

Reasons to Discipline

God commands Christians to discipline their brethren (Romans 16:17; II Thessalonians 3:6), yet many neglect to do so. Revealing the proper reasons for discipline may motivate the reluctant.

We Discipline for Love

Love is always the correct motive for fulfilling the Lord's will (John 14:15), and so it is with discipline in particular. Discipline is not practiced for spite, but for love. Jesus said, *"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent"* (Revelation 3:19). Those who have no regard for the souls of others are willing to let them perish, but those moved by love will correct the erring when they stray. Those receiving discipline must learn to accept it accordingly: *"My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor detest His correction; for whom the Lord loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights"* (Proverbs 3:11-12; cf. Hebrews 12:5-6).

We Discipline for Shame

Paul ordered the Thessalonians, *"And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed"* (II Thessalonians 3:14). People ought to be ashamed of themselves when they sin. God criticized His people in Jeremiah's day, saying, *"Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed; nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time I punish them, they shall be cast down"* (Jeremiah 6:15; cf. 8:12). Without shame there can be no remorse, which is necessary to repent and be saved (II Corinthians 7:10). Unless a person is *"past feeling"* (Ephesians 4:19), he should be brought to shame when his brethren exclude him. And that, in turn, should motivate his repentance.

We Discipline for Deterrence

One goal of discipline is to prevent others from committing the same transgression as the one punished. The evangelist Timothy was told, *"Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear"* (I Timothy 5:19-20). Others can be dissuaded from perpetrating error by witnessing the consequences. Such was the case when God killed Ananias and Saphira for lying: *"So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things"* (Acts 5:11).

We Discipline for Purity

When Paul admonished the church in Corinth to expel the fornicator, he explained, *"Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened"* (I Corinthians 5:6-7). In other words: one bad apple really does spoil the whole bunch. In part, this is a further argument in favor of the deterrent effect of discipline, but more than that, it's about the purity of the group. Not only does harboring the sinner embolden others to sin, but the association also implies approval. It is written, *"If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him, for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds"* (II John 10-11). We keep ourselves pure by keeping our distance from the wayward.

We Discipline for Self-Preservation

The Lord told Ezekiel the priest, *"When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul"* (Ezekiel 3:18-19). Failure by the righteous to warn the wicked imperils the righteous. This principle is recognized in criminal justice when those aware of an impending murder refuse to warn the victims or alert the authorities and are subsequently charged with second degree murder. Thus also the Christian who refuses to warn his brother about his sin will stand in jeopardy for that sin. The apostle Paul abided by this principle, telling the Ephesian elders, *"Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God"* (Acts 20:26-27).

We Discipline for Self-Improvement

After the Corinthians had disciplined a sinful brother, Paul reminded them how it had improved themselves to do so: "*For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter. Therefore, although I wrote to you, I did not do it for the sake of him who had done the wrong, nor for the sake of him who suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear to you*" (II Corinthians 7:11-12).

We Discipline for Obedience

Having been instructed by the apostle Paul to withdraw from an immoral brother (I Corinthians 5:1-13), the saints in Corinth did as they were told (II Corinthians 2:6). Paul explained his earlier instruction, saying, "*For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things*" (II Corinthians 2:9). Following through on discipline is not an easy task, but few tests of obedience are.

- by Bryan Matthew Dockens

"To Tell, Or To Hear Some New Thing"

When the apostle Paul found himself in ancient Athens, he encountered the philosophers for which the city was famous. They congregated constantly and "*spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing*" (Acts 17:21). It seems they were motivated more by curiosity than by true conviction.

There are still people who love to "hear some new thing." They are constantly looking for some new twist on a religious subject. Their interest is not in learning "*the way of God more perfectly*" (Acts 18:26). Rather, theirs is "*a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions*" (1 Timothy 6:4 NASV).

The serious student of the Bible will realize that able minds have been studying the inspired Word for thousands of years. Certainly, many have reached erroneous conclusions. But faithful brethren have also discovered the great truths and fundamental essentials of His message. In the process, these sound minds have done a thorough job of exposing doctrinal error.

It is difficult to imagine that there is some critical bit of information that has not yet been mined from the Scriptures. That being the case, we ought not to approach our study of the Bible with the assumption that the faithful ones who have gone before us have somehow 'missed it'. Instead, it seems reasonable to think that they have done a worthy job of discerning the truth, and we should not carelessly dismiss their efforts.

We must always imitate the noble Bereans in "*searching the scriptures*" (Acts 17:11) to see if the things we believe are true. But we must be careful not to be "*tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine*" (Ephesians 4:14).

Those who want to hear "*some new thing*" need to realize (as we have often said): 'if it's new, it's not true; if it's true, it's not new.' Think!

- by Greg Gwin