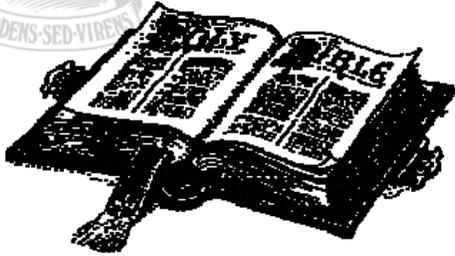




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The problem of sin in the Church

No. 5 (part 3) - "Discipline"

In this study we wish to make clear the purpose of discipline.

One of the difficulties facing parents when they bring their children to a hospital for treatment is to calm their fears and persuade them that the treatment about to be

received is for their good and not for their hurt.

In our land, we have a health system put in place to cater for the sick of the nation. It does not always work. It has been greatly abused and is still abused and that accounts for much of the wastage of public funds which in turn starves the health service of much needed funds.

The system of discipline instituted by God is perfect in itself but very imperfectly used and applied and, in consequence, many feel that church discipline is an instrument by which a "hierarchy" selfishly keeps the rest of the people in line! That may be how some abuse the office of the eldership but it is not how God intended discipline to work.

1. It is much misunderstood. This misunderstanding stems from its misuse and abuse. "For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for **edification, and not for your destruction**, I should not be ashamed," 2 Corinthians 10:8. "Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me **to edification, and not to destruction**," 2 Corinthians 13:10. Literally, Paul is saying that the authority he exercised in discipline and the purpose of that discipline were intended to build them up, not pull them down.

When discipline is exercised in accordance with God's Word it is for the building up of the church and not for the pulling down of God's people.

It is likely that the believers in Corinth needed a little persuading about the use of discipline, which often involved a chastening, an inflicting of punishment, and within the congregation might be seen by many as a threatening measure.

Nature illustrates the need of discipline. We go along with the use of "chastening" within nature most happily. Trees, shrubs and plants of all descriptions are subject to a pruning of branches which are "getting out of line". Much of the refreshing fruit that we love to eat is the result of annual and vigorous pruning or chastening. This is accepted as necessary and good and beneficial for the plants. So it is in the spiritual realm.

We bring destruction upon ourselves when we rebel against discipline. If we reject the remedies God has ordained we will embrace our own hurt.

Peter refers to this hurt in 2 Peter 2:1. "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction." There is a price to be paid by those who defy God, not just false prophets but also God's own people who defy God and refuse to be corrected by Him.

How many expect their children to submit to their discipline but refuse to submit to God's



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discipline! We are often more foolish than our children.

2. It often requires courage on the part of those appointed to administer discipline. Ministers who are in the least concerned about the opinions that others may form, should they seek to impose God's law, may well back off from such action, lest they arouse opposition within their congregation and upset the present tranquility that prevails. But for the sake of those requiring discipline the action must be carried out, no matter what the perceptions of men may be regarding the process and procedures.

Consider these exhortations addressed to God's servants throughout the ages. "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear," 1 Timothy 5:20. There comes a time in our dealings with some when private admonitions no longer count and a public word is necessary.

"But truly I am full of power by the spirit of the LORD, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin," Micah 3:8. Here the difficulties facing the prophet who must upbraid his fellow-countrymen requires the help and assistance of the Holy Ghost for the duties to be carried out. Micah could not have done it in his own strength. He required the enabling power of the Holy Ghost. Elders need the power and the grace of the Holy Ghost to carry out discipline in God's house. Woe unto the church which has office-bearers who are not full of the Holy Ghost. That church is heading for destruction.

This indicates the measure of difficulty that discipline often encounters.

Here are some other verses.

2 Chronicles 26 tells us much about Uzziah, a great man of God. However, he went astray. "But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to *his* destruction: for he transgressed against the LORD his God, and went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense upon the altar of incense. And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the LORD, *that were* valiant men: and they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, *It appertaineth* not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the LORD, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither *shall it be* for thine honour from the LORD God. Then Uzziah was wroth, and *had* a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, from beside the incense altar. And Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he *was* leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence; yea, himself hastened also to go out, because the LORD had smitten him. And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, *being* a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the LORD: and Jotham his son *was* over the king's house, judging the people of the land," verses 16-21.

It took Holy Ghost imparted courage on the part of Azariah and his companions to act in defiance of the king's wickedness.

These familiar verses teach us the same truth.

"This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith," Titus 1:13.

"These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee," Titus 2:15.



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May the Lord enable his servants to administer discipline within His house for the benefit of the people of God generally.

This is the third part of our fifth study in a series of messages on “The problem of sin in the church”. [Click here](#) to listen to/download a recording of each of the messages in the series.