

## ORDER AND DISCIPLINE IN THE NEW CREATION

### Discipline in the Ecclesia

#### —[Matt. 18:15-18](#)—

The administration of discipline is not the function of the elders only, but of the entire Church. If one appears to be in error or in sin, his supposed wrong should be pointed out to the erring one only by the one he has injured, or by the member first discovering the wrong. If the reprov'd one fails to clear himself, and *continues* in the error or sin, then two or three brethren without previous prejudice should be asked to hear the matter and advise the disputants. (Elders they may or may not be, but their eldership would add no force or authority in the case except as their judgment might be the riper and their influence the more potent.) If this committee decide unanimously with either party, the other should acquiesce and the matter be wholly at an end—correction, or restitution, so far as possible, being promptly made. If either of the original disputants still persists in the wrong course, the one who made the original charge or one of those called in committee or, preferably, all of these together, *may* then (but not sooner) exercise their privilege of bringing the matter before the *Ecclesia*, the body, the Church. Thus it is evident that the Elders were in no sense to be judges of the members—hearing and judgment were left to the local body, or Church.

The two preliminary steps (above mentioned) having been taken, the facts being certified to the elders, it would be their duty to call a general meeting of the *Ecclesia*, or consecrated body, as a *court*—to hear the case in all of its particulars, and in the name and reverence of its Head to render a decision. And the matter should be so clear, and the condemned should have such generous treatment, that the decision would be a unanimous one, or nearly so. Thus the peace and oneness of the body (the *Ecclesia*) would be preserved. Repentance even up to the moment of the Church's condemnation is possible. Nay, to secure repentance and reform is the very object of every step of these proceedings—to reclaim the transgressor; his *punishment* not at all the object. Punishment is not ours but God's: "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." ([Rom. 12:19](#)) Should the wrongdoer repent at any step in this proceeding, it should be a cause of thanksgiving and rejoicing to all who possess the Lord's Spirit, and no others are members of his body. [Rom. 8:9](#)

Indeed, even if the transgressor refuse to hear (obey) the decision of the entire Church, no punishment is to be inflicted or even attempted. What then? Merely the Church is to withdraw from him its fellowship and any and all signs or manifestations of brotherhood. Thenceforth the offender is to be treated "*as a heathen man and a publican.*" [Matt. 18:17](#)

At no time in these proceedings are the faults or failings of the offender to be made public property—scandalizing him and the Church, and the Lord, the Head of the Church. Nor is he to be harshly spoken of even after the separation; just as we are not to berate, or rail against, heathen men and publicans, but are to "speak evil of no man" and to "do good unto all men."

([Titus 3:2](#); [Gal. 6:10](#)) Love is the quality which insists on the strictest obedience to these last two requirements to "all men": how much more will love insist that a "brother," a fellow-member in the *Ecclesia*, the body of Christ, shall not only not be injured by false or garbled statements, but that additionally, his weaknesses or blunders or sins be carefully covered, not from the unsympathetic world only, but also from "the household of [faith]" and from even the Church—until the final step of "telling it to the Church" should be found absolutely necessary. At every step the spirit of love will hope that the wrongdoer is laboring under some misapprehensions, and will be praying for wisdom and grace to turn a sinner from the error of his way and thus (possibly) to save a soul from death. [James 5:20](#)

Oh, that the holy Spirit, the spirit of love, might dwell in every member of the *Ecclesia* so richly that it would give pain to hear a defamatory tale about anyone, and especially about a fellow-member! This would at once eliminate one-half the friction, or more. Nor would the following of the above procedure, outlined by our Lord, lead to *frequent* church trials: rather, while removing the ground for animosities, it would inculcate a respect for the judgment of the Church as being the judgment of the Lord, and the voice of the Church would be heard and obeyed accordingly. Furthermore, with order and love thus prevailing we may be sure that each would seek as far as possible to "mind his own business" and not attempt to reprove his brother or correct him, or bring the matter before a committee or the Church, unless the matter were one of some importance as concerned himself or the Church or the Truth.

