

CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE



“But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” -1 Corinthians 9:27

“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him...”-Hebrews 2:3

As Christians, there are many things we must never attempt independent of the leading of God's Spirit. In other words, things we just cannot take upon ourselves to simply *do*. For example, we don't presume, apart from the leading of God's Spirit, to prophesy. On the other hand, there are other things that we are plainly commanded to *do*. With these things we need no further instruction, we must merely act and *act decisively*, lest we become disobedient and obstinate. Thus, we conclude, genuine faith not only hears and believes God's Word, but acts upon it as well. This being true, we see that true faith is rooted in our will, not our feelings. Yet sadly, Christendom today often allows emotion, feelings, and carnal reasoning to dictate. Now, I'm not trying to strip Christianity of its pathos and passion. Emotion is, I believe, consistent with pure faith: *how can I believe that Jesus brutally died on Calvary to redeem me from all sin without being moved emotionally?* Nevertheless, we are never to be led by emotion nor are we to depend on what we can sense or feel to confirm spiritual matters. I believe one of the leading marks of spiritual maturity is to be weaned from relying on what we see or feel. The Bible declares...

2 Cor. 5:7 For we walk by faith, not by sight...

As Christians we are to, by faith, come under the government of God's Word and allow it to define our reality. Therefore, a life of faith necessitates a life of discipline. We must come to understand, true spirituality cannot be measured by knowledge, or revelation, or waxing emotional. No, true spirituality is to overcome the flesh, the world, sin, and Satan by faith in the Word of God. We can never know such spiritual victory apart from exercising Christian discipline: something lacking in today's loose and apathetic church-world...

"Ours is an undisciplined age. The old disciplines are breaking down. Above all, the disciplines of divine grace are derided as legalism or are entirely unknown to a generation that is largely illiterate in the scriptures. We need the rugged strength of Christian Character that can come only from discipline."
-V. Raymond Edman

Self-denial is the first oracle of Biblical discipleship. In short, to follow Jesus, will often require that we say "no" to ourselves and our feelings. Yet, in this touchy-feely generation people often justify their compromises with, *"I want to make sure I'm being led by God's Spirit."* Or, in other words, they want to feel something. Being led by the Spirit is not an esoteric exercise shrouded in mystery. We must begin by obeying the Bible, as obviously to obey the Scriptures is indeed being led by the Spirit.

In this article, I will outline five spiritual givens, so to speak, in our lives. These are areas that we may not always feel like *doing*, nevertheless, we should be resolved to *do*, simply because they are commanded.

WE WILL NOT ALWAYS FEEL LIKE PRAYING

1 Thes. 5:17 Pray without ceasing.

Personal prayer is a spiritual discipline. How do we know this? Because prayer is commanded.

Proverbs 8:17 I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me.

Luke 21:36 Watch ye therefore, and pray always...

1 Peter 4:7 But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.

Prayer is fundamental to our relationship with God. Yet, today if you preach that men must pray, you will be accused of legalism.

Matthew 28:20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you...

We must not wait to feel like praying; we must act, by faith, on God's Word. We have an early morning prayer meeting at 5:30am. I must confess, I rarely feel like getting up at 5:00am to attend this prayer meeting. However, I realize, if I do not plan to pray, if I do not set aside time to pray, then the day will pass and I will, more than likely, not pray. Saint of God, if we refuse to wake up and seek God, ultimately, we will one day wake up to find ourselves in hell.

"He that is not a praying man, is not a Christian man." -John Bunyan

Prayer doesn't save, Jesus saves, but prayer is the foundation of our saving relationship with Him.

Hebrews 11:6 ...for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

WE WILL NOT ALWAYS FEEL LIKE PRAISING AND WORSHIPPING GOD

Psalm 107:8 Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!

Praising and worshiping God is not an option, but a command. *Praising God* can be simply defined as giving God thanks for what He has done, while *worshiping God* is to adore Him for who He is. Both are commanded all over the Bible. Furthermore, the Bible speaks of valid modes and expressions of praise and worship. However, many complain, *"I don't feel anything"*. My reply? "You ought to believe something!" Sadly, I find people want a sign, something they can tangibly feel, or they refuse to respond, by faith, to God in simple praise and worship. The Bible says *signs* shall follow the Word, not the Word will follow a sign (Mk 16:17).

