



**Talmid תלמיד** a Hebrew word that means “a true disciple who desires to be what the Rabbi Jesus is.”

*Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6 (NIV)*

VOLUME 7, ISSUE 12

DECEMBER 1, 2015

STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDETH NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY  
DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH. 2 TIMOTHY 2:15



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## A Gift Beyond Description

A. My text this morning is [2 Corinthians 9:15](#). It is a short verse, only 8 words long. Listen as the apostle Paul says,

**2 Corinthians 9:15 (NASB)**

**<sup>15</sup> Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!**

This is the time of year when we are concerned about choosing just the right Christmas gifts to give to the special people in our lives. But let me ask you, “Have you ever received an indescribable gift?” Have you ever received a gift that was beyond description?

I thought about that for a while this

week. What kind of gift would it have to be to be called “**indescribable?**” Would it be a gift that you open and look at and say, “This is just beautiful, and it is something that I’ve wanted all my life - what is it?”

Or maybe it is a gift that carries a lot of emotional feelings with it. It was given to you by someone very special, and it was a complete surprise when it was given. You’ll treasure it always because of the memories. Would that make it an indescribable gift?

Or maybe it would be a gift that you cared so little about that you wouldn’t even bother to find words to try to describe it.

**ILLUSTRATION:** A number of years ago, on “**Good Morning, America TV Program,**” **Joan Lunden**, featured some gift ideas that might be called indescribable. They were extraordinary gifts that some of you might want to include on your Christmas gift list.

One of them was a Jaguar automobile, the Jaguar 220. If you care to order one of these, go to your Jaguar dealer and put down your \$80,000 deposit. Then when the automobile is delivered, you are expected to pay the balance of \$507,000. The Jaguar 220 is a \$587,000 automobile, and they only make 250 of them a year.

Now if you should care to buy your preacher one of those to express your love and appreciation for him, I’ll be a

gracious recipient. But I warn you ahead of time, I may not be able to find words to describe my gratitude. It might be an indescribable gift.

**Joan Lunden** also mentioned that if you were to purchase such an automobile, you might also be interested in a new car wax that promises to give it the ultimate shine. It retails for \$3,400 for an 8 ounce can. I guess if you can afford a \$587,000 automobile, why not spend \$3,400 for car wax?

A third item she mentioned was a \$300,000 gold and silver toilet seat inlaid with precious stones. Of course, there were cheaper gifts for those who have everything: an \$18,000 Frisbee, a \$10,000 yoyo, a \$12,000 mousetrap, and even a \$27,000 pair of sunglasses.

And for the proud grandparent who is wondering what to buy the new grandbaby, how about a \$28,000 pacifier?

Such gifts stagger our imagination, don't they? But they are not indescribable. Even though we may not be able to find words to describe them, I assure you the manufacturers can, and they will spend lots of money describing them in TV and newspaper ads.

They will seek to describe them in such appealing ways as to entice you into believing that you simply can't live the rest of your life without them. You see, every human gift is describable by someone.

**APPLICATION:** In [2 Corinthians 9](#), Paul at first is writing about human gifts. The church in Corinth is taking up offerings to give to the poor Christians in Jerusalem. He commends them for their eagerness to help, and reminds them that those who sow sparingly will also reap sparingly, but that those who sow generously will reap generously.

**B.** Then he shifts his attention from human gifts to God's gift of sending Jesus to earth for us. And he cannot find words to describe that. He simply says, "**Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!**"

**ILLUSTRATION:** Now at this time of the year we do our best to depict the wonderfulness of God's gift of Jesus to us.

Musicians have composed some of their greatest music on this theme: Handel's "**Messiah**," Bach's "**Christmas Oratorio**," and the beautiful hymns, "**Joy to the World**," "**Silent Night, Holy Night**," "**O Little Town of Bethlehem**," and my favorite, "**I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day**."

Some of the greatest music our ears will ever hear was written about God's indescribable gift.

Poets and painters and sculptors have taken up the tools of their trade to pay tribute to Jesus, the gift of God's love.

**PROPOSITION:** Now Paul said, "**Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift.**" Why does Paul call Jesus "**indescribable**?" I think that there are at least four reasons.