Unquestionably, the majority of the Church troubles (and society and family troubles as well) spring not from a desire to wrong, nor even from a wrong unintentionally committed, but from misunderstandings and, at least, partial misinterpretations of intentions or motives. The tongue is the general mischief-maker; and it is part of the spirit of a sound mind, therefore, to set a guard upon the lips as well as upon the heart, from which proceed the ungenerous sentiments which, the lips expressing, set fire to evil passions and often injure many. The New Creation—the Church—has strict instructions from their Lord and Head on this important subject. His spirit of love is to fill them as they go *alone*, privately, to the injuring person without previous conference or talking with anyone. They go not to make him (or her) *ashamed of his conduct*, nor to berate him or otherwise punish, but to secure a cessation of the wrong and, if possible, some recompense for injury already received. Telling others of the wrong, first or afterward, is unkind, unloving—contrary to the Word and Spirit of our Head. Not even to ask *advice* should the matter be told: we have the Lord's *advice* and should follow it. If the case be a peculiar one, the wisest of the elders should be asked for advice along the lines of a hypothetical case, so as not to disclose the real trouble and wrongdoer.

Unless the trouble is serious, the matter ought to stop with the personal appeal to the erring one, whether he hears or forebears to hear—to yield. But if the second step be deemed necessary, no explanation of the trouble should be made to those asked to confer until they gather in the presence of the accuser and the accused. Thus slanderous "talk" will be avoided and the committee of brethren will come to the case unbiased and be the better able to counsel both parties wisely; for the trouble may be on both sides, or, possibly, wholly on the side of the accuser. At all events, the accused will be favorably impressed by such fair treatment and will be much more likely to yield to such counselors if his course seems to them also to be wrong. But whether the one deemed by the committee to be in error shall yield or not, the whole matter is still strictly private, and not a mention of it should be made to anyone until, if thought sufficiently important, it is brought before the Church, and passed upon finally. Then

for the first time it is common property to the saints only, and in proportion as they are *saints* they will desire to say no more than necessary to anyone respecting the weaknesses or sins of anybody.

In carrying out the findings of the Church court, the matter rests with each individual; hence, each must discern the justice of the decision for himself. The penalty of withdrawal of fellowship is designed to be a correction in righteousness, and is of the Lord's prescribing. It is to serve as a protection to the Church, to separate those who walk disorderly, not after the spirit of love. It is not to be esteemed a perpetual separation, but merely until the reprov'd one shall recognize and acknowledge his wrong and to the extent of his ability make amends.

### **Accusations Against Elders**

*"Against an Elder receive not an accusation, except at the mouth of two or three witnesses."* [1 Tim. 5:19](#), R.V.

The Apostle in this statement recognizes two principles. (1) That an Elder has already been recognized by the congregation as possessing a good and noble character, and as being specially earnest for the Truth, and devoted to God. (2) That such persons, by reason of their prominence in the Church, would be marked by the Adversary as special objects for his attacks—objects of envy, malice, hatred and strife on the part of some, even as our Lord forewarned—"Marvel not if the world hate you"; "ye know that it hated me before it hated you"; "If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household!" ([Matt. 10:25](#); [1 Jno. 3:13](#); [Jno. 15:18](#)) The more faithful and capable the brother, the more nearly a copy of his Master, the more proper his choice as an Elder; and the more faithful the Elder, the more sure he will be to have as enemies—not Satan and his messengers only, but as many also as Satan can delude and mislead.

These reasons should guarantee an Elder against condemnation on the word of any one person, if otherwise his life appeared consistent. As for hearsay or rumor, they were not to be considered at all; because no true yokefellow, cognizant of the Lord's rule ([Matt. 18:15](#)), would circulate rumors or have confidence in the word of those who would thus disregard the Master's directions. To be heard at all, the accusers must profess to have been *witnesses*. And even if two or more witnesses made charges there would be no other way of hearing the case than that already defined. Any one person charging wrong against the Elder, should, after personal conference failing, have taken with him two or three others who would thus become *witnesses* to the willful and obstinate resistance. Then the matter, still unamended, might be brought by Timothy or anyone before the Church, etc.

