

2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 (William John Hocking, Editor) 211631

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DISCIPLINE by the assembly has also a two-fold character, which may be described as internal and external. In the ordering of our families, we chasten the offender inside before resorting to the extreme measure of expelling him, and a similar order is laid down for the saints in the word of God.

Turn to 2 Thess. 3:6-15. Here we have the apostle commanding the brethren to withdraw themselves from every brother walking disorderly, contrary to instructions received. This does not at all mean exclusion from the fellowship of the assembly, for their careless walk had not yet led them into open sin, but the persons were to be disciplined within. Their company was not to be cultivated, that they might become ashamed of their ways. Such were not to be treated as enemies, but admonished in a brotherly manner, for the good of their souls. To deal rightly in such cases as these calls for much spiritual wisdom and discernment. Flesh is apt to take advantage of what is holy and of God for the furtherance of its own prejudices and dislikes. This must be guarded against. In dealing with erring saints, we are acting for God, not for ourselves, and everything must be carried out in a manner conducive to His glory. If this character of discipline were better understood and exercised in faith, it would probably spare us the sorrow and shame of the more extreme act of putting away.

Rom. 16:17-18, and Titus 3:10-11, also refer to internal discipline, though dealing with a wholly different matter. Here it is no question of disorderly walk, but of party making amongst the saints of God. The apostle commands Titus to admonish such twice, and failing godly repentance, to avoid them. The brethren at large are to mark them and shun them. Paul acts upon the principle that if there were no followers, there would soon be no leaders. Flattery and hero worship are fatal to the fellowship of the church of God. They lead to the undue exaltation of particular servants of Christ, to the disparagement of others, equally, if not more truly, sent of God. Paul suffered much from this in his day, and many a faithful man has groaned over the same evil since. Let us earnestly heed the exhortations of the apostle in this matter. Wherever it is evident that the aim is to make a party, and to constitute one or more servants of Christ a kind of center, let us show our hearty disapproval of their evil by a complete avoidance of them. This is at once good for their souls, and for the saints at large, and for the divine glory.

External discipline has to be resorted to sometimes. 1 Cor. 5 is a solemn instance. There was a fornicator in the assembly. So bad was the condition of the saints in general that they were not even mourning about the matter. The apostle pressed upon the assembly its responsibility to act for God with regard to the evil. The assembly is an unleavened lump in the sight of God, and this character it is responsible to maintain in the world. Leaven must be purged out, or it will impart a character to the whole, as we read, "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." The saints cannot well avoid having dealings with evil men in the world, but in the holy circle of God's assembly they must not be allowed a place. God is the judge of those without, but those within, the assembly is bound to judge when evil manifests itself in them. This must be the united act of the assembly—"in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together." Leading men, however wise and spiritual, must not act for the whole company in this, as it is of the highest importance that all consciences should be exercised, and that all should reject with holy abhorrence the sin which has intruded itself among them.

The exhortation is, "Put away from among yourselves the wicked person." This goes far beyond putting away from the Lord's table (though it involves it); it means exclusion from the Christian circle in every way. If a person is dealt with ecclesiastically and yet admitted to social intercourse, of what value is the discipline, and what power is it likely to have upon the conscience of the transgressor? We must be thorough in all that concerns the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is a further act spoken of in 1 Cor. 5, which seems to require apostolic power—"to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." (See also 1 Tim. 1:20.) In the absence of apostles, no company of saints may pretend to this, but the responsibility to put away evil ever abides, in consistency with the holiness of the One after Whom the church is called.

Evil of a doctrinal character is dealt with in 2 John and Rev. 2:14, and its working is described in Gal. 5:9. The assembly of God is not only to guard holiness in all its individual members, but the glory of Christ's person and work must be maintained unsullied. A deceiver and antichrist is not eligible for a place at the table of a Christian lady and her children, how much less at the table of the Lord! In the epistles to the seven churches we have to listen to the Lord's solemn rebuke of those who tolerated false and corrupt teachers in their midst. How lightly is this regarded today! How few comparatively care for the Lord's honor in this respect! The indifferent spirit of Laodicea is spreading itself in every direction, and will soon bring down upon itself the Lord's solemn judgment. May He give grace to us to be faithful to His name and word until the end! W.W.F.