## I. BECAUSE OF HIS NATURE

**A.** First of all, I believe that Paul calls Jesus "**indescribable**" because of His nature. How do you describe Jesus? What words would you choose? How do you describe a baby born of a virgin? How do you describe God in flesh, walking upon our earth and reaching out to the hurting masses of humanity?

**Isaiah** said He would be called Emanuel, "**God with us**." How do you describe that? What words would you choose?

How do you describe that which is spirit when all we have ever known is that which is either physical or material? How do you describe God who has all knowledge when all we have is limited knowledge?

How do you describe God who is all powerful? How do you describe the eternal? How do you describe the indescribable?

**B.** Paul says that we can't. Words aren't adequate. But many of the wisest men in the world have tried to describe Jesus.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Listen to the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. The greatest theological minds of the time came together and tried to describe Jesus. Here is their description:

“Perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood. Truly man of a reasonable, rational soul and body. Consubstantial, co-essential with the Father according to the manhood. In all things like unto us without sin. Begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead. And in these latter times for us and for our salvation, born of the virgin Mary and of the mother of God. According to the manhood - one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten to be acknowledged in two natures. Inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably and the distinction of nature’s being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved.”

**SUMMARY:** Did you understand that? Neither did I. That’s man’s attempt to describe the indescribable. Even when we bring together our greatest minds and our most extensive vocabularies, we cannot adequately describe Jesus.

## II. BECAUSE OF HIS PURPOSE IN COMING TO EARTH

A. Secondly, I think Paul called Jesus indescribable because of His purpose in coming to earth. The angels announced to the shepherds, **“Unto you is born this day in the City of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord.”**

What do we celebrate at Christmas? We celebrate the fact that Jesus came into our world to save us. God saw that mankind needed saving. He saw man’s inhumanity to his fellow man.

**ILLUSTRATION:** The hopes of world peace brought about by the breakup of the Soviet Union have been shattered by civil wars that have since broken out. We may have peace treaties between the great powers, but these treaties will never ensure peace because the nature of man has not changed.

When God looked at our world He knew that our greatest need is not for more wealth, nor better schools, not even a better welfare system. Our greatest need is for a Savior.

B. But there will never be peace on earth until men have been lifted out of their sin, & their hearts changed, & their way of thinking changed, because

the Savior has come into their lives. Our greatest need is to be saved from the very flames of hell, itself.

How do you describe that? How do you put into words what God accomplished when He sent His only begotten Son into the world?

**SUMMARY:** I think that Jesus, God’s gift, is indescribable because of His nature, because of His purpose in coming to earth, and thirdly, because of the grace by which Jesus is given.

## III. BECAUSE OF THE GRACE BY WHICH JESUS IS GIVEN

A. You know, every gift that I give this Christmas will be given because the recipient of that gift has some claim on me.

Now you might not like that idea, but that is as frank as I know how to be. I’ll buy a gift for my wife because she is my wife. I’ll buy gifts for my children because they are my children. I’ll buy gifts for my grandchildren because they’re my grandchildren. We buy gifts for family members because they are family.

Now if I buy a gift for you and you are not in my family, it is probably because you bought a gift for me last year and I didn’t buy a gift for you. So I owe you one this year, and thus the cycle keeps on going.

If I give a gift to feed the hungry, or clothe the naked or to take care of the homeless, I do it because deep inside I recognize that I have a debt to humanity, a feeling of obligation to them.

B. That is what makes God’s gift so special. He doesn’t owe us anything. Indeed, we are in constant rebellion against Him and His will for our lives.

With that in mind, Paul says something remarkable in the 5th chapter of Romans. He says,

### **Romans 5:8 (NASB)**

**<sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.**

God gives a gift, not because He feels obligated to give a gift but because His love is so overwhelming. It’s

a gift of grace.

And when you stop at the manger at Bethlehem and look at the Christ child, you must realize that He is a gift of grace. And there are no words adequate enough to describe God's grace towards us in Jesus.

