

Sermon to the Saints of God assembled at Topeka, KS: Sunday, November 19, 2017

Church Discipline – Part 1

A couple of months back, I felt compelled to speak about church discipline, because Satan and his emissaries would have us to be ashamed that we follow the scriptural commandment to maintain that discipline, by withdrawing ourselves from, and keeping no company with, those who renounce their profession of faith, or otherwise walk disorderly, particularly when those false professors are our close familial relations. This emotive assault is one of Satan's favorite tactics; he violently accuses our hearts and assaults our minds hoping that our natural affection, mingled with sorrow for our own sin, can be transformed into inordinate affection. He hopes that this tactic will cause us to forsake God, and show great hatred for our neighbors and our co-elect, by faithlessly clinging to those who have forsaken Christ. Beloved, we are not ignorant of his devices! Therefore, I thought it would be good for us to be freshly reminded of the scriptures that relate to this blessed duty and privilege that we refer to as church discipline.

For much of my life I understood church discipline as revolving around the duties to correct, and when necessary exclude, those in the church who walk disorderly. These corrective actions are certainly critical aspects of church discipline; even though they are infrequently used, these are things that we ought to inquire into, and be prepared to utilize with great clarity, humility, gravity, and sobriety. Lord willing, we will do that over the course of these two sermons. However, there is a much bigger picture when it comes to church discipline, that is crucial to every moment of our lives, and that greatly informs and shapes our use of corrective discipline. To lay the foundation for this discussion, let's spend some time considering what the word discipline even means.

What is "discipline"

- **The world's view:** The people of our generation are not fond of this word, or anything that flows from it! To them, this word largely has a negative connotation, and has become nothing more than a synonym for punishment, brainwashing, and tyrannical control. It is a brilliant satanic ploy to convince the world that any sort of discipline is archaic and barbaric. The world despises the idea of discipline, because it proclaims in its teeth that there is a standard to be followed. Depraved humans, left in their hopeless pride and vanity, believe that they can – and do – define morality for themselves. Submitting to a standard – ANY STANDARD – is anathema to these people, because it deprives them of their "right" to define their own! Consider how this lawless, rudderless generation is being undone, as every person sets up their own lofty standard, and is then dashed to pieces by it! It is an

amazing and awful thing to behold – they speak of freedom and love, and yet they are shackled, raging, vengeful, selfish creatures.

- **Dictionary definition:**

- Our English word “discipline” comes from the Latin word “disciplina”, which means instruction, teaching, learning, knowledge. This same Latin word is also where we get the English word “disciple”. More on that later.
- “Behavior in accord with rules of conduct; behavior and order maintained by training and control.”
- “Activity, exercise, or a regimen that develops or improves a skill; training”
- “A branch of instruction or learning, according to an established order.”

- **Biblical usage:**

- Job 36:10 “He openeth also their ear to **discipline**, and commandeth that they return from iniquity.”
 - This is the only time that the English word “discipline” occurs in the entire Bible.
 - The Hebrew word is “muwcar” (moo-sawr’). This word is used 50 times in the Bible; 30 times it is translated as “instruction”, and 15 times as either “correction”, “chasten” or “chastisement”. Consider how it is used in the following verses:
 - **Proverbs 1:7-9** “7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and **instruction**. 8 My son, hear the **instruction** of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: 9 For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.”
 - **Proverbs 3:11,12** “11 My son, despise not the **chastening** of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction: 12 For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.”
 - **Proverbs 12:1** “Whoso loveth **instruction** loveth knowledge: but he that hateth reproof is brutish.”
 - **Proverbs 23:12,13** “12 Apply thine heart unto **instruction**, and thine ears to the words of knowledge. 13 Withhold not **correction** from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die.”
 - **Jeremiah 32:33** “And they have turned unto me the back, and not the face: though I taught them, rising up early and teaching them, yet they have not hearkened to receive **instruction**.”

- **Disciple:**

- As we saw earlier, the word “disciple” and “discipline” are closely related. So let’s include an understanding of the scriptural usage of disciple as a part of our foundation for discipline. We will consider three Greek words, the noun

(translated as “disciple”), and two verbs that come from that noun (translated as “to learn”, and “to teach”).