Indeed, this accusation before two or three witnesses, being the requirement as respects all of the members, leaves room for the supposition that the Apostle was merely claiming that an Elder should have every right and privilege guaranteed to any of the brethren. It may be that some were inclined to hold that since an Elder must be "well reported," not only in the Church, but out of it, an Elder should be arraigned upon the slightest charges, because of his influential position. But the Apostle's words settle it that an Elder's opportunities must equal those of others.

This matter of *witnesses* needs to be deeply engraved on the mind of every New Creature. What others claim to know and what they slanderously tell is not even to be heeded—not to be received. If two or three, following the Lord's directions, bring charges against anyone—not back-bitingly and slanderously but as instructed—before the Church, they are not even then to be believed; but then will be the proper time for the Church to *hear* the matter—hear both sides, in each other's presence; and then give a godly decision and admonition, so phrased as to help the wrongdoer back to righteousness and not to push him off into outer darkness.

### **Mistaken Calls to Preach**

A considerable number of people declare that they received of the Lord a *call* to preach the Gospel; perhaps they add in the next breath that they never knew why, or that they are aware that they have no special qualifications for the service, or that circumstances have always seemed to hinder them from responding to the call. Questioning them respecting the nature of the "call," develops the fact that it was merely an imagination or conjecture. One felt *impressed* at some time in his experience (perhaps before becoming a Christian at all) that he ought to devote himself to God and His service, and His highest ideal of God's service was drawn from his nominal church experiences, represented in the preacher whose services his family attended. Another felt impressed, and said to himself—How I would like to be able to wear the cloth and receive the respect and titles and salary of a preacher—even a second or third-rate one. If possessed of large self-esteem, too, he probably felt still further impressed that as the chosen apostles were "untalented and ignorant men," so, possibly, God had him specially in mind because of his lack of talent and education. God has favored many such, and his cause as well, in not opening the way to their ambitions, misconstrued to be his call to preach.

As already pointed out, every member of the New Creation is *called to preach*; not by his ambitions or imaginations, but by the Word, which calls upon all who receive the grace of God not in vain to "*show forth the praises* of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light." ([1 Pet. 2:9](#)) This call includes, therefore, all begotten of the spirit of the Truth—male and female, bond and free, rich and poor, educated and uneducated—black, brown, red, yellow and white. What further commission is needed than this—"He hath put a new song into my mouth," even "the loving kindness of Jehovah"? [Psa. 40:3; 107:43](#)

True, the Lord did *specially choose* and specially call the twelve apostles for a special work; true also he has proposed that in so far as his people will hearken to his words he will "*set* the various members in the body" as pleases him—some to one service and some to another, "to every man according to his several ability." ([Matt. 25:15](#)) But he clearly shows us that many will seek to "*set*" themselves as teachers; that it is the duty of the Church to look continually to him as their true Head and Leader, and not to favor the self-seeking ambitious brethren; that neglect of this duty will mean neglect of his words; deficiency, therefore, of love and obedience; and will surely be to the spiritual disadvantage of such an *Eccllesia*, as well as to the disadvantage of the self-set teacher.

The Lord's rule on this subject is clearly set forth to be—"He that humbleth himself shall be exalted; and he that exalteth himself shall be abased." ([Luke 14:11](#)) The Church is to follow this rule, this mind of the Spirit, in all matters in which she shall seek to know and obey her Lord. The Lord's method is to advance only him whose zeal and faithfulness and perseverance

in well-doing have shown themselves in little things. "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much." ([Luke 16:10](#)) "Thou hast been faithful over a few things: I will make thee ruler over many things." ([Matt. 25:21,23](#)) There is always plenty of room at the bottom of the ladder of honor. Whosoever wills, need not for long be without opportunities for serving the Lord, the Truth and the brethren in humble ways which the proud-spirited will disdain and neglect, looking for service more honorable in the sight of men. The faithful will rejoice in any service, and to them the Lord will open wider and yet wider doors of opportunity. Thus his will, exemplifying the wisdom from above, is to be carefully followed by every member of the New Creation—especially in his vote, in his stretching forth of his hand as a member of the body of Christ to express the will of the Head.