#### IV. BECAUSE OF HIS EFFECT ON US

**A.** Now what happens when I receive God's gift? When you open your gifts this Christmas will your life be different? When you receive the gifts that have been purchased for you by loved ones, will this change your life and make you different? Or will you be the same as you have always been?

The Bible teaches that when we accept Jesus, the indescribable gift of God, that we will never be the same again because of how He affects our life.

**1.** The first effect of Jesus coming into our life and our obedience to Him is that we are forgiven of our sins. Now that may be so old and so elementary that you think, "So what else is new?"

But don't dismiss it that quickly because when our sins are forgiven, God forgets them, will not remember them, and buries them as deep as the sea.

Because Jesus is now my Savior my sins are forgiven. Cherish that promise with all your heart.

**2.** When I accept Jesus I am adopted into His family and I am guaranteed citizenship in His kingdom. Before, I was a foreigner and an alien, separated from God. But now, because I have accepted Him, I am an adopted son of Almighty God. Everything that belongs to Jesus also belongs to me. We are brothers and sisters in God's family because I accepted His indescribable gift.

**3.** When I accept Jesus I receive the gift of His Holy Spirit to live within me. Now He will guide and counsel and protect and empower me.

**4.** I am also given His peace. Not the peace of the world, but the peace that passes all understanding. Peace that allows me to cope with everyday situations. Peace that allows me to look beyond the smug and smog of our world to see the great pure air of

Almighty God in heaven.

**5.** Because of Jesus my mansion in heaven is paid for, a dwelling place that will last for all eternity. And that's indescribable, too.

**B.** I knew when I started this sermon that I would fail in my attempt to describe Jesus because someone else failed before me, and he was better at it than I. The apostle Paul looked at Jesus and said, "I can't describe Him. All I can do is fall on my knees and thank God for His indescribable gift."

And I guess that's what we need to do at Christmas time, too, to fall on our knees and thank God for His indescribable gift.

**C.** When God looked at our confused world nearly 2,000 years ago; when He saw Roman soldiers marching in the streets; when He saw people looking for peace and meaning and depth in life, He wanted so urgently to communicate His love.

But how? "How shall I communicate my love? If I appear in person," He must have thought, "If I stand before the people in all my glory, they'll be frightened, they'll be scared away. They will never feel that they can come to me and talk with me. They'll be much like Moses who stood on the mountain and took off His shoes because he was on holy ground."

"If I speak, if they hear the thunder of my voice, they may never grasp the words of my love. If I send down legions of angels perhaps they will not know how to respond. Maybe they will never be able to experience my love."

**CONCLUSION:** Folks, how in the world do you describe that which is indescribable? God said, "I know. I will send a baby. Babies don't frighten people. Babies are so tender and soft and helpless. Maybe they will hold the baby in their arms. Maybe they will touch the soft skin of a baby. Maybe they will hear the gentle sighs of a baby. Maybe they will experience my love if I send a baby."

So in the fullness of time God sent His only begotten Son, as a baby. Indescribable! But the good news is that you don't have to be able to describe Him to accept Him. You just have to be warmed and changed by Him.



So make your journey to the manger with the shepherds. Take Him into your heart and accept God's indescribable gift for you.

## CORAM DEO (Before the face of God)

### *The Superiority of Jesus Christ*

THE TRUE CHRISTIAN should never take the story of Christ's birth for granted. Even when reread from the human perspective, the narrative of Christ's entrance into this world ought to remain for-ever fresh, fascinating, and awe-inspiring. There's the amazing appearance of the angel Gabriel to Mary to announce that she would bear God's Son. There's the intriguing interaction between Mary and Elizabeth (with a Spirit-inspired response from the unborn John the Baptist) as Mary sought confirmation of Gabriel's news. Then there is the unprecedented account of the angels' nighttime appearance to the shepherds right after Jesus was born. And finally, there are the varied and profound human responses to the significance of Christ's birth, from the divinely directed mission of the wise men to Simeon's Spirit-filled pronouncement at the temple.

