

# Discipline and Freedom

by K.P. Yohannan

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*The sermon explores the necessity of discipline in the Christian life while warning against the pitfalls of legalism and perfectionism, advocating for a balance that embraces freedom in Christ.*

**Topics:** "Freedom in Christ", "Discipline"

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## Description

K.P. Yohannan emphasizes the importance of maintaining a balance between discipline and freedom in the Christian life. He warns against becoming enslaved by rigid disciplines, as exemplified by the Pharisees, who, despite their devotion, were bound by legalism. Yohannan encourages believers to embrace personal discipline while also extending grace and mercy to others, avoiding judgmental attitudes that can lead to unhappiness. He highlights Paul's struggle in Romans 7, illustrating that true freedom comes from yielding to Christ rather than striving for perfection through discipline. Ultimately, believers are called to be disciplined yet flexible, allowing God to guide their lives.

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## Transcript

Setting good habits for ourselves and being disciplined in our lives are good. But it is not good to become a slave to that sort of disciplined life. The Pharisees were very disciplined people. They fasted. They prayed regularly. They studied the Scriptures. And they were also bound by their traditions and discipline. The same thing can happen to us Christians today. "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free" (Galatians 5:1, NIV). There needs to be a balance between discipline and freedom.

Some of the unhappiest people I have ever met in my life are those who are militant about everything in their lives. They must always have things together, always be on time, perfect in every way. These perfectionists make their own lives miserable, as well as everyone else with whom they come in contact. These people are controlled, not by grace and freedom, but by legalism. Someone once said, "Nothing will keep a Christian more immature than trying to keep a list." Having a disciplined life is important--very important--especially in the areas of personal discipline (such as prayer life, time management, systematic study of the Bible).

Yet some people become so paranoid about doing all these things with a legalistic mindset that they actually become slaves of these disciplines. They first embraced them because they believed the discipline would bring freedom to their lives. But now they are enslaved by them, and their daily life is one big burden of endless striving. And it doesn't end with themselves either. People who live like this will often use their own standards to judge others. They constantly become critical and judgmental toward their

spouses, children and fellow workers.

These kinds of people are absolutely miserable to live with. In his book *He Still Moves Stones*, Max Lucado states, "Legalism: Turns my opinion into your burden. . . . Turns my opinion into your boundary. . . . Turns my opinion into your obligation."<sup>1</sup> There needs to be a balance in the way we handle our own life of discipline and how we respond to others. In Romans 14 we find the instruction about giving freedom and grace to others--living by the law of love, not of discipline.

When we become judgmental and critical toward the people around us, we make their lives hard and difficult. Romans 14:13 says, "Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way." It is good to have a disciplined life and make personal demands on ourselves. But at the same time, we must show grace and mercy toward others who may not be like us or who disagree with us, and bear with one another in love and humility.

In Romans 7, Paul talks about the incredible struggle in his own life to find victory and peace through "rigid discipline." These demands only made him more miserable and wretched as he kept striving to be perfect. The truth of the matter is this: Although we must do our part, we also must realize that if our part is all there is, then everything begins with us and ends with us. And the Scripture says, "Nothing good dwells in me" (Romans 7:18, NASB). Toward the end of Romans 7, we hear Paul bursting out with joy and celebration because he realized there is true freedom and victory--not in rigid discipline, but in yielding all that he was to Christ who came to set him free.

Romans 7:24-25 says, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!" My encouragement to you is this: Be disciplined, absolutely. You must be. Yet don't let that become your master and your god. Don't become militant about organizing your every minute. Don't try so hard to save time that you forget to live. Don't become so scheduled that you demand from yourself and everybody else a perfectly structured life.

There is no joy, no freedom, in that kind of living. Ask God to order your time. If you are in the middle of a scheduled prayer time and someone knocks on the door, don't automatically ignore the knock. Ask God. Maybe He has sent this person to pray for you or maybe this person needs your comfort. Don't be undisciplined, but at the same time rest in the assurance that "the steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD" (Psalm 37:23). Notes: <sup>1</sup> Max Lucado, *He Still Moves Stones* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), p. 120. Used by permission.

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