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Church Discipline, Part 4

In Scripture there are many words that translate as “discipline” in the English. For example, there is παιδεύω (*paideuō*)/παιδεία (*paideia*) which speaks of maturing someone via verbal correction and/or chastising. This is a key word in child training. There is κατηχέω (*katēcheō*) which lays emphasis on oral instruction. It is from this word we get the English “Catechize” which is what we are doing with our children during study hour. There is ὄρκος (*horkos*) which speaks of a fence, an enclosure, and so that which restrains a person from doing ill and so preserves them so that they might do what is right. Then there is τάξις (*taxis*) which refers to a

line of soldiers drawn up for battle. The “discipline” here is the marshalling of the child of God unto battle. In the Old Testament, the primary word for “discipline” is מוֹסֵר (*musar*) and יָסַר (*yāsar*) which speaks of a correction in the context of a love relationship which results in edification/growth.

And yet of all the terms, perhaps the most illustrative is σωφρονισμός (*sophronismos*). The word references a secure and sound mind, and so a mind that is self-controlled, disciplined, and properly prioritized. This, family of God, is one of the goals of discipline. It equips the believer to control their lives, whether positive or negative, unto the service and honor of Christ.

Discipline preserves the honor of God. For example Joshua told Achan after he was found to be in gross rebellion against God, “...give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and give praise to Him; and tell me now what you have done...” (Joshua 7:19)!

Discipline guards the reputation of the gospel. Paul wrote to the Corinthians this:

2 Corinthians 6:1, 3, “And working together *with Him*, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain... giving no cause for offense in anything, in order that the ministry be not discredited.”

When sin is allowed to fester in a church body, the ministry of the gospel is discredited!

Discipline preserves the effectiveness of a church body. After mentioning many of the blessings which accompany citizenship in the Kingdom of God, Jeremiah said this:

Jeremiah 5:25, “Your iniquities have turned these away, and your sins have withheld good from you.”

A church body that is content to endure sin in each other’s lives is a church body whose ministry will be compromised/thwarted!

Discipline is the means by which the Lord preserves His people.

Hebrews 12:7a, “It is for discipline that you endure...”

This is a command on the part of God. The way God preserves His body is by you and me bringing God’s word to bear on each other’s lives. Outside of a worship service, that is the purpose of every gathering of this church! May God give us the grace NOT to lose sight of this calling!

Discipline sobers the body unto vigilance in their walk. Paul instructed Timothy this way:

1 Timothy 5:20, “those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful *of* sinning.”

Truly, church discipline has the net effect of sobering those in the body of Christ that they might NOT look upon any sin lightly! And that brings us to the sixth and final reason we ought to engage in church discipline, it is one of the primary means given by God to reclaim the unrepentant brother or sister. Christ's command in the case of an unrepentant Christian is this:

Matthew 18:15-19, "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer. Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven."

This is God's standard when it comes to the unrepentant brother or sister. Yet once and again, it is imperative that you see that this process is motivated out of love.

Hebrews 12:5b-10, "...'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.' It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines us* for *our* good, that we may share His holiness."

Yet regardless of the type of discipline referenced, ALL are administered on account of love and so the passion to see a person grow in their relationship with God! This is what Paul directed:

2 Corinthians 12:7, "And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me- to keep me from exalting myself!"

Truly, every ounce of discipline met out to us by God is motivated by love and the desire to see us become all that God has willed us to be in Christ! We see it in the case of Paul when it came to Hymenaeus and Alexander. There was a time in Paul's ministry were these two men apostatized. In fact, in the process, one of them did Paul much harm (2 Timothy 4:14). Yet notice Paul's statement about them:

1 Timothy 1:20, "Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered over to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme."

Paul's course of action was NOT to get even these two men, BUT to endeavor to save them from destruction! This is what we are after when it comes to formal discipline!

We see it when it comes to God's dealing with us. At Corinth some of God's people died because of their rebellion against God. Yet God did NOT take their life because He was angry. RATHER, the Lord took their life in love! Notice Paul's explanation:

1 Corinthians 11:32, "But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world."

Such are the reasons God gives this tool to His people. You say, *"I'm convinced! I see that church discipline is NOT about kicking out the one we don't like from our church, BUT instead is an act of love, concern, and care NOT only for the one who has fallen into sin, BUT for all in the body, individually and corporately AND ultimately God! So how is it done?"*

It is to this that we will turn our focus. We will begin looking at the forms of God's discipline in the life of a Christian answering the question, "When God disciplines His child, how does He do it?"

It may surprise you, but what we call "formal church discipline" is but one of SIX different types of discipline referenced in the Bible. For example, in Scripture we read of the discipline of prevention.

2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

This text describes the four-fold working of the word of God in the life of the believer- a working that clearly involves discipline. Notice what God's word is given for:

- Teaching: which is nothing less than instruction on how to think, live, and believe.
- Reproof: this is discipline. When a child of God is veering from the truth- whether in thought or practice- God's word issues forth a rebuke in order to convict them of their misbehavior or false doctrine. Richard Trench, a noted nineteenth century British theologian said that, "[This word refers to rebuking] another with such effectual wielding of the victorious arm of the truth, as to bring him not always to a confession, yet at least to a conviction of his sin." (MacArthur, 1995, p. 158)
- Correction: this word references the restoration of the one who was reprovved.
- Training in righteousness: the word used for "training" is the same word used in the rearing of a child. It therefore is broad in its spectrum but has as its telos the growth and maturation of the individual.

