

The Necessity of Discipline

Misc Texts from the Epistle to the Hebrews

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Sermon preached at Judsonia Church of Christ, Judsonia, Arkansas

Introduction:

- I. UCLA sociologist James Wilson has observed an interesting fact abt city life:
The crime rate escalates on those streets where broken windows are not repaired. His study showed that the failure to replace windows makes an announcement to the public by saying that standards have been lowered and authority has been abandoned. Wilson sees practices of disrepair as an invitation for further crime without the threat of adverse consequences. What is true on the street is also true in our personal lives. If we allow bad habits, inappropriate behavior, or unacceptable practices to go unchecked, we will be inviting further destruction into our lives. When we exercise the discipline needed to stop and change our damaging behavior, we erect a fence of protection that prevents further personal erosion (*Reader's Digest*, October 1995, 157).

- II. What modern sociologists are "discovering" by their individual research is ancient truth that God has revealed centuries ago: Discipline brings security, peace, and happiness! It is tempting to believe that total "freedom" and no discipline and full pursuit of self's pleasures will bring great satisfaction, but such is a lie. True joy is found in the disciplined life!
 1. The purpose of civil law was designed by God to provide a society that was satisfying. Order and civility from the citizenry results in a nation at peace. When citizens fail to honor and respect the civil law patters, there will be anarchy and chaos.
 2. The purpose for God ordering laws to govern the home and domestic life was so mankind would find satisfaction and contentment. When the discipline of God guides the home then all within the home unit will relish an environment that is a blessing. When the discipline pattern for the home is disregarded, there will be a brutal environment and all happiness will be exiled.
 3. The purpose for God ordering laws to govern His Church was to insure that the Church would provide the appropriate environment that will nurture and guard the salvation of our soul. When God's laws for the order of the congregation are disregarded, the congregation will cease being the haven of security from the tribulations of the world and will become a source of grave trouble.
 4. No one wants to live in a situation where disorderliness reigns because

discipline is absent!

a. In the community (Judges 21:25).

b. In the home (Malachi 2:15; Proverbs 10:1).

c. In the church (I Corinthians 11:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:11; Titus 1:10-11).

5. Note: In order for each institution to provide the blessings that God has designed, there must be order maintained by discipline. When discipline is not evident, then God's rules will be ignored. We are especially interested in this as it applies to the local congregations of God's Church. Within a congregation a subtle message can be given that authority is abandoned and standards are lowered when God's discipline is shunned. What evidences such?

a. Gossip; slander; lying; speaking so that ill-feelings are established to support a selfish agenda (Philippians 2:14-16).

b. Division (1 Corinthians 4:6)

c. Self-exaltation and blindness to one's true spiritual condition with God (1 Corinthians 5:2; 2 Corinthians 10:10-12, 17-18).

e. Attitudes that say: "YOU will do it MY way or I'll leave!" "I will rule or I will ruin this place!" (1 Corinthians 6:12; 3 Jn 9)

f. Dishonoring members (1 Corinthians 12:14-20)

e. The situation described in 1 Corinthians well illustrates the situation that will occur when church discipline is ignored.

III. The Epistle to the Hebrews illustrates the critical urgency for congregational discipline.

1. The Hebrew Christians were on the verge of going back into Judaism.

2. The brethren had begun Christianity with fervor and zeal but then began to slacken. Some had weakened a little and then a little more until they stopped studying and growing, ceased attending on a regular basis and began deliberately scheduling events that conflicted with the assemblies. Some had grown callous and indifferent. It all began with small incremental steps that were allowed to go unchallenged. There was a glaring absence of discipline that would guide the brethren into steadfast fidelity. Consequently the Epistle to the Hebrews was written to call these brethren back to committed service. The Epistle reminded its readers that God has a plan and pattern for Christians and this plan must be followed.

3. Look at a survey of the Epistle to the Hebrews and observe how it stresses to us the necessity for discipline in the local congregation if members of that congregation expect to be saved.

