

Sermon to the Saints of God assembled at Topeka, KS: Sunday, April 29, 2018

Church Discipline – Part 3

This week, we will take up where we left off in our analysis of Church Discipline (Part 1 preached on 11/19/2017, part 2 preached on 2/11/2018). As a reminder, we discussed the following as a working definition of “church discipline”:

“Church Discipline”:

- The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is made up of disciples of Christ; we follow after him, and pattern our lives after the order of things that He established in the earth as the one and only lawgiver (**James 4:12**). If the Lord is with us, then we progressively get more light as we make this pilgrimage – the pattern never changes, but the clarity of our view changes, and we adjust our behavior to our better understanding of the pattern.
- **Titus 1:9 “Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.”**
- It is our blessed and sober duty to “hold fast” to the word of God – the form – the discipline that Christ established! We are to maintain that discipline – continually learning, doing, and teaching the pattern of the scriptures. This is the very purpose of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ in the earth; it is the work of our lives that is commanded in the Great Commission (**Matthew 28:18-20**)

Recall that we are considering discipline under these three headings:

1. **Formative** (Teach, Instruct, Edify, Train, Nurture, Exhort, Provoke)
2. **Corrective** (Rebuke, Admonish, Correct, Chasten, Chastise)
3. **Excisive** (Exclude, Withdraw, Avoid, Keep no company)

In part 1, we established the “Formative” aspect of church discipline; our duty to continually teach the “form” – the doctrine and commands of God found in the scriptures - in meaningful, on-the-ground ways, to those whom the Lord has entrusted to us. In part 2, we began our analysis of “Corrective” discipline; our duty to give scriptural, spiritual correction, when behavior deviates from the sound form of doctrine that we have been taught. Today we will complete our discussion on corrective discipline. Lord willing, next time I preach, we will examine “Excisive” discipline.

Corrective Discipline

In my last sermon we began our examination of corrective discipline under the following headings:

- Watch for one another
- Give correction
- Receive correction

We considered the first two topics: our sober duty to watch for one another – considering each other, in order to provoke to love and to good works (give instruction and correction).

Hebrews 3:12,13 “12 Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. 13 But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”

We discussed the terrifying context of this sober command from Paul – the murmuring and provocation of the Jews in the wilderness, and the dreadful consequences that flowed from that undisciplined and faithless behavior. Therefore - take heed! Watch for and exhort one another – DAILY – with all humility, gravity, sobriety, and godly-fear. This is required work. We can’t just talk a good talk, and have theoretical standards; when a person’s behavior doesn’t align with their profession of Christ, then we must be willing to correct them, and they must be willing to be corrected. Which brings us now to our final topic under the heading of corrective discipline:

Receive correction:

Proverbs 1:7-9 “7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction. 8 My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: 9 For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.”

Watching for one another and giving correction is fruitless, if the spirit of both the person being corrected, and the person offering the correction, are not aligned on this point: we ALL stand desperately in need of instruction and correction, and it is a blessing to receive it. We will need godly counselors and scriptural reproof until we quit this corrupt, depraved flesh. If you doubt that, then you believe that you stand, and will in fact fall (**1Corinthians 10:12**). Not only do we need it, but we must desire it, and seek the Lord to give it to us in the measure that is needful for us, so that we are fruitful in our

profession of Christ. Desiring, seeking, peaceably receiving, and contentedly submitting to godly, scriptural correction is a beautiful, edifying, and comforting ornament that each of us ought to adorn ourselves with – that spirit of meekness, and humble submission is a hallmark of the church of Jesus Christ, and it is a part of what makes her look forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners! (Song of Solomon 6:10)

Proverbs 9:8-10 “8 Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee. 9 Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning. 10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.”

The meekness that flows from our reverential fear of God is the thing that causes us to understand that we do, and always will, need instruction and correction.

Proverbs 25:11,12 “11 A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver. 12 As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear.”

Clearly then, part of what makes a man wise is the fact that he knows he needs instruction, and he will, ultimately, rejoice to receive it in whatever form the Lord presents it to him.

Proverbs 17:17 “A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.”

Adversity - when Satan’s fiery darts are flying; when we are struggling with our awful flesh – that’s when we need brothers and sisters in Christ to be willing to get down into the muck with us, fight through our fleshly wrangling, and apply scriptural helps for the good of our soul – they were framed for that very work! If we despise that notion, and only want to hear arms-length happy talk from our brothers and sisters, then we have cut off the help that the Lord has given us.

