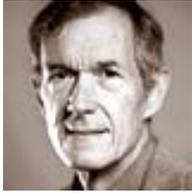


## Feature Article Two

# The Purpose of Discipline

(taken from *A Guide to Church Discipline*)

J. Carl Laney



Many people fail to make a clear distinction between punishment and discipline, and there is a very significant difference between these two concepts. Punishment is designed to execute *retribution* for a wrong done. Discipline, on the other hand, is designed to encourage the *restoration* of one involved in wrongdoing. Punishment is designed primarily to avenge a wrong and assert justice. Discipline is designed primarily as a corrective for the one who has failed to live according to the standards of the church and/or society.

Shortly after midnight on September 6, 1983, Jimmy Lee Gray entered the gas chamber at the state penitentiary in Parchman, Mississippi, and was executed for the rape and murder of a three-year old girl. Although Gray had become a Christian in 1977 while awaiting trial, the state of Mississippi determined that the death sentence was proper for one who had committed such a violent and costly crime. That's punishment.

Some time ago a member of a large urban church began making false accusations about the pastors. When confronted by the pastor about his lying and gossiping, the man was quite unresponsive to the rebuke. Eventually the matter was brought before the board of deacons. When challenged by the church leaders as to his false accusations and gossiping, the offender insisted on justifying himself in spite of the overwhelming evidence against him. Finally, a special meeting of the church was convened at which the deacons explained the situation and the member in question was given a chance to respond. The congregation then voted to dismiss the man from church membership. That's discipline. The action taken by the church was not designed to hurt, but to heal. The church's firm discipline was intended to turn the sinner from his way and restore him to fellowship with Christ, the pastor and the church.

Luis Palau presents a sound biblical perspective on church discipline when he points out that discipline is not carried out to punish, but "to awaken people to their sin." He adds that church discipline "is not carried out in cruelty to destroy, but rather in love to produce conviction, sorrow, repentance, and restoration."<sup>1</sup> The church has not been entrusted by God with the responsibility of executing judgment on errant saints. That is God's business. "Vengeance is *Mine*, I will repay, says the Lord" (Ro 12:19). ". . . fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (He 13:4). But God has entrusted the church with the authority and responsibility to carry out discipline. As an essential aspect of discipleship, discipline's purpose is always to help, heal, and restore a wayward saint. Several biblical texts provide insight into this subject.

### To Turn About – 2 Thessalonians 3:14

In his concluding comments of his second Thessalonian epistle, Paul gives teeth to the matter of obedience: "And if anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame" (2 Th 3:14). The last clause of the verse makes clear that the discipline of disassociation has a definite purpose.

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<sup>1</sup> Luis Palau, "Discipline in the Church." *Discipleship Journal* (Issue 16, 1983), p. 18.

The Greek word *entrepo*, translated “be put to shame,” is derived from the word *trepo*, meaning “to turn or direct someone or something.” With the preposition *en* (“in”), *entrepo* means “to turn about” or “to turn in.” The word may convey the sense of inward reflection (“turn in”) which *may* result in shame if one’s conduct is in question. While *entrepo* may bear the meaning “put to shame” in certain contexts (cf. 1 Co 4:14), here it appears that Paul’s concern is to bring about repentance – a genuine turnabout in character and conduct. This seems to be Paul’s focus in Titus 2:8 where the word appears again. If the primary objective of the disciplinary action were to shame the offender, the verb *aischuno* (or one of its close relatives), meaning “to be ashamed,” would probably have served Paul’s purpose better in that it would have left no doubt as to Paul’s intended meaning.

The discipline Paul advises in this passage, therefore, is not designed to humiliate and disgrace the fallen saint, but to stimulate the brother or sister to do some serious inward reflection and “be turned about” from sin.

### **To Produce Healthy Faith – Titus 1:13**

In Titus 1 Paul offers his disciple and fellow worker on Crete wise advice on how to deal with the disorderly teachers in the church. Having described the true character and conduct of the Cretans (Titus 1:10 – 12), Paul instructs Titus, “For this cause reprove them severely that they may be sound in the faith” (Tit 1:13).

The present tense of the verb “reprove” suggests that one confrontation may not suffice. Paul is actually saying, “Keep on reprovng.” Persistence in correcting the brother or sister is required for success. The word “severely,” or “sharply,” means “cut as with a knife.” A severe rebuke may be necessary but it must always be done with a spirit of gentleness (cf. Ga 6:1).

