

A Terrifying Thing



Falling into the Hands of the Living God



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"Explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words."

1 Corinthians 2:13

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Introduction

“It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God..”

Hebrews 10:31

A Terrifying Thing ~ Falling into the Hands of the Living God -

A different title would have been more inviting. “To fall into the hands of the living God” is “terrifying”. But it is more than that. While we may not need to “seek” the experience, if it comes, we hopefully have the meekness to embrace it as the spiritual blessing which it is.

It is “terrifying”. You don’t have to “seek” it. It is a blessing.

What I have to share here is a result of such an experience in my life and the instruction of the Holy Spirit I received through His inspired scriptures. Since my wife edits my writings, I must admit publicly that what I have learned from the scriptures is not fully evident in my life.¹

Never-the-less, I will endeavor to share some things about –

- “The Discipline of the Lord”

¹ “... but I press on if I may also take hold of that for which I was even taken hold of by Christ Jesus” Philippians 3:12b

- The Judgment of God
- His Judgment on His Household
- His Judgment on Individual Believers
- “Suffering in the Flesh” and “Ceasing from Sin”
- Self-Discipline
- “Pursuing Holiness” and “Seeing God”

I think what I have to offer is true and in accord with scripture. But I also think it is minimal. There is much more to be “unearthed”.

“The Discipline of the Lord”

Firstly, we need to settle whether or not we believe “the hands of the living God” can give us “love” in the form of something other than what we usually think of as “love” – namely, “discipline” in the form of physical chastening. Granted, “discipline” is a diverse subject. But do we believe that, along with more “spiritual” forms of discipline, the Lord also may discipline His children with various forms of physical chastening? Shortly after writing, **“It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”** (Hebrews 10:31), the writer to the Hebrews also wrote this:

4“You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; 5and you have forgotten the exhortation, which is addressed to you as sons, “MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE PUNISHED BY HIM; 6FOR WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE PUNISHES EVERY SON WHOM HE ACCEPTS.”² 7It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9Furthermore, we had earthly fathers³ to discipline us, and we

² Cf. Proverbs 3:11-12 (NASB) The Hebrew words *musar*, Strong’s # 4148 and *towkechah*, Strong’s # 8433, translate essentially the same as the Greek words used by the writer to the Hebrews.

³ Lit. “fathers of our flesh”

respected them; shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? 10For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. 11For the moment, all discipline seems not to be pleasant, but painful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. 12Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, 13and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is impaired may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.”

Hebrews 12:4-13

The word “discipline” appears in this passage nine times. This word “discipline” doesn’t upset our theology. The Greek word is *paideia*⁴, which can be translated with various words: *tutorage*, *education*, *training*. We’re not bothered by those words. By implication, it can be translated as *instruction*, or even *nurture*. We are certainly not disquieted by those words either. But it can also imply *correction*, *chastening*, *chastisement*. Now we’re getting a bit uncomfortable.

To make matters worse, the writer then uses a word which the NASB translates as “punished” and “punishes”. Granted, other translations use the words *corrected*, *reproved*, *rebuked* for the Greek word *elegcho*.⁵ Those words are a bit stern, but we can

⁴ Strong’s # 3809

⁵ Strong’s # 1651

accept them. Even the 1977 and 1995 editions of the NASB used the word “reproved”. So why did the 2020 edition of the NASB choose to use the word “**punished**” in verse 5. We don’t like that word, “**punished**”. And it unsettles our theology.

What is really bothersome is that the NASB uses the word “**punishes**” again in verse 6. It probably should have not, because there the text has a different Greek word – *mastigoo*.⁶ Greek scholar, James Strong, says this word means literally or figuratively, “**whip**”, because it is the Greek word for the Roman flagellum. Along with this passage in Hebrews, the word appears six other times in the New Testament being used by all four gospel writers; and every time it refers to a **physical scourging**.⁷ I think it would be difficult to make a case that the writer to the Hebrews meant ONLY some type of “spiritual instruction” when he chose this word.

On the contrary, I believe the writer to the Hebrews is including the *allowance for*⁸ **physical discipline** in the various forms in which our Spiritual Father disciplines His children. This does, but should not, disturb our theology. If this particular type of discipline

⁶ Strong’s # 3146

⁷ Matthew 10:17; 20:19; 23:34; Mark 10:34; Luke 18:33; John 19:1.

⁸ I put the words “allowance for” in italics, because we will be discussing the fact that the “physical discipline” is meted out, not by God’s hand, but by Satan’s hand.

were not applied to the body, what could the writer possibly mean with the words:

- **“shedding blood in your striving against sin”?** (Hebrews 12: 4) The writer speaks of this in the context of **“the discipline of the Lord”**. **“Striving against sin”** is an aspect we will address a bit later. But **“shedding blood”** – this is clearly in the category of the physical.
- **“Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb, which is impaired may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.”** (Hebrews 12:12-13) As it has been said: *“‘Therefore’ is there for a reason.”* He is referring to body parts which have been afflicted and now need to be restored to health.

