

HEBREWS: REPLACING MAN'S RITUALISM WITH CHRIST
"Part XXIV: Prudent Conduct By Faith In The Midst Of Pruning Trials"
(Hebrews 12:12-29)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

As last Sunday we found that God may allow trials to come our way to mature us. However, though we may be able to **accept** that idea, we may **still** not be able to **ADJUST** well to it!

(1) A number of years ago, I knew a pastor who came into great difficulty in his ministry only to lose his job because of stresses in the work. He knew God had allowed the problems to arise, but didn't handle them well at first. Whenever his thoughts on the matter troubled him, he would drive to the "Jack-in-the-Box" fast-food restaurant in town and order a meal and soda. He did this daily and became noticeably overweight in gaining 40 extra pounds!

(2) I remember as a pastor meeting an old acquaintance I knew who was suffering from terminal cancer! Before I could interact with him, he told me, "Don, don't try to give me any ideas about how to deal with my condition before God! You just don't know what it's like to have terminal cancer like I do, and how difficult it is to face, so don't give me any suggestions or pastoral advice!"

As yet, I hadn't opened my mouth to interact with him, and just then I learned I was not about to do so on a pastoral level! He was a believer, that was sure, and he certainly faced an overwhelming personal trial, but he wasn't handling his trial well at the time!

(3) Many times in the pastorate, I have had stressed Christians ask me, "Pastor, if God allows all this trouble to come into a person's life, and he doesn't know **why** or **how** he can possibly handle it all, **what** am I supposed to think and **do**?! What does God want from me **now**?"

Well, how do we respond to trials that we may know God allows but which often catch us off-guard and make us come "unglued"?

(We turn to the sermon "Need" section . . .)

***Need:** "I accept the idea that God allows trials to come in my life to **MATURE** me. However, I find it hard to take productive advantage of them when they arise since I usually come fully unglued when they hit! Does God give insight on adjusting well to these trials?!"*

- I. **As we learned from Hebrews 12:3-11, the readers of Hebrews were to view God's allowing even unjust persecutions for their faith as pruning opportunities in their own maturation in Christ.**
- II. **However, the author of Hebrews noticed that his Hebrew Christian believers tended to be spiritually **WEAK**, Bib. Know. Com., N.T., p. 810. Accordingly, he gave **PRACTICAL** instructions on **ADJUSTING prudently** to their "pruning" trials as follows:**
- A. **Step One** - Regardless how hard is the trial, **trust** that **GOD** is sovereign and productive in letting it occur, and **FACE** it by **FAITH!**
 1. The author advised his readers to "lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees" in **view** of their trials, 10:32ff; 12:3-11.
 2. This expression alludes to Isaiah 35:3 where the readers would recall God's encouragement to Israel in view of the impending invasion of the frightening Assyrians, Young, Isaiah, v. II, p. 448.
 3. That admonition countered the tendency in Israel to freeze in fear before these invaders, becoming (a) unproductive ("hands which hang down") and (b) non-enduring ("feeble knees"), *Ibid.*, Young.
 4. God wanted His people to **remain** productive and enduring in view of the kingdom hope where faith would be **rewarded**, Isa. 35:1-10!
- B. **Step Two** - While **facing** the trials, budget our human resources to **avoid adding** to the trials **assigned**, and thus avoid burn-out, 12:13!
 1. Having mentioned "knees," the author spoke of making **level paths** (NIV) for the legs to avoid **producing needless DISABLEMENT!**
 2. Hence, God wants the believer to **budget** his human resources to avoid **unnecessary stress** in trials. Otherwise, he risks burn-out that fails to take advantage of the trials God has allowed him to face!
- C. **Step Three** - Seek to live as peaceably with all men as is possible, a step in wisely minimizing relationship stresses in trials, Heb. 12:14a.
- D. **Step Four** - Seek to live as separate as is possible from sin in the trials, for that causes us to enjoy God's fellowship and blessing, 12:14b.
- E. **Step Five** - We must be sure to live by **grace**, for slipping back into **legalism** would bring God's sharp discipline, Heb. 12:15-29:
 1. The author expressed the need to avoid slipping into dead legalism under trial, but to press on in grace and keep living by faith, 12:15a.
 2. He alluded to an Old Testament figure in warning about an apostate "root of bitterness" and the carnal lusts of Esau that led him to sell his birthright, Heb. 12:15b-17, *Ibid.*, B.K.C., O.T., p. 810-811.