A self-seeking brother should be passed by, however capable; and a less capable, but humble, brother should be chosen for Elder. So gentle a reproof should be beneficial to all—even though not one word be uttered respecting the reasons governing. And in the case of a capable Elder giving evidence of a dictatorial spirit, or inclining to regard himself as above the Church and of a separate class, or implying a divine right to teach not coming through the *Ecclesia* (Church), it would be a kindness as well as a duty to such an one to drop him to some less prominent part of the service or from all special services for a time, until he shall take this gentle reproof and recover himself from the snare of the Adversary.

All are to remember that, like other faculties, *ambition* is necessary in the Church as well as in the world; but that in the New Creation it must not be a selfish ambition to be something great and prominent, but a loving ambition to serve the Lord and his people, even the very humblest. We all know how ambition led to Satan's fall—from the favor and service of God to the position of an enemy of his Creator and an opponent of all his righteous regulations. Similarly, all who adopt his course, saying, "I will ascend above the stars of God [I will set myself above others of the sons of God], I will be as the Most High—[a ruler amongst them, a usurper of divine authority without divine appointment, and contrary to the divine regulation]," are sure to suffer divine disapproval, and proportionate alienation from the Lord. And the influence of such, like Satan's, is sure to be injurious. As Satan would be an unsafe teacher, so are all who have his disposition sure to lead into darkness for light; because they are not in the proper attitude to receive the light and be used as messengers of it to others.

Whenever, therefore, any brother feels sure that he is called to preach in some public capacity when no door of service has been opened to him in the appointed manner—if he is inclined to force himself upon the Church, without its almost unanimous request—or if having been chosen to the position of a leader or Elder he seeks to hold the position and consider it his by right, without regular votes of the Church from time to time requesting his service continued, we may set it down either that the brother has not noted the proprieties of the case, or that he has the wrong, self-seeking spirit unsuitable to any service in the *Ecclesia*. In either event it will be the proper course to make a *change* at the first proper occasion for holding an election: and, as already suggested, the first Sunday of a year or in a quarter would be an appropriate time easily remembered.

## "Warn Them That Are Unruly"

*"We exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any, but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves and to all men." [1 Thess. 5:14,15](#)*

This exhortation is not to elders, but to the entire Church, including the elders. It takes cognizance of the fact that although the entire Church, as God's New Creation, has a perfect standing before him as New Creatures in Christ Jesus, nevertheless each and all of them have their imperfections according to the flesh. It shows, further, what we all recognize; viz., that there are differences in the degrees and in the kinds of our fleshly imperfections; so that, as in children of an earthly family different dispositions require different treatment by the parents, much more in the family of God there are such wide differences of disposition as to require special consideration one for the other. To take notice of each other's imperfections, from the standpoint of criticism, would be to do ourselves much injury, cultivating in our hearts a faultfinding disposition, keenly awake to the weaknesses and imperfections of others, and proportionately, perhaps, inclined to be blind to our own defects. Such criticism is entirely foreign to the spirit and intention of the Apostle's exhortation.

Those are addressed who have been begotten of the spirit of the truth, the spirit of holiness, the spirit of humility, the spirit of love. Such as are thus growing in the graces of the Spirit, will fear and criticize chiefly their own defects; while their love for others will lead them to make as many mental excuses and allowances for them as possible. But while this spirit of love is properly condoning the offenses and weaknesses of the brethren, it is to be on the alert, nevertheless, to do them good—not by bickering, strife, contention, chiding, faultfinding and slandering one another, but in a manner such as the Golden Rule, would approve. With gentleness, meekness, long-suffering and patience, it will seek to make allowance for each other's weaknesses, and at the same time to help each other out of them, each remembering his own weaknesses of some kind.