Physical Discipline

I am NOT purporting that physical discipline is the ONLY form of **“the discipline of the Lord”**, or even that it is the most common form of **“the discipline of the Lord”**. I do believe that the Lord’s primary form of disciplining His children in the New Covenant is by the Holy Spirit through His inspired scriptures. But spiritual children, like natural children, do not always take to heart words of instruction. Even mature disciples of Christ, knowing and becoming accustomed to His grace, often abuse that grace,

deceiving themselves into thinking: “The Lord has and will forgive all my sin, I’m covered by His grace.” While this is true, the Lord’s purposes go beyond forgiveness to sanctification. In other words, He desires not only to forgive us of sin, but to also cleanse us of sin. So, in His love, the Lord sometimes allows physical discipline for the purpose of “the holiness”,⁹ without which no one will see the Lord. (Hebrews 12:14, Cf. 12:10) And, while some may insist the idea of physical discipline is theologically “debatable”, the concept, in fact, runs throughout scripture.

There is, of course, the verse: **“The one who spares his rod hates¹⁰ his child, but the one who loves his child is diligent in disciplining him.”¹¹** But that has to do with the discipline of children by “fathers of the flesh”.¹² I am focusing in on an aspect of “the discipline of the Lord” which is physical discipline and can be “a terrifying thing”.

“The Hands of the Living God”

“The hands of the Living God” inflicting physical discipline on His beloved children? Let’s investigate the idea: We can begin in

⁹ Note: The definite article, “the”, is in the Greek text.

¹⁰ “‘Hating’ a child in this sense means in essence abandoning or rejecting him; ‘loving’ a child means embracing and caring for him. Failure to discipline a child is tantamount to hating him—not caring about his character.” (NET notes)

¹¹ Proverbs 13:24 *New English Translation* (NET)

¹² Cf. Hebrew 12:9

the Old Testament with Job: **“Have pity on me, my friends, have pity, for the hand of God has struck me.”** (Job 19:21) From a reading of the Book of Job it is obvious that Job’s suffering was physical suffering.

And David: **“For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was drained as in the summer heat. Selah.”** (Psalm 32:4) From what David wrote in the previous verse, we know he was referring to physical suffering: **“... my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.”** Psalm 32:3

The apostle Paul pronounced the following upon Elymas: **“The hand of the Lord is upon you’, and he was blind and not see the sun for a time. And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand.”** (Acts 13:10-11) Now Elymas may not have been a child of God, but the fact is, a few chapters earlier in the Book of Acts the same thing happen to the apostle Paul, **“by the hand of the Lord”**. (Acts 9:9-18) And, of course, whatever it may have been, Paul’s **“thorn”** was **“in his flesh”**.¹³

The Lord God Himself declared: **“The One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating disaster; I am the LORD who does all these things.”** Isaiah 54:7

¹³ 2 Corinthians 12:7-9

In both the Old and the New Testaments, we see this concept of physical discipline administered “by the hand of the Lord”. How are we to understand “the hands of the living God” afflicting His creatures? A few verses down in the same chapter of Isaiah 54 gives us the understanding:

“Behold, I Myself have created the smith who blows on the fire of coals and produces a weapon for its work; and I have created the destroyer to inflict ruin. (Isaiah 54:16) Specifically, God created Satan to do the afflicting in His physical disciplining. The story of Job agrees with this perspective: Twice, Satan asked the Lord to afflict Job physically. Twice the Lord responded to Satan: “He’s in your hand.”¹⁴ And the Lord used the physical discipline for His purposes in Job’s life and character. I will touch more on these things, as we go along. I have also written of these things in much more detail in other articles.¹⁵ Suffice to say here that the phrase, “falling into the hand of the living God”, means the Lord allows one to fall into the hand of Satan for physical discipline in the process of accomplishing His purposes in us and in our lives.

¹⁴ Job 1:9-12 & 2:4-6 Many translations read, “in your (Satan’s) *power*”; but the literal translation is, “in your (Satan’s) *hand*”.

¹⁵ Some Thoughts on Job, The Treasures of Darkness, Some Thoughts on Evil

“Suffering in the flesh”

A parallel passage to the Hebrews 12 passage is 1 Peter 4 (which we will discuss more fully again later):

“Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because the one who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.” 1 Peter 4:1

Here I’d like to point out **the connection between physical discipline and “suffering in the flesh”**. As we have preconceived ideas about a physical application of **“the discipline of the Lord”**, we also have preconceived ideas about what **“suffering in the flesh”** the Lord would allow. We usually think in terms of persecution and the physical sufferings that may include. This is a perfectly accurate perspective; but not the only possibility of what **“suffering in the flesh”** might mean. Peter made reference to Jesus’ crucifixion, which was, indeed, persecution; but it was also literal **suffering in His flesh**. I am not wanting to sound glib, but over many years, I’ve come to the conclusion that while the avoidance of death and **suffering in our flesh** is of extreme importance to us human beings, it apparently doesn’t hold that same place of prominence in the Lord’s perspective. I think scripture attests that our perspective on the preservation of the flesh is different from the Lord’s:

“For you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” Gen 3:19b

Now if your right eye is causing you to sin, tear it out and throw it away from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand is causing you to sin, cut it off and throw it away from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell. Matthew 5:29-30

If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than to have two hands and two feet and be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell. Matthew 18:8-9¹⁶

“The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven.... Now I say this, brothers *and sisters*, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.” 1 Corinthians 15:47 & 50

This is obviously not a full treatment of the subject but suffice to say here that physical discipline and “suffering in the flesh” are tools of sanctification “in the hands of the Living God”.

