

1 Corinthians 11:30-32 (William John Hocking, Editor) 211621

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ON looking somewhat into this subject, one cannot fail to be struck with the largeness and breadth of the word of God—so much beyond the narrow and contracted thoughts of man. With many believers the word “discipline” at once suggests to the mind exclusion from God’s assembly—their thoughts about the matter scarcely rise above that one idea. But the truth is, there are several distinct aspects of Christian discipline in the scriptures, and it should be our aim to understand them all, and to carry them out in faith and love. For clearness’ sake, we will look at the matter in the following order: —

Self Discipline.

Divine Discipline.

Assembly Discipline.

Self-discipline is of the first and highest importance, and if rightly and habitually exercised by the saints of God would obviate the necessity of anything further, either from God or the assembly. The neglect of it leads to shame and disgrace. Self-discipline was painfully lacking at Corinth when Paul wrote his first Epistle, hence his words, “If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged” (1 Cor. 11:31). Flesh was running riot there, to the apostle’s sorrow and the assembly’s public shame. Every believer should examine himself constantly and searchingly in the light of the divine presence, that he may judge and put away every working of the flesh within. If this were done more frequently and thoroughly, how much everybody would be spared! Things that, when developed, cause pain and confusion would thus be nipped in the bud and never allowed to become full-blown. All evil begins in the heart. “Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23). The heart goes wrong before the hands and the feet, as doubtless we have all painfully proved in our christian experience.

Flesh in the believer is no more to be trusted than in the man of the world. It is incorrigibly evil and deceitful, and is ever ready to assert itself and lead our souls astray. Let us be watchful and prayerful. Let us not shun to use the sharp knife of circumcision upon ourselves, thus mortifying our members that are upon the earth. Where this is the habit of the soul, the Christian goes on humbly and peacefully with God, and grows in conformity to Christ in glory. But where self-discipline is lacking, God has to come in and take the case in hand Himself, for its spiritual welfare and His own glory.

Divine discipline, however, has two distinct phases. (1) The Father’s dealing with His children as such; and (2) the Lord’s action as Son over God’s house. The first we find in 1 Peter 1:17 “If ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear,” etc. The Father is holy, and will have all His own to be partakers of His holiness. Where there is crookedness and waywardness, His hand is seen. He brings down His rod upon the backs of those that bear His name, but who fail to walk in His ways. This is often very bitter to the soul, but afterward it yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness, if indeed the soul is exercised thereby. This is, of course, confined to our walk in this world—it is during the time of our sojourning here. We are subject to the Father’s government on the road, for which we shall praise Him through all eternity when we are with Him above. But for His hand, evil that we fail to judge might grow to alarming proportions, and plunge us into a sea of sorrow and disaster. When under the Father’s mighty hand, let us not chafe therefore, but rather humble ourselves. Love applies the rod, and holiness is its aim and object.

Connected with this, but distinct from it, is the discipline of the Lord as Son over the house of God. This takes cognizance of unjudged evil in the assembly, and was being experienced by the Corinthians when Paul wrote to them, “For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep ... But when we are judged we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world” (1 Cor. 11:30-32). It is very solemn when the Lord has to intervene in this way. This happens when saints utterly break down in their responsibility to resent and purge out evil from their midst. If in them, conscience becomes blunted, so that they fail to act for His honor, He never forgets what is due to His name, and He acts and judges accordingly. Of course this in no way touches the question of the salvation of the soul, it is earthly governmental discipline. Sickness may be sent, or even death, as John speaks, but the soul is secure. It is unspeakably blessed to be near the Lord, but it is also deeply solemn, for judgment always begins with that which is nearest to God. Let us walk softly and carefully in consequence.

(To be continued).

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