

41. Four disciplines we need

May 25, 2014

As the Pima County Regional SWAT Team chaplain, I get to hang around with the K9 deputies and their Belgian Malinois from time to time. These dogs are highly trained and disciplined. The handler can put a piece of his favorite treats on top of the snout of his dog and he orders the dog not to move. Guess what? Against all that yummy treat smell, that dog will sit there and keep his eyes on the handler without moving. As soon as the handler gives an order to eat, the dog would flip the treat in the air so that he can catch it with one gulp.

Let's face it, the word 'discipline' is one of those words that we really don't want to associate with that often, if at all. Its English definition is "training, exercise, or a regimen that develops or improves a skill" or "punishment inflicted by way of correction and training". Neither one of them makes us feel comfortable, because we want an easy life.

The Greek word for 'discipline' is "hypopiazō" and its definition is far more graphic – "like a boxer one buffets his body black and blue, handle it roughly". You will find one verse that includes this word in the NT:

1 Corinthians 9:27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

We cringe at the definitions. But the Lord Jesus teaches us through His Word that discipline is more than punishment and correction, rather divine discipline is rooted in a deep care for our ongoing spiritual growth and maturity.

John 15:1-2 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

This morning we are going to see the Lord painstakingly pruning His very obedient and fruitful apostle Paul – not because Paul had done anything wrong, not because the Lord was totally sadistic, but because through these four disciplines he was about to receive, Paul would be more fruitful and bring glory to the Father in heaven.

I believe that the same disciplines of delay, false accusations, unfair exploitation, and uncertainty are used by the Lord for our spiritual maturity as well.

A. THE DISCIPLINE OF DELAY

Acts 24:27 But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound.

Acts 25:1 Now when Festus had come to the province, after three days he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem.

Since we finished the study of chapter 24 last Sunday, it has been only 7 days, but in this portion of the Bible, it was two prolonged years for Paul as a Roman prisoner. While he was chained to one of the Roman guards, he couldn't go anywhere and do anything. So he started a prison ministry and he had a captive audience – Roman guards. Where would they go? They were stuck with Paul by chain until their shifts were over. I wouldn't mind being stuck with this apostle.

Think about it, ladies and gentlemen. Until he was arrested in Jerusalem, Paul was unstoppable. He was constantly moving from city to city, from country to country. He

was the main evangelist of God. Now he was stuck in a jail and twiddling his thumbs and waiting, and more waiting without knowing when he was going to be released since the Lord Jesus personally told him that he was going to go to Rome to witness.

As the days became months; months became years, Paul's thought must have spun wildly: "Lord, how can I preach to the world if I can't get out of this jail? There is no internet, no YouTube, no PodCasting. Have you set me aside for a reason? Are you through using me? Am I in sin? Am I being punished?" You can feel his wondering heart.

Actually, God was planning to use Paul in even greater ways, but first He had to teach him lessons of patience, endurance, and humility that he could learn only through the discipline of delay.

B. THE DISCIPLINE OF FALSE ACCUSATIONS

Acts 25:2-8 Then the high priest and the chief men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they petitioned him, 3 asking a favor against him, that he would summon him to Jerusalem--while they lay in ambush along the road to kill him. 4 But Festus answered that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself was going there shortly. 5 "Therefore," he said, "let those who have authority among you go down with me and accuse this man, to see if there is any fault in him." 6 And when he had remained among them more than ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day, sitting on the judgment seat, he commanded Paul to be brought. 7 When he had come, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood about and laid many serious complaints against Paul, which they could not prove, 8 while he answered for himself, "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all."

Two years have passed since Paul's escape from Jerusalem under the protection of the Roman soldiers and his defense before the former governor Felix, yet these Jews were still grinding their axes. You would think that their anger would have subsided after two years, but it had not, Satan the murderer was hard at work. They didn't want justice or truth, they just wanted Paul dead.

Many in the Bible were the target of false accusations, such as Joseph and Daniel. Yet in another sense, every follower of Jesus is the target of false accusations by the accuser of the brethren. Thankfully, Jesus is our Defense against condemnation and false accusation.

Romans 8:33-34 Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

If you are not prepared in your heart for false accusations from the enemies of God, you will go into a massive tailspin which can easily cause you to doubt the faithfulness of the Lord. You can not learn this from books or from other people's experience. You can only get it through the Word of God and the discipline of false accusations.

C. THE DISCIPLINE OF UNFAIR EXPLOITATION

Acts 25:9-12 But Festus, wanting to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me

concerning these things?" 10 So Paul said, "I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know. 11 For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar." 12 Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, "You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!"