¹⁶ Cf. Mark 9:43-49

The Judgment of God

“The Discipline of the Lord” and “The Judgment of God” are integrally related, because when God brings judgment upon His people, it is for the purpose of discipline¹⁷ – NOT condemnation.¹⁸ Judgment upon the non-believer is for condemnation.¹⁹ But ultimately, everyone is judged the same way, according to the same standard, by the same criteria – the perfection of God.²⁰ The non-believer will be judged – condemned - after the end of this age. The believer is being judged – disciplined - now, during this age - for *tutorage, education, training, instruction, nurture, correction, chastening, chastisement*.²¹ And as we have discussed, discipline can also have a physical form²². Likewise with judgment – it too may have a physical form.

Like “The Discipline of the Lord”, “The Judgment of God” is also a diverse subject. Even the Greek word, *krima*²³, which is translated “judgment”, has diverse but related meanings. The root meaning is to distinguish – to make a distinction – to make a separation - between good and evil, between right and wrong, and in a court

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 11:32; 2 Corinthians 7:10; James 1:2-4

¹⁸ Romans 8:1

¹⁹ Mark 16:16; John 3:18; Hebrews 3:19; 1 John 3:23

²⁰ Cf. Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 18:30; Matthew 5:48; Ephesians 4:13

²¹ Cf. 1 Peter 4:4-13. Greek: *paideia*, Strong’s # 3809 and *elegcho*, Strong’s # 1651

²² Greek: *mastigoo*, Strong’s # 3146

²³ Strong’s # 2917

of law, between legal and illegal. In the New Testament, the Greek word *krisis*²⁴ usually refers to the result or consequences of the decision made in judgment – for example, the Lord’s judgment in favor of the Redeemed and the Lord’s condemnation of the Unredeemed.²⁵

**“The Lord is known *by* the judgment He executes;
the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands.”**

Psalm 9:16 NKJV

The first part of this verse indicates that, if we want to know and understand God, we need to know and understand His judgments. This is so because His judgments reveal an essential aspect of His nature and character – namely, “**the holiness**”²⁶ which intrinsically distinguishes between good and evil, and between right and wrong. “The holiness” is “**His holiness**”.²⁷

The second part of verse tells us that we can be snared in the work of our own hands. That “snare” may come in the form of God’s disciplinary judgment simply allowing one to “reap what is sown”. But if one repeatedly ignores the conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit and His inspired scriptures,²⁸ disciplinary judgment

²⁴ Strong’s # 2920

²⁵ Cf. Revelation 20:4-6

²⁶ Hebrews 12:14. Note: The definite article, “the”, is in the Greek text.

²⁷ Hebrews 12:10

²⁸ John 16:8

can come in the form of God allowing Satan to exercise
PHYSICAL discipline, which would be the consequence of
one's own brazen-faced behavior. The latter is the focus of our
discussion here.

His Judgment Now on the Household of God

“For *it is* time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what *will be* the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?” 1 Peter 4:17

The scriptures inform us that now – in this age – there will be judgment exercised on the Household of God – the Church.²⁹ The Church is being judged now, and “**those who do not obey the gospel of God**” will be judged at the end of this age, at the Great White Throne Judgment.³⁰

Much could be said about Judgment in the Household of God, I’d like to share just a few personal observations: It seems to me when the subject of Judgment in the Household of God is being discussed, one usually has “other” people in mind – for example, all those “other” people in the man-made religious systems, and all those “other” people teaching and following doctrines of demons, etc. However, **the prophets appointed by God who warned of judgment identified themselves with the people of God.** There was no “us and them” – just “us”. Consider Jeremiah’s Lamentations and Jesus weeping over Jerusalem.³¹

²⁹ Cf. Matthew 3:10; Revelation 11:1-2; 1 Corinthians 5:5, 11:30-32

³⁰ Revelation 20:11-15

³¹ Matthew 23:37-39; Luke 19:41-44

The "them" were their persecutors - enemies of the Household of God.

Concerning the "us and them" perspective in the Church: There is an essential difference between a judge and a prophet. A judge makes a separation – for example, separating people, as a shepherd separates sheep and goats.³² A prophet may also bring a separation. But whereas the judge pronounces the separation, the prophet pronounces "the word of the Lord". That word brings the separation – not the prophet. In other words, the prophet pronounces the word of the Judge. There are many prophets who act as a mouthpiece of the Lord. There is only One Judge.

"There is *only* one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you, judging your neighbor?"

James 4:12

"Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand." Romans 14:4

The true prophet does not act as The Judge. Rather, he identifies himself with the people of God, and is jealous for all those whom Jesus redeemed by His blood.

³² Matthew 25:31-46

Also, the subject matter being addressed in the context of the Judgment in the Household of God does not have to do with “not doing church correctly” or even false teachings. **It has to do with “human lusts”: “indecent behavior, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties, and wanton idolatries” (1 Peter 4:2-3). To Peter’s lists of human lusts we could add Paul’s list of the “deeds of the flesh”: “sexual immorality, impurity, indecent behavior, idolatry, witchcraft, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Galatians 5:19-21³³**

In these lists of lustful behaviors, some are of a public nature which quickly and easily tarnish the witness of the Church to the watching World. But others are also of a private nature - “secret sins” which may be hidden from the World and the Church but are **“open and laid bare”** before the face of the Living God.