Hebrews 12:4-13 “4 Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. 5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: 6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. 7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? 8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are

ye bastards, and not sons. 9 Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. 11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. 12 Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; 13 And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.”

This passage is rich with good perspective for us when we are being chastened. I’m going to touch on a few points, but strictly in the context of receiving corrective words. There’s a lot more to be learned here, e.g. considering this passage when the Lord is chastening us with physical affliction.

- “Ye have forgotten”: It’s the nature of our flesh to say that we know we need correction, and yet, in practice, we quickly forget the importance of it, and think ourselves above it, such that we subtly begin to arrange our days in a way that protects us from receiving that correction, even while we’re willing to give it to others. While we theoretically agree that we need correction, we can use an endless array of devices to practically ensure that no one has the opportunity or the heart to meaningfully offer it to us. This is grave danger to ourselves, our families, and the church. If we will not receive chastisement, then we have no claim that we are among the sons of God.
- “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous”: Correction is contrary to our flesh. We have to know that about ourselves, and fight against it. Our first and strongest instinct in the flesh will be to kick against chastisement, and particularly against the immediate means of that chastening. The Lord uses many devices to correct, but in this context of corrective words, our fleshly instinct is to turn our ire on the person who is delivering the words. Last time we covered the duty of the person giving the corrective words to do so with a spirit of meekness, and yet the person receiving the correction must not be easily offended – looking for offense where none is intended. We have to fight hard against this instinct, as it is a satanic red herring, that causes great distress to the person that is trying to help you, and ultimately it can cause a reticence on their part to do the work of discipline! That kind of fleshly maneuvering also sets a bad example for others to emulate – if you can effectively put up roadblocks, then so can I; this is the very process of being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Rather than focus on perceived slights, and someone’s imperfect approach to you, you should focus on whether you are being approachable, and actually hear the spirit

of the words. It's not immediately pleasing and gratifying to be corrected, but it is life and health to us!

- **Proverbs 27:5,6 “5 Open rebuke is better than secret love. 6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.”**
- We will only receive the peaceable fruits of righteousness IF our hearts are exercised through the chastisement. When we are corrected, the best thing we can do is to quickly and humbly get to the Lord in prayer, seeking a right spirit to receive the instruction; Get to the scriptures, and ask the Lord to help you to understand how to apply them to your circumstance; Get to your co-elect, and ask them to help you in these efforts – drink in the wisdom and comfort that the Lord has given to them in the various exercises of their lives. HERE we will find lasting help; HERE we will find comfort and peace; HERE the body will be edified and compacted together in love (**Ephesians 4:16**). If the Lord has exercised you, and given you clarity and peace about the matter, then that should bring forth fruit – a change in behavior that reflects a person who has been exercised. If someone has offered you words of correction – LET THEM KNOW that it is well with you, and that YOU are sincerely well with THEM.
- “Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; 13 And make straight paths for your feet”: Having plainly established the need for correction, this passage ends with a renewed exhortation to do the work of watching, and giving correction. Consider your brothers and sisters, and when you see them struggling – whether they know they're struggling or not – give them fitly framed scriptural words of instruction and comfort, as well as whatever practical help you are able to give. When one of our brothers or sisters is telling us that we are on a dangerous course, and they offer us a straight, practical path forward, they are doing it for our good – it is safety for us! This is not the time to be quibbling over technicalities – heed the counsel and move forward with joy and thanksgiving to God. If we will not submit ourselves; if we will not patiently endure chastisement; if we will not be exercised in our hearts and behavior, but rather kick against the pricks, then the Lord will deal with us!
 - **Proverbs 29:1 “He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.”**

A willingness to peaceably receive correction is good, but scripturally speaking, it's not enough. If we truly desire to walk in wisdom, and to be knit together in love with our co-elect, then we must make it the practice of our lives to seek and heed godly counsel. Seeking and receiving good counsel is a willing, proactive, and comfortable way to engage in this work of discipline FOR YOURSELF, rather than depending upon those around you to be reactive to your circumstances, which they may not even be aware of.

It also destroys the satanic traps that often keep instruction and correction at bay; if you are asking for help, then no one has to fight through assumptions, and obstacles (real or perceived), you can simply commune together, compare spiritual things to spiritual, and seek the Lord for wisdom about a matter.

