The Forgotten Command

(Robert F. Turner)

It would be trite to say authority and discipline are unpopular in current society; and unnecessary to say this spirit has affected the church. Hundreds of churches have existed for years without exercising corrective discipline in a single case – and not because everyone was faithful. Bring up the subject, and brethren tremble because we see trouble at the door.

Why does church discipline have such a reputation? [1] Brethren have not learned to think objectively – to separate personal feelings from principles – to lose self in the greater cause of Christ. [2] Discipline has been abused, used vindictively (when we wanted to “tell off” someone), or practice majority rule. Or, [3] it has been neglected for so long there is no “easy” place to start. We await some horrible deed that will shock us all – and we are building immunity to shock. Perhaps some churches have acted to save face respecting highly publicized events; or a few may have made a “flag” of disfellowship – proving “soundness” by something akin to martial law; but for the most part we have neglected corrective discipline.

A comparison of Job 36:10, 2 Timothy 1:7, and 2 Timothy 3:16 – in the King James Version and in the American Standard Version, will show discipline and a controlled and instructed mind have much in common. Discipline begins as we present the call of the gospel to an alien. He is “called out of darkness” (1 Peter 2:9), is taught to crucify the “old man” in obedience to a “form of doctrine” that he might become a “servant of righteousness” (Romans 6:3-7, 16-18).

While not corrective or punitive in the sense of disfellowship, this hedges about and brings into line in a most positive way. If we are careful to explain the cost of discipleship (Luke 14:26-33) and the necessity of forsaking “self” unto the Lord, this initial “discipline” will spare the need for much later correction.

1 John 1:5-7 makes the relation of discipline to fellowship very obvious – “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie.” The means of forgiveness, hence of fellowship with God, is provided by Christ; but my forgiveness, my fellowship is contingent upon my walking in the light. This involves a humble walk, ever acknowledging my inadequacy, my need for Him – “If we confess…He is faithful and just to forgive” (v 9).

Church discipline, properly viewed, is a part of the mutual assistance we should expect among Christians in our effort to walk in fellowship with God.

Godly Sorrow

(Gary Henry)

“For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death” (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Being self-centered makes it difficult for us to feel godly sorrow, and so we find it difficult to repent of our sins in any lasting way. By definition, godly sorrow is a remorse that grieves what our sins have cost God, and if our thoughts have to do mostly with our own gains and losses, then whatever mourning we do will be worldly, not godly. To turn away from sin decisively, we have to concentrate on things higher than ourselves.

Godly sorrow is a stronger force than worldly sorrow. In 2 Corinthians 7:11, Paul describes how it had affected the church at Corinth: “See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done” (NIV). A sorrow powerful enough to produce these things is much more than a mood. It is a deep-down disturbance that recognizes what is really wrong with sin, and this recognition continues to govern one’s conduct long after the painful effects of the sin have been ameliorated (1 Corinthians 15:9, 10).

The quality of one’s character is indicated by what disturbs that person. As long as their own situations are comfortable, most people are not disturbed by anything at all. Some people, however, have a higher character than that. While their own situations may still be comfortable, these people are disturbed by the evil that is “out there” in the world, and they make the world a better place by crusading against social injustice and so forth. But beyond that, an even higher character is possessed by those who are disturbed most of all by the evil of their own sins. And what they are disturbed about is just the fact of having sinned against God, whether the sin has caused them any other pain or not! These folks are the unselfish, God-centered people who, once they realize they’ve erred, will grieve the wrongfulness of their sin, not its painfulness. The self-pitying sorrow of the world leads to death, but godly sorrow leads to – God Himself!