



DISCIPLINE WON'T WORK

Joe Fitch

"Discipline won't work." For years I denied it. After all, the scripture plainly commands it (2 Thess. 3:6; 1 Cor. 5:1-). But I now concede. It will not work and I will tell you why.

Discipline will not work because our congregational relationship is faulty. "...with such a one, no, not to eat" (1 Cor. 5:11). But we are not eating with one another anyway! "...I have written unto you not to keep company..." But we are not doing that either! Our association is limited to a greeting nod or an occasional chat after an assembly. It is announced that brother Smith is sick. "Who is he?" We have no abiding and close tie (company) to sever. "...after the first and second admonition, reject." (Tit. 3:10). A man "joins" (Acts 9:26) the disciples, and they "receive" him with an announcement, a handshake, and an entry into the directory. If nothing more develops, "rejecting" him is nothing more than an announcement and a directory mark out. It has little impact. Such a distant and shallow relationship leaves nothing meaningful to "withdraw." It does not work. **OF COURSE, WE COULD CHANGE THE CONGREGATIONAL RELATIONSHIP.**

Discipline will not work because the whole scope of discipline is not employed. Discipline is defined with words like training, education, instruction, correction, as well as punishment. It includes encouragement in struggle, praise in victory, comfort in distress, instruction for the ignorant, support for the timid, scolding for some, a harsh rebuke for others, and even the final effort of withdrawing self from the obstinately rebellious. All is discipline — aimed at saving souls. If discipline means only an occasional withdrawal, it does not work. **OF COURSE, WE COULD DO ALL THE WORK OF DISCIPLINE.**

Discipline will not work because it is not done in love of souls. The Father chastens those he loves (Heb. 12:6); we often chasten those who embarrass or anger us. We ignore "sin in the camp" — especially among our friends — until something scandalous happens. Suddenly discipline is in order. Did a love of souls call for this action? — will it continue? Nice sins are as damning as the shameful. Such hypocrisy thwarts the work of discipline. **OF COURSE, WE COULD LOVE ONE ANOTHER WITH A PURE HEART.**

Discipline will not work because we do not work. Many brethren do not know where to start. Past neglect has left a littered house, and our first house cleaning is a distressing mess. Some throw up their hands in despair. Many, many brethren simply want nothing to do with any discipline. They plainly say discipline is a bad idea. No matter what God commanded it. They dislike it, and will not do it. They would rather see a brother go to hell quietly than have any unpleasantness. "It does not work" and "It does more harm than good" is their faithless cry. How do they know? Have they ever tried it? Thus, for one excuse or another, brethren do not work God's plan of discipline — and therefore, the plan does not work. **OF COURSE, WE COULD BOLSTER OUR FAITH IN GOD AND DO WHAT HE SAYS.**

(EDITOR'S NOTE: In our judgment, brother Fitch in this article in PLAIN TALK, hits the nail right on the head. If we had done more teaching through the years on this subject and practiced it more in the past then it would not send such shock waves through congregations when they finally muster the courage to begin practicing discipline. We might add that discipline often will not work in an area where many congregations exist because too many of them practice a "no questions asked" policy of fellowship. All one has to do when discipline is either threatened or administered is to jump to another area congregation to be received with open arms — no questions asked! The "poor mistreated thing" attitude of many Christians(?) toward the one withdrawn from does not help either. In nearly every case we hear that it "was unfair" ("others do things just as bad and get by"), "too quick" or "too late", etc. etc.— anything to make a villain of the church for acting rather than bringing pressure upon the disciplined one to repent and be saved. So, church discipline becomes about as effective as child discipline does when one parent spansks a child for his misbehavior and he runs to the other for comfort and succeeds in having the second parent jump on the one administering the discipline. Of course, the second parent is not going to say that he is against ALL discipline — just the discipline that was administered at the time—every time! It seems to matter little that the child continues to be a brat and that comfortably. IT IS HIGH TIME THAT WE MADE DISCIPLINE WORK.— EOB)

EDITOR'S DESK

It is good having DOUG THOMAS working with us this summer. He will be doing the work of an evangelist in our midst. We are looking forward to working with him.

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About the time we get to wondering if our efforts in this paper are really worth it, we get a real boost like the following letter from Bottineau, ND:

"I would like to thank you for sending the Reflector and ask that my name be kept on the mailing list. We enjoy the Reflector very much and read every one.

"My wife and I are the only members of the church in this area. The nearest church of Christ that we could attend is at Minot, No. Dak. a trip of about 80 miles. We worship every Lord's Day at home. It is over 10 years since the night we were baptized, and to this time we have not found anyone that believes as we do. We need the comfort and instruction we get from the Reflector."