Proverbs 11:14 “Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.”

We often reference this verse, and specifically the second half of it; it largely speaks for itself, but here are two things to consider:

- The connotation of the word “safety” might leave a person thinking that counsel is nice to have, but not necessary. There are some things in this life where we take safety seriously, but more often, for many reasons, we cut corners when it comes to safety, and it usually works out ok. If you apply that thinking to this verse, then you have completely missed the boat. The Hebrew word is “teshuwah”, and it is elsewhere translated as salvation, deliverance, help, and victory. Strong’s defines it as “deliverance, usually by God through human agency”. This “safety” is not just nice to have; it is a must have that we ought to aggressively pursue with thanksgiving, and not take for granted!
- To further underscore that point, this verse presents both sides of the coin: either seek and submit to godly counsel and be blessed, or you will fall.

Consider this exhortation from Paul as he closes out his letter to the church at Thessalonica.

1Thessalonians 5:11-15 “11 ¶ Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do. 12 And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; 13 And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves. 14 Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. 15 See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.”

- “Know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake”: This is describing the pastors of the church, engaging in the work of oversight and discipline. Don’t just begrudgingly endure their efforts, but rather esteem them highly, because you know that the Lord appointed the office – it is needful, and often difficult; you know that they give their time and tears on your behalf; you know that their family gives up that time, mind-share, and heart-share with their

husband and father. If you are kicking and chafing against their reproofs, or avoiding their oversight, then you are adding extra heaviness and sorrow to their labor. Please consider that Paul doesn't simply say that the pastors have the duty to watch and admonish, but he also charges each of us to "know them"; consider that simple command:

- Know them: consider them, consider their frame, know their circumstances, know how they labor for you, and in turn, how you can minister to them, and communicate to their needs: **"Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things."** (Galatians 6:6) The word "communicate" in this verse does not mean what we typically think when we see that word – it does not mean expressing thought in written and spoken words. The Greek word is "Koinoneo", and it means to commune or fellowship, and to distribute. The meaning of the verse is this: recognize that these people invest their lives into teaching and watching for you, and that you should be in close communion with them to enable that work, to give help and comfort to them in the doing of that work, and to thereby be in a position to recognize their needs, and distribute to those needs.
- Be known to them: This is a responsibility that EACH OF US must bear for ourselves; it is not optional! Each of us bears the burden to form and maintain a comfortable relationship with those whom the Lord has charged with keeping the oversight of the church. While you might be closer to some than others, you ought to be comfortable with each of them, and you certainly ought to have the same mind toward each of them. If you don't have that, then you have work to do, with urgency. If you think that they are hindering you in that work, or that they aren't considering you, or they are offending you in some way, then you have a simple Bible remedy: entreat them. (1 Timothy 5:1) Don't accuse them, don't assume bad motives, don't gossip about them, don't grind away in your heart with anger toward them – simply entreat them; they will hear you, and they will help you. Through that blessed scriptural remedy you will better know and understand each other, and be better prepared to help one another when temptations and troubles arise. If we don't submit to this instruction – if we decide that it's sufficient to maintain a cordial, distant relationship - then we hinder the whole body. If we won't make ourselves known, then we leave the pastors to watch for us from a distance, with no clear view of our circumstances or the state of our heart, and with major obstacles to overcome if they are going to deliver any meaningful instruction or correction. On the other hand, if we will do this work – if we will be compacted together, then we enable the work of church discipline. We enable the free blood-flow of godly counsel, correction, and comfort throughout the body. If we comfortably commune with one another,

truly esteeming each better than ourselves, then we will get good counsel as a matter of course, rather than waiting for pitched moments where we have already decided what we want to do, and now stand in defense of our position as our helpers try to find a way to give a word of counsel.