The *unruly* are not to be comforted and supported and encouraged in their wrong way; but in kindness, in love, they are to be admonished that God is a God of order; and that in proportion as we would grow in His likeness and favor we must observe rules of order. They should be admonished that nothing is further from the divine arrangement than anarchy; and that as even worldly people recognize the principle that the worst form of government imaginable is preferable to anarchy, so much the more should God's people, who have received the spirit of a sound mind, the holy Spirit, recognize this same principle in the Church; and the Apostle exhorts us to submit ourselves one to the other, for the sake of the general interests of the Lord's cause. If we were all perfect, and our judgment of the Lord's will perfect, we would all think exactly the same—there would be no particular necessity for submitting one to another; but since our judgments differ, it is necessary that each consider the other and the other's standpoint of observation and judgment, and that each seek to yield something in the interest of general peace—yea, to yield everything so as to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace in the body of Christ, except where principle would be infringed by such a course.

The unruly or disorderly are not entirely to blame for their condition, perhaps. Many people are born disorderly and inclined to be so in their dress and in all their affairs in life. Disorderliness, therefore, is a part of their weakness, which should be thought of

sympathetically, kindly, but, nevertheless, should not be permitted to do injury to the Church of God, to hinder its usefulness, to prevent its cooperation in the study and service of the Truth. It is not the will of God that his people should have that meekness which would amount to weakness in dealing with disorderly persons. Kindly, lovingly, but firmly, they should be shown that, as order is heaven's first law, so it must be highly esteemed amongst those who are heavenly-minded; and that it would be sinful for the congregation to permit one or two or more of its members to do violence to the divine regulations, as expressed in the Word of God and as generally understood by the congregation with which he is associated.

### **Admonishing Not a General Order**

It would be a great mistake, however, to suppose that the Apostle, in using this general language to the Church, meant that every individual of the Church was to do such admonishing. To admonish wisely, helpfully, is a very delicate matter indeed, and remarkably few have a talent for it. The election of elders on the part of congregations is understood to signify the election of those of the number possessed of the largest measure of spiritual development, combined with natural qualifications to constitute them the representatives of the congregation, not only in respect to the leading of meetings, etc., but also in respect to keeping order in the meetings and admonishing unruly ones wisely, kindly, firmly. That this is the Apostle's thought is clearly shown in the two preceding verses, in which he says:

*"We beseech you, brethren, to 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 works' sake. And be at peace amongst yourselves." [1 Thess. 5:12,13](#)*

If divine wisdom has been properly sought and properly exercised in the choosing of elders of a congregation, it follows that those thus chosen were very highly esteemed; and since novices are not to be chosen, it follows that these were appreciated and selected for their works' sake, because it was discerned by the brethren that they had a considerable measure of the holy spirit of love and wisdom and meekness, besides certain natural gifts and qualifications for this service. To "be at peace amongst yourselves," as the Apostle exhorts, would mean that, having chosen these elders to be the representatives of the congregation, the body in general would *look to them to perform the service to which they were chosen*, and would not attempt to take it each upon himself to be a reprover, or admonisher, etc. Indeed, as we have already seen, the Lord's people are not to judge one another personally; and only the congregation as a whole may exclude one of the number from the fellowship and privileges of the meeting. And this, we have seen, can come only after the various steps of a more private kind have been taken—after all efforts to bring about reform have proved unavailing, and the interests of the Church in general are seriously threatened by the wrong course of the offender. But in the text before us the Apostle exhorts that the congregation shall "know"—that is, recognize, look to—those whom they have chosen as their representatives, and expect them to keep guard over the interests of the Church, and to do the admonishing of the unruly, up to the point where matters would be serious enough to bring them before the Church as a court.

