

[F315]

STUDY VI Part 4—Doctrine and Meetings

ORDER AND DISCIPLINE IN THE NEW CREATION

Doctrine Still Necessary

Respecting the first proposition: We are living in a time when doctrines in general are being sneered at, and when quite a good many claim that doctrine and faith are of no value in comparison to works and morals. We cannot agree with this, because we find it entirely out of accord with the divine Word, in which faith is placed first and works second. It is our faith that is accepted of the Lord, and according to our faith he will reward us, though He will properly expect that a good faith will bring forth as many good works as the weaknesses of the earthen vessel will permit. This is the rule of faith everywhere laid down in the Scriptures. "Without faith it is impossible to please God." "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." ([Heb. 11:6](#); [1 John 5:4](#)) No man can properly be an overcomer, therefore, unless he exercise faith in God and in His promises; and in order to exercise faith in the promises of God he must understand them; and this opportunity and ability to grow strong in faith will be in proportion to his understanding of the divine plan of the ages, and the exceeding great and precious promises connected therewith. Hence, doctrine—instruction—is important, not merely for the knowledge which God's people are to have and to enjoy above and beyond the knowledge of the world in things pertaining to God, but especially because of the influence which this knowledge will exercise upon all hopes and aims and conduct. "He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself" ([1 John 3:3](#)) is a Scriptural expression which fully coincides with the foregoing statements. He who would endeavor to purify himself, to cleanse his conduct, must, to be successful, begin as the Scriptures begin, with the heart, and must progress, using, for a cleansing, the inspired promises. And this means a knowledge of the doctrines of Christ.

It is appropriate, however, that we clearly distinguish and differentiate between the doctrines of Christ and the doctrines of men. The doctrines of Christ are those which he himself and his inspired apostles have set before us in the New Testament. The doctrines of men are represented in the creeds of men, many of which are grossly and seriously at variance with the doctrines of the Lord, and all of them in disagreement with each other. Moreover, it is not sufficient that we be indoctrinated once; for, as the Apostle intimates, we receive the treasures of God's grace into poor earthen vessels which are very leaky; and hence, if we cease to receive we will cease to have; for which cause it is necessary that we have "line upon line, precept upon precept," and that we continually renew and review our study of the divine plan of the ages, using whatever helps and assistances divine providence supplies, seeking so far as possible to obey the Apostle's injunction to be—"not forgetful hearers, but doers of the work," and thus "doers of the Word." [James 1:22-25](#)

Our second proposition is one that may not at once be so fully appreciated as the first. It is apt to be the thought of many, if not of all, that those who can express the truth most clearly, most fluently, most accurately, should be the only ones to express it, and that the others should keep silence and hear and learn. This thought is right in many respects. It is not our suggestion that any should be put to teach or be looked up to as teachers, or their words received as instruction, who are incapable of giving instruction, and who do not clearly apprehend the divine plan. But there is a great difference between setting such to teach—as in the case of elders—and having a meeting at which all members of the New Creation would have an opportunity of *briefly expressing themselves or asking questions*, with the understanding that their questions or doubts or expressions are not upheld by the Church as being the sentiments of the company. At such meetings, wrong ideas may possibly be set forth in the form of questions—not with an intention of teaching these opinions, nor with the purpose of enforcing them, but with a view to having them criticized. But beware of violating conscience by any attempt to defend error. Such procedure should be sanctioned only in the presence of someone advanced in the Truth and able to give a Scriptural reason for his faith, and to show the way of the Lord more perfectly. Is it asked, What advantage could come from such a course? We reply that we have frequently seen the advantages demonstrated. It is often difficult—sometimes impossible—to state matters in the simplest and most direct manner; and it is equally impossible for all minds, however honest, to grasp a subject with an equal degree of clearness from the same illustration. Hence the value of questions, and of a variety of presentations of the same truth, as illustrated in our Lord's parables, which present subjects from various standpoints, affording a more complete and harmonious view of the whole. So, too, we have noticed that the blundering and somewhat bungling statement of a truth may, at times, effect an entrance into some minds where a more sound and more logical statement had failed—the incompetence of the speaker matching in some respects the lower plane of reason and judgment in the hearer. We are to rejoice if the Gospel is preached and finds a lodgment in hungry hearts, whatever the channel, as the Apostle explains—"some even preach Christ of contention and vainglory." We can only rejoice if some are brought to a proper knowledge of the Lord, even though we must greatly regret the improper motives of the presentation; or, as in the other case, the imperfection of the presentation. It is the Lord and the Truth and the brethren that we love and desire to serve; and, hence, we must rejoice in anything which brings the desired results, and should make our arrangements so as not to interfere with this, which we recognize to be a fact. This does not signify that the illogical and incompetent should be *set* to teach in the Church, nor that we should imagine that the illogical presentations would be the most successful in general. Quite the contrary. Nevertheless, we are not *wholly to ignore* that which we see is sometimes a channel of blessing to some minds and which has the backing of primitive Church usage.