- You might have noticed that while I described the duty of the church members toward the pastors, I have been referring to “them”, rather than “us”, because even though I am a pastor, I have the same duty toward each of them, and am held to the same standard as every other church member. The scriptural requirements that I just laid out apply to me, and to each of the pastors individually. We have a duty to know and submit to one another; in fact we have a duty to submit to every single member of the church. (**1Peter 5:5**) We must daily seek the Lord to help us put on behavior that is becoming of the role, which in this context includes: vigilant, sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith and charity, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach, no striker (including verbally), patient, not a brawler, not self-willed. (**Titus 1:6-9; 2:2; 1Timothy 3:1-7**) We have to be VERY CAREFUL to make this process easy – to be approachable – to be entreatable – to consider the ramifications of even one interaction where we impatiently rail on someone. The Lord has placed each of us here together, with experiences, gifts, and roles that are perfectly suited for the good of the body as a whole, and he has given authority that we must exercise. However, we are each acutely aware of our own sin, and we know through the chastening of the Lord that NONE OF US corners the market on wisdom – individually, or collectively. We are simply servants here, with a particular job to perform. We are under-shepherds beneath the great shepherd – this is not our flock, it is His!

If we refuse to engage in this work – with our whole hearts, and thankful submission to God - then we become as those around us; we become as the world, every man doing that which is right in his own eyes. To the contrary, we are supposed to be of one mind and one accord, walking by the same rule, minding the same thing. (**Philippians 1:27, 3:15**)

Consider these wonderful proverbs on this matter of counsel:

Proverbs 18:4 “The words of a man’s mouth are as deep waters, and the wellspring of wisdom as a flowing brook.”

The wisdom described here is not worldly wisdom. The man described here is not a worldly wise man. Where you find men and women of faith, who fear God, and walk in the light of His Word and His wisdom, you find these people. Where you find those

people, whom the Lord has instructed and chastened, “even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil”, you find this wisdom. **(Hebrews 5:14)** Paul describes these same people, and this same wisdom like this: “And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.” **(Romans 15:14)** My friends, the Lord has surrounded us with these people; we show ourselves to be thankless and full of pride if we reject that help, and seek to find wisdom within ourselves.

Henry: “The similitudes here seem to be elegantly transposed. 1) The well-spring of wisdom is as deep waters. An intelligent knowing man has in him a good treasure of useful things, which furnishes him with something to say upon all occasions that is pertinent and profitable. This is as deep waters, which make no noise, but never run dry. 2) The words of such a man’s mouth are as a flowing brook. What he sees cause to speak flows naturally from him and with a great deal of ease, and freedom, and natural fluency; it is clean and fresh, it is cleansing and refreshing; from his deep waters there flows what there is occasion for, to water those about him, as the brooks do the low grounds.

Proverbs 20:5 “Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out.”

Here we find these same people, and this same metaphor - deep waters of wisdom - but this time with a different focus. In the previous proverb, you see that the wisdom of God is flowing like a river all around us in these people of faith, and that they will seek to help us with all of the gifts and wisdom wherein God has furnished them. However, in this proverb, the burden shifts to each of us to actively seek out that counsel, by alluding to a well of water. The deep, sweet well of life giving water is right in front of us, but it is incumbent upon us to put down our pride and go to draw from it! The alternative is to refuse to draw from that well, and to laboriously dig your own well, by taking counsel with yourself. What needless sorrow we bring upon ourselves, and those that love us, when we do such a thing. If you truly desire counsel, then you have to earnestly seek it.

Henry: “To get knowledge by them. Some are very able and fit to give counsel, having an excellent faculty of cleaving a hair, hitting the joint of a difficulty, and advising pertinently, but they are modest, and reserved; they have a great deal in them, but it is loth to come out. In such a case a man of understanding will draw it out, as wine out of a vessel. We lose the benefit we might have by the conversation of wise men for want of the art of being inquisitive.”

We all know that this is true, and yet we all struggle with it. Our flesh wants to be right all the time, and so it finds every excuse to sidestep this process of submitting ourselves

to one another, and bowing to the godly wisdom and correction of our brothers and sisters. Either we look at our own wisdom as the best, or we convince ourselves of the deficiency and unworthiness of each of those around us. We look at what we have a “right” to do, and a “right” to decide on our own, rather than sincerely, soberly considering the impact of our behavior and our decisions on the body. That ought not to be so – consider the importance of our “right” to do something according to our own counsel, in light of the end of all earthly matters:

2Peter 3:11-14 “11 Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, 12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? 13 Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. 14 Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.”

I am deeply sorry for the ways that I have failed in every phase of this process, and the offenses that I have caused to each of you dear friends. I am very grateful for the instruction that the Lord has given to me through each of you, and pray that each of you find something of value in these words.

I love you all. Amen.