3. The author of Hebrews then revealed the great superiority of the Christian's home in heaven with Christ as opposed to the expressions of God in Israel's earthly Mount Sinai experience, Heb. 12:18-25.
4. As the Old Testament believers at Mount Sinai did not escape God's severe discipline unto physical death for sin, we believers in the New Testament era of grace are even more accountable to obey God and live by faith, Hebrews 12:25, 26-28.
5. The God of fiery judgment at Sinai is the same God we Christians have, so we **must** live by grace and not slip back into legalism, 29!
6. In *practical* terms, here are **some** avenues of living by *grace* under duress that Paul gave to a stressed Timothy, cf. 2 Tim. 2:1; 1:1-18:
 - a. Under trials, submit to **God's** will in service and life, 2 Tim. 1:1.
 - b. Under trials, serve **God**, not ourselves or others, 2 Tim. 1:3.
 - c. Under trials, focus on using **God's spiritual gift** instead of trying to use all other human abilities, 2 Tim. 1:6-7.
 - d. Under trials, **rely** on the **Holy Spirit** for power, love and self-discipline in facing persecution without fear, 2 Tim. 1:7-8.
 - e. Under trials, trust **God's eternally-assigned** certification for our **service** instead of doubting our calling to date, 2 Tim. 1:9.
 - f. Under trials, **rely** on the **Spirit's leading** to keep our **theological views accurate**, 2 Tim. 1:12-14; Jn. 14:26

Lesson Application: *When facing huge trials that God uses to mature us, INSTEAD of "coming unglued", we need to ADJUST well by (1) believing on Christ for salvation, Jn. 3:16. (2) Then, we confess any sins God reveals in the trials, 1 Jn. 1:9 and (3) lean upon the Holy Spirit for behavior control (Gal. 5:16-23) to (4) do God's will. That will includes PRUDENTLY (a) trusting God's use of the trial so we can FACE it while (b) budgeting resources to minimize adding more stress. (c) We can live as peaceably with others as possible (d) while separating from sin, (e) all the while being careful to live by GRACE instead of in LEGALISM! ((a)) This last step entails doing GOD'S will instead of ours or another's, ((b)) serving God and not ourselves or another, ((c)) using God's enabling and not human resources, ((d)) and leaning on God's plans for us and His power in us at every step!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . .)

One day while serving as a Chaplain at the Baylor University Medical Center in Dallas, I was contemplating the Lord's leading in my life on the job. Mine was a trying occupation, for my mere presence as a chaplain often frightened patients, leading them to think the doctor had sent me to minister as they were closer to death than the doctor had let on! So, I wondered what God's will for me in such a unique job!

So, that day I began going about the usual assignment of visiting patients who had been admitted that day with a view to seeing how I could use my "frightening" presence as *productively* as possible.

One of the patients that day was a big, young chesty Texan football player! He was in for heart surgery involving a procedure that I had been told by the staff had a slight risk of ending in his death!

Accordingly, with his parents in the room with him, and in view of the **slight** possibility of his dying in the treatment, I asked him outright if he had ever accepted Christ as Savior. He listed himself on the admissions form as Southern Baptist, so I felt comfortable asking the question. I prefaced this theological question with the fact that his surgery, though considered to be a low-risk one, could yet end in death!

In his typically polite Texan way, the young man reacted to my question very seriously by emphatically replying, "Yes sir, I sure have!"

When I finished ministering there, I left the room satisfied I had done God's will in that event.

Well, for some reason, the surgery was **not** a success, and that 22-year-old man **died** the next day on the operating table!

His parents later stopped by the head chaplain's office when I was away at the seminary to express how **grateful** they were that I had asked their son the question in their presence. They had not known until then whether he had accepted Christ, and hadn't known before how to approach the subject with him. It took a hospital chaplain's "scary" visit before a critical procedure to set the stage for the answer.

The great loss of that young man was yet manageable for his parents because it had been approached from the start with a eye to doing God's will in what was my awkward calling as a chaplain! That's how all trials in life become productive in Christ -- when we face them in God's will, power and leading!