“There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him to whom we must answer.” Hebrews 4:13

“I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.” Revelation 2:23³⁴

³³ Cf. Romans 1:28-32; 1 John 2:16

³⁴ Cf. Psalm 7:9; 26:2; 139:1; Jeremiah 11:20; 17:10

I am reminded of David's sin with Bathsheba.³⁵ David went to great lengths to keep his sin with Bathsheba secret. In very cunning ways, David was able to successfully hide his lust from public view. And as he did so, his sin birthed more sins resulting in death, for by its very nature, sin always produces death.³⁶ We would like to think so, but this death is not limited to the emotional and spiritual realms. In this case, a physical fruit of that death was the death of Uriah, Bathsheba's husband. Of a certainty, the Holy Spirit was laying heavy upon David's heart and mind to bring him to repentance. But he resisted, or somehow through deceptive reasoning he convinced himself he could still remain in God's favor while continuing in his sin. We have no idea of how long he actually persisted in this. But one day, there was "a knock at the door" with Nathan pointing his finger in David's face saying, **"You are the man.... and you have shown utter disrespect for the Lord."**³⁷ David repented³⁸ and God forgave him. But the death emanating from his sin continued further in the form of the death of his son born to Bathsheba. David was forgiven and continued

³⁵ 2 Samuel 11-12

³⁶ "The wages of sin is death." Romans 6:23

³⁷ 2 Samuel 12:14

³⁸ Psalm 51

“serving the purpose of God in his generation”³⁹, but never-the-less, he also received judgment by the hand of the Living God.⁴⁰

³⁹ Acts 13:36

⁴⁰ In total, four of David’s sons experienced untimely deaths – the “four times over” judgment David unknowingly pronounced upon himself. 2 Samuel 12:5-6

His Judgment Now on Individual Believers

The other observation I've made is that when Judgment in the Household of God is discussed, we tend to think in "collective" terms, rather than individuals - like ourselves - being judged. It may not be wrong to think of God's judgment coming upon the whole Church, but the reality is, the Church is made up of individuals, and judgment comes upon individuals – even ourselves. In fact, the scriptural examples I have found concerning Judgment in the Household of God depict individuals coming under the hand of the Living God. Let's look at two examples:

“... destruction of the flesh....”

“You are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.”

1 Corinthians 5:5

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul addresses a situation in the church involving a sexually immoral person – a believer who was a member in the local body of believers in Corinth. Paul exhorted the church to exercise judgment – that is, to distinguish, and make a distinction between good and evil, between righteousness and unrighteousness, and in this case to dis-fellowship the sexually

immoral person – that is, to make a separation. In fact, although he was not physically present, in his letter Paul pronounced the judgment and specified that the sexually immoral person be **“delivered to Satan for the destruction of his flesh” SO THAT “his spirit may be saved on the Day of the Lord”**. The outcome hoped for was that **“his spirit may be saved on the Day of the Lord”**. How are we to understand this **“destruction of the flesh”**? It cannot be viewed as a punishment by which salvation is paid for, because salvation is only **“by grace, through faith”**⁴¹ in the blood sacrifice of Jesus. No, **this “destruction of the flesh” is physical discipline - “suffering in the flesh” - as a form of God’s judgment with a view to repentance, sanctification, and redemption.**

We see another example in the Old Testament of the Lord allowing someone to be **“delivered to Satan for the destruction of his flesh”** in the Book of Job. The Lord allowed this to occur twice, and both times the Lord set parameters for Satan. The second time, Satan was allowed to cause **“suffering in the flesh”** for Job. The Lord said to Satan, **“He is in your hand, but spare his life.”**⁴² Now within such a parameter, Satan is not limited to what makes sense to us as being **“spiritually beneficial”** – for example, **“The reason this particular thing is happening is**

⁴¹ Ephesians 2:8

⁴² Job 2:6 NKJV

because it will teach and develop such and such in me.” That may or may not be the result, but the reality is, any situation given over to Satan will, by nature of the case, be rather “hideous”.⁴³

But getting back to the New Covenant, while we do not know what the Lord allowed Satan to do to the Corinthian man’s flesh and we do not know the outcome, never-the-less, I believe this is a clear example of an individual believer experiencing physical discipline - “suffering in the flesh” - as a form of God’s judgment with a view to repentance, sanctification, and redemption.

“... weak, sick, and dying”

“For this reason, many among you are weak and sick, and a number are dying. But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.” 1 Corinthians 11:30-32

The Corinthian church was eating the Lord’s Supper in an **“unworthy manner” – “not recognizing the body” and “despising the church of God”**. Paul exhorted them to **“judge themselves”** so that they would not *continue* to bring God’s

⁴³ C. S. Lewis titled *That Hideous Strength* after a line in a poem by Sir David Lyndsay called “Ane Dialog” (1555) in which Lyndsay was describing the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11: 1-9): “The shadow of that hideous strength, Six miles and more it is of length.” In other words, the presence, and workings of Satan casts a long dark shadow.

judgment upon themselves – that is, *continue* to become “weak, sick and dying”. Paul referred to this judgment as being “disciplined by the Lord”, SO THAT they would “not be condemned along with the world”. Again, we have a clear example of believers experiencing physical discipline - “suffering in the flesh” - as a form of God’s judgment in lieu of them “rightly judging” themselves. It is important to note that Paul said this judgment in the Household of God was happening *now* “so that we will not be condemned along with the world” at the end of the age.