- Disciple: The Greek word is “mathetes” (math-ay-tes’):
 - Strongs: Learner, pupil, follower.
 - **John 8:31 “Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;”**
 - With these words, Jesus Christ helps us to understand that a disciple is a doer of the word, not just a hearer.
- To learn / understand: The Greek word is “manthano” (man-than’-o):
 - Strongs: To learn, to be increased in knowledge, to hear, to learn by use and practice.
 - “It’s use consistently implies an internal process that always has external effects” – Theological Dictionary of the New Testament
 - **Philippians 4:8,9 “8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. 9 Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.”**
 - **Romans 16:17 “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them.”**
 - **Titus 3:14 “14 And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful.”**
 - We see then that this is not merely an intellectual learning – it is an experiential learning in the heart and mind that brings forth fruit in the behavior of a person.
 - Consider how the 144,000 redeemed Jews will “learn” their song: **“And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.” (Revelation 14:3)** This is not a matter of learning notes and words – this is an experiential, fruitful learning that is unique to these individual people. They alone, because of this experience, will be able to sing the Song of Moses, and the Song of the Lamb.
- To teach: the Greek word is “matheteuo” (math-ate-you-o)
 - Strongs: To teach, to make a disciple (to cause to follow)

- **Acts 14:21 “And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch,”**
 - We again see that this is not a mere intellectual exercise. Paul and Barnabas did the work of the herald, proclaiming the gospel to all of the ears that they could reach in that city (Derbe). Those people could all hear, and intellectually understand the words, but they only “taught” those whose heart and behavior were changed as a result of that preaching. Those are the ones that were caused to learn and to follow – they were made disciples.
- **Summary definition of “discipline”:**
 - Discipline is an established order of things that is to be followed.
 - A disciple is a person that follows after that established order; it is a part of who they are – they pattern themselves after the established order.
 - To be disciplined, is to be caused to learn, understand, and follow that established order.
 - To discipline is to teach, and cause to follow that established order.

What is “church discipline”:

- The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is made up of disciples of Christ; we follow after him, and pattern our lives after the order of things that He established in the earth as the one and only lawgiver (**James 4:12**). If the Lord is with us, then we progressively get more light as we make this pilgrimage – the pattern never changes, but the clarity of our view changes, and we adjust our behavior to our better understanding of the pattern.
- **Romans 6:15-17 “15 What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. 16 Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? 17 But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.”**
 - Clearly then, you are not a disciple just because you say you believe and love the Lord; you are a disciple when those words align with your behavior – when you follow after Christ in your heart, your words, AND your walk.
 - “Form of doctrine”: our brother Jon just gave us a helpful understanding of this concept of a “form”; you might recall he told us about the forms that they use in the production of airplane parts. Once the form is established it is not to be changed or deviated from, but to be used perfectly and faithfully, or else there will be deadly consequences! Similarly, if we discard the form of

doctrine that has been delivered to us in these blessed scriptures, then we are imperiling our own souls, and the souls of all those that we influence!

- Consider these parallel instructions from Paul to Timothy and Titus – men who were taking oversight (pastors), and teaching others to take oversight within churches.
 - **2Timothy 1:13 “Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.”**
 - **Titus 1:9 “Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.”**
 - It is our blessed and sober duty to “hold fast” to the word of God – the form – the discipline that Christ established! We are to maintain that discipline within the church.
- Let us consider again the Great Commission: **Matthew 28:18-20 “18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”**
 - Herein lies our authority to operate as a church, our mission, and our confidence that the Lord dwells in our midst, and causes our faithful efforts to prosper.
 - We are to make disciples (teach), baptize them upon their fruitful profession, and then ... **teach them to observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded.** I submit to you that this last instruction is the definition of maintaining church discipline. This is a never ending cycle: learn the pattern, live the pattern, teach the pattern. Learn → Do → Teach.
- Consider also this commendation that Paul gave to the church at Colossae:
 - **Colossians 2:5-7 “5 For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ. 6 As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: 7 Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.”**
 - They were set in order, after the pattern that Christ had established – they were true to the form – they were a disciplined church. Yet, this is only a moment in time – that order and discipline that exists in one moment must be maintained in the next moment - continually! It is the job of every person in this body to participate in the work of discipline, submitting ourselves with prayer and thanksgiving.