In support of our third proposition: No matter how confident we are that we have the truth, it would certainly be unwise for us so to shut and lock the door of interrogation and contrary expressions as thoroughly to exclude all that might be considered error by the leader of the meeting or by the entire congregation. One limitation alone should prevail to a thorough exclusion; viz., that the gatherings of the New Creatures are not for the consideration of secular subjects, worldly sciences and philosophies, but solely for the study of the divine revelation; and in the study of the divine revelation the congregation should first, last and always recognize the difference between the foundation principles of the doctrines of Christ (which no member may change or alter, nor consent to have questioned) and the discussion of advanced doctrines,

which must be fully in accord with the foundation principles. The latter should at all times have full, free opportunities to be heard, and there should be meetings at which they can be heard. This, however, does not mean that they should be heard over and over, and that some individual should be permitted to confuse and distract every meeting and every topic with some particular hobby. Let his hobby have a fair hearing and a fair discussion at an appropriate time, in the presence of some well versed in the Truth, and if ruled out by the congregation as unscriptural, and the promoter of the thought be not convinced of its unscripturalness, let him at least refrain from intruding the subject upon the notice of the Church for a long time—perhaps a year—when he might without impropriety request another hearing, which might or might not be granted, as the congregation should think the matter worthy or unworthy of hearing and investigation.

What we urge is, that unless there be some such vent, two dangers may be encountered: One, the danger of falling into the condition we see prevailing now in the nominal churches of Christendom, in which it is impossible to find access to their ears through their regular Church meetings, every avenue of approach being carefully guarded. The other danger is, that the individual having a theory which appeals to his judgment as truth—no matter how false and irrational it might be—would never feel satisfied unless it should have a reasonable hearing, but would be continually obtruding the topic; whereas, after having been heard reasonably, even if not convinced of the error of his argument, he would be disarmed as respects the impropriety of intruding the matter upon those who have already heard and rejected his thought.

Our fourth proposition: Growth in knowledge is very liable to detract from devotion—strange as it may appear that it should be so. We find our capacities so small, and our time for religious things so limited, that if attention be energetically directed in one channel it is apt to lead to dwarfing in other directions. The Christian is not to be all head and no heart, nor all heart and no head. The "spirit of a sound mind" directs us to cultivate all the fruits and graces which go to round out and complete a perfect character. The tendency of our day in all matters is in the opposite direction—to specialize. One workman does this part, another workman that part; so that now very few workmen understand a trade in full as in former times. The New Creature must resist this tendency, and must "make straight paths for his feet" accordingly; lest while cultivating one element of grace he falls into danger through the lack of the proper exercise of another God-given faculty or privilege.

The qualities of devotion are found in all mankind in a greater or less degree of development. These mental qualities are called veneration and spirituality, and they summon to their aid the organs of conscience, hope, tune, etc. If these be neglected, the result will be that interest in and love for the Truth will degenerate; so that instead of our hearts being led to the Lord with greater appreciation of his love, and with greater desire to please, honor and serve him, we will find the lower organs joining more in the controversy, taking the places of these higher ones, and the investigations will come to be more in the light of mental philosophies, into which will enter combativeness and destructiveness, ambition, strife and vainglory. The New Creation needs, therefore, not only to unite devotional services, prayer and praise, as a part of every meeting, but, we believe, needs in addition a special meeting of a devotional kind once a week, joined with which should be opportunities for testimony respecting Christian experiences—not according to the usual custom of going back from one to twenty years or more to tell about a first conversion, etc., but an up-to-date testimony, referring specifically to the condition of the heart at the moment, and during the week intervening since the last meeting

of a similar kind. Such up-to-date testimonies prove helpful to those who hear; sometimes encouraging them by the rehearsal of favorable experiences, and sometimes comforting them by the narration of trials, difficulties, perplexities, etc., because they thus discern that they are not alone in having trying experiences, and sometimes failures.

