

The Cross and Discipline

by L.E. Maxwell

L.E. Maxwell's sermon emphasizes the necessity of self-discipline and enduring hardships as essential elements of the Christian faith.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:3

Topics: "Discipline", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

L.E. Maxwell emphasizes the necessity of discipline in the Christian life, likening it to the rigorous training of climbers who push their limits to achieve great heights. He argues that believers are called to be soldiers of Christ, enduring hardships and mastering their flesh rather than seeking comfort and ease. Maxwell warns against the dangers of a soft, undisciplined faith that fails to confront sin and challenges, urging Christians to embrace self-discipline in all aspects of life, including parenting and personal conduct. He highlights that true discipline is about making sacrifices for the sake of spiritual growth and obedience to God. Ultimately, Maxwell calls for a return to a soldier's spirit, where believers actively engage in the fight against their own weaknesses and the challenges of the world.

Transcript

HOW THE WORLD of flesh rebukes and reproaches the Church! It endures all manner of privation and peril, runs risks that make us shiver--all to achieve its goal. In their fight to scale Mount Everest some years ago, a company of daring spirits were so bodily fit that they climbed and lived at an altitude of 27,000 feet. They said that dozens of others could do the same "if only they liked," but they couldn't like. The narrator says that these "have not the spirit." He then says of one of the climbers, "Many excelled him in bodily fitness, but where he excelled was in spirit. His spirit drove his body to the utmost limit. His spirit would not allow him to give up. He must make one last desperate effort." And then the writer says, "The spirit will drive the body on and the body will respond to the spirit." These men passed through terrific trials, casualties mounted--a broken leg--a clot on the brain--feet frostbitten to the ankles--pneumonia, and deaths.

My friend, have you ever begun to climb? Have you ever entered the ranks? Have you ever so mastered yourself that through the Spirit you can say to the body, as the trembling soldier said going over the top, "Come on, old body. You would shake worse than that if you knew where I am going to take you." It seems to be supposed, by churches everywhere, that believers, young and old, instead of being recruits to Christ's army, are to be "cradled and coddled, and wheeled in a perambulator to heaven under the

caressing smiles of their mother church; whereas as a matter of fact, God no sooner saves a soul than his trumpet-blast calls him to suffer hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (Panton).

In dealing with the subject of self-discipline, it is difficult to escape being stigmatized by some as an ascetic or monk. The whisper of asceticism frightens the easily frightened. But while Paul was neither ascetic nor monk, he knew that "the flesh with its affections and lusts" was his most dangerous enemy. He said: "So fight I, as not beating the air: but I beat et my body" --bruise it black and blue, make it livid, every blow striking home (Ellicott)--"and bring it into bondage," i.e, lead it as a captive. Paul knew his dangers; he never ceased to dread the flesh. He was balanced indeed and was therefore alert. He rejoiced, but always "with trembling." One of the Christian workers of the Dohnavur Fellowship on holiday once wrote: "There is such a loving thought and care here that I sometimes fear lest the soldier-spirit may be weakened rather than strengthened. Everything is made so easy and so comfortable that I feel more than ever the need of the inner, private discipline which defends the soul against sloth and slackness."

From subtle love of softening things,

From easy choices, weakenings

(Not thus are spirits fortified,

Not this way went the Crucified),

From all that dims Thy Calvary,

O Lamb of God, deliver me.

--Amy Carmichael.

The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. When she ceases to bleed, she ceases to bless. She can thrive through persecution, but never through peace and plenty. Christ sends not peace, but a sword. But we have become soft. We have ceased to be soldiers, have ceased to storm forts, have ceased to sacrifice. We want spiritual society, not rugged soldiery. The "soft slipper" stage has taken us. "I've had my day--now the rocking chair has gotten me." We once held meetings with an old preacher who had been a suffering circuit rider. He could say, "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." But an hour after a most delicious meal he continued to pat himself on his stomach saying, "That was a good meal; it makes me feel so good." Poor soul, his sermons were yellow. He scarcely looked into his Bible. He had been a soldier once but he had gone soft, had ceased to "goad" himself. All of which reminds us again of that word of saintly Robert Murray McCheyne that "if Satan can only make a covetous minister a lover of

praise, of pleasure, of good-eating, he has ruined your ministry." But McCheyne has ever been known as a soldier. He knew that the Christian life is a climb, a conflict, and first and always, a war. And our campaign enjoys neither intermission nor discharge.

When the slothful flesh would murmur,

Ease would cast her spell,

Set our face as flint till twilight's

Vesper bell.

On Thy brow we see a thorn-crown,

Blood-drops in Thy track,

O forbid that we should ever

Turn us back.

--Amy Carmichael.