The purpose of the reproof is “that they may be sound in the faith.” The expression “be sound” may be translated “be in good health” (cf. 3 Jn 2), and the verb is used in a metaphorical sense to refer to sound doctrine. Paul’s concern is that the disorderly teachers be corrected and that their teaching become sound – “healthy” – for the body of Christ. Paul doesn’t throw the problem-people out of the church. He instead admonishes Titus to take firm steps to restore them to a healthy, wholesome teaching ministry.

### **To Encourage Spiritual Healing – Hebrews 12:10 – 13**

In Hebrews 12:4-13 the writer of the epistle sets forth the loving motives and beneficial results of God’s loving discipline of His own . . . I want to highlight . . . God’s purpose in discipline as revealed in this text. The writer of Hebrews reveals that discipline is designed to produce “holiness” (12:10) and “the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (12:11).

In verses 12 and 13 the writer emphasizes that discipline is intended to bring healing and restoration, because the Hebrew Christians were in danger of becoming disheartened and discouraged by the trials God was using in their lives. Reverting to the athletic imagery of 12:1 – 2, the writer insists that the Christians not be overwhelmed by weak hands and feeble knees – injuries resulting from the disciplinary process. Rather, they must straighten out the course of their life “so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.” God’s discipline is not intended to permanently disable those who have been crippled by sin. Rather, His loving discipline is designed to restore and heal.

### **To Restore to a Former Condition – Ga 6:1 – 2**

While God’s will for believers is that they be sanctified – set apart to God – and conformed increasingly to the image of Christ (1 Th 4:3; Ro 6:12, 13; Co 3:10), Paul acknowledges in Ga 6:1 that Christians may occasionally sin (see also 1 Jn 2:1). Paul writes to the Galatian churches, “Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted.”

#### ***The trespass***

Paul visualizes a situation in which a believer is literally “overtaken” in or by a trespass. There is some debate as to whether the Christian is surprised *in* the midst of the transgression (ie., caught “red

handed")<sup>2</sup> or overtaken and caught by the transgression (ie., ensnared by the deceitfulness of sin).<sup>3</sup> The Greek preposition *en* (translated "in" by the NASB) can have a locative (in, on, within, among) or instrumental (with, by means of) meaning. Lenski suggests that Paul is excluding willful, deliberate sin and referring to those transgressions which rise from ignorance, weakness, the deceptive power of sin, and the persuasion and example of others.<sup>4</sup> The last phrase, "lest you too be tempted," appears to suggest that Paul has in mind a kind of situation which may endanger even the most spiritual person.<sup>5</sup> Thus the context points toward the "overtaken by the transgression" viewpoint.<sup>6</sup>

The word "transgression" literally means to fall beside" and suggests the idea of falling along the way. As one who enjoys mountain climbing, I know the importance of carefully watching my steps when scaling a high peak. One false step or careless move can result in a disastrous fall. In the context of Ga 6:1, "transgression" refers to an ethical violation or moral blunder. It is a sin which constitutes a departure from God's straight and narrow way.

What is to be done when we discover a Christian brother or sister has been ensnared by the clutches of sin? Usually we express shock ("I can't believe that Joe would do something like that!") and perhaps dismay ("What is the church coming to?"), and then we tell someone about it ("Say, did you hear what happened to . . ."). Such expressions of shock and dismay and gossip are often made under the guise of spirituality and concern ("I'm telling you this so you can pray for . . ."). Is this the way Paul would have us respond to a brother or sister who becomes entangled in sin?

Paul writes to the Galatians, "You who are spiritual, restore such a one . . ." Notice that Paul calls to action the "spiritual" Christians – those who are walking by the control of the Spirit and manifesting the fruits of the Spirit (Ga 5:16, 22 – 24). Warren Wiersbe, former pastor of Moody Memorial Church, offers this probing thought: "The way you and I respond to someone who sins indicates whether or not we are spiritual."<sup>7</sup> Paul seems to be emphasizing that not all Christians, but Christians who are spiritually mature, should deal with sin in the lives of others. Not all may be qualified. Those who are weak, easily tempted, or unable to forgive should pray for the sinner (1 Jn 5:16), but leave the task of correction to others.