All those events, as uplifting as we've found them in our study of the Incarnation, come only from the human perspective. But there is another absolutely essential viewpoint of Christ's birth that we must not omit—God's perspective. And you find that perspective in the New Testament Epistles. When the inspired writers of those letters look back to the birth of Jesus Christ, all they discuss is the person of Christ, which is very fitting because in the Gospel narratives there is no in-depth description or explanation of the Child Himself. There is not even a description of His physical appearance that would distinguish Him as divine rather than human. But the Epistles continually look back at the birth and life of Christ from God's perspective. They go beyond the human perspective of a baby in the manger to the divine perspective of His person and work.

For instance, [Romans 1](#) asserts that Jesus was both the Son of David and the Son of God. [Galatians](#)

[4:4](#) says that in the fullness of time God brought forth His Son, born of a woman and subject to the Law. [Ephesians 3](#) introduces the concept of the mystery of Christ, that God has now revealed the truth of His Son in human flesh to the Jews *and* the Gentiles (cf. [1 Timothy 3](#)). [Philippians 2](#) teaches us that Christ during His Incarnation laid aside the form of deity and took on the form of humanity to die on the cross. [Colossians 2](#) makes the sweeping and profound statement that the fullness of the Godhead dwelt bodily in Jesus Christ. But there is one other crowning passage among those that provides divine insight into the person of Jesus Christ—[Hebrews 1](#). I believe that it is particularly important to understand this passage if we would have a complete grasp of the significance of Christ's birth.

## A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO HEBREWS

The letter to the Hebrews, written about a.d. 67–69 by an unidentified author, was obviously written to Jews, mostly true believers in Jesus. Its purpose was to show them that Jesus Christ is in fact the fulfillment of all the Old Testament Messianic promises and that He is superior to all the pictures, types, representations, and shadows that preceded Him. The Epistle was written to assure believing Jews that their faith was rightly placed and to encourage unbelieving Jews that embracing Jesus was the right commitment to make. Many in the community were intellectually convinced Jesus was the Messiah and God, but they had not yet personally believed and publicly confessed Him as Lord. They didn't want to be alienated like their believing friends had been. Some had been put out of the synagogue, some had been ostracized by their families, and others had lost their jobs.

In view of those fears and uncertainties, the writer of Hebrews wanted to encourage the Jews that in the long run they were not losing anything by embracing Jesus and confessing Him as Lord. The things they might have to give up in this life were worth it compared to what they would gain in full atonement for their sins and complete access to the very presence of God forever. So the writer affirms that the Babe born in Bethlehem is the Messiah and that He is indeed the Lord of a New Covenant, which is far superior to the Old Covenant of Moses.

[Hebrews 1:1–3](#) launches right into the purpose of

the Epistle: “<sup>d</sup> God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, <sup>2</sup> in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. <sup>3</sup> And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

Here again in a few short verses is an insightful, divine description of who the baby born in Bethlehem really is. It is probably the most concise and comprehensive New Testament summary statement of the superiority of Christ. And the writer includes three key features in composing his classic statement: the preparation for Christ, the presentation of Christ, and the preeminence of Christ.



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## **Hebrews 12 – Overview**

### **Part 3**

#### **Hebrews 12:4-11 – The Discipline of God**

As we begin this section of [Hebrews 12](#), it is important to at least look at several of the issues that the writer addresses. We are only going to address two of the issues. However, before doing that, it is important to cast these verses in their immediate context. Obviously, many of these Hebrew believers were struggling with both their faith and their faithfulness. Many were being persecuted, they had suffered greatly at the hands of their own countrymen, and life had become very, very difficult for them. To make it worse, they did not know that within just 2-3 years of this letter being written that the Romans would come in and utterly destroy both Jerusalem and the temple and most of them would be scattered everywhere. They would lose everything.

