

The Church

Biblical Discipline - Part 1

Introduction.

There are few matters more serious in the duration of any church, or the life of a believer, than being Biblically disciplined by the church leadership. Admittedly, this is becoming less and less for in today's world it is perhaps more likely that one will be disciplined for standing for Biblical truth. It is possibly the most serious and solemn matter which the leadership of any church can officiate in, possibly the most serious for an entire church to execute, and for any individual to have done to them. Having been involved in local church matters for approximately fifty-eight years, I acknowledge that in that time I have seen a number of saints disciplined, and it has never been pleasant.

The matter becomes all the more intensely solemn for I know, from that which I have witnessed, it has not always been done scripturally. There have been times when individuals failed to be disciplined, and at times it was done by twisting of the scriptures to maintain an "old boys club". I have seen multiple saints and families damaged and churches disintegrate because the Lord was grieved to such an extent that He closed the doors.

In the life of an individual the most serious decision they will ever make is in regards to salvation. It is an act of the will, "If any man . . . come" (Jn. 7:37; Lk. 9:23), and again, "they would not come" (Matt. 22:3).

It is:

- a) The acknowledging of full dependence on divine Persons by having a thankful, dependent spirit (Rom. 1:21).
- b) The submitting of this life to God (Rom. 12:1-2).
- c) A life which begins with obedience (Acts 6:7), and a life that is enjoyed only by obedience (1 Pet. 1:14).

Therefore, idealistically, whither the individual is one of the elders who needs discipline or one of the congregation being disciplined, the discipline must be carried out in perfect accord with the scriptures. Only then can it be for the glory of God, and the honor of the Lord.

When one is saved then there are the solemn matters of baptism and considering how the Lord would want His people to gather to Himself. Being part of a New Testament church is both an honor and a responsibility. It is my belief that every believer desirous of being a partner in a church fellowship should be made aware of the privileges they can enjoy, the significance of being part of the fellowship, and the obligations it places on the individual.

The seriousness of discipline is seen also by the reality that it must be done in a consciousness of the presence of Christ (Matt. 18:20), therefore, this must be exercised with:

- a) A consciousness of the divine holiness. God is Holy (Lev. 11:45; Isa. 6:3), the Spirit is Holy (Lk. 11:13), and Christ is Holy (Mk. 1:24).
- b) A bowing to the unreserved authority of the Lord. He is the Lord of Hosts and is utterly sovereign therefore, any discipline not according to His authority is either satanic rebellion or fleshy and soulish carnality. Idealistically, a New Testament church is divinely owned. It is God's husbandry (1 Cor. 3:9), God's building (1 Cor. 3:9), and any damaging of it will incur the uncurtailed power of Divine displeasure as is seen in the Old and New Testament (Isa. 63:6; Jer. 7:20; Nah. 1:6; 1 Cor 3:17).

Thus, to discipline without following the scriptures in spirit and letter will damage the saints and the church. The name of God is not being upheld, but dishonored. "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven" (Matt. 6:10) ought to be our prayer.

When we view the church in 1 Timothy 3:15, we read of the "House of God"

Due to a failure to keep the expression in context, acknowledge the law of first mention, or the literal interpretation, it is often taught that the local church is the house of God. Several observations are to be made.

- a) The local church is not the house of God, for several reasons:

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- i) If the local church was the house of God, then God has thousands of houses throughout the world.
- ii) The Greek text literally says, "That men may know how to behave themselves in house of God". There is no definite article, which indicates character, and this is what is supported by the context in which we read of three houses:
 1. Of the three houses mentioned in Timothy, in two of them a distinct word is repeated for emphasis (1 Tim. 3:5, 12) and it is the word "rule". Regarding the elders house, and he must rule his own house (v.5); the deacon must rule his own house (v.12). In both cases "rule" indicates a conforming to his standard of behavior and character.
 2. The third house mentioned is the house of God and this must be administered by the rule of God, it will strive to have His character.
 - (a) That is a characteristic of holiness. Therefore, all that offends must be removed. Compare (Rev.chs. 2-3).
 - (b) That is the characteristic of Orderliness (1 Cor. 14:40).
 3. God is the God of order and this is seen Governmentally, Kings, Celestially, Divine Persons, Seraphim, cherubim, archangels, angels, Assembly, Christ, elders, saints. That is a characteristic of developing saints for the glory of Christ and God, and this is seen in the meaning of the word.

