

Session 5

Role of Men in the Church

Man as Self-disciplined in the Spiritual Disciplines - Daniel

Daniel 1:8 - 16; Proverbs 5

“But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself.” Daniel 1:8

“He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly.” Proverbs 5:23

- I. Discipline yesterday and today.
 - A. Men have undoubtedly struggled with self-discipline since time immemorial. For example, the apostle Paul readily admits his struggle. “ I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.” (Romans 7:15)
 - B. In times past, however, self-discipline was a valued virtue, something toward which men should strive.
 1. “No pain, no palm; no thorns, no throne; no gall, no glory; no cross, no crown.” William Penn
 2. “That discipline which corrects the eagerness of worldly passions, which fortifies the heart with virtuous principles, which enlightens the mind with useful knowledge, and furnishes to it matter of enjoyment from within itself, is of more consequence to real felicity than all the provisions which we can make of the goods of fortune.” Hugh Blair
 - C. Today, however, our society virtually shouts to men that self-discipline limits the pleasures and potential of life.
 1. Drive your automobile as fast as you can or into the most dangerous place that you can (A Jeep Cherokee will take you anywhere, even to the top of the highest mountain).
 2. Buy whatever your credit limits will permit (“Some things money can’t buy. For everything else there is Mastercard.”).
 3. Indulge every sexual pleasure (James Bond sleeps with every woman he can).
 4. Eat whatever you like (go for the “Biggie” meal at a fast food establishment).
 5. Watch TV as much as you like (or surf the web). No need to read.
 6. Multi-task (drive and use your cell phone at the same time).
 7. Work 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You can be a workaholic and a couch potato at the same time (and get in three rounds of golf as well).
 - D. Another way of looking at the message of society to men (and women for that matter) is that there are no limits. With God, there are no limits, but we are human and God is continually reminding us of our limits. Only “through

Him” can I do all things and He sets the agenda. (Philippians 4:13). The message from society is otherwise.

- E. Men are getting the message from society.
 - 1. We drive faster than ever (only seat belts and interstate highways save us).
 - 2. The Baby Boom generation is in more debt and saves less than previous generations.
 - 3. One statistics suggests that 5% of married men are engaged in a illicit affair in any given year. (And our indignation at political figures is not so much with their infidelity but their cover ups.)
 - 4. We are more overweight and out of shape than previous generations (despite the billions we spend on dieting and exercise). Our diets are among the worst in the world in terms of balance and it is only the advent vitamins, the “statins”, early detection of hypertension and better control of diabetes which has saved us from our weight gain and sedentary life style.
 - 5. Some suggest that we watch up to five hours of TV on average a day (and this is not just the kids).
 - 6. We play music in the background, have the TV on, talk with a friend on the phone and surf the internet simultaneously (it is a source of pride as to how much we can do at the same time, not whether we can do any of it well).
 - 7. We are working more, not less (as was promised during the 1950s). The mythical reduction of the 40 hour work week to a 30 hour work week has been replaced by the 50 hour work week.

II. Discipline and men in the church.

- A. Recently in the *Christian Chronicle* it was reported that Jim Bill McInteer (a well known, tireless and faithful minister in the church), had not missed taking the Lord’s Supper for nearly 70 years (and it was brought to him on a Sunday when he was hospitalized for gallbladder surgery). This “accomplishment” in the big picture may not mean much (it won’t be for this behavior that Brother McInteer meets his Master in Heaven). Of relevance to the current discussion, this “accomplishment” sounds virtually absurd to us. Why bother if you miss communion a Sunday or two?
- B. There is very little that we ask of our men in terms of discipline (work yes, but discipline no). For example we strongly encourage our men “get involved”, to “work” (but as noted before, we don’t define that work particularly well). We tend to assume that “if you want something done, ask a busy person to do it.” There is truth in this statement. Yet we don’t often consider the complementarity between work in the church and discipline in the lives of our men. A flurry of activity which is undisciplined may bear few fruits. For example, we might find more productive Christian men among those who spend an hour in prayer and study every morning, that is, men who discipline their spiritual lives and their personal lives.

- C. If we consider the spiritual disciplines suggested by Richard Foster, in his book Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth, we rarely teach about, inquire into and perhaps don't value these disciplines in men nearly so much as activity and enthusiasm. Spiritual discipline is more likely to be emphasized and practiced by women in the church than men. These inward and outward disciplines include:
1. Meditation – “but I will meditate on our precepts...I will meditate on it all day long.” Psalms 199:78, 97
 2. Private prayer – “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” Mark 1:35
 3. Fasting – “when you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do...put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting.” Matthew 6:16-18
 4. Private study – “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” Psalm 119:11
 5. Discipline of the body – “I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.” I Corinthians 9:27
 6. Submission to one another – “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Ephesians 5:21
 7. Steadfastness – “Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord...” I Corinthians 15:58

We will return to some of these activities later in our study. For now, we concentrate upon the discipline required for such activities.