“Suffering in the Flesh” & “Ceasing from sin”

1“Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because the one who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human lusts, but for the will of God.” 1 Peter 4:1-2

Here the apostle Peter makes an intriguing statement: “The one who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.”⁴⁴ How are we to understand “ceasing from sin”? Let’s begin with the word “ceasing”⁴⁵: The Apostles Teaching⁴⁶ does NOT contain the teachings of “sinless perfection” or “entire sanctification”. While still in the body, the Christian will always be capable of sin. The apostle John wrote: “No one who remains in Him sins continually; no one who sins *continually* has seen Him or knows Him.”⁴⁷ The verb tense in this sentence is present active indicative. The literal meaning is “does not keep on sinning” – that is, as a lifestyle. To “cease from sin” is to stop, refrain, quit sin *as a lifestyle*. The apostle Peter refers to *sinful lifestyles* in verses 2-4 of 1 Peter 4.

⁴⁴ 1 Peter 4:1

⁴⁵ Greek: *pavo*, Strong’s # 3973

⁴⁶ Acts 2:42

⁴⁷ 1 John 3:6

However, while not living a sinful lifestyle in public, the believer may still be continuing in a particular sinful practice(s)⁴⁸ which the Lord will address with His discipline and judgment with a view to the believer stopping, refraining, quitting that particular sinful practice(s).

Still, how are we to understand the connection between “suffering in the flesh” and “ceasing from sin”? “Suffering in the flesh” is NOT to obtain forgiveness of past sins, for our sins have already been forgiven.⁴⁹ Rather *it is for the ceasing of the continuance of sins in the future*, as it were. To help further our understanding of the connection between “suffering in the flesh” and “ceasing from sin”, let’s review some parallel passages from Paul’s writings which make similar statements:

“If by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” Romans 8:13

“Putting to death” may be equated with “ceasing”. The Greek word translated here as “deeds” is *praxis*⁵⁰, which is more literally translated “practices” or “habits”. This “putting to death the habits of the body” is enabled “by the Spirit”.

⁴⁸ Romans 7:14-24

⁴⁹ 1 John 2:12; Acts 13:38; 1 Corinthians 6:11

⁵⁰ Strong’s # 4234

“Now those who belong to Christ Jesus crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” Galatians 5:24

Paul’s use of the word “**crucified**” equates with the phrase “**dead to sin**” which he uses in his epistles to the Romans.⁵¹ The Greek word translated here as “passions” is *pathema*⁵², which also carries the meanings “influences, or emotions, or affections”. And the Greek word, *epithumia*,⁵³ translated here as “desires”, is more literally translated, “a craving, longing, mostly for evil desires”.⁵⁴

“Therefore, treat the parts of your earthly body as dead to sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.” Colossians 3:5⁵⁵

The “**parts of the body**” are not evil in and of themselves, but in this case are the instruments used to sin. To “**treat as dead**” can again be equated with “**ceasing**”. Here Paul equates various human lusts as “**idolatry**”. The Greek word translated “idolatry” is a compound word: *eidfola*, meaning “idol;” and *latreia*, meaning “serving in sacrificial worship”.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Romans 6:2-7, 11

⁵² Strong’s # 3804

⁵³ Strong’s # 1939

⁵⁴ *Vines’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*

⁵⁵ Cf. 1 Corinthians 5:10

⁵⁶ *Vines’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*

So, we see that these three verses from Paul's epistles communicate thoughts which are similar to or related to that which we read in Peter's epistle.

Some interpret this **"suffering in the flesh"** and **"ceasing from sin"** as the equivalent of Paul's statement in Romans 6:7: **"For he who has died has been freed from sin."** But, if we look at the preceding verse, we see Paul is referring to the "old man" in Adam having been **"crucified with Christ"**: **"... knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin."** (Romans 6:6) Whereas Peter is referring to born-again Christians – those who are part of the new creation in Christ, and who are now being disciplined, judged, and made holy so **"they may live in the spirit according to *the will of God*"**. (1 Peter 4:6)

Concerning the interplay of **"suffering in the flesh"** and **"ceasing from sin"**, I think Adam Clarke's comment on the passage is excellent and experientially accurate:

"He that hath suffered in the flesh, hath ceased from sin - This is a general maxim, if understood literally: The man who suffers generally reflects on his ways, is humbled, fears approaching death, loathes himself because of his past iniquities, and ceases from them; for, in a state of suffering, the mind loses its relish for the sins of the flesh, because they are embittered to him through the apprehension which he has of death

and judgment; and, on his application to God's mercy, he is delivered from his sin."

To that I would add: If physical discipline and judgment of the Lord takes the form of illness or injury, the body is "forced" into a situation of being denied certain cravings and comforts. Care for a body that is ill or injured may demand discipline in schedules, diets, treatments, procedures, etc. This is an "imposed" discipline rather than a true self-discipline like self-control. (We will discuss self-control shortly). But these "impositions", along with pain and suffering, serve to acclimate the body to self-denial. The body learns to live without its lusts being satisfied at its demand.

I offer this summary regarding "suffering in the flesh" and "ceasing from sin": An individual believer experiencing the physical discipline of the Lord - "suffering in the flesh" - as a form of God's judgment is given opportunity to truly and fully repent of here-to-fore sin of which he had not truly and fully repented. He is given opportunity for the Holy Spirit to cleanse (sanctify) him of said sin(s). And thus, he is given opportunity for the redemption of his body on the Day of the Lord, having been judged now rather than at the end of the age with the "sons of disobedience".⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Colossians 3:6; Ephesians 2:2-3; Cf. Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:19

Self-Discipline

I stated that an individual believer experiencing the physical discipline of the Lord - “suffering in the flesh” - as a form of God’s judgment is given opportunity to repent and be cleansed (sanctified) in preparation for the redemption of the body. Obviously, an individual may reject that opportunity and not cooperate with the work of the Lord. But, alternatively, how does the individual “cooperate” in this process?

