

Church Discipline: WHY should discipline be practiced? Numbers 11:1-15

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Introduction:

- I. God designed His Church to be a haven of security where the eternal security of saved believers will be protected. In the local church God designed elders to “shepherd” the flock so that God's lambs would be safe from harm and their loyalty to God would remain uncompromised.
 1. God's designs for the safety and security of His lambs are constantly threatened. Satan seeks to devour and destroy (1 Peter 5:8ff).
 2. The greatest threats are often not from without but from within (Acts 20:28-30).
 3. The dangers from “within” are subtle and often bring the greatest destruction because they are not dealt with in the proper manner.
 4. God knew that such dangers would arise and He designed a system of discipline for His Church that would protect and preserve.
 - a. **If Christians follow God's designs** of discipline then God's Church will remain the pure haven of refuge and the source of support for the saints to grow and mature.
 - b. **If Christians do not follow God's designs** of discipline then the local church loses her focus and becomes the instrument for Satan to deceive and destroy precious souls.
 5. There is a sad neglect of God's design of discipline.
 - a. Many are unwilling to practice church discipline.
 - b. Many have never contemplated the tragedy that occurs when discipline is not practiced.
 - c. Some simply do not want to consider this topic because it is “uncomfortable” for them.
- II. In our lesson text we discover a vital lesson that addresses this problem. Perhaps the most surprising point is that the situation occurred while the greatest leader of God was in charge.
 1. Moses had been used by God to bring Israel out of bondage.
 2. The life of this extraordinary man is one that is marked with one miracle following another.
 3. But even the greatness of Moses had its limits. When Israel left Egypt she was accompanied by others who were not Jews. These were allowed to travel and enjoy all the benefits of Israel. However this group proved

to be a source of tragedy. Their conduct was unruly and they had a horrible impact upon Moses and Israel. In our text, verse 10 – “displeased” is translated by some to read “depressed.”

4. We have opened our Bibles to a point in Moses’ life where he was so burdened and disillusioned he was ready to just quit! In fact, he had the towel posed in his hand ready to toss it into the ring. The depressing situation was because appropriate discipline had not been exercised and the unruly conduct of others affected the entire congregation.
5. Examine this marvelous incident and observe a much needed lesson on how Christians should deal with those who must be disciplined.

Body:

I. Consider prominent factors in this account. These help us put into perspective the principles of church discipline. Proper discipline addresses each of these points so that problems will not arise and trouble God’s congregation.

A. **PEOPLE!** Here is perhaps the primary cause.

1. Moses was surrounded by people whose conduct and words depressed him.
2. These people are amazing to consider. In fact, their actions are a tragic comedy.
 - a. They had known little else than a life of miracles since the arrival of Moses
 - b. But they griped and grumbled about everything that happened (cf. v. 4,6,18b,20).
 - c. They had wafers of honey but they complained because they did not have onions and garlic! (cf. v.6). What ingrates they were!
 - d. It isn’t surprising to me that these people depressed Moses! Note Moses’ attitude toward them (v. 11-15).
3. Moses was surrounded by people who constantly complained – this was their habit of life! (v.10). Moses should have addressed these quickly but the failure to do so only caused the problem to increase.
4. This kind of murmuring, grumbling, and complaining is a sin. God has NEVER sanctioned such in His Church and has ALWAYS condemned such and will judge harshly such individuals on the Judgment Day (Philippians 2:14-15; 1 Timothy 5:19; James 5:9; Matthew 12:34-36). God has placed the elders in charge of the congregation so they will deal with the grumblers and sowers of discord (Titus 1:10-11).

B. PHYSICAL EXHAUSTION

1. Moses was overworked – in the terms of modern business, “He was burned out!”
2. Failure to delegate resulted in him handling everything by himself (cf. Ex. 18:13-23, esp. v. 17-18).
3. Within the Lord’s Church there must be involvement with the focused objective of God receiving the glory. When the congregational workload falls upon a few many will be left in idleness and will be pulled into grumbling (2 Thessalonians 3:11-12).
4. The Lord’s Church grows properly when each member is involved and working (Ephesians 4:16).