From this passage we conclude that one of the functions of the word of God is discipline. That is why we profess that the preaching of the word of God is a means by which God disciplines His

people. Because this is the case, right now you all are sitting under the discipline of God! And I dare say, you wouldn't have it any other way!

Secondly, there is the discipline of "tempering."

Hebrews 11:17, "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac..."

The word used here for "testing" is the same word translated elsewhere in the Bible as "tempting." Yet this ought not to confuse us. The word in the Greek is *πειράζω* (*peirazō*) which refers to a trial generically. Now, when Satan brings a person through a "trial" it is always for their downfall, and so Bible translators have opted to use the word "tempt" or "tempting." This is something God will never do to a child of God — test them unto their ruin.

James 1:13, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone."

Any trial that God brings to an individual is for their benefit, never their harm. Thus when the same word is used of God, Bible translators have opted for the "testing" or "tempering" as in steel being put in the fire!

1 Peter 1:6-7, "In this you greatly rejoice [the 2nd Coming], even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire [indeed, God tests us/tries us/tempers us], may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (cf. also 1 Peter 4:12).

This is another form of discipline. God brings us through trials and difficulties in order to strengthen/temper our faith.

Thirdly, there is the discipline of consequence. (This is when a child of God continues to flirt with sin; they know it is wrong, but just one more time!).

Proverbs 5:22, "His own iniquities will capture the wicked [again, the word for 'wicked' here references NOT the unbeliever, BUT the covenant member who will not give up their sin, cf. Ez. 33], and he will be held with the cords of his sin."

How does God do this? The Lord withholds His preserving grace and allows the child of God to suffer more greatly under the consequences of his sin! Again, that which only makes sin enjoyable on this side of the grave (cf. Hebrews 11:25) is God's preserving grace. Right? Those in hell do not enjoy their sin for there they reap the full consequences of their sin all the time! Indeed! Sin is pleasurable here only because God withholds the bitter consequences. Yet in the case of rebellion, the Lord at times will discipline His child by removing His protective grace and allowing them a fuller taste of the wages of their sin in the here and now. That is what is behind Hosea, speaking of God's unrepentant people:

Hosea 2:6-7, “Therefore, behold, I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her so that she cannot find her paths. And she will pursue her lovers, but she will not overtake them; and she will seek them, but will not find *them*. Then she will say, ‘I will go back to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now!’”

This passage reminds us of the struggle the prodigal had. In his flight from his father, his path was made so difficult that he chose to return to his father. That is what God was doing in Hosea. And that is what God does at times in our lives as well.

Notice a fourth form of discipline is the discipline of fellowship.

Genesis 2:18, “Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.’”

Many read this and draw the false conclusion that God’s answer to man’s aloneness is marriage. Yet that cannot be the conclusion in light of the fact that Paul, who himself was single, gave this exhortation:

1 Corinthians 7:7-9a, “Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am [single]. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that. But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. But if they do not have self-control, let them marry...”

From this passage we conclude that God’s answer for being alone is NOT marriage. For if it were, God would require every person to be married which He clearly does NOT! What then are we to conclude about Genesis 2:18 and the statement, “It is not good for man to be alone”? John Calvin gave a great answer:

The commencement, therefore, involves a general principle, that man was formed to be a social animal... [And] although God pronounced, concerning Adam, that it would not be profitable for him to be alone, yet I do not restrict the declaration to his person alone, but rather regard it as a common law of man’s vocation, so that everyone ought to receive it as said to himself, that solitude is not good... (Calvin, 2011, p. 128)

Interesting! Calvin understood Genesis 2:18 to say that the solution to man’s aloneness is NOT marriage, BUT fellowship! And this we can say is commanded by God for His people.

Hebrews 3:13, “But encourage one another [this is a command!!] day after day [and so something we are to do regularly; we are to cultivate a life geared toward this when it comes to the body], as long as it is *still* called ‘Today,’ lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”

From this we see a fourth form of discipline. God deigned for it to come through the fellowship

of God's people who gather to bring God's word to bear upon each other's lives. This is something we must actively seek out — NOT the getting of fellowship, BUT the giving of it!

The fifth form of discipline is that of deliverance (formal church discipline).

Jude 20-23, "But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith; praying in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. And have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh."

We will consider later on how we do this exactly; so I won't say much more here. Know that this is what typically is in mind when we talk about church discipline.

The sixth form of discipline is that of death. Some of the members of the church in Corinth had rebelled so grievously against God that He deigned to take them.

1 Corinthians 11:29-30: "For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep."

If today we were living in heaven/paradise/THE Promised Land, then we might fault God in His treatment of the believer here. Yet if our current age is more akin to the wilderness wanderings of Israel (which it is) then we do NOT fault God, for even here He is being loving! In advanced cases of rebellion, the Lord at times will choose to take the unfruitful Christian home.

You say, "*That doesn't sound very bad.*" Such would be our estimation IF the goal in life is simply to get to heaven. BUT if the goal in life is to glorify God, then from the perspective of eternity, this disciplined individual has suffered "great loss" which was Paul's valuation in 1 Corinthians 3:14-15!

With this we see the six-fold expression of discipline on this side of the grave. And we conclude that:

- Each one of us in Christ are at all times under the disciplining hand of the Lord.
- This is NOT bad news. As we've seen: "It is for [or on account of] discipline that you endure..." (Hebrews 12:7)! Again, is not our greatest desire someday to be in the New Heavens and Earth serving the Lord in glory? Would you not therefore say, "*Whatever it takes to get me there, Lord, do it*"?

Brothers and sisters, understand that it is God's plan for each of us to be placed in the crucible of discipline — at least by His word and providences- that our faith might be tempered such that we might live unto the "praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7b).