

Friday's Letter from "Cum and Rest" – 23rd May 2014

J. Ligon Duncan III commenting on the Church says: "... *it is instructive to remember that the early Church fathers spoke of **"unity of believers" as one of the four ancient marks of the Church.***

*In the Protestant and Reformed tradition, however, **we often list only three:***

- 1. The right preaching of the Word*
- 2. The right administration of the sacraments*
- 3. The right administration of discipline in the Church"*

Roy Clements, in *"Strength of Weakness"* (published by Christian Focus) makes the following concluding comments on **Church Discipline** from 2Cor.2:5-11, under the heading, **"LESSONS ABOUT CHURCH DISCIPLINE."**

He draws our attention to five lessons we need to note:

(a) Sin within the membership injures the whole church

If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you, to some extent (2:5).

- The church is not merely a collection of individuals; it is a body with a corporate identity. ***The sin of one member shames the whole; the hurt of one member hurts the whole...*** Church discipline is the vital way in which the sense that we belong to one another is given meaning...

(b) Disciplinary action is to be taken by the church

The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him (2:6).

- ***It may be that the word 'majority' indicates that there was a lack of unanimity. Whether or not that is so, it is clear that the church took the action as a collective body...*** How much more our church membership would mean to us if we realized that it involved participation in this kind of mutual care and mutual discipline...

(c) The practice of discipline in the church is a necessary mark of the church

The reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything (2:9).

- At the time of the Reformation, one of the things that distinguished the Anabaptists from the Reformers was their insistence that a true gospel church... must be a church marked by discipline... ***This was not just a desirable feature of church life;*** it was, they insisted, a necessary feature by which a true church could be distinguished from an apostate church. It appears that Paul would have had sympathy with that strong line...

(d) Church discipline is always intended to be remedial

Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow (2:7).

- Final judgment does not lie in the power of the church. The power that Christ has bestowed upon the local church is one of chastening only. ***For that reason, it must always aim at the restoration of the offender.*** Forgive, says Paul. Show grace to him, comfort him. Literally, *'get alongside and encourage him'* - because if you don't, says Paul, he may be drowned by despair.

(e) Church discipline can be exploited by the devil for his purposes

What I have forgiven - if there was anything to forgive - I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes (2:10-11).

- Some Christian groups have practiced discipline with such severity that marriages have been broken, children have been alienated from parents, and even minds have been deranged. ***Some have taught a doctrine of 'shepherding' which when taken to excess can lead to elders playing God to believers under their charge...*** Discipline is necessary, for sin injures the church and we cannot be indifferent to it. The church has a responsibility to discipline its members, laid upon it by apostolic command, ***but that discipline must be remedial and forgiving in its goal...***

Surely the safety check lies in that proverb... ***"this is going to hurt me more than it hurts you."***
LOVING DISCIPLINE WILL ALWAYS BE RELUCTANT DISCIPLINE."

Discipline is never easy, is it? But then, who said it would be? For that reason may we be given the mind and heart of the Great Shepherd of the sheep.

Warmest Christian greetings,

Brian