Thus all may learn more fully the meaning of the words of the Apostle, "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which shall try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you." ([1 Pet. 4:12](#)) They find that all who are the Lord's people have trials and difficulties, and each learns thus to sympathize with the other; and as the bond of sympathy grows the spirit of helpfulness grows, and the spirit of love—the holy Spirit. Such midweek meetings could advantageously have a topic suggested at the previous Sunday gathering; and this topic being before the minds of the class should inspire each to mark the passing experiences of life, and to make note of them, especially along the line of the particular topic for the week. Undoubtedly every Christian has an abundance of opportunities for noting the lessons and experiences of life along various lines every week; but the majority, not thinking, not noticing, permit these valuable lessons to flow past them unrecognized, and learn chiefly from the larger and more bitter experiences of life what they might better have learned by taking heed to the Lord's daily dealings with them through his providences.

To illustrate: Suppose that the topic for the week had been, "The peace of God," from the text, "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep [guard in] your hearts." ([Phil. 4:7](#)) Each of the brotherhood should take notice during the week to what extent this scripture found fulfilment in his own case; and what things seemed to interrupt and prevent this ruling peace—bringing in disquiet, discontent. These experiences and the lessons drawn from them, told by those in the group more expert, and by those less expert (male and female) would not only bring to each other's attention their own experiences during the forepart of the week, but in the after part would add to their own experiences the lessons and experiences of others, thus broadening their sympathies and leading them more and more to discern the beauties of peace in contrast with strife—the blessing of the peace of God in the heart; and how it is possible to have this peace even when surrounded by turmoil and confusion or distressing conditions over which we have no control. The devotional feature of these meetings will add to their benefit. He who realizes most keenly his own defects, and who is most earnestly striving to grow in the graces of the Spirit, will be the most earnest in his devotions to the Lord and in his desires to please him and to partake more and more of his holy Spirit.*

*There are meetings of the character here described held in various localities, convenient to the little groups who constitute them.

In these meetings, as in all others, it is apparent that the greatest good can be accomplished by preserving order—not to the extent of destroying the life and liberty of the meeting, but to the proper extent of best preserving its liberty, without anarchy or disorder, under wise, loving, gentle restraint. For instance: The character of the meeting should be understood in advance; and it would be the duty of the leader to hold it, with reasonable, loving laxity, to its specified and agreed-upon purpose. It should be understood that these are not general question-meetings, nor meetings for discussion, nor for preaching; that other meetings are provided, and that those

who wish are welcome to attend them; but that these meetings have a limited scope. To keep the meeting thus properly in line, and to avoid private discussions or replies of one individual to another, the leader—being the one chosen to represent the whole—should be the only one to reply or to criticize others—and then only when *necessary*. It is his bounden duty to see that some testimonies are not so lengthy as to be tedious and hinder others from having opportunity, and that the meeting is not prolonged beyond its reasonable, agreed-upon, length. All these things devolving upon the leader, imply that he should be an Elder in the Church. A novice of insufficient experience would be apt, even with the best of intentions, to be either too lax or too rigid in applying principles to such an occasion; he might either spoil the meetings with too great leniency, or offend some worthy brother or sister by an unwisely expressed correction and application of proper rules. Moreover, the leader of such a meeting should be an Elder, or one competent to hold the position of an Elder in the Church, so that he might have a sufficiency of knowledge of the Word, and experience in grace and teaching ability to be able to give a word of encouragement or counsel or helpful advice *in response* to the various testimonies as presented. For "A word in due season, how good it is!"—how much more helpful, often, than a whole discourse under other conditions. [Prov. 15:23](#)

