

Discipleship And Discipline

A Christian is a disciple of Jesus Christ, The heart of this discipleship is "obedience to faith". Stress obedience apart from faith and you get legalism. Stress faith apart from obedience and you have faith without content. Faith has the elements of commitment and responsibility. Obedient faith leads to personal conviction.

Discipleship and discipline belong together. They cannot be separated. How do Christian parents discipline their children? Is discipline really necessary? Is it possible to be loving and firm at the same time? It is my conviction that it is unloving not to discipline. When a child is never taught to say "no", the child's moral development is impaired. The withholding of corrective measures is not true love. Scripture says: "Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." (Heb. 12:1 Of N.I.V.)

We agree that the carrying out of discipline is for the benefit of the child; but this takes much wisdom as each child has his/her own personality. Each child has a different character with specific needs. Jesus, in His pastoral ministry, never used the same approach. He met Nicodemus at his intellectual and spiritual level (John 3), and He had a totally different method for meeting the needs of the woman at the well (John 4). In God-centered discipline, parents and teachers try to discover the talents of the children placed in their trust and seek to meet their needs. So the child is taught self-discipline and responsible behaviour. When a wrong has been committed, it is a wrong done against God to Whom the child belongs. After discipline has been exercised, it is important to demonstrate acceptance of the child. The child must know that the bad behaviour is disliked and not the child himself. So the character of discipline is constructive.

One definition of discipline is "subjection to control". With this definition in mind we can say that discipleship and discipline go hand in hand. May God grant parents and teachers wisdom and love for the children placed in their care. The words of Dr. J. Waterink, internationally known Christian psychologist and author, sums up my own personal conviction: "... the punishment which we must administer to the child must always serve to make plain to him how Christ has delivered us from all our sins and miseries, and how we must show thankfulness to God for such deliverance. in that way Christian discipline acquires depth or meaning."

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