When you were a kid, you were told to do something and you didn't like it. The first sentence that rolled out of your mouth was, "It's not fair." Then, your parents replied without missing a beat, "Life is not fair." Wouldn't you know, you repeated the exact same thing to your own kids. Guess what? When you are a Christian, it just gets a little worse, because the world and the devil are against you.

Though Festus was a much better governor than Felix, he understood that it was important for him to have and keep a good relationship with the Jewish leaders in his province. After all, he was a politician.

Paul was in the Jewish leaders' court previously and he knew that he was not going to get a fair trial. So he pulled out his trump card as a Roman citizen – appealing to Caesar. A Roman citizen, unless he was guilty of murder, could always make his appeal to Caesar if he was getting an unjust decision from the court. Caesar would be the one man Supreme Court of that day. He reserved the right for the final disposition.

I'd love to be in this court chamber when Paul announced, "I appeal to Caesar." Governor Festus would have been totally stunned and the Jewish religious leaders covered their mouths in astonishment. With one sentence, Paul took his case completely out of the hands of both of them. It is far more powerful than someone in our country who is arrested to say to police, "I want my lawyer now." From that moment police cannot question that person anymore unless his lawyer is present.

As a result of the mutual benefits between the new governor and the Jewish leaders, Paul felt the sharp edge of the dagger near him again – the discipline of unfair exploitation, but under God's approval and supervision.

D. THE DISCIPLINE OF UNCERTAINTY

Acts 25:13-22 And after some days King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to greet Festus. 14 When they had been there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying: "There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix, 15 about whom the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, when I was in Jerusalem, asking for a judgment against him. 16 To them I answered, 'It is not the custom of the Romans to deliver any man to destruction before the accused meets the accusers face to face, and has opportunity to answer for himself concerning the charge against him.' 17 Therefore when they had come together, without any delay, the next day I sat on the judgment seat and commanded the man to be brought in. 18 When the accusers stood up, they brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed, 19 but had some questions against him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. 20 And because I was uncertain of such questions, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there be judged concerning these matters. 21 But when Paul appealed to be reserved for the decision of Augustus, I commanded him to be

kept till I could send him to Caesar.” 22 Then Agrippa said to Festus, “I also would like to hear the man myself.” “Tomorrow,” he said, “you shall hear him.”

At the time of Jesus and apostle Paul, there were three very complicated leaderships in Israel:

- 1) **Roman Governor** – He had the overall power with the Roman military forces behind him.
- 2) **Kings of the Jews** – Though the Herods’ family was Edomites, they were appointed by the Roman emperor to oversee the civil affair in the land.
- 3) **Sanhedrins** – This Jewish group, a.k.a. the council dealt with religious and ritualistic Temple matters in Israel.

Let’s meet king Agrippa and Bernice. They were brother and sister .

This King Herod Agrippa II ruled a satellite kingdom of the Roman Empire to the northeast of Festus’ province. Agrippa was known as an expert in Jewish customs and religious matters. Herod Agrippa II didn’t rule over much territory, but he was of great influence because the Roman emperor gave him the right to oversee the affairs of the temple in Jerusalem and the appointment of the high priest.

Some of you might be confused so many names of Herod in the NT . Here is a simple explanations. This king Herod Agrippa II’s great -grandfather had tried to kill Jesus as a baby; his grandfather had John the Baptist beheaded; his father had martyred the first apostle, James. Nice family reputation, don’t you think?

Bernice was Agrippa’s sister. She was married to her uncle. Upon her husband’s death, Bernice lived with this king, her brother. According to secular history, these two’s relationship was incestuous. Even Hollywood producers would blush for this.

This hearing was not a formal court. Besides, how could Paul expect any kind of justice from the morally corrupt Agrippa and Bernice?

Can you imagine the uncertainty of Paul’s future? To the Jewish religious leaders, Paul was a thorn in the flesh; to the new governor Festus, he was an embarrassment; to king Agrippa and Bernice, he would become a court jester for their entertainment. Anyone of them could easily have killed Paul and never report to Caesar about him and no one in any of three leaderships would miss him.

How easy it was at times like these to doubt his value and worth, and even the promise of God! Yet throughout this discipline of uncertainty, Paul held fast to his faith in Jesus Christ. We can do the same.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Don’t press God to end your discipline.

It is a waste of time. He is not going to be pushed around by you or me. If we continue to end the discipline we are going through, it is the evidence that we need more.

2) Don’t turn to unbelievers for their advice. You will get the ungodly ones from them. Turn to God’s Word, the Bible.

From the Word of God you will receive the refreshment and comfort you need, because that is how God speaks to you.

3) Don't think that the end result has anything to do with yourself . It is all about Jesus.

At the end of our discipline training , let's not think that we pull ourselves up out of difficulties by our bootstraps. Because it is not us, but the L ord's mercy and love for us.