However, in v4 and v5, the writer provides some very interesting insight into something else that was occurring in their life. Even though the Scriptures do not specifically identify what it was, it appears that many of them were struggling with sin in their life. Based on the whole context of Hebrews, a primary sin that is being

addressed here was a lack of faithfulness to Christ. It was not that these believers did not understand what sin was, but rather that it was not worth it to them to resist and to strive against that sin in their life. [Hebrews 12:4](#) provides the picture when it says,

**4You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.**

There simply are some areas of the Christian life where believers have no option but to resist and to strive against certain sins. In the Christian culture in which we live, it seems that the prevailing sin for us is one of spiritual indifference and lethargy. The modern church has become so addicted to comfort, convenience, security, entertainment, and prosperity that those things have become its primary focus – things that it cannot live without. In the midst of that kind of perspective, striving against sin of any kind becomes a very difficult and inconvenient task.

So, when it comes to issues of sin, both subtle and flagrant, it is often times much easier for the individual to simply prevail on the love and forgiveness of God and just proceed as if all is okay. In that case, they are **not resisting** and they are **not striving**, but rather presuming on the goodness of God. The word for “**resist**” simply means to “*stand firm against*” something. It is the Greek word “*antihistemi*” which comes from “*anti*” and “*histemi*”. “*Anti*” means “*against*”, and “*histemi*” means “*to stand*” – literally to stand against. It carries the idea of holding your ground in the face of temptations and trials that come your way. In our vernacular it would certainly include the idea of standing firm against an often very unbiblical Christian culture. The second word is “**striving**” and it is the Greek word “*antagonizomai*” which means to fight agonizingly against something. It speaks of a terrific fight. The problem is that if we give in to sin in one area, we will be prone to give into sin in other areas. It has a spiritual domino effect. If we take one step towards sin, we will take a second step towards sin, and then a third, and the more that we do that, the more we have to justify and rationalize what we are doing. Soon we just become numb to both God’s word and God’s values. So, every believer needs to find practical ways to resist and strive against sin in their life.

Obviously, the word “**chasten**” is the key word in this section. It is used seven times in seven verses (v5-11) and it speaks to God disciplining sins and curbing unbiblical passions. If parents just let their children do whatever they want to do, they will ruin them. Many Christians just seem determined and

resolved on doing what they want to do or saying what they want to say, and so very often God has to intervene. In this section, we could summarize the content by simply saying that God’s discipline is used to adjust our character and our behavior. What this section will clearly teach us is that God’s discipline is corrective, preventive, and instructional.

The first issue is that if a believer is going to run the spiritual race with endurance, then they have to appreciate that God’s discipline will be a normal part of that process. No believer is exempt from God’s discipline. [Hebrews 12:6](#) says that “**whom the Lord loves He chastens**”. The Greek word is “*paideuō*” and the root of that word is “*pais*” which is the Greek term for a child. So, the word carries the meaning of disciplining a child, and specifically for the purpose of training, instructing, and teaching them. In fact, [Hebrews 12:11](#) actually uses the word “**trained**” in explaining the purpose of discipline. The meaning of “**chasten**” can include all of the following: physical chastising, correcting with words, reproving, or admonishing. Vine’s simply says that the word primarily denotes “*to train children, suggesting the broad idea of education*”. [The Complete Word Study Dictionary](#) states that the purpose of the chastening is to “*influence the conscious will and action*” and in the case of [Hebrews 12](#) is “*to chastise for the purpose of educating someone to conform to divine truth*”. The vital truth here is that God’s discipline always has a specific purpose. It is never arbitrary or out of anger. Sometimes you may see someone in a store and they have an unruly child that is misbehaving, and the parent is vocally chastising the child and even physically disciplining them out of frustration or anger. That scenario never happens with God’s discipline. God never disciplines out of anger or frustration, and when He does choose to discipline it has a very specific **corrective** goal and **preventive** purpose in mind.

At a personal level, I have found that God seems to always provide believers the opportunity to “**self-correct**”. I.e., you may very well do something that is outside of the will of God. However, when you do, the Holy Spirit convicts you of such, and you make the necessary adjustments in your life to remove that sin and disobedience from your life. In reality, that is what the Christian life is about – growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. This would be included under the heading of responding to and allowing the Holy

Spirit to control your life. This is very good when it happens. Each of us should be personally grateful that God does not discipline us every time that we fail or disobey, but rather that He provides His mercy, His grace, and His longsuffering to us and they allow us the opportunities to make the life changes necessary. God does not have a touchy trigger finger. God is never out to hurt a believer, but rather to simply help them make the adjustments that need to be made in their life. So, at a practical level, if you are involved in some sin that you know is outside of the will of God and God has yet to discipline you, thank Him for His patience and simply remove that sin from your life.