To begin with, I think it necessary to clearly state again that this sanctification and redemption is NOT “earned” through “suffering in the flesh”, since “It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1:30-31 NIV) “Salvation is of the Lord,”⁵⁸ it is not “earned” through “suffering in the flesh”.

However, Paul tells us to “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to desire and to work for *His* good pleasure.”

Philippians 2:12-13

⁵⁸ Psalm 3:8; 37:39; Jonah 2:9

“Salvation is from the Lord”, but we “work it out”. We “work” in faith that God is also working in us to bring His salvation to the point of “His good pleasure” in our lives. Our “work” is to cooperate with the Spirit of the Lord working in us. How do we “work” and “cooperate” with the Lord in this process? One way, which is pertinent to our discussion, is by “strictly disciplining our body”. This is a phrase used by Paul. Let’s see what he means by that.

²⁴“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. ²⁵Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. So, they *do it* to obtain a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶Therefore I run in such a way as not *to run* aimlessly; I box in such a way, as to avoid hitting air; ²⁷but I strictly discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.” 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

The Greek word Paul uses is *hupōpiazō*,⁵⁹ which means: “to hit *under the eye* (*buffet* or *disable* an antagonist as a pugilist), that is, (figuratively) to *tease* or *annoy* (into compliance), *subdue* (one’s passions): - keep under, make weary.”⁶⁰ I think the Amplified Bible succeeds in giving the full meaning of the word:

⁵⁹ Strong’s # 5299

⁶⁰ Strong’s Concordance

“But [like a boxer] I buffet my body [handle it roughly, discipline it by hardships] and subdue it, for fear that after proclaiming to others the Gospel *and* things pertaining to it, I myself should become unfit [not stand the test, be unapproved and rejected as a counterfeit].” 1 Corinthians 9:27 AMP

It is true that Paul himself imposed this discipline on his own body. But I am suggesting further that in the situation of **“suffering in the flesh”** under **“the hands of the Living God”**⁶¹, the body is being **“strictly disciplined”** or **“buffeted”**. And it is this **“buffeting of the body”** - physical discipline – which helps enable the human soul for true and full repentance – i.e., **“ceasing from sin”**.

But, even when the body is being buffeted, there are still the **“battle fields”** of the mind and emotions, which even in illness and injury also require one to **“abstain from every form of evil”**⁶² and **“make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts”**⁶³.

Self-Control

This **“ceasing from sin”** is not an elimination of all temptation, but rather it is the ability to say **“No”** to the lusts of the flesh. But what is the source of this ability to say **“No”**? **Self-control**. This

⁶¹ Physical suffering allowed - not directly imposed - by God, as we have discussed.

⁶² 1 Thessalonians 5:22

⁶³ Romans 13:14

abstinence or *keeping oneself away from*⁶⁴ “every form of evil” is done through self-control, which is simply controlling the self with regards to human lusts.

Paul equates his “strictly disciplining the body” with self-control, in the context of the fact that “God is at work in you, both to desire and to work for *His* good pleasure.”⁶⁵ For Paul saw self-control as one of the fruits of the Spirit.⁶⁶ So, if we have received the gift of the Holy Spirit, we can look to the power of the Holy Spirit to control our selves. I find it is always simply a matter of choice – to obey our lusts or obey the Spirit. I am not minimizing the struggle between the flesh and the Spirit. But our sanctification is God’s will, and He is present within us and at work within us to accomplish His will in us.

³“For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, ⁵not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶and that no one violate the rights and take advantage of his brother or sister in the matter, because the Lord is the avenger⁶⁷ in all these things, just as we also told you previously and

⁶⁴ Greek: *apechō*, Strong’s # 566, to *keep* (oneself) *away*, that is, *be distant* (literally or figuratively).

⁶⁵ Philippians 2:13

⁶⁶ Galatians 5:22-23

⁶⁷ Greek: *ekdikos*, Strong’s # 1558, “One who exacts a penalty from a person, an avenger, a punisher.”, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*.

solemnly warned *you*. ⁷For God has not called us for impurity, but in sanctification."

1 Thessalonians 4:3-7

"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will do it."

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

“Pursuing Holiness” & “Seeing God”

“The Holiness”

¹⁴ “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, ¹⁵ but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior;¹⁶ because it is written: “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” 1 Peter 1:14-16

The word Peter uses for “holy” is *hagion*.⁶⁸ This word is a noun, not an adjective, and it means a consecrated, or set apart thing. It relates to the Hebrew word, *qadash*,⁶⁹ which also means a consecrated, or set apart thing or place, like the Old Covenant tabernacle or temple, and the articles within them. As the dwelling place of God in the New Covenant, we are exhorted by Peter to “be holy in all your behavior” with a particular reference to “former lusts”, some of which he later lists in his epistle.⁷⁰ The meaning of Peter’s exhortation is this: *“As the Ecclesia – called out ones – you are consecrated and set apart to God. Therefore, be separate from the world with its human lusts, and be pure vessels for the Lord.”*

⁶⁸ Strong’s # 39

⁶⁹ Strong’s 6942

⁷⁰ 1 Peter 4:3. “A course of indecent behavior, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties, and wanton idolatries.” Cf. 1 John 2:16

The apostle John exhorts God's Ecclesia in the same manner:
"Everyone who has this hope set on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." 1 John 3:3