- Consider how the Greek word (“taxis”), translated here as “order”, appears in the following passage (in verb form):
 - **1Corinthians 16:13-16** “**13 ¶ Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. 14 Let all your things be done with charity. 15 I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,) 16 That ye submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with us, and laboureth.**”
 - Paul is telling the Corinthians to submit to discipline – to look to those like Stephanas, and follow their example. Stephanas had zealously, day-by-day ordered his house after the pattern. Everything about his house was set up in a way that enabled them to be disciples of Christ, and to deliver that discipline to others. You must live the pattern, if you are going to teach it. You must be a disciple, if you are going to participate in the work of discipline.
- Revelation 2 and 3 give us a clear warning that we jeopardize the candlestick if we fail to maintain the pattern. Each of those churches had different particular areas where discipline was eroding, but the end result is the same destruction.
 - Consider the sharp contrast between the spirit of Bezaleel and Aholiab as opposed to Nadab and Abihu.
 - Bezaleel and Aholiab were wise hearted men “**in whom the LORD put wisdom and understanding to know how to work all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary, according to all that the LORD had commanded.**” (Exodus 36:1). These men were skilled in “curious” and “cunning” work, and they faithfully employed those skills to build and maintain every intricate detail of the tabernacle. They maintained the pattern, and taught it to others.
 - Nadab and Abihu, on the other hand, purposefully deviated from that same pattern, by offering “strange fire” in the tabernacle. “**And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.**” (Leviticus 10:2)

Now that we’ve considered church discipline at a high level, we will consider it in a more detailed and practical way, by putting it into three categories:

1. **Formative** (Teach, Instruct, Edify, Train, Nurture, Exhort, Provoke)

2. **Corrective** (Rebuke, Admonish, Correct, Chasten, Chastise)
3. **Excisive** (Exclude, Withdraw, Avoid, Keep no company)

Lord willing, we will cover “formative” today, and take up the others on my next opportunity to preach.

Formative

Formative means giving form, shaping, molding; it’s often used to refer to a time in a person’s life when they are impressionable, and their outlook is being developed and established.

- **Ephesians 6:4 “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”**
 - “Nurture and admonition” – that phrase encapsulates formative and corrective discipline. “Nurture” is translated as “Instruction” in the Geneva version. It includes every effort that parents invest into teaching and training their child; forming their thinking and behavior. We are to teach the form, monitor the behavior, and bring that behavior back to the form whenever it begins to deviate. This is a gradual, continual process:
 - **Isaiah 28:10 “For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little:”**
 - This is a process that requires dedication, patience, and humility. The student must submit themselves to the teacher, and the teacher must humbly accommodate themselves to the student, if the instruction is going to be effective and meaningful. As a parent, I have to consider the frame of each of my children, so that I can address them in a way that is helpful to them; to do otherwise is pride and folly. Remember, we are to first consider one another, before we are able to meaningfully provoke one another to love and to good works. Consider Paul’s words on this topic:
 - **1Corinthians 9:22 “To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.”**
 - When we have a brother or sister that is young in the faith, we are to be like a nurse maid to them, knowing that they are in need of formative instruction in the faith, we are to constantly consider and supply their needs. For more on this topic, revisit

the fruitful labor that my dad did (sermons on 10/15/17, 10/29/17).