## Public Rebukes Rare

This admonishing, under some circumstances, might need to be done publicly before the congregation, as the Apostle suggests to Timothy: "Them that sin [publicly] rebuke before all, that others also may fear." ([1 Tim. 5:20](#)) Such a public rebuke necessarily implies a *public sin of a grievous nature*. For any comparatively slight deviation from rules of order the elders, under the law of love, and the Golden Rule, should surely "consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works," and so considering they would know that a word in private would probably be much more helpful to the individual than a public rebuke, which might cut or wound or injure a sensitive nature where such wounding was entirely unnecessary, and where love would have prompted a different course. But even though an Elder should rebuke a grievous sin publicly, it should be done, nevertheless, lovingly, and with a desire that the reprov'd one might be corrected and helped back, and not with a desire to make him odious and to cast him forth. Nor, indeed, does it come within the Elder's province to rebuke any to the extent of debarring them from the privileges of the congregation. Rebuke to this extent, as we have just seen, can proceed only from the Church as a whole, and that after a full hearing of the case, in which the accused one has full opportunity for either defending himself or amending his ways and being forgiven. The Church, the *Ecclesia*, the consecrated of the Lord, are, as a whole, his representatives, and the Elder is merely the Church's representative—the Church's best conception of the Lord's choice. The Church, therefore, and not the elders, constitute the court of last resort in all such matters; hence, an elder's course is always subject to review or correction by the Church, according to the united judgment of the Lord's will.

While considering this phase of the subject, we might pause a moment to inquire the extent to which the Church, directly or indirectly, or through its elders, is to exercise this duty of admonishing the disorderly, and of eventually excluding them from the assembly. It is not within the power of the Church to exclude permanently. The brother who, having offended either a brother member or the whole Church body, returns again and says, "I repent of my wrong course, and promise my best endeavors to do right in the future," or the equivalent of this, is to be forgiven—fully, freely—as heartily as we hope the Lord will forgive the trespasses of all. No one but the Lord has the power or authority to cut off any individual everlastingly—the power to sever a branch from the Vine. We are informed that there is a sin unto death, for which it is useless to pray ([1 John 5:16](#)); and we are to expect that such a willful sin as would thus bring the penalty of the Second Death would be so open, so flagrant, as to be readily discerned by those who are in fellowship with the Lord. We are not to judge of any by what is in their hearts, for we cannot read their hearts; but if they commit willful sin unto death it will surely become manifest outwardly—by their lips, if they are doctrinal transgressions, denying the precious blood of atonement; or by their immoralities, if they have turned to walk after the flesh, "like the sow that is washed, to her wallowing in the mire." It is respecting such as these, referred to in [Heb. 6:4-8; 10:26-31](#), that the Apostle warns us to have no dealings whatever—not to eat with them, not to receive them into our houses, and not to bid them Godspeed ([2 John 9-11](#)); because those who would affiliate with them or bid them Godspeed would be accounted as taking their places as enemies of God, and as partaking of the evil deeds or evil doctrines, as the case might be.

But in respect to others, who "walk disorderly," the regulation is very different. Such an excluded brother or sister should not be treated as an enemy, nor thought of as such; but as an erring brother, as the Apostle says further on in this same epistle, "If any man obey not our

word by this epistle [if he be disorderly, unwilling to submit himself to sound reasoning and loving, generous rules of order] note that man, and have no company with him, to the end that he may be ashamed; yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." ([2 Thess. 3:14,15](#)) Such a case as this would imply some open, public opposition on the part of the brother to the rules of order laid down by the Apostle, as the Lord's mouthpiece; and such a public opposition to right principles should be rebuked by the congregation, should they decide that the brother is so out of order that he needs admonishing; and if he do not consent to the form of sound words, sent us by our Lord through the Apostle, he should be considered as so out of accord as to make it no longer proper that he should have the fellowship of the brethren until he would consent to these reasonable requirements. He should not be passed by on the street unnoticed by the brethren, but be treated courteously. The exclusion should be merely from the privileges of the assembly and from any special brotherly associations, etc., peculiar to the faithful. This is implied also in our Lord's words, "Let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican." Our Lord did not mean that we should do injury to a heathen man or a publican, nor treat either in any manner unkindly; but merely that we should not fellowship such as *brethren*, nor seek their confidences, nor as New Creatures give them ours. The household of faith is to be cemented and bound together with mutual love and sympathy, and expressions of these in various ways. It is from the lack of these privileges and blessings that the excluded brother is caused to suffer, until he feels that he must reform his ways and return to the family gathering. There is a suggestion in this respect to warmth, to cordiality, to true brotherliness, that should prevail amongst those who are members of the Lord's body.