Although in the foregoing we have indicated various interests that should be provided for in the meetings, we have described particularly only the last—which, by the way, we consider one of the most important of all: the one meeting most helpful in spiritual growth. Let us now glance at what might be good arrangements respecting other meetings. These would differ according to the circumstances, conditions, and numbers constituting the gathering—the *Ecclesia*, the body. If the number were fifty or so, and if some of the number were particularly talented in public speaking and clear exposition of the Truth, we advise that one preaching service in the week might generally be advantageous—especially as the meeting to which friends, neighbors or others might be invited. But if in the Lord's providence none of the company are specially qualified for the presentation of a connected, logical, reasonable discourse on some Scriptural topic, we believe it would be better that this form of meeting be not attempted, or that the time be divided between several possessed of some ability to treat a Scriptural subject thus connectedly in public, the topic being the same and the brethren taking turns in leading off. Or such elders might alternate, one this Sunday, another next, and so on, or two this Sunday, two next, and so on. It would appear that the best interests of the whole Church are conserved by the bringing forward and granting opportunities to *all* the brethren *in proportion* to their ability—always estimating that humility and clearness in the Truth are absolutely the primary essentials—not flourish and oratory.

But the most important meeting in our judgment, the most helpful, next to the devotional meeting first described, is one in which the whole company of believers take part under sometimes one chairman, or leader, and sometimes another. For these meetings either a topic or a text of Scripture may be taken up for discussion, and the leader, looking over the subject in advance, should be intrusted with authority to divide it amongst leading brethren, if possible appointing them their parts a week in advance, that they may come to the meeting prepared to offer suggestions, each along the line of his own particular department of the topic. These principal participants in the examination of the subject (perhaps two, or perhaps a half dozen, or more, as the number of competent persons, the size of the congregation, and the weight of the topic might demand) will find the new Berean Bibles with the references to *Studies* and *Towers* and the Topical Indexes, very helpful. Let them either present the matter

in their own language, or find special extracts from *Studies, Towers*, etc., right to the point, which they might read in connection with some appropriate remarks.

When the meeting has been opened by praise and prayer, the topics may be called for in their proper turn by the Chairman; and after each appointed speaker has presented his findings on his phase of the subject it should be open to the entire class for questions and expressions, either in harmony with, or in opposition to, what has already been presented by the leading speaker on the topic. If the class appear disinclined to discuss, and need drawing out, the Chairman should do this by skillful questions. The Chairman only should address the speakers or attempt to *answer* or harmonize their declarations; though, of course, he may call upon any speaker for a further explanation of his position or reasons. The speakers should all address their remarks to the Chairman and never to each other, and thus danger of personality and wrangling may be avoided. The Chairman should take no other part than as above in connection with the discussion, but should be able at the close to draw together the various findings, briefly summarizing the whole subject from his own standpoint, before closing the session with praise and thanksgiving.

Each point may be gone through with, and the entire subject be well ventilated and investigated, so that it will be clearly discerned by all. Or, in some of the more complex subjects, the Chairman might better sum up and give his views at the close of the examination of each topic. We know of no better kind of meeting than this for a thorough study of the divine Word. We consider it much more advantageous usually than regular preaching for the majority of gatherings of the Lord's people.

A meeting of this kind includes all the features covered by the suggestions numbered 1, 2 and 3, foregoing. As respects the first, those who are assigned the leading parts have full opportunity for the exercise of whatever abilities they possess. In regard to the second point, all have an opportunity of taking part, asking questions, offering suggestions, etc., following each of the leading speakers on the several points. And as to the third point, it also is accommodated by such a meeting as this, because the topics for each week should preferably be decided on by the whole class, and not by the leader, and at least a week ahead of their discussion.

Any one in attendance at such a class should have the privilege of presenting his question or topic, and the spirit of love and sympathy and helpfulness and consideration pervading all should be such that all proper topics would be accorded a respectful hearing. And in the case of a special request for a topic supposed to be contrary to the general views of the congregation, yet fully within the lines of the foundation principles of the Gospel, the person desirous of having the subject discussed should be granted a reasonable time for the presentation, and should be the chief speaker for the occasion, his time possibly being limited, say, to thirty minutes or more or less, according to the importance of the topic and the interest of the class in it. Following his presentation the question should be open for discussion by the others of the class, the propounder of the question having a few minutes granted him subsequently for a brief answer to any objections brought forward by others, the Chairman having the final word in closing the meeting.

