

DISCIPLINE IN THE CHURCH

Some who are not fully aware of the perfect organization of the Church of Christ, seem to think that there is not, neither can be, any such thing as discipline in it. They see its members scattered all over the world, many of them standing alone, and some in little companies, often numbering only two or three, and meeting from house to house. They see no record of membership, hear no talk of church building, church debts, collections, etc., and see no salaried and titled ministry. Their ideas of church discipline are drawn from what they see in the various sects of the nominal church, where they occasionally see some of the saints judged by the standard of human creeds and cast out, but very rarely one of the „disorderly.”

The organization and discipline of the church of Christ is, however, most perfect. Its invisible Lord is fully recognized, as its only and infallible Head; His Word is authority for the settlement of every question; his plan of work is studied and acted upon by the various members; his spirit is fostered and cultivated in the hearts of all; and his disciplinary punishments are applied when necessary.

It is not our purpose at present to enter into the details of the organization and effectual working of the true church; this we have done before. (TOWER of Sept. '84.) We now merely call attention to the discipline of the church—what is the appointed method of dealing with offenders, etc. That the church has important duties in the direction of discipline is clearly indicated by many expressions of the Lord and the Apostles.

Discipline includes not only the dealing with offenders, but it includes the entire process of education by instruction, exercise, correction and punishment; and in cases where these methods fail and meet with defiant opposition from those who still claim to be members of the church, and associate themselves with it, it includes the cutting off of such members from the church.

All discipline in the church is properly under the direction of the Head of the church only, and the object of such discipline is stated to be—“that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:26,27). No member of the church has any authority in matters of discipline except in carrying out the directions of the Head, though each member has a duty in so doing. The talents of each must be used for the benefit of all as far as possible. Not only are our talents to be used in widely proclaiming the blessed gospel, but they are to be used for the upbuilding, protection, and

perfecting, of those who accept it and by consecration have become members of the church, the body of Christ.

This important work requires carefulness both in our judgment of each other and in our study of the Word of God. But there is much misunderstanding with reference to the church's duty in the matter

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of judging, from a failure to understand clearly the teaching of the Scriptures on the subject.

Jesus said, „Judge not, that ye be not judged.” (Matt. 7:1.) And Paul said, „Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters?”—1 Cor. 6:2.

A superficial glance at these two expressions might lead some to suppose that the Apostle was not in harmony with the Lord's teaching here. But when rightly understood, there is no lack of harmony.

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Our Lord addressed those who had not yet received the spirit of adoption, for the spirit had not yet been given (John 7:39); while Paul addressed the church—consecrated believers, who had received the spirit, who had heard and accepted the call to be partakers of the divine nature and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ as rulers and judges of both angels and men.

While the class thus addressed were not at all perfect, as his reproof to them indicates, they were able, by reason of their understanding of the mind of God expressed in his Word, to judge righteous judgment and to act upon it. As imperfect men, our judgment is generally warped and biased by prejudice and false ideas of justice, etc., but as „new creatures,” we are able to judge from God's standpoint if we *let* the mind of God dwell in us richly, if we freely imbibe his spirit through his Word.

In the extreme case of immoral conduct referred to by Paul (1 Cor. 5:1), he was reproofing the Corinthian church for not judging such a one unworthy to be counted one of their number. With their understanding of the general principles of God's plan they should have needed no such instructions from him, but should have acted promptly on their convictions. And the fact that they did not do so, gave evidence of a cool indifference to the will of God which needed reproof.

Imperfect human judgment might greatly err in dealing with such a case. Some would say that the crime was so glaring and so base that the offender had justly merited eternal torment, while others would say, Well, he has some good traits of character yet; he is kind, or benevolent, or gives largely of his means to support the church, and the good must balance the evil. But those acquainted with the principles of God's government know that eternal torment has no place in God's plan, and also that the sin committed was not the sin unto death, but that it was by no means excusable; nor could it be considered as balanced by other good qualities. They know also that such a one, though he may have made a full and entire consecration of himself to God, has shamefully violated his covenant and brought reproach upon the cause of Christ, which must be resented by every loyal member of the church, that he may feel their righteous indignation and his own degradation. And not until there is evidence of sincere repentance should such a one ever again receive the hand of fellowship.

To thus judge and deal in such a case, is to deliver such a one over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 5:5). When thus cast off by the saints as unworthy and unfit for their society, and entirely deprived of their fellowship, the adversary to whose temptations he gave way, will buffet him yet more; the blows of adversity will come heavy in some shape or form; and God's object in permitting it will be his reformation. How painful is such a measure of discipline; yet had such measures been pursued the church would not have been overrun with tares as it has been, and great Babylon, with her millions of professors merely, would not have come into existence.