Now, how can we get tired of sitting, writing, type-setting, doing paste-ups, getting black ink all over us - after receiving a letter like that? It even makes the postage not seem nearly as high as it did before. Thanks to brother Allen L. Lundy. We needed that!

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The church in SUCCASUNNA, NJ is looking for a preacher to work with them. Ed Bragwell, Jr. is now working with them but will be moving to Anniston, AL Aug. 1. Contact Mario Costa at (201) 398-7187.

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Often the difference between "right" and "wrong" is not so much a matter of putting a thing under one of the two columns - but a matter of undue emphasis upon a thing that might otherwise be right. For example, it is kind of hard to get along without money. The grocery store is kind of picky about letting me have food without it. But, when one places undue emphasis upon it can result in materialism, coveteousness, and all kinds of evil (see 1 Tim. 6). Money becomes "the thing" to which every things else becomes subservient - even morals, ethics, and spirituality.

Congregations can put the emphasis in the wrong place. Congregations cannot operate without the "numbers" - you know, the facts and figures: attendance, contribution and "visible results". Now, let's be honest about it. In most congregations their progress and strength are mostly measured by the numbers. A church is "doing great" if it can point to a certain % of increase in the facts and figures from one reporting period to the next. Never mind that they may have declined in real growth. Never mind that the "contribution" has been extracted "out of necessity" rather than a a result of folks first giving themselves to the Lord.(See 2 Cor.8-9). Never mind that in that "increase" that there are adulterers, etc. Never mind that the attendance has been kept up by not "rocking the boat" on worldliness, indifference, etc. Never mind that that discipline has become a relic of the past. Never mind that the increase comes from seizing the opportunity to add another to our number because he is "unhappy" elsewhere without regard to why he is "unhappy". Brethren, if we will put our emphasis upon saving souls - both by their conversion and spiritual progress - the "facts and figures" will take care of themselves. In some cases a decline in the "facts and figures" may indicate more real progress than an increase. It may indicate that a long overdue house cleaning has taken place. Think about it.

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I am looking forward to being with the brethren at Rock Church in Dickson County Tennessee for a series of meetings (June 21-27).

ONE THING I DO KNOW

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

"Whether He is a sinner, I do not know, one thing I do know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see". -- John 9:25 NASV.

One does not have to know all about a matter to be sure of some things. The formerly blind man admitted that he might not know all about Jesus but still declared "one thing I do know." Ignorance on a subject does not have to cancel out all certain knowledge. The idea that since one cannot give all the answers to objections or questions a critic might raise, he must not be definite about any answers is foolish and spiritually fatal.

I do not hesitate to admit that there is a lot about God and His word that I do not know. I would like to find the answers to many questions that I have and have had others to raise. But, based on the evidence, I do believe in God. I believe the Bible is His word. "I know on whom I have believed" and know that I must respect and obey Him. The fact that one might raise some questions about God's nature and mind that I cannot satisfactorily answer does not keep me from confidently and boldly affirming what I do know about Him.

Must one wait until he has all the answers worked out before forming definite conclusions and convictions about some of the answers? Must the first grader wait until he has mastered algebra before he can be sure that simple arithmetic is dependable? Must a writer wait until he can spell every word in the dictionary before defending his spelling on any word?

Friend, if one can give evidence that your definite convictions about a matter is in error - be man enough to change your conclusions! But do not allow a perpetual questioner (you know, "ever learning but never coming to a knowledge of the truth") to shake your faith in your convictions simply because he is smart enough to raise some questions you have no answers to - yet!

There are some questions about baptism that I have not solved. But, "one thing I do know": God commanded it in order to be saved (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16). Why did God choose to save us in this way? I do not know. Why did He choose water as the element? I know not. But, this does not keep me from confidently preaching that "baptism doth also now save us" (1 Pet. 3:21). It would be terrible for me to reason that since I cannot supply all the answers that I will simply ignore the subject and leave it to each person to "do his own thing" without any prodding from me.

Whom should a Christian include in his fellowship? This is a lively topic these days. Most brethren with whom I have talked admit problems with the matter. Since there are some unsolved problems in the minds of many of us - should we then just solve all the unsolved problems by simply letting the gap down and fellowshiping every professed believer. Some apparently think so. Certain young turks, encouraged a few perennial mavericks, are reasoning thusly: "Can

we say that we know (understand) everything the Bible might say?" Of course, only a rank egotist would answer affirmatively! "Ah, ha", reasons the querist, "then how can you be so sure about those things that we make a test of fellowship"? I believe this reasoning is rooted in despair and agnosticism so characteristic of this age. It has become fashionable to be a "don't know it all" intellectual. About the only things these folks know for certain is that we can't know anything for sure! The Bible surely teaches that there are lines of fellowship to be drawn! (1 Cor. 5; 2 Thess. 3; Rom. 16:17,18; Gal. 2:4,5; 2 John 9). The circle is not large enough to include all who profess acceptance of the fact that Christ is Lord. The fact that I may be imperfect in knowledge and application on the matter of fellowship does not keep me from trying to apply the principles that I do know. The fact that I do not know ALL does not mean that I know NOTHING. My ignorance and weakness may make me inconsistent at times, but I must try!

