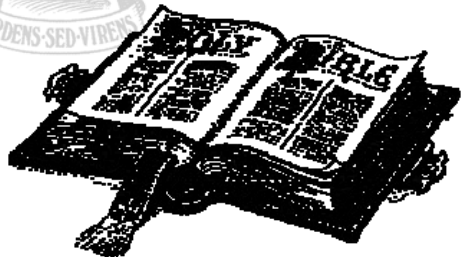




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The problem of sin in the church

No. 5 (part 2) - "Discipline"

"For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee," Titus 1:5.

In our last study we considered three points. They were:

1. The church is the channel of God's revealed truth to the world.
2. The maintenance of the true worship of God is the responsibility of the church.
3. The church is to be governed in accordance with the teaching of the Bible.

We wish to take the study a little further today and concentrate upon

DISCIPLINE IN THE CHURCH

The establishing and maintaining of God's order in the assembly of the saints is what we are considering and what we, as believers, must do when God's order is defied and breached.

1. God has ordained a way in which His affairs are to be conducted. It is not left up to ourselves what we teach or how we teach it. There is a standard by which all matters must be judged. God does not oversee anarchy. There can be no question of "every man doing that which is right in his own eyes." That is lawlessness and must not be tolerated in God's house. How God is to be worshipped is not left to our devices. "God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth," John 4:24. Our spirits, our hearts are to be engaged in the worship of God but that engagement must be in accordance with God's Word! It is not enough to be earnest and sincere for we can be sincerely wrong. That which is not according to God's Word, no matter how sincere it may be, is not acceptable to Him.

Consider these verses which speak to us about how we must worship God.

"Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of *any thing* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation* of them that hate me," Exodus 20:2-5.

"Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain," Exodus 20:7.

"What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it," Deuteronomy 12:32.

"Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth," Titus 1:14.

"This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me," Matthew 15:8.

There could be an adding of many more texts to this list but it is clear from these that how



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we worship God is governed by what He says to us in His Word.

2. It is the responsibility of the duly appointed officers in the church to undertake this duty.

This duty is deputed by the members of the church unto those men qualified in their character for such an office. "This *is* a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil," 1 Timothy 3: 1-7. Elders are thus chosen of the people in accordance with the Word of God for the task of governing God's house.

Such officers are to be obeyed in matters of doctrine and conduct. So it was in the early church when the elders and ministers met in Jerusalem and sent out directions which believers were required to obey. "But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter . . . Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and *from* fornication, and *from* things strangled, and *from* blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day. Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; *namely*, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: and they wrote *letters* by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren *send* greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, *Ye must* be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no *such* commandment: It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell *you* the same things by mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well. So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: *Which* when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation. And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed *them*." Acts 15: 5-6, 19-32.

So the membership of the church was required to submit to the directions given by those elected as elders. "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," Hebrews 13: 17.

What a solemn undertaking is that of the elder.



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“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood,” Acts 20:28.

“Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind,” 1 Peter 5:2.

“A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject,” Titus 3:10.

“And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed,” 2 Thessalonians 3:14.

3. It is a duty that requires constant diligence. “And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: *and* how I kept back nothing that was profitable *unto you*, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I *am* pure from the blood of all *men*. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive,” Acts 20:17-35.

It is an “all seasons”, “night and day” task!

The devil is ever on the prowl, seeking out victims from God’s flock.

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour,” 1 Peter 5:8. The eldership is engaged in an unending battle against predators which would divide the sheep.

This is the second 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.