The necessity of judging in such matters will thus be seen to be most necessary to the purity and growth of the church, and to the honor of her name as the virgin of Christ. In difficulties or disputes between brethren, the church should find in its own members some at least who could point out the course of justice as viewed from God's standpoint. If in the future they are to be the judges of angels and men, they should at present be able to judge in such small matters without appealing to civil courts to settle their disputes. For *brother* to go to law with *brother* would not indicate that either has much of the spirit of Christ, or much love for the cause they represent. If they had real love for the cause, they would prefer, as Paul says (1 Cor. 6:7), to suffer injustice rather than bring upon it this reproach.

But some of the saints seem to misinterpret Paul here and think they are forbidden to go to law with a worldly person at whose hands they have suffered injustice. This is quite a different matter and in a case of real injustice brings no reproach upon the cause. The church has nothing to do with such a case, because the man of the world is not at the present time accountable to the church. Paul more than once appealed to the law for justice and protection from his enemies.—Acts 16:37; 22:25-28; 23:17; 25:10-13; 26:32.

In the church there are also the necessary duties of reproof, exhortation, encouragement, and teaching, and the various members must judge when each is necessary and perform them in the spirit of the Lord and Head of the church, who directs and guides the church through the ministry of its faithful members, imbued with his spirit and instructed through his Word. And every member of the church should be ready at all times to receive as well as to give assistance, in the spirit of meekness, whether it be in the way of reproof, exhortation, or teaching, recognizing the Lord's object in all discipline, whether painful or otherwise, to be to present to himself a glorious church without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

BIND HIM HAND AND FOOT

There is another feature of church discipline in which also the Head of the church acts through the agency of its faithful and loyal members. Our Lord foretold that in the end of the age, the time of harvest, certain of those in the church would secretly become its most subtle enemies, and thereby not only bring reproach upon the church and dishonor to her Lord, but spread a snare for the unwary feet of some of the saints. The matter is referred to in the parable of Matt. 22:1-13. When the King came in to inspect those called to the wedding, he saw one there not having on a wedding garment. As in the illustration wedding robes were provided for all the guests by the host, the fact of one appearing without the robe provided, showed great disrespect to the host. It indicated that though the robe was given him he preferred his own clothing and considered it better than that provided.

The illustration is a striking one. Its location just prior to the marriage, points to the exact time in which we are living, the harvest of the Gospel age, just preceding the marriage of the Lamb, the exaltation of the church as the Bride of Christ. The robe of Christ's righteousness, purchased for all by his precious blood, is the wedding garment. And to appear in this church company without this robe, is to appear in the filthy rags of our own righteousness and to do despite unto the spirit of grace in despising the robe provided by the Lord by his *ransom*. And to so appear in his own garments is a practical invitation for others to do likewise.

Such an insult to our Lord, the King, should be promptly resented by every loyal member of the body of Christ, and those members who are strong and able should promptly follow the King's directions—"Bind him hand and foot and cast him into outer darkness."

Such is part of the painful duty of the present hour. Some who once walked with us in the light of truth, clothed in the righteousness of Christ imputed to them „*through faith in his blood,*” have since taken off that robe and appeared in their own filthy rags, boldly inviting others to do likewise. While it is the duty of the stronger members of the body of Christ to protect the weaker,

in every way possible against these baneful influences, it is their duty to bind the offenders and cast them out—in other words, to disfellowship them—to show up their true standing, and thus bind them hand and foot by putting others on their guard, thus *restraining* their influence upon the church. Sooner or later they will either put on the robe or withdraw from the light which reveals the filthy rags of their own righteousness.

Thus the church must maintain her integrity and loyalty—"The King said to *his servants*, Bind him hand and foot and cast him into outer darkness." The darkness is that in which the whole world is enveloped with reference to God's plan. Light is sown for the righteous, and only the righteous may enjoy it. Though these once had the light, it is for them no longer; and such as sympathize with them and do not firmly reprove their course are in danger of being drawn by their influence into outer darkness with them. Take heed that ye, brethren, be not deceived or ensnared, or hindered in the race for the prize of our high calling. Watch and pray, and be firmly established in the truth; be fully imbued with *its spirit*, that you may be counted worthy to be of that glorious church without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. MRS. C. T. R.

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