But many of my readers are not missionaries, are not ministers, are not what we call "full time" workers. How does this apply to them in the daily routine of the home, the business, the school, the factory, and the farm? Here are a few of the ways in which discipline will apply:

There is everywhere, especially in our cities, the plague of late talking, and night lurching which has nothing whatsoever to do with the King's business. We dare to repeat ourselves at this point. The time for God, for His Word, and for prayer is, as a result, cut short the next morning. Let the Cross cut off that false habit. Don't pray about it. Quit it. Then don't pray about getting up in the morning. Get up.

It will seem severe to some to cut loose from an unholy affection, a fleshly attachment. Have you had a "crush" on somebody? God hates it. You deny it. Deny self there. That is discipline.

Others suffer from a tongue loose at both ends. Such persons will be forced to keep a strict watch over themselves, and cry continually, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth."

Others will learn to endure under the discipline of some ever-present opposition, an opposition of suspicion, of slander, of being wounded in the house of their friends. Their "daily furnace" is the tongue of man. Such is their inescapable lot. What an opportunity to get the gold of self-discipline!

Others will need to exercise a rigid self-discipline, in order to endure that defeat, that failure, that misunderstanding, that utter discrediting of their best efforts--patiently.

Are you providentially located? Learn to be faithful right there. Be content. Do not wish yourself "other-where."

Are you naturally hasty, impetuous, and zealous? We knew one such person who never learned to discipline himself "to be quiet." He became sour, and sick, and--dead.

A great mother in Israel said: "There are many women who would not be entirely well for anything in the world. No one would enquire about them."

Many parents will suffer a painful inner crucifixion through learning to discipline their children. Those who have not disciplined themselves--how can they discipline their children? Children are being denied proper and godly discipline today because the parents have not yet learned to hate their "own flesh." Not having laid the Cross on his own flesh, the parent denies the Cross to his child. "He that spareth his rod hateth his son."

There are still others who are weak, sensitive, and nervous in body. One who knows says, "There will be days when the smallest fret, a jarring noise, bustling people, people who drum on the rail of the bed, or knock it, or drop things, a crooked picture, wrong colors put together, a book upside down, something

perversely lost among the bed clothes will be absurdly but intensely irritating; even common good temper will need to be prayed for then; it will not come of itself" (Amy Carmichael).

What then is discipline? The same author says:

David once prayed regarding his enemies, ever-present and lively, "Slay them not, lest my people forget." It is said that the Spartans refused to allow the destruction of a neighboring city which had often called forth their armies, saying, "Destroy not the whetstone of our young men." All the difficulties of life are to teach us discipline.

But what shall we say about the lack of church discipline? Trace ' this lack to its root and it will be found in the soft Christians who refuse to separate themselves from the unholy, who refuse to stand out against sin, who refuse to uncover sin in others--all in spite of God's, "Neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal."

We never cease to thank God for the homes where the parents recognize the perils and pitfalls and flabbiness of this soft age. With each recurring school year we meet up with such, who pray and sacrifice and send their young people to the Prairie Bible Institute for training. They want to see their young people become soldiers of the Cross. They want them delivered from the dilettantisms of modern schools and education. Such homes rise up before us as we write. From such homes have gone forth in this very generation soldiers of the Cross who are girt, ready, sacrificial, sacrificing all, becoming old early in life, but winning for the Lamb the reward of His sufferings.

We wonder whether the father of Dr. J. Hudson Taylor had the least conception of what his son would accomplish under God. The founder of the China In-land Mission came to know the value of a disciplined life and leadership. He was himself brought up under such a leadership. His father was a great disciplinarian. From the Growth of a Soul we quote the following regarding his father:

Though stern and even quick-tempered at times, the influence James Taylor exerted in the life of his son can hardly be overestimated. He was decidedly a disciplinarian. But without some such clement in his

early training who can tell whether Hudson would ever have become the man he was, by the grace of God. Do we not suffer in these days from too great a tendency to slackness and easy-going? Even Christian parents seem content if they can keep their children moderately happy and good-tempered. But with James Taylor this was not the point. Life has to be lived. Work must be accomplished. People may be consecrated, gifted, devoted, and yet of very little use. because undisciplined. He was a man with a supreme sense of duty. The thing that ought to be done was the thing that he put first, always. Ease, pleasure, self-improvement had to take whatever place they could. He was a man of faith, but faith that went hand in hand with works of the most practical kind. It was not enough for him that his children were happy and amused, well-cared-for and obedient even. They must be doing their duty, getting through their daily tasks, acquiring habits that alone could make them dependable men and women in days to come.

When I refuse the easy thing for love of my dear Lord,

And when I choose the harder thing for love of my

dear Lord,When I look up and triumph over every sinful thing,

The things that no one knows about, the cowardly, selfish thing,

And when with heart and will I live to please my glorious King,

That is discipline.

To trample on that curious thing inside me that says

To think of others always, never, never of that "I'll To learn to live according to my

Saviour's word, "Deny,"

That is discipline

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