The Meaning of The Word Discipline

While the word discipline is not found in the scriptures, it is clearly taught. The Greek word indicating this is translated as: Instruction (2 Tim. 3:16); Chastisement (Heb. 12:8); Chastening (Heb. 12:5, 7, 11); Nurture (Eph. 6:4). In this last reference it is to train a child both verbally and punitively.

Because of true Spirit directed godly discipline, it will have an effect on the disciplined one. If they respond to that which is godly then they will be blessed (Heb. 12:9-11), so will the other saints in the assembly, for in its broadest aspect the Holy Spirit commands us, "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear" (1 Tim. 5:20). If, however, the discipline is not done as Spirit directed and in godly fear, then the disciplined one may rebel and turn away from the assembly/church in spite and hurt, or they may take it as from the Lord as David did and ultimately reap the blessing. Therefore, when we speak of discipline in the house of God, we are speaking of:

- a) The rule of God in His moral training of us
- b) The rule of God in His conforming us to His character
- c) The rule of God in His changing of our attitudes, behavior and outlook.

God's house is to be marked by fidelity to His teachings (1 Tim. 3:16), therefore, sin permitted is a denial of the doctrine which the church is to profess and uphold.

In the Scriptures there are three avenues of discipline

1) The Lords discipline on an individual

- a) This is something the Lord does personally (1 Cor. 11:30). It is not always because of wrong, but to develop the individual to grow spiritually. This is the truth seen in John 15:2, "Every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit."
 - 1) The Lord can use Satan to discipline us but He always sets boundaries on Satan (Job chs. 1-2), and in it we learn His sufficient grace (1 Cor. 10:13; 12:9).
 - 2) God at times uses the persecution which arises from being a child of God in fellowship with Christ (Heb. 12:6). In the context of Heb. 12, God permitted the enemies of the cross to take from His people that which they had (ch. 10:32-34). It will be observed that this is much harder than giving things to God.

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- 2) The Lord's discipline on an assembly/church, or any work professing to be His.
 - a) When God disciplined Israel collectively for their failures, it was via famine, physical depletion, weakness, enslavement of the people, etc. When we come to the New Testament, He does it in the same way in assemblies/churches. Having had the privilege of ministering to some five hundred assemblies in nineteen countries of the world on four continents, that which is rampant among assemblies/churches is a famine for divine truth instead of politically correct sermons. Saints who once knew the liberty, which is their birthright, are enslaved by traditions. This discipline is always idealistically, personally done by the Lord (Rev. 2:5, 16, 20-21; 3:3, 16).
 - b) Sometimes the Lord does not discipline activities which profess to be His and gullible people and saints are allured into them, ie; Benny Hinn, etc. The Lord lets false teachers abound for saints to learn spiritual discernment. Tragically, there are many saints who are supporting such evilness in their luxurious life styles while many a saint is in dire need (1 Cor. 11:21).
- 3) The assembly discipline on an individual covers three areas:
 - a) Discipline because of divisions between saints.
 - b) Discipline because of disregarded moral restraints.
 - c) Discipline because of defection from doctrinal truth.

When godly men are the elders, it is because God has placed them there to rule for Him and guide His flock. When pseudo elders discipline in a way which is clearly contrary to the scriptures, the saints in an assembly must abide by the decision they make, however, they can pray that the Lord will deal with the men in a decisive way.

**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13**

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