Body:

I. When church discipline is absent – The problems confronting the Hebrew Christians:

- A. Indifference toward spiritual matters (2:1-4; 7:25-10:25)
- B. Self-centeredness instead of self-sacrifice (3:7-19)
- C. An immature and weak faith in Christ (5:11-14)
- D. Deliberate apostasy (6:3-8; 10:26-31)
- E. Discouragement and lessened devotion (10:32-11:40)

II. When church discipline is present – The objectives sought for the Hebrew Christians will guard and guide the members in the congregation:

A. Renewed dedication (10:39)

B. Revived involvement – “let us” passages

- 1. Hebrews 4:1 – Let us “fear”
- 2. Hebrews 4:11 – Let us “labor”
- 3. Hebrews 4:14; 10:23 – Let us “hold fast”
- 4. Hebrews 4:16 – Let us “come boldly”
- 5. Hebrews 6:1 – Let us “go on to perfection”
- 6. Hebrews 10:22 – Let us “draw near with a pure heart”
- 7. Hebrews 10:24 – Let us “consider each other”
- 8. Hebrews 12:1 – Let us “lay aside” “run with patience”
- 9. Hebrews 12:28 – Let us “have grace”
- 10. Hebrews 13:13 – Let us “go forth”
- 11. Hebrews 13:15 – Let us “offer a sacrifice of praise”

Note: In all of these exhortations discipline is required. One cannot do it “his way.” Self has to be crucified. Personal concerns must be focused upon the welfare of the Church and not upon petty jealousies or personal prejudices! “True love” is a love that has been disciplined and that demonstrates loyalty to God above loyalty to friends, family, or favorites (1 John 3:18).

III. When church discipline is respected — The Hebrew brethren were told the means to accomplish the objectives:

- A. Realization of our position (12:1-11)
- B. Sensitivity toward our brethren’s weaknesses (12:12-13)
- C. Refusal to coddle evil attitudes (12:14-17)
- D. Understanding the dignity of the Church (12:18-13-16)
- E. Submission to Elders rule (13:17-21)

The God-ordained order for the discipline of the local congregation is

stated within Scriptures:

1. All authority was given to Christ (Matthew 28:20).
2. Christ delegated this authority:
 - a. First to the Apostles who occupied a temporary office
 - b. Second to the elders who occupy a permanent office. The authority of the eldership is clearly identified in Hebrews 13:17 with these terms:
 - 1) **"Obey"**

From *pi'-tho* (πειθω). A primary verb; to *convince* (by argument, true or false); by analogy to *pacify* or *conciliate* (by other fair means); reflexively or passively to *assent* (to evidence or authority), to *rely* (by inward certainty): — agree, assure, believe, have confidence, be content, make friends, obey, persuade, trust, yield.
 - 2) **"Have the rule"**

From *heôgeomai* (ηγέομαι). To *lead*, that is, *command* (with official authority); figuratively to *deem*, that is, *consider*: — account, (be) chief, count, esteem, governor, judge, have the rule over, suppose, think.
 - 3) **"Submit"**

From *hupeikoô* (υπείχω). From *ûpó* (to be *under*, a place of position *beneath*; *Note*: In compounds it retains the same genitive applications, especially of *inferior* position or condition) and *éikw* (to *yield*, be "weak"); to *surrender*: — submit self.
 - 4) **"They watch"**

From *agrupneoô* (ἀγρυπνέω). Ultimately from *ǵ* (as negative particle) and *ûπνος* (sleep). Thus the term means to *be sleepless*, that is, *keep awake*: — watch.
 - 5) **"Give account"**

From *apodidoômi* (ἀποδίδωμι). A compound word from *ápo* and *dídomi*. Thus meaning to *give away*, that is, *up, over, back*, etc. (in various applications): — deliver (again), give (again), (re-) pay (-ment be made), perform, recompense, render, requite, restore, reward, sell, yield.
 - c. For a brief period of time the Apostles and Elders jointly ruled together (Acts 15:3). When the temporary office of the Apostles ceased the permanent office of the Eldership was in place and continued functioning as the delegated means of authority in the Lord's Church.

The Bible teaches that Elders "rule" the congregation. This is the "sticky point" for many! The attitude of submission to God's governing order has long been a source of contention.

1. It started in Eden (Genesis 3:3-4, 6).
2. It was demonstrated in Egypt (Exodus 5:2).
3. It was evident in God's nation of Israel (Numbers 16:1-3).

