face up to the wrong we have committed, confess our sin and repent, and make restitution if needed.

Read Hebrews 12: 5-11

Some of the early believers were indifferent to God's discipline while others were overwhelmed by it (5). The latter were weighed down by their afflictions and felt God had forsaken them. The writer of Hebrews encouraged them to take comfort that it was out of His fatherly love that God had disciplined them. Their suffering was purposive and the pain was only for a short while. He told them good would come out of their affliction; "it will yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness" (Heb 12: 11).

Questions to Ponder

1. Why did the writer tell the early believers not to be indifferent or despondent over their afflictions (5)? What should they understand about God's discipline and how should they respond to Him (6-9)?
2. How is God's discipline different from that of our earthly fathers and what is His purpose in disciplining us (10)? What is "the peaceful fruit of righteousness" that will result from His discipline (11)?
3. When was the last time you had been disciplined by God and what positive changes had it brought into your life? Do you see yourself now as in need of God's discipline and what step of obedience can you take immediately to eliminate the need for God to discipline you?