And the writer to the Hebrews gives us the same exhortation:
"Pursue the holiness⁷¹ without which no one will see the Lord."
(Hebrews 12:14) And in verse 10, he had defined **"the holiness"** to be **"His holiness"**. To be more exact: In both verses we have nouns – not adjectives. The "holiness" in verse 10, *hagiotēs*,⁷² is the abstract quality of holiness. The "holiness" in verse 14, *hagiasmos*,⁷³ means sanctification or purification. The exhortation is to: **"Pursue sanctification or purification, without which no one will see the Lord."**

The desired outcome of the discipline of the Lord - physical discipline, "suffering in the flesh"⁷⁴ - as a form of the judgement of God is "ceasing from sin" in the "pursuit of the holiness".
And the outcome of "the holiness" is to "see God".

⁷¹ Or *that holiness*.

⁷² Strong's # 41

⁷³ Strong's 38

⁷⁴ Again, this is NOT the only method God uses to discipline His children. In the New Covenant, the instruction of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit-inspired scriptures are God's preferred method of discipline.

“Seeing God”

What does it mean to “see God”? A survey of the scriptures on the subject may leave one confused, for while some scriptures speak about “seeing God”, others say we cannot “see God”.⁷⁵ In Exodus 24:9-11, it says that Moses, with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel “saw God, and they ate and drank”. While a few chapters later in Exodus 33:20, the Lord told Moses, “You cannot see My face, for mankind shall not see Me and live!” When Jacob had “seen God face to face” at Peniel, he expected to die (yet he lived).⁷⁶ In the midst of his testing, Job declared he would “see God” with his own eyes;⁷⁷ and at the end of his testing he confirmed that he had “seen God” “with the seeing of the eye”.⁷⁸ And, of course, Jesus said that “the pure of heart will see God”.⁷⁹ So, we can “see God” in some sense – maybe “face to face”, maybe not. The question remains: How are we to understand “seeing God”? I think the answer is multi-faceted. A few thoughts:

⁷⁵ I would recommend two articles from John Piper’s ministry to acquaint oneself with the subject: 1) “Can We Ever See God or Not?” <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/can-we-ever-see-god-or-not> 2) “We Will See His Face” <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/we-will-see-his-face>

⁷⁶ Genesis 32:30

⁷⁷ Job 19:26-27

⁷⁸ Job 42:5

⁷⁹ Matthew 5:8

“God is Spirit.”⁸⁰ We cannot see spirit. Therefore, because He is Spirit, we cannot see God’s face or body. Thus, we read of some theophanies in the Bible.

However, the Man, Jesus of Nazareth, is **“the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature”**.⁸¹ And **“now we see Jesus”**⁸² – albeit for us, through the scriptures. But in glory, we will see His glorified body.⁸³ And in response to Phillip’s request for Jesus to **“show the Father”**, Jesus replied, **“He who has seen Me has seen the Father.”**⁸⁴ So now, as we grow in our revelation of Jesus Christ, our “seeing” of God increases.

After **“suffering in the flesh”**, Job declared: **“I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You.”** (Job 42:5) I have reflected at length on Job’s statement. What is the fundamental difference between “hearing with the ear” and “seeing with the eye”? To hear about Someone with the hearing of the ear, the Object need not be present. But the Object must be present for the seeing of the eye. For example: I may be standing before a wooded area and hear the roaring of a lion. Hearing the

⁸⁰ John 4:24

⁸¹ Hebrews 1:3 *English Standard Version*; Cf. 2 Corinthians 4:6 “The Light of the knowledge of the glory of God (is given) in the face of Jesus Christ.”; Colossians 1:15; John 14:9 “If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father.”; John 12:45

⁸² Hebrews 2:9

⁸³ Philippians 3:21; Cf. <https://www.gotquestions.org/Jesus-physical-body.html>

⁸⁴ John 14:7-11

sound of the lion roar, my mind could bring up images of lions based on my previous experiences with photographic images, zoos, etc. But if the lion were to walk out of the woods and stand before me, my eye would see Him as he is.

Perception

Job's perceptions of God based on "the hearing of the ear" were not necessarily wrong. But there came a time – after "**suffering in the flesh**" – in which he had a perception of God based on God's presence in his life, which Job described as "**the seeing of the eye**". We have perceptions of God based on our cultural mores which may not be all together wrong, but rather, just incomplete. This is why experiencing God with those "**from every tribe, language, people, and nation**"⁸⁵ is beneficial – we can learn from the perceptions of other cultures. Although "religion" is beset with man-made traditions, not all of our religious perceptions of God are all together wrong either, but rather have a "lesser glory" than perceptions based in New Covenant relationship with God.⁸⁶ And those perceptions of God based on Spirit-given revelation of Spirit-inspired scriptures are certainly not wrong, but even that knowing can be incomplete knowing. There is a more "full" perception of God when He invades one's life with

⁸⁵ Revelation 5:9

⁸⁶ Cf. 2 Corinthians 3:7-11, 18

His presence – *the natural man encountering the Divine Spirit*. We read of these kinds of encounters in the lives of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Paul, and others in the scriptures. But all who are born of the Spirit and have received the gift of the Spirit have “more full” perceptions of God when He has invaded their lives with His presence. And so too, our perceptions of God also become “more full” during times of the discipline of the Lord - physical discipline, “suffering in the flesh”⁸⁷ - as a form of the judgement of God in the “pursuit of the holiness”. Like Job, during these times, we “see God with the seeing of the eye”.