The rebellion led by Korah is frightfully similar to rebellions that cause heartache in the Lord's congregations today (Numbers 16:11-14). The treatment of the rebellious is a lesson to all today (Numbers 16:21-27).

4. The Hebrew writer concludes his exhortations for a disciplined behavior with a very strong emphasis on the fact that Elders are in charge and they will be held accountable so they must discipline in such a way that the congregation's spiritual security is not endangered. This is a point stressed repeatedly in the Bible (Acts 20:28; Titus 1:10-11).
 - a. The ruling authority of the eldership is a grave responsibility to the Elders. Individually they will stand before the Judgment Bar and given an accounting for how the congregation fared under their "rule." *Elders who fail to "rule" will face the wrath of God because they allowed the Bride of Christ to become polluted; to feed upon a meaningless diet; to become corrupt. Elders who rule "well" will hear the Lord's gracious welcome because they have fought in the trenches, suffered personal slander, and lain awake at night with the pressures of uncooperative souls weighing their hearts. Tragically godly elders are often on "the critical list" and seldom hear positive encouragement!*
 - b. The ruling authority of the eldership is a grave responsibility to the members of the congregation. God expects members to strengthen the Elders; to encourage the Elders; to support the Elders to uphold all Scriptural positions and to accept agreements in areas of expediency (even if the members do not agree) because they acknowledge the Eldership's decision is for the best interest of the whole congregation and not just a small "interest group. Those who obey and submit to the Eldership will hear the Lord's gracious welcome and find rewards for eternity!
 - c. **Note:** The emphasis upon the congregation following the Eldership is stressing the obligation to do such ONLY as the congregation is being led in biblical ways! No man (even the

Eldership) has the authority to modify God's commands. No Christian has the obligation to follow error – no matter WHO is advocating it!

Conclusion:

When discipline is not evident, then God's rules will be ignored. This is true in society, the homes, and especially in the Church. Within congregations a subtle message can be given that authority is abandoned and standards are lowered when God's discipline is shunned. If Satan cannot defeat the Lord's congregation by open opposition, he will try covert maneuvers (Numbers 14:1-2, 11, 22, 27ff). He will thus plant evil thoughts in the hearts that will germinate and sprout into vicious verbal attacks, slanderous gossip, and anonymous lies. The Devil celebrates an empty triumph whenever members of a congregation disregard the Elders' authority and subtly campaign to convince others that the elders are wrong and deserve no respect or honor. In fact, such delights in nurturing the environment where elders are "second guessed" and whose motives are viewed only with the cruelest interpretation. The murmuring campaign leavens the entire congregation and Satan's evil receives more attention than God's holy design. Those involved in such actions face an eternity of woes (Numbers 15:30-31).

The following biblical truths reveal critical facts regarding the attitudes of those within the congregation toward discipline:

1. **The elders** have a God-given duty to exercise discipline that will nurture, protect, and preserve the integrity of God's Church (1 Peter 5:1-4). Some suggest the preacher and Deacons are "co-rulers" or "equal in authority" with the Elders. Such is not true. The preacher/Deacon is under the eldership's authority. These serve the Eldership as an expedient means for the Elders to accomplish their God-given task. Their role does NOT make them equal to the Eldership.
2. **The members** have a God-given duty to "obey" and "submit" to the "rule" of the elders showing respect and gratitude because they have accepted such a burden (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).
3. **The preachers** have a God-given duty to proclaim God's Word so that capable elders will be appointed to rule the congregation (Titus 1:5). The preacher's task is NOT to "rule" but to "proclaim" (2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 2:15). The false doctrine of "evangelistic authority" suggests the preacher is "over" the elders because Timothy and Titus were told to appoint elders. The Bible teaches that when an Eldership exists, that eldership "rules" all

within the congregation – INCLUDING the preacher.

4. **The deacons** have a God-given duty to "serve" in specific areas (1 Timothy 3:10).

The God-ordained governing structure of the local congregation is very simple:

1. Elders are to "rule," "shepherd," "oversee," "administrate," etc., the congregation.
2. Members of the congregation (including preachers and deacons who are "members" of the congregation) are to "obey and submit."

Having established the overall purpose and structure of church discipline, our next lessons will begin to explore various aspects of this critical part of the local congregation.