### **The restoration**

The "spiritual" have the responsibility to restore the Christian who has fallen into sin. This concept of restoration is the key to this passage from Galatians, and is also the foundation stone of this book. Consider restoration in light of your attitude toward your car. If your auto loses traction in snow or rain and slips off the road into the ditch, what do you do? Abandon it? Leave it to rust or be stripped by vandals? Of course not! You call the towing company to pull the car out of the ditch and transport it to the repair shop. There workmen beat out the dents, repair the engine, realign the wheels and restore the vehicle to good running order. That is God's attitude toward a fallen saint.

On May 8, 1981, mountaineers Jim Wickwire and Chris Kerrebrock were climbing Alaska's Mount McKinley when they both fell into a deep crevasse. Chris fell into the crevasse first, pulling a sled loaded with supplies on top of himself. Jim landed on top of the sled. After about 45 minutes of delicate climbing, Jim worked his way out of the crevasse. But his climbing partner was pinned facedown "like a piece of

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<sup>2</sup> J.B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1957), p. 215.

<sup>3</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Galatians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* vol. 10, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), p. 502)

<sup>4</sup> R.C.H. Lenski, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians and Philippians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), p. 297.

<sup>5</sup> Homer Kent, Jr. objects to this view and offers the following comment: "Strictly speaking, one can be overtaken by temptation but not by transgression (*paraptomati*), for that requires an act of the individual." *The Freedom of God's Sons* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), p. 168.

<sup>6</sup> In taking this position, we do not, however, deny there is a way of escape from every temptation (1 Co 10:13). Nor do we deny that man is totally responsible for his sinful actions (Acts 2:23).

<sup>7</sup> Warren Wiersbe, "When My Brother Sins," *Moody Monthly* (February 1983), p. 95.

wood in a vise” in the 40-foot-deep crevasse. Although Jim attached a rope to Kerrebrock and tried to pull him out, he was unable to free the fallen climber.

Chris began suffering from hypothermia as night approached. Jim, exhausted from his attempts to free his friend, climbed out of the crevasse for the last time about 9 p.m. He was in shock and emotionally shattered. Christ probably died sometime early the next morning. Jim stayed at the site for eight days, however, until lack of food forced him to leave the mountain. He had done his best, but was unable to extract the fallen mountaineer from the grip of the crevasse.<sup>8</sup>

How often in the church we leave fallen Christians in the crevasse of sin without even taking the effort to restore them from their moral blunder. Certainly not all will be restored. Some might be so ensnared by sin that they are unwilling to repent and turn again to Christ. Some may resist the church’s best efforts to return them to the straight and narrow way. But may we as Christians not be guilty of *abandoning* a believer in the crevasse of sin when all he or she needs is a little help to get out!

God makes a significant investment in the lives of His saints. Peter writes that Christians are “not redeemed with perishable things like silver and gold . . . but with precious blood as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ” (1 Pe 1:18-19). Paul calls the believer Christ’s inheritance” (Ep 1:18). God has an investment in the life of each believer. And it is encouraging to know that He never makes a bad investment! The concept of God’s investment in the life of each believer should motivate every believer to share in the process of restoration.

### ***The meaning of restoration***

Mature Christians are to restore the person who has fallen into sin. What does the word “restore” mean? In classical Greek the verb *katartizo* had a wide variety of meanings which can be gathered under one of two headings: (1) “to adjust, to put in order, to restore”; (2) “to equip or fully furnish someone or something for a given purpose.”<sup>9</sup> In the New Testament the word is used thirteen times, twice in quotations from the Old Testament (Ma 21:16; He 10:5). The basic meaning of the word is to “restore to its former condition.”

*Katartizo* is used in Ma 4:21 and Mark 1:19 with reference to James and John “mending” their torn or tangled fishing nets. During a summer sabbatical in 1983, I was privileged to visit Japan. Our family stayed several days in a Japanese inn at Katsura, a little fishing village on the Chiba peninsula. My children and I enjoyed watching the fishing boats unload their catches at the end of the day. The fish were placed in crates, covered with ice and then trucked to market. Near the area where the fish were being sorted and boxed sat a group of Japanese women with large spools of nylon cord, repairing fishing nets. The fishermen had made a sizable investment in the nets and could not afford to cast off such expensive equipment simply because of a tear. Careful, nimble fingers were busily restoring the damaged nets to their former condition.