Obviously, there are many different means of discipline that God can use on His children and many different means of discipline that parents can use on their children. In all cases, a general principle that should be followed is simply that the discipline should be appropriate and fitting for the misbehavior. God is not going to burn your house down because you became irritated with someone. Over-discipline is just as detrimental as under-discipline or no-discipline. As parents, we all know that one child may respond to discipline in one way, and the next child respond in a completely different way. One may be immediately responsive and the next may kick and scream with all of their might. Stubbornness or rebellion is not an unusual response at all for many children. However, the overriding principle is that once discipline has been initiated, it should be followed through until it achieves its desired results. The way that this is expressed is found in [Hebrews 12:10 and 11](#),

**<sup>10</sup>For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed *best* to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.**

**<sup>11</sup>Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.**

The issue is simply that incomplete discipline only produces frustration in the person receiving the discipline.

God's discipline always carries with it the idea of being for the believer's profit. If you deeply believe

that God loves you, then you should not become upset when you experience His chastening in your life. Spiritual discipline is a normal part of the outworking of God's will for a believer's life. A believer cannot become what God wants them to become without corrective spiritual discipline. There simply is much that we need to learn, and too often we become stubborn and/or resistant to what God is trying to teach us and so He simply has to discipline us to gain our attention. We all understand that discipline should just be a normal part of raising children. It is a method of teaching them and protecting them, and it is no different in the Christian life. God has various means and methods in which He teaches the believer, and discipline and chastening are just one of those means. Generally when someone thinks of discipline, they are normally thinking of chastisement and correction – which it obviously does mean. However, and this is very important to understand if we are going to capture the essence of the meaning of the word “**chastening**”, it carries the idea to train, teach, and instruct someone. Both of those aspects are included in the Biblical word “**discipline**” or “**chastening**”.

What is the practical outworking of this – either positively or negatively? Positively, when we are faced with a particular trial or sinful impulse in our life, the Holy Spirit will stir us to stand fast and endure the trial and to turn away from the sin. None of us is exempt from these events in our life – none of us. That should be obvious. In the discipline process, God guides, directs, teaches, trains, and instructs us all along the way in order that we may become stronger and draw closer to Him. From God's perspective, He does not want trials or sins to defeat us, overtake us or even discourage us, but rather to strengthen us. He wants to use them to discipline and teach us more about spiritual endurance and to teach us that we can both trust and depend on Him. However, the believer has to let God work in their hearts to use the trials to strengthen them. We cannot just flounder around in self-pity or react against the trials and problems that take place in our lives. This is a very important aspect of benefitting from a trial. We must see the trial and the corresponding discipline from God's perspective, and that is not always easy.

Benefitting from a trial is a **spiritual mindset** that every believer needs to develop in their life that they are not going to complain, grumble, and murmur against God's



discipline in their life. In [2 Corinthians 11:23-28](#) Paul expressed what he endured in his life.

<sup>23</sup>Are they ministers of Christ?--I speak as a fool--I *am* more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. <sup>24</sup>From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one. <sup>25</sup>Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; <sup>26</sup>in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; <sup>27</sup>in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness- <sup>28</sup>besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.

So you think that you have had a bad day when you had to stand in line too long at Walmart or your kids got on your nerves? Paul never complained, but fully accepted God's outworkings in his life. Obviously, some wounds are very much self-inflicted, but generally complaining is simply evidence that a believer is not satisfied with God's sovereign control over their life. You would have thought that God would have taken better care of His servant Paul – right? Well, He was, and it was the listing that was just given that was His way of doing that – of teaching him to trust Him and to lean on Him during difficult times. Paul was spiritually refined through suffering. God's ways simply are not our ways, and unfortunately that does not sit well with most American cultural Christians. In [1 Corinthians 4:11-13](#), Paul tells us exactly how he responded to various trials in his life,

<sup>11</sup>To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. <sup>12</sup>And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; <sup>13</sup>being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.