Another kind of meeting which has proven very advantageous in the study of the Word is known as a "Berean Circle for Bible study." These are not merely reading circles, but a systematic study of the divine plan in all its phases, taken up item by item. The several volumes of SCRIPTURE STUDIES, treating the subjects, as they do, in a connected and consecutive

order, constitute (with the Bible) textbooks for these Bible studies; but in order to the profit of these classes it is necessary that the leader and the class should clearly differentiate between reading and studying. So far as the reading is concerned, all of the dear friends can as well, or perhaps better, do their reading by themselves at home. The object of these studies is to take up a certain portion of each topic as presented in one or more paragraphs, and to discuss it thoroughly between themselves, calling up collateral passages of Scripture, etc., and thoroughly ventilating the matter, and, if possible, getting each member of the class to give an expression of his thought respecting the particular matter under consideration, proceeding then to the next topic. Some of these Berean Circles have taken a year or two for the study of a single volume of SCRIPTURE STUDIES—and that to great interest and profit.*

*There are meetings of this kind held in various localities, and on evenings most convenient for the friends attending each. They are led by various brethren-elders.

"Let Every Man Be Fully Persuaded in His Own Mind"

—[Rom. 14:5](#)—

All logical minds delight in reaching a *decision*, if possible, respecting every item of truth; and this the Apostle declares should be striven for by each member of the Church for himself—"in his own mind." It is a common mistake, however, to attempt to apply this personally good rule to a Church or to a class in Bible-study—to attempt to force all to *decide* on exactly the same conclusion respecting the meaning of the Lord's Word. It is proper that we should wish that all might "see eye to eye"; but it is not reasonable to expect it when we know that all are fallen from perfection, not only of body, but also of mind, and that these deflections are in various directions... in any gathering of people. Our various kinds and degrees of education are important factors also in assisting or hindering oneness of view.

But does not the Apostle intimate that we should all mind the same things?—and that we will be all taught of God so that we will all have the spirit of a sound mind?—and that we should expect to grow in grace and knowledge, building one another up in the most holy faith?

Yes, all this is true; but it is not intimated that it will all be attained in one meeting. The Lord's people not only have differently developed brains, and differences in experience or education, but they are additionally of different ages as New Creatures—babes, youths, matured. It must not surprise us, therefore, if some are slower than others to comprehend and, hence, slower to be fully persuaded in their own minds respecting some of "the deep things of God." They must grasp the *fundamentals*—that all were sinners; that Christ Jesus, our Leader, *redeemed* us by his sacrifice finished at Calvary; that we are now in the School of Christ to be taught and fitted for the Kingdom and its service; and that none enter this School except upon full consecration of their all to the Lord. These things all must see and fully and always assent to, else we could not recognize them as even baby brothers in the New Creation; but we have all need of patience with each other, and forbearance with each other's peculiarities—and behind these must be *love*, increasing every grace of the Spirit as we attain more and more nearly to its fulness.

This being so, all questions, all answers, all remarks—in meetings where several participate—should be *for* the entire company present (and not personal to any one or any number), and should, therefore, be *addressed to the Chairman*, who represents all—except

when the Chairman may for convenience request the speaker to face and address the audience direct. Hence, too, after having expressed his own view, each is quietly to hear the views of others and not feel called to debate or restate his already stated position. Having used his opportunity, each is to trust to the Lord to guide and teach and show the truth, and should not insist that all must be *made to see* every item as he sees it, nor even as the majority view it. "On essentials, unity; on non-essentials, charity," is the proper rule to be followed.

We agree, however, that every item of truth is important, and that the smallest item of error is injurious, and that the Lord's people should pray and strive for unity in knowledge; but we must not hope to attain this by force. Unity of spirit on the first basic principles of truth is the important thing; and where this is maintained we may be confident that our Lord will *guide* all possessing it into all truth due and necessary to him. It is in this connection that the leaders of the Lord's flock need special wisdom and love and force of character and clearness in the Truth, so that at the conclusion of each meeting he who has led may be able to summarize the Scriptural findings and leave all minds under their blessed influence—expressing himself clearly, positively, lovingly—but never dogmatically, except upon the foundation principles.