*Katartizo* is used in Lu 6:40 in the sense of equipping someone for a purpose. There Jesus declares that a disciple will not be better-equipped than his teacher. In secular Greek the word is used of outfitting a ship for a voyage. In a military context it is used of an army, fully armed, equipped and prepared for battle. A ship sailing the Mediterranean without spare masts, sails, and ropes would be unthinkable (cf. Ac 27:19). A soldier entering battle without his sword, shield and helmet would be insane (cf. Ep 6:13). As the disciple must be equipped for ministry, the ship for a voyage and the soldier for battle, so must a fallen Christian be re-outfitted, trained and equipped for dealing with the temptations he or she will certainly face.

*Katartizo* is used by secular Greek writers to denote joining together, or setting, a fractured or dislocated bone. When my brother broke his arm, the physician didn’t just send him home with some pain pills. Neither did he amputate the injured limb. Instead, he carefully set the bone in the proper position and put the arm in a cast to immobilize it while the fracture mended. In the same vein, Paul may be employing the

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<sup>8</sup> *Oregon Journal* (May 15, 1981).

<sup>9</sup> William Barclay, *New Testament Words* (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1964), pp. 168-69.

concept of “joining together” when he encourages the Corinthians to make an adjustment (*katartizo*) so that divisions and factions be avoided in the church (1 Co 1:10).

What implications does the meaning of *katartizo* have for our study of church discipline? First, the discipline of a saint is not designed to punish or destroy but rather to “mend” and “repair” someone who has been injured or damaged on the battlefield of life. Second, restoration involves equipping the saint with the spiritual principles necessary to avoid further injury and to meet the demands of the Christian life. Third, restoration is not simply the expression of forgiveness toward the sinner, but is a process of restoring the sinner to his former condition. The present tense of the verb *katartizo* in Ga 6:1 suggests the necessity for patience and perseverance in the process of restoration.<sup>10</sup>

Drawing on the rich background of *katartizo*, Warren Wiersbe presents a challenging thought:

When a brother or sister sins, the first response of the spiritually minded believer is to restore him or her. He says, “I want this part of the body to be strong and healthy. I wasn’t this net to be catching fish. I want this soldier to be fighting. I want this ship to be carrying cargo.”<sup>11</sup>

Does this attitude match our way of dealing with those who sin? Often we inwardly rejoice when another Christian stumbles, thinking that the exposure of someone else’s sin will make us look better. Or we broadcast the fallen Christian’s failure throughout the Christian community, making restoration much more difficult. Or we turn aside and either neglect or reject the brother or sister who sins. Paul says, “No, Christian! Don’t shoot the wounded soldier! Give him first aid and equip him to reenter the conflict!”

### ***The manner of restoration***

Paul offers two guidelines in Ga 6:1 for those spiritual persons who would go to the aid of a wounded Christian. First, Paul says that the restoration ought to be done “in a spirit of gentleness.” The word “gentleness” (NASB) or “meekness” (KJV) is the same word (*prautes*) used in the list of Spirit-produced virtues in Ga 5:22. While our English word “meekness” is often equated with weakness, the Greek word *prautes* has no such implication. It does not suggest weakness, hesitation or compromise. In classical Greek the verb form of the word was used to speak of taming wild animals. Hence, the word implies strength under control.

For the Christian, *prautes* is a condition of the heart and mind which evokes courteous, considerate, thoughtful and humble dealings with others. It is the opposite of pride, self-assertiveness and self-interest. The meek, or gentle, Christian is neither shocked nor dismayed at the failure of others, for he is not occupied with making comparisons.

Church discipline, says Paul, is to be carried out in an atmosphere of gentleness. The gentle person God uses to help restore a sinning saint will be firm and uncompromising, and will never deny the awfulness of sin. But the person God uses will also show Christ-like consideration for the fallen believer. The words of the hymn writer, Kate B. Wilkinson, express well both the source and result of the virtue of gentleness: “May the mind of Christ my Savior live in me from day to day, by His love and power controlling all I do and say.”

Paul’s second guideline for those helping in the restoration process is that they beware lest they too fall into temptation. Paul warns, “Restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted.” The word “looking” means more than just seeing the facts. It implies mental consideration. The Greek word (*skopeo*) is the one from which we derive our words “microscope” and “telescope.” It suggests the idea of looking with contemplation and reflection.

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<sup>10</sup> W.E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, vol. 3 (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1940), p. 290.