- **1Thessalonians 2:11 “As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children,”**
- Notice that if we do not provide this formative and corrective discipline, then we are provoking to wrath; we are sending people down a path of destruction that will cause them to be miserable, and that will bring God’s wrath upon them. If we refuse to provide discipline in the name of “mercy”, it will produce great sorrow for everyone involved.
- **Proverbs 22:6 “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”**
 - Let’s consider training:
 - This word means to “dedicate” them; “initiate” them in their path; walking alongside them, and teaching them with each step. Again, a matter of patience, and consistency – over and over again - betimes. As that young one (in life, or in faith) encounters new obstacles, you are there with them to show them their duty, warn them of dangers, and mark upon their minds the blessings that God has promised to those that obey, and the curses promised to those that rebel. By faithfully doing this work, you provide for them the means to stand on their own. Think of the form that is set up for concrete. Once the concrete is poured and set, the form is removed, and the concrete stands firmly in place.
 - Consider how you “train” a piece of wood when you’re building something. Say you’ve got a long board that you are nailing into place – let’s say that it’s the top plate on a wall. You set it roughly in place, and then go to one spot, perfect that spot, and then nail it into place. From there, you work your way down the length of the board, continually “training” the board – in each place that you have perfected it’s position, you put another nail. Little by little, the board is straightened and locked into place, until it is straight and firm. It’s amazing how much you can train a piece of wood, and how much that straight piece of wood lends strength and stability to the rest of the structure. It’s also amazing just how much pain and trouble an untrained piece of wood can cause. You’re either going to fight that bend in the wood throughout the rest of the project, or else you’re going to have to fix it. The longer it sits in place – the more integral it becomes to the structure - the harder it will be to repair. If you fix it immediately, then you’ll pull all of the nails, or use a saw to cut them out, and then reset the board. This re-setting process is time

consuming, awkward, frustrating, and destructive; it leaves the board scarred, split, and punctured with extra holes. If you don't fix it immediately – say the roof structure gets set on top of that wall – then you will not be able to pull it and reset it. Your only option now is to painstakingly work down the length of the board, trying to apply a saw to the wood. This process is brutal, and it will leave the board permanently disfigured, and will likely scar the boards around it.

- Apply that analogy to our duty to teach and maintain discipline to our children, or those that are new in the faith. It is a great blessing to all involved when that work is done faithfully; it strengthens the whole house – the whole church! Each of us has a part in that work, every day! When we fail of that duty, Lord willing we will be corrected. It is a great mercy that the Lord chastens us, and yet it is a painful process that leaves a lasting impression on everyone involved.
- **Proverbs 29:15 “The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.”**
 - If we find this work of discipline (in all of its forms) to be too uncomfortable to bear, or we don't make it a priority, or we think ourselves above it - then we expose ourselves, and each other to danger; the only result of that can be sorrow and shame. If some child comes to years, or some person comes to this church, and doesn't think that they ought to have to submit to this kind of watchfulness and instruction, then they can leave. It's that simple. You don't have a right to be left to your own devices – not while you live under your parent's authority; not while you are calling yourself a member of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. It would be hateful to leave you with the impression that you do – that's a worldly, fleshly, deadly concept, and we won't take part in it.
- Every member of the body has help that they can offer to other members; however, it must be help that is commiserate with their experience, gifts, roles and understanding. We are only able to teach those things that we have already learned, and followed. We are only able to discipline where we have been disciplined.
 - **Hebrews 5:14 “But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”**

- When you are at milk - generally, or in some particular area - you shouldn't be trying to teach in that area. You should be focused on learning scriptural helps from those that have experience, and following their example. That means that you have to be willing to receive that help, and not kick against it. We must be scrutable.
- **2Corinthians 1:3,4 “3 Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; 4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.”**
 - We are supposed to comfort each other with the gifts and experiences that the Lord has given us personally; ministering “comfort” in this way means to instruct, encourage, and strengthen a person with the particular help that the Lord has given us in our own walk – teaching each other how to apply the scriptures, and how to frame our minds, in the face of affliction and satanic opposition.
 - Consider the immune system of our natural bodies: when a virus is introduced into our body, our immune system fights it off, and then makes a record of that particular assault. The next time the body is assaulted by that same enemy, the immune system can consult that record, and be quickly and effectively prepared to deal with it again. This spiritual body is supposed to function in that same way. If we are watching for one another, and looking to each other for help, then we will know when and where that experienced help is needed. When someone encounters a satanic assault which others have already experienced, then they should be able to bring scriptural, spiritual help. The person enduring the assault must desire the help, and be willing to receive it.
 - A word of caution on this: sometimes the immune system misfires. Sometimes the immune system THINKS that it sees a familiar enemy, and comes running to the rescue, only to be mistaken. When that happens, there is fallout – the body is going to hurt from that mistake. 1) We ought to be very careful not to think ourselves wise, and not to intrude carelessly into a situation. 2) When this happens (and it will), we ought to be quick to acknowledge it, and quick to forgive.
- **Titus 2:1-6 “1 But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: 2 That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. 3 The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; 4 That they may teach**

the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, 5 To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. 6 Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded.”