Summary

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”⁸⁸ I believe Jesus was referring to “seeing God” – that is, His presence in eternity, but also experiencing God in the here and now. Greek scholar, A.T. Robertson, wrote: “Sin befogs and beclouds the heart so that one cannot see God.”⁸⁹ Sin prevents us from “getting in tune” with God, as it were. Whereas purity is like a gateway into God’s very nature, enabling us to get in harmony with God so we can experience His presence in our lives.

⁸⁷ Again, this is NOT the only method God uses to discipline His children. In the New Covenant, the instruction of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit-inspired scriptures are God’s preferred method of discipline.

⁸⁸ Matthew 5:8

⁸⁹ Robertson’s *Word Pictures*, Matthew 5:8

In order to experience God more fully, we must pursue “**the holiness**” – not achieve its perfection – but sincerely desire and pursue “**His holiness**”,⁹⁰ which is *the nature and character of God*. This must go beyond “desire” expressed in prayer – we must “**show our faith by our works**”.⁹¹ And this is worked out practically:

“Therefore, sin is not to reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the parts of your body to sin *as* instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those who are alive from the dead, and your body’s parts *as* instruments of righteousness for God.... For just as you presented the parts of your body as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your body’s parts as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.” Romans 6:12-13, 19⁹²

The Greek word translated “present” here is *paristemi*.⁹³ Other translation choose the English word, “yield”. Greek scholar, Marvin Vincent explains it means “to render, to put in the service of”.⁹⁴ In other words: **“Stop rendering your body parts to the service of lust, sin, impurity, lawlessness, and unrighteousness;**

⁹⁰ Note: Hebrews 12 has “His holiness” in verse 10; and “the holiness” with the definite article in the Greek text of verse 14.

⁹¹ James 2:17-26

⁹² Cf. Romans 12:1

⁹³ Strong’s # 3936

⁹⁴ Vincent’s *Word Studies*

and render your body parts to the service God, righteousness, and sanctification.”

“Pursue the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.”

Hebrews 12:14

I think Adam Clarke’s comment on this verse summarizes the matter:

“To “see God” is a Hebraism meaning to experience God. (Strong) And holiness - Τὸν ἁγιασμόν· That state of continual sanctification, that life of purity and detachment from the world and all its lusts, without which detachment and sanctity no man shall see the Lord - shall never enjoy his presence in the world of blessedness. To see God, in the Hebrew phrase, is to enjoy him; and without holiness of heart and life this is impossible. No soul can be fit for heaven that has not suitable dispositions for the place.”⁹⁵

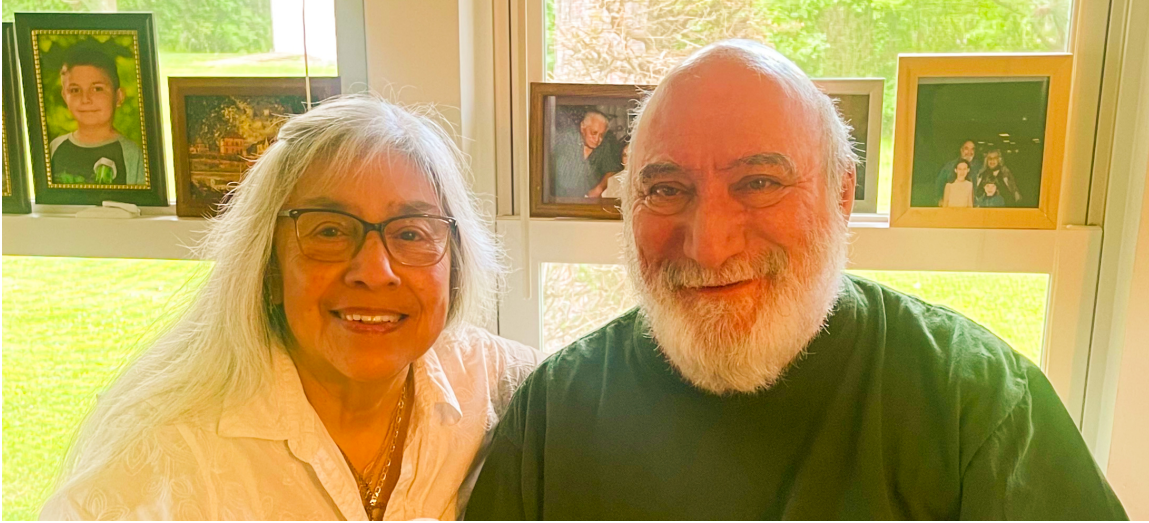
⁹⁵ Adam Clarke, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*

Postscript

“Therefore, since we also have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let’s rid ourselves of every obstacle and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let’s run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking only at Jesus, the originator and perfecter of the faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:1-2

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.” 2 Timothy 4:7-8

Bill & Frances Furioso
~ At Christ's Table ~



Bill Furioso and his wife, Frances, have been married for more than 40 years, and have two children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Bill and Frances served as missionaries in South Africa for thirteen years making disciples, establishing churches, and training church leaders. Over a span of 40 years, they also traveled extensively in an itinerant Bible teaching ministry which took them to hundreds of gatherings on four continents ministering in churches, conferences, spiritual formation seminars, and home gatherings. They have shepherded several churches, discipled many to Christ, and mentored church leaders in the USA and abroad.

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