<sup>11</sup> Wiersbe, “When My Brother Sins,” p. 96.

Paul indicates that paying close attention to ourselves – our attitudes and actions – is for the purpose of avoiding a careless response to seductive temptation. But are we not talking about the “spiritual” Christian? Certainly those who have the spiritual maturity, insight and ability to restore a fallen sinner would not succumb to the same sin! “Don’t count on it,” says Paul. He is warning the spiritual Christian to beware of the deceitfulness of sin, not to let it catch us by surprise or take us unaware. In the process of correcting and restoring others, we must watch our steps, lest we too succumb to Satan’s schemes!

Even the most mature can be duped. On the night of December 6, 1942, Admiral Kimmel, Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet, attended a dinner party with a number of important naval commanders and their wives. One woman there, the wife of Admiral Halsey, insisted the Japanese were going to attack. But everyone at the dinner party thought she was crazy. Twelve hours later the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, destroying most of the U.S. Navy’s Pacific Fleet.

At a naval inquiry in 1944, Admiral Leary spoke of the complacency at the dinner and at the daily conferences held by Admiral Kimmel during the weeks preceding the attack. When asked whether any thought had been given to the possibility of a surprise attack by the Japanese, he said, “We all felt that the contingency was remote . . . .” The same attitude was expressed by other naval officers: “We always felt that it couldn’t happen here.” Admiral Kimmel’s advisors concurred that they acted on the basis of an “unwarranted feeling of immunity from attack.” Their lack of vigilance led them down the pathway to unexpected disaster.

Paul is warning all Christians who would come to the aid of a wounded soldier, “Don’t operate under the delusion that you are immune to attack.” A.T. Robertson, the noted Greek grammarian, offers this warning: “Spiritual experts (preachers in particular) need this caution. Satan loves a shining mark.”<sup>12</sup>

### ***Being burden-bearers***

Paul adds a further note on Ga 6:2 to encourage mature Christians to share in the work of restoring a sinning saint. He says, “Bear one another’s burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ.”<sup>13</sup> While this verse has been applied (and rightly so) to many different situations in which Christian love may be expressed, the application in this context concerns church discipline. Believers ought to be concerned about helping other Christians recover from moral lapses. The Galatians are exhorted to “keep on bearing one another’s burdens.”

What burdens might Paul have in mind? Perhaps the burdens may be thoughts of the shame, grief, depression, and remorse that result from the exposure of one’s sin. Perhaps they are the discipline, the loss of position, and the difficult circumstance experienced by the Christians who has undergone moral catastrophe. Whatever the burden, Paul exhorts the believers not to let the brother or sister bear it alone. Others need to come alongside and give help when it is needed.

The motivation for such aid is none other than Christ’s law of love. The “law of Christ” refers to the principle of love for God and for one another (Dt 6:5; 1e 19:18; Jn 13:34, 35), which serves as the basis for God’s instructions in both the law and the prophets (Ma 22:34-40).

It appears quite clear from our study of Ga 6:1-2 and other related texts that God designed church discipline to restore fallen saints. That objective ought to be preeminent in any disciplinary action within the church, for sharing in the recovery of one of God’s flock is a precious privilege – and a weighty responsibility. Discipline must be done firmly, yet gently, and always out of love. Those who share in the process also share in the joy of seeing a saint restored. Does not the Father rejoice over the recovery of the one sheep more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray (Ma 18:13)?

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<sup>12</sup> A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 2: *The Epistles of Paul* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931), p. 315.

<sup>13</sup> There is no contradiction between Ga 6:2 and 6:5. It is the duty of every Christian to carry his own “pack” or load (6:5), but those who have a burden more heavy than they can bear should be given assistance (6:2).

*J. Carl Laney, Th.D., is Professor of Biblical Literature at Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon. He has served as a visiting professor at seminaries in the Philippines and the Netherlands and has also served as interim-pastor of a number different churches. A contributor to a number of theological journals and Christian magazines, Dr. Laney has also published several wonderful books on the Bible and theology. He enjoys outdoor activities including camping, hiking, fishing, skiing, gardening, and canoeing, and can often be found in his garage restoring antique cars. An expert on the historical, geographical, and cultural backgrounds of the Bible, Dr. Laney serves as Coordinator for Israel Study Programs at Western Seminary. He and his wife, Nancy, are the parents of four grown children and one grandson.*