III. Self discipline in the spiritual disciplines - the example of Daniel.

- A. Daniel was a privileged young man. He, along with three others among the Israelites, was selected by the King for special service because there was no physical defect found in him and he possessed many talents. He was sort of like the “best and the brightest” of our generation, one of the “beautiful people.” He should have had it made. Yet Daniel chose the road less traveled. He self disciplined himself in the spiritual disciplines as well as exhibited his multiple talents and courage.
- B. Daniel exhibits discipline of his body by refusing the rich foods from the king's table, “Give us but vegetables to eat and water to drink.” Daniel 1:12
- C. Daniel exhibits the discipline of steadfastness by his persistent and incorruptible work as a satrap to Darius, “they could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent.” Daniel 6:4.
- D. Daniel exhibits the discipline of regular prayer. “Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to God, just as he had done before.” Daniel 6:10

- E. Daniel exhibits the discipline of submission by his identification with the community of Israel. A virtually spotless man, he nevertheless accepted his communal responsibility. "O Lord...we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your prophets...this day we are covered with shame." Daniel 9:4-7
 - F. God blessed Daniel by providing him a vision of the future not seen by others. Perhaps it is through the practice of self-discipline in the spiritual disciplines that God opens our eyes to His glorious future.
- IV. Steps toward increasing self-discipline in the spiritual disciplines.
- A. Recognize that we discipline ourselves because of the grace God has shown us, not because we desire to merit our salvation. "Therefore I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God...do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Romans 12:1, 2 We therefore discipline ourselves based on joy and hope, not upon fear.
 - B. Discern between self discipline in the spiritual disciplines and other disciplines. Working daily to improve your golf swing does not qualify as a spiritual discipline.
 - C. Realize that discipline in the spiritual disciplines is much like discipline in other habits. There are many pitfalls.
 1. Admit to yourself that you have a problem and that problem is a sin. (Just as the alcoholic admits the he is an alcoholic for life in Alcoholics Anonymous, the man who neglects prayer must admit that he carries the sin of neglect of his Father in heaven.)
 2. Don't try to change too many things at once.
 3. Consider change over the long run, not just for a short period (much like dieting – a crash diet may solve a short term problem but does not address the long term issue of weight control).
 4. Commit yourself, perhaps by making your commitment known to others and permitting yourself to be accountable to others (much like Weight Watchers and Alcoholics Anonymous).
 5. Recognize that you will fail at times and develop ahead of time a plan to address your failures.
 6. If your discipline involves abstinence in some manner, replace that vacuum with something useful.
 7. Pray fervently that God assist you in your self-discipline. You can't do it alone.
 - D. Choose our discipline. These may include:
 1. Establishing a regular time for prayer each day (say 10 minutes in the morning).
 2. Block out 30 minutes twice a week during which time we sit quietly, relax, and listen for God's voice. (There are many "manuals" for learning

to meditate. The key is clearing our minds of distractions so God can speak to us.)

3. Read carefully two chapters of scripture each day.
4. If you physically are able, fast one day a week (or significantly limit the amount of food intake for a period of time).
5. Put yourself on a “buying fast.” Select one month during which time you buy nothing except the necessities.
6. Dedicate one week to not complaining about government or church leaders.

V. Self discipline in the spiritual disciplines – the role of the church.

- A. The church has long been reticent to take on too active a role in self discipline.
 1. We live in a very individualistic society (one does not tell someone else what to do).
 2. We are fearful of cults and over controlling leaders, such as we perceive in the “discipling movements.”
 3. Encouraging discipline in others many times takes on the character of seeing the speck of sawdust in another person’s eye while missing the plank in our own. (Matthew 7:3-5) For example, we may be very critical of the person who is overweight (what many people falsely view as inevitable evidence of poor self discipline) while we cannot seem to find time to watch TV.
 4. The church should not be viewed as a military like organization, in which members have bought into a certain life style (such as a short hair cut) when the reason for elements of that life style are not clear.
- B. Nevertheless, the church does have a key role in encouraging discipline among its members.
 1. Though each Christian is an individual, we should be encouraging disciplines for all of us which are essential to growth in our walk with the Lord. “Make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to your goodness knowledge; and to your knowledge self-control.” II Peter 1:6
 2. A common characteristic of Christians should be their constant struggle to better control their appetites and sinful behaviors. “We all stumble in many ways.” James 3:2
 3. Discipline should be taught as evidence that one is saved, not as a requirement for salvation. For example, Jerry Rice is perhaps the greatest receiver in the history of pro football. He is also one of the players who works the hardest in training. That he works so hard in training is evidence of his greatness, not a requirement (he probably could have been a pretty good ball player and a fairly lazy ball player given his innate talent). As Paul taught to Timothy, “Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.” I Timothy 4:16

4. Discipline should be held up as an example. Again, Paul writes to Timothy, “set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.” I Timothy 4:12, 13

References

Foster R: Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth. New York, Harper and Row, 1978