Psalm 9:2 I will be glad and rejoice in thee: I will sing praise to thy name, O thou most High.

Notice, the Psalmist declares that he, with his will, has resolved to praise and worship God through song. This is the Biblical pattern.

WE WILL NOT ALWAYS FEEL LIKE READING AND STUDYING THE SCRIPTURES

Psalm 119:18 Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.

Personal Bible reading, meditation, and study is a spiritual discipline.

2 Tim. 2:15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

We have a command to search the Scriptures, therefore, it is a Christian discipline. Reading, meditating on, or studying the Bible is not something that we will always feel

like doing. Nevertheless, we must discipline ourselves to go to God's Book. Apart from God's Word we are alienated from the life of God. God's Word is quick, powerful, eternal, everlasting, and by it we are liberated, sanctified, and protected. Hence, the Christian must develop and cultivate the habit of going to and meditating on God's Word. It should be our daily spiritual meat...

Psalm 119:128 Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.

WE WILL NOT ALWAYS FEEL LIKE EVANGELIZING

Mark 16:15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

Evangelism is a spiritual discipline. Again, evangelism must be seen as a spiritual discipline because we have a command; it is not optional. The fact that most people in the modern professing-church rarely, if ever, practice Biblical evangelism, verifies that few think of evangelism in the context of a spiritual discipline. However, many say, they must be led by the Spirit. But is this sound? Hasn't Jesus, via the Great Commission, already told us where to go and what to do? Absolutely! And if we obey His Words we are being "led by the Spirit"! Don't be deceived, saint of God, we can go anywhere and speak the Word of God to anyone based on the divine authority of God's Word. Because of God's Word, we can confidently declare, "the world is my parish." However, let us not be naive, confronting sinners in their sin requires self-denial...

Romans 1:15 So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel...

The Apostle is not saying he has continually "good feelings" every time he thinks about preaching. No, he is declaring that he has resolved and committed himself, by faith in God and His Word, to obey the Great Commission. Love is not a warm-fuzzy-feeling inside, it is basically a commitment, it is action based on divine principle. Those who fail to witness/preach to the lost, no matter how much they talk about love, actually love no one. We will not always feel like going, there must be a commitment to go and to preach the Gospel.

WE WILL NOT ALWAYS FEEL LIKE ASSEMBLING WITH OTHER BELIEVERS

Hebrews 10:25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Commitment to a local assembly is a spiritual discipline. We have a command to always assemble. We must make this our habit, our discipline. But what constitutes the assembling of ourselves together?

Assembly: (Greek) *ep-ee-soon-ag-o-gay'*, 'The Christian meeting for worship, (established by the leadership of any local church).

Acts 2:46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple...

Our's is an uncommitted and faithless generation. *Sunday morning, hit and miss Christianity* is one of the most wretched spiritual curses of our times.

Matthew 6:33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Who can run a business, a charity, etc. apart from faithfulness? Sadly, most professing Christians are more faithful to their job than to the local church. I am thankful that I was taught, from the beginning, to be faithful to the assembling of the believers...

Psalms 84:10 For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.

Psalms 122:1 I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Faithful to God's house, He'll be faithful to yours.

Today, folks want to be blessed, but they refuse to be a blessing. They want God to ever be tangibly present in their homes, but they refuse to be faithful to the house of God and to a local assembly. Men must break free from the carnal mentality of, "that's simply where I attend services on Sunday," they must see it as a calling. As the pastor should know, "God has sent me here", I believe, so must the individual Christian members that make up the local body. Only with this basic level of commitment can any real discipleship take place.

Of course, this list is not meant to be exhaustive, as there are many other Christian disciplines that could be discussed. Nevertheless, these are some of the more obvious and fundamental disciplines that are eroding away in our lukewarm generation.

—B.W.