- Notice again, that the people who are specifically instructed to be focused on the teaching are those that have been taught, and have put that teaching into action. How can an older man teach a younger man to be sober minded, if he isn't already walking in sobriety and gravity? The most effective teaching tool that we have is our own behavior.
- There is a mountain of scripture that speaks to these concepts of formative discipline, and much of it is tightly tied to our duty to “love as brethren”. I am most thankful for the labor that our brother Jon just did for us on that topic, and incorporate his sermons of 11/5/17 and 11/12/17 as a part of the formative discipline of the church. As a reminder, Jon talked about our duty to love the brethren; have compassion on one another, communicate (provide) for both outward and spiritual needs; watch over each other; bear with one another; pray for one another; assemble together (being separate from those that would defile); strive together for the faith of the gospel; be not respecters of persons; be examples to one another in our holy walk and conversation. Herein is a big part of the form that we are to maintain. We don't maintain it by saying it; we maintain it by doing it every day. Make no mistake, our example will cause others to follow – for good, or for evil - it WILL cause others to follow. Our behavior WILL provoke behavior in others. We are instructed to consider ourselves, and to consider one another, so that we are able to provoke one another to love and to good works. If we won't do that work - if we won't maintain the form in ourselves – if we are not disciplined – then we will teach others to deviate from the form; we will indeed provoke them to hatred and evil works; we will break the spiritual mold, and thereby discipline our brothers and sisters to be conformed to the world.
- **Hebrews 13:17 “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.”**
 - Who has “the rule over you”, and “watches for your soul”? Primarily godly parents and pastors. God directly assigned this authority to parents, when he gave them the child; He gave this authority to pastors, through the voice of the church, by the working of the Holy Spirit, when they were chosen as those who are duly qualified and experienced for the work. These ought to be obeyed – heartily, as unto the Lord.

- Church discipline requires heaping doses of submission. If we won't submit ourselves to this process, then it is fruitless for us, and we will be cast off. If the church as a whole won't submit to this process, then we will lose our candlestick.
- While this process requires the use of authority, that authority is to be exercised with a proper spirit, as unto God. There can be no Lording authority over one another. The standard is not ours – it's God's. None of us has learned anything according to our own wisdom and righteousness; in fact we largely learn as a result of God's chastening. We have nothing that we have not received, and therefore glory in nothing but Christ.
 - **1Peter 5:5 “Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”**
 - None of us is ever done with this learning process. We all have new things to learn, we all need better light, and we are all continually in need of refreshing on those things that slip away from us. Sometimes we are instructed by others, sometimes we are instructed by reading the scriptures, sometimes by new experience, and sometimes by the Lord directly writing the matter on our hearts – often when pride is put away in the sleeping hours (Job 33:17). By submitting to this process – humbling ourselves – the Lord disciplines us; He teaches and corrects our hearts - even when we're in the role of a teacher.

We have a discipline – Christ, our sure foundation; he has disciplined us - made us to experientially hear and learn His word, and to be changed (in mind and behavior) by the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, so that we are disciples indeed. The work of our lives is to teach and maintain that discipline. We teach the standard of Christ to every soft heart that the Lord puts in our path; first and foremost, we do that with self-discipline – we live the standard of Christ, consistent with the light that we have, giving thanks, and praying all the while that he will give us better understanding. Lord willing, we will discuss how, and with what spirit, we are to maintain that discipline, through correction and exclusion from the body, the next time I preach.

Beloved, I am so very ashamed of my own sin, and yet endlessly thankful and hopeful that the Lord has mercifully assembled and compacted me together with each of you – disciples of Christ. Let us continue to maintain this blessed discipline that we have received. I love you all! Amen