C. UNREAL EXPECTATIONS OF HIMSELF!

1. Moses expected more of himself than God did!
2. Thus, all Moses was able to see was failure on his part. He felt that he had personally failed. Notice how he refers to “I” in v. 11-15 as though he felt everything depended upon himself! (cf. v.14).
3. Moses was not having problems with the “Big I”, but with the “Little I” – he felt inferior, unable to accomplish anything.
4. This is a tragic consequence that many Elderships face. The problems and discord are not their fault, yet they are often blamed. Many elders give themselves to guide and govern the congregation in the biblical way only to find bitter complaining and no support – they feel like total failures! And the complainers encourage such a conclusion!

D. A NEGATIVE VIEW OF HIMSELF!

1. This is closely tied with our last point.
2. Moses had accomplished so much, but he looked on his work as if he had not done anything at all! (v. 11,13,14-15). He had been a good leader, yet he was rewarded with grumbles and gripes! He saw only the negative, the things left undone!
3. A disciplined group is a confident group. This is true with any sport team. This is true in our armed forces. This is true in the Lord’s Army as well. Whenever church discipline is not practiced, then the entire congregation begins to feel failure and only negatives are voiced and heard.
4. It is sadly amusing that the critics and grumblers and murmurers within a congregation quickly point out that all is “negative” and they “NEVER hear any positive.” But they are the very cause of what they complain!

5. God's plan for church discipline has provided ways that complaints and objections can be voiced, but it is not through whispering campaigns and huddled interest groups.

E. LOST CONNECTION WITH GOD!

1. Note v. 11-13 – Moses felt distant from God, as if he had been severed from God's presence. He seemed totally ignorant of God's plans and purposes.
2. Since he had lost connection with God, he felt everything depended upon him – he felt He had to do it all!
3. Note v. 21ff – After God's promise of meat, Moses doubted and had to be rebuked! (v.23). Moses' question (v. 21) was asked b/c of the vast multitude of Israelites. 600,000 soldiers PLUS their families would make a population between 3-3 1/2 million people! To feed such a group would require 1,500 tons of food each day! God promised 45,000 tons of meat. The tonnage of the meat is hard enough to comprehend but listen to this – to transport that much meat would require abt 60 freight trains, each a mile long! Looking at it w/this perspective helps us understand Moses' doubt!
4. Here is the eventual tragedy when church discipline is ignored – the congregation loses connection with God!

III. Consider how this text relates to the modern believer.

- A. **It reveals to us** the common causes of unruliness within a congregation.
 1. People who love onions and garlic more than they do honey!
 2. Weariness and exhaustion because members are not involved!
 3. Unreal expectations of ourselves because we hear only criticism!
 4. Negativism and a failure to look at the good that is accomplished!
 5. A lost connection with God!
- B. **It reminds us** that God is concerned for the welfare of His congregations and He has given us clear instructions on how we can insure this congregation remains a haven of safety and a source of encouragement to remain true to God.
- C. **It teaches us** that discipline is not optional, it is required! A congregation may choose not to address the unruly member, but such failure only means the problem will grow instead of vanish.

D. **It cautions us** that Satan uses every means to strike us a fatal blow. He will prevent us from faithful duty by using one of the five causes discussed to keep us from following God's designs of congregational discipline.

Conclusion:

I. Church discipline is not optional. If we truly seek to follow the New Testament plan of basic Christianity, we will be just as determined to follow the plan of congregational discipline as we are the plan of salvation. If we insist upon the plan of salvation but fail to insist upon the plan of discipline, we are allowing people to be taken out of the world but placed into a “church” that is not the church of the Bible. A failure to exercise congregational discipline means we are willing to permit the unruly to terrorize, disrupt, and destroy the Bride of Christ. Do we fully understand the severity of this action? Are we prepared to stand before God on the Judgment Day and admit this is what we chose to do?

II. Let all beware ...

1. **Of the urgency** for this congregation being governed as God designed. Do we think OUR way is better than God's way?
2. **Of the temptation** to do nothing to those who are unruly; to remain silent while the grumblers and murmurers spread their poison and by our silence the entire congregation is discouraged? (Hebrews 12:14-15)
3. **Of the lesson taught** in Numbers 11 and how it applies to our congregation today.