Every one of us would do well to mark Paul's response to difficult circumstances in his life – he blessed, he endured, and he entreated. Perspective is everything. I have taught it this way in the past – **outlook determines outcome**. Developing a spiritual mindset is something that comes through (1) constantly meditating on the Scriptures and (2) personally resolving to let the "mind of Christ" operate fully in our life.

Negatively, when we fail and yield to a trial or sin, God allows us to reap what we have sown. Do not miss this point. The spiritual principle is simple: we reap what we sow ([Galatians 6:7-8](#)). There are many Christians who seem to have the mistaken notion that as long as they confess their sin and pray for forgiveness that the unpleasant results of their sin will be removed. However, that is not spiritually accurate. Believers, just like unbelievers, will bear the normal consequences of their sin. God takes the sufferings and unpleasant results that are caused by trials and sins, and He uses them as one of His means to correct and discipline the believer. He uses the suffering caused by sin to correct and discipline them, to stir them to draw near to Him, and to motivate them to live like God desires for them to live.

The second issue that the writer deals with is actually a kind of spiritual warning. If a professing believer has never experienced the discipline of God in their life when they blatantly stray outside the boundaries of Scripture, chances are very good that they may not even be a Christian. For many, this is a very difficult subject to address. We live in a Christian culture that has conditioned people to simply assume that everyone who says that they are a Christian is actually a Christian. However, nothing could be any further from the truth. [Matthew 7:13-14](#) states the issue this way,

<sup>13</sup>"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. <sup>14</sup>Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

[Matthew 7:21](#), clearly speaking of the issue of obedience in the Christian life, says,

<sup>21</sup>"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

God is an amazing parent, and He simply does not turn the other way when one of His children continues to live in sin. [Hebrews 12:8](#) expresses this truth negatively in this way,

**<sup>8</sup>But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.**

I have personally known a good number of individuals who claim to be saved, but they just seem to always be living outside of the boundaries of God. Many have been involved in immoral relationships and living with someone to whom they are not married. This has become very prevalent and accepted in many Christian churches for people considered to be official members of the church, but obviously this is far outside the boundaries of God's will. What frightens me for them, however, is that I never see them being disciplined by God. Life just goes on in a normal way, and they seem to think that spiritually all is well. If that is the case, then most likely the individual has never truly been saved. Either the church is going to take God at His word on this issue, or it is not.

Obviously, all Christians make mistakes and often use poor judgment in their life and are certainly recipients of God's grace and forgiveness when that occurs. The issue, however, is more clearly identified in [1 John 3](#) when it speaks of the issue of continuing to live in sin as a habit of one's life. It is the continuing nature of the Scriptural violation that provides insight into the validity or lack thereof of a person's true salvation experience. My personal opinion is that our Christian culture has fostered a relatively liberal viewpoint on this and unfortunately have given many the false illusion that they can just casually live in flagrant and blatant violations of God's Word and be saved. That is a very slippery slope and an incredibly dangerous spiritual scenario.

I am addressing this particular issue simply to make the point that you may know people who continue to live in flagrant sin as a pattern of their life and then utilize God's love and forgiveness as a means to rationalize what they are doing. In essence, the sin is even deeper because what they are doing is exploiting God's goodness. In their case, if they do not experience God's discipline in their life that causes

them to become "**partakers of His holiness**", then most likely they simply are not true believers and have never been genuinely saved. Once again, discipline is a normal part of the Christian life. Sometimes it may only last for a short time, but in many cases it may last for a very long time.

### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>. Strong's, 957.
- <sup>2</sup>. Wuest, 217.
- <sup>3</sup>. Strong's, 1282.
- <sup>4</sup>. Vine's, 175.
- <sup>5</sup>. Zodhiates, 1088.
- <sup>6</sup>. Robertson, 584.
- <sup>7</sup>. Practical, na.
- <sup>8</sup>. Practical, na.


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 Living Word Christian Center*

6520 Arizona Avenue  
 Los Angeles, CA 90045 USA  
 (310) 645-2522 or (310) 665-0137

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