

Discipline:

The accountability factor - (part 1 of 2)

Discipline is a process that keeps an individual or group of persons accountable to a set of agreed-to standards and to each other. It is profitable to understand discipline and its application personally and in groups of which we are a part. It is of vital importance to life itself.

The root word of discipline is *disciple*, defined as “one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another.” “*Discipline*” must be defined as a noun and a verb. Discipline as a noun is defined as; “*a subject that is taught; a field of study; training that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character.*” As such, it is a continuous, proactive activity.

As a verb, *discipline* means “*to train or develop by instruction and exercise especially in self- control.*” or “*to bring a group under control.*” Properly applied it is also proactive until mastery is achieved. If disciplinary efforts fail, a synonym for discipline, “punishment,” is administered as a result of failure.

The exercise of discipline is necessary in our personal lives, family lives, professional lives and the communal life of the church. To live an undisciplined life ensures failure, loss of achievement and unhappiness. This treatise will examine discipline’s value in a believer’s personal and family life, as well as his or her function as a productive member of society and his or her covenant fellowship of believers.

Personal discipline:

The Apostle Paul had a perfect understanding of discipline. The application of it in his personal life is a model for every believer. Consider the following statements: “*I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*” (Gal. 2:20) Christianity is a perfect example of discipline as a noun, “*training that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character,*” taught and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

He then reveals the need to apply discipline as an action verb declared in 1 Cor. 9:26-27; “*I therefore so run, not as uncertainly, so fight I, not as one that beateth the air, **But I keep under my body, and bring it under subjection:** lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.*” He describes a conscious effort through **disciplined** living as necessary to live victoriously in Christ. His desire to please his Master was so acute that he declared in his letter to the Galatians; “*But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom **the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world.***” (Gal. 6:14) It should be a greater challenge for us to serve Christ faithfully than it was for King David to please God. David lived in the Old Covenant, yet he declared in Psalm 139, verses 23 and 24, “*Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*” Should not we who are called the children of God be humbled when we read this?

Discipline in the family:

In addition to our personal lives, those of us who have been blessed with families need to project our disciplined way of living to our offspring. The family is the smallest unit of society and the church. The discipline of true Christianity must be the bedrock of our homes and value system that motivates everything that happens in our homes and wherever the family goes. Father and mother, working together to raise their children for God’s Kingdom, are the first line missionaries of this effort. Training our children to become

disciples of the Lord begins before they are born as we pray for God's grace and wisdom to nurture and rear them for Him. Our parenting will soon reveal to whom or to what we have dedicated them.

In the process the scriptures exhort parents to remember, "*Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him..*" (Proverbs 22:15) On the other hand, Paul writes to the Ephesians. "*And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*" The parameters for parental guidance and discipline are set in these two verses. What falls between them is the tedious task of being parents, requiring love, patience, wisdom and the grace of God. It has been said the finest gift a father can give to his children is to love their mother.

Moses provided clear direction from God to the Israelites as to how they should serve and obey him. It contained parental guidance that, if followed, would ensure their survival for generations. Included were:

Be living examples of keeping the commandments – (Deut. 6:6)

Diligently teaching the commandments to their children in every facet of life – (Deut. 6:7-9)

Warning them of the dangers of affluence – (Deut. 6:10-12)

Encouraging them to serve God and none other – (Deut. 6:13-15)

Be ready to explain why the commandments were given and rewards for keeping them – (Deut. 6:20-25)

The Lord also commands today's parents to be teachers of their offspring in the most critical time of their lives. The pre-school years are for building the foundation of their children's value system by instilling in them the Judeo-Christian ethic, including faith in God and steps to salvation. How sad that many parents take their children to others to teach and train them in the rudimentary life skills. Few hirelings are capable of instilling those important values. No other time will be available for that important labor of love.

Proverbs 22:6 exhorts parents to "*Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*" Notice it says "*train up,*" not raise up a child. Training is time consuming and requires much discipline on the part of the parents to stay focused on training their child. Nothing is of greater importance at this time of their lives. Proper training has four distinct facets that cannot be compromised. They are: explaining what needs to be done; showing the way to do it; watching them do it until they have mastered it; and checking from time to time to see if they are still doing it correctly.

We must remember when communicating with anyone, in addition to our choice of words, our tone of voice and body language is very important. Children are very sensitive to *how* we say things. The awareness that we are making an eternal investment for the Kingdom of God is a tremendous motivator not to give up the fight for their souls! 3rd John 4 expresses the deep satisfaction of godly parents; "*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.*"

The salutation in the Apostle Paul's beautiful second letter to Timothy reveals the reward of dedicated parenting. "*I thank God whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day; Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy; When I call to remembrance **the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother, and in thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded in thee also.***" (2 Tim. 1:3-5)

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