The fact that I am unable to know the exact moment that a child becomes accountable does not keep me from baptizing young people -- nor does it keep me from refusing to baptize babies or children who are obviously too young! If I wait until I can say for sure the "exact moment" that one passes from an "improper subject" to a "proper subject" of baptism to act then I would probably never act. I might reason that since I cannot know exactly when each person when each person become accountable that I simply will not baptize anyone or that I will baptize everyone coming or brought to me for baptism. After all I want to be consistent. Surely no thinking brother would recommend either course. Yet, some brethren would try to tie our hands similarly on other matters.

Since it is hard to tell the exact point, in every case, that dress passes from being modest to being immodest, brethren seem to think that we have no right to denounce any dress practice as immodest. "Just at what point does a dress cease to be modestly long and become immodestly short", we are asked. Or, "just how tight is too tight?" "Just at what point does clothing styles make one appear masculine or feminine or vice versa?" It may come as a shock to those who have heard me preach and read things I have written to know that I do not know, in many cases, the answer these questions! Nor do I know the exact point that hair ceases to be short and begins to be long. Now that I have admitted my ignorance (it usually shows without my having to admit it), what should I do? Should I just dismiss the whole matter and teach nothing on these subjects as though the Bible said nothing about modesty, hair, dress, etc., simply because there are questions that I cannot answer about them? Should one should be immune from criticism regardless to his practice in these matters? Shall I allow the fact one may present me with a case that I am not sure whether it should be placed under "modest" or "immodest"; or "masculine" or "feminine"; or "long" or "not long" cause to the despair and say that all teaching and criticism should be avoided on these matters and that each one should be free to do his own thing regardless to have "far out" he may get -- for after all we have already admitted that we don't know exactly where to draw the line! Hence such passages as 1 Cor. 11:14-15 and 1 Tim. 2:9-10 are of no practical value to us because

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SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

SUNDAY:

Bible Classes 9:45 A.M.
Worship 10:45 A.M.
Worship 6:00 P.M.

Note: Sunday PM services will be
at 6:00 beginning July 4

WEDNESDAY:

Bible Classes 7:30 P.M.

COME WORSHIP WITH US THE THE NEXT SERVICE

ONE THING (from page 3)

in SOME cases I cannot tell one whether or not he or she is standing in violation of these verses. Since I am unable to determine EVERY violation then I should not determine that there are ANY violations. Who can believe it? Such reasoning is should be repulsive to one making an honest effort to please God in all things.

This "one thing I do know"; I do not have to know all to know any.

THIS, TOO, IS LIBERALISM

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

For a generation the church has been involved in controversy over church supported institutions, sponsoring churches, and the work of the church in general. Those who have favored support of institutions, sponsoring churches, church sponsored recreation and social activities have been generally labeled liberal by those who have opposed such things. I believe that for the most part that such labeling was more than justified.

But while many were fighting the liberals in these matters, they themselves have become rather liberal in their approach to morals and worldliness. Conservative churches and conservative preachers have been known to be rather liberal in their views on modesty, drinking and marriage.

When a preacher (or anyone) openly states that there is nothing wrong with drinking alcoholic beverages in the privacy of your home, brother, that is liberalism in my book! It would seem hardly necessary to remind such a one of the sin of drunkenness and all of its evil effects. Yet, such an attitude on the part of one who should be apt to teach can but contribute to sin.

When a preacher (or anyone) openly states that a bare-breasted woman in Africa would be modestly clothed because of the customs of that area, then that is liberalism in my book! Surely such a one must be aware of what the Bible has to say about the shame of nakedness. Such an idea would make complete nudity modest in a nudist colony. If not, why not?

When a preacher (or anyone) openly states that one may have been married several times without scriptural grounds for divorce (fornication) and when he is baptized that such a one may continue with the wife that he has at the time of his baptism, brother, that is liberalism in my book! It's too bad that John the Baptist did not have the benefit of such wisdom(?) before he lost his head. After all, John was baptizing folks for the remission of sins. Why did he not just try to convince Herod to be baptized, then it would be "lawful for him to have her"?

Brethren, while we are fighting the liberals on institutionalism, etc., let's not let Satan lull us into liberalism on matters of worldliness and morals.

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