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Discipline: The Acid Test of
A Christian School

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Chapter 26

DISCIPLINE

The Acid Test of a Christian School

Gaebelein (1968) suggests, "Few things can be more damaging to students and faculty than the gap between professed principles and the actual practices of those who are in authority over them..."(p.91)

One of elements that influences the integration of faith and learning in a school or/and college is the way discipline is enforced. Hoover (1982) defines discipline as follows: "The word discipline is from the Latin *disciplinā*, which refers to teaching and learning. It is closely associated with the term *discipline*, which means to follow or study under an accepted leader. Over time, however, school discipline developed various negative connotations. Blind conformity was expected, failure to conform meant harsh, often brutal, physical attacks on students of all ages. The early colonial schools, for example, were equipped with whipping posts; misbehaving students were tied and flogged. Thus the expression 'beat the devil out of him.' "In those days it was believed that children were literally possessed of the devils. Whipping or flogging were designed to rid the individual of such demons." (p.68).

It seems that in that era discipline was viewed differently from the way it is viewed today. People's world view at that time influenced their definition of the word 'discipline'. What is discipline and how can it be enforced in a Christian

institution? This paper attempts to address this two prolonged question. First, what is discipline? Hoover's definition seems to have merits and it may suffice for our discussion in this paper. To disciple is to make one a disciple. A disciple follows or learns under an accepted leader. The word 'accepted' should be key in our discussion. Those who are led or taught must accept those in leadership.. This suggests a process of democratizing education and the learning process. People must believe in the merits of those who enforce discipline to them. They should know why certain things should be done or not done. As Christians we hold a Christian world view and this world view should promote the democratization of the educational process. Students should be taught to reason from cause and effect. Discipline and motivation are part of the same process in education. Hoover (1982) suggest that discipline essentially should be conceived as another method of teaching. This suggestion concurs with his definition of discipline. Hoover proposes that aims of good discipline are centered on helping the individual adjust to the personal and social forces of his/her experiences. Some educators view learning as a process of adjusting to one's environment, a spiritual environment and a mental environment. When the learner makes positive adjustments to these environments, we say learning is taking place.

Discipline according to the foregoing discussion is similar to the learning processes that take place in the classrooms. We sometimes describe the areas of study as disciplines. For example, theology and mathematics are disciplines. When learning is taking place in these and other disciplines, there must according to Gange (1977) changes in human behaviors,

dispositions, capabilities and attitudes which persist for a long period of time. Those changes should not be attributable to physical growth and development. Similar patterns of changes should take place when and where discipline is enforced in a Christian institution. It must be understood that in secular education the major objectives of discipline are, as best articulated by Hoover,

1. to help the learner to develop socially, acceptable ways of satisfying basic and emerging physical and psychological needs. In this aspect the learner is expected to develop new and more mature relationships with other members of society, to develop emotional independence, to achieve socially responsible behaviors, and to also acquire an adequate value system which is used for guiding and regulating all his or her behaviors.
2. to help the learner adjust to the demands of the existing culture and institutions. This aspect requires a degree of cooperativeness, conformity and consistency in the expected behaviors (p.63).

A Christian educational programme should go beyond these obvious expectations and include the spiritual dimension. White (1952) rightly suggests that the work of education and redemption is one. Discipline in Christian education has, therefore a redemptive aspect. It seems the work of education and discipline is also one in the sense that both require what Hoover describes as "disciplined and acceptable inner control." This implies that when one's faith is wavering there will be deficiencies which may affect that "disciplined and acceptable inner control." God requires his children to have self control rather than external control.

What factors influence a person's inability to acquire that self control or "inner control"? According to Glasser (1965) discipline problems accrue as a result of an individuals inability to fulfil certain essential needs. It is believed, according to Glasser, that the failure to meet these needs stems from certain social inadequacies in which an individual denies the reality of the world around him/her. To rectify this problem, Hoover suggest that certain behavior patterns must be adjusted as the individual interacts with other individuals or groups. Glasser (1965) outlines four basic symptoms of behaviors that suggest that someone has certain social inadequacies. These are:

1. Engaging in acting-out of behavior: anger.
2. Becoming depressed, sad or dejected.
3. Becoming psychotic.
4. Developing a psychosomatic ailment.

Frey and Young (1979) suggest the following four remedies for such problems:

1. Caring: making sure that somebody in the class likes that student. They need someone to care about them as humans.
2. Understanding: A Christian teacher needs to display empathy, understanding and tolerance towards such an individual.
3. Satisfaction: Such a student or students should be recognised as separate worthy, individual(s) who have responsibilities in social situations.
4. Recognition: Notice and show appreciation for the students' unique individual contribution(s). Also help the student to gain status with the peer group.

Frey and Young do not view these remedies from a Christian

perspective and yet at close examination we find that Jesus employed these remedies in His ministry. As Christian educators, we need to employ redemptive discipline rather than punitive discipline. Through redemptive discipline, students must be helped to think and obey, to obey and learn. A Christian teacher needs to realize that some inappropriate classroom behaviors are a symptom of classroom learning problems. If this is the case it is best for that particular teacher to organize some remedial programme for the student(s) in question. The teachers preparation prior to the teaching of their lessons helps reduce many discipline problems.

How to Discipline Students.

I would like to adapt what Strauss and Sayles (1972) described as "progressive discipline." These authors suggest that this type of discipline works very well in a work place. In a work place progressive discipline follows the following sequence:

1. Oral warning.
2. Written warning.
3. Disciplinary layoff.
4. Discharge.

In this type of discipline a worker is given three chances to correct his/her behaviour(s). This approach could be adopted in institutions of learning. A student who misbehaves could be given:

1. an oral warning.
2. a written warning.
3. a disciplinary suspension, and

4. a dismissal.

God allows second chances in our lives. The way those who err are dealt with in our schools tells a great deal whether Christian principles are put into practice or not in our schools. This is the acid test of a Christian institution. Enforcing discipline is a very painful process. How can subordinates believe that leaders are a source of help when discipline is by nature painful? (Strauss and Sayles 1972).

The "Red Hot Stove Rule" Strauss and Sayles (1972)

The two authors cited above suggest a very interesting approach to discipline. They describe it as the "Red Hot-Stove Rule." "This rule draws an analogy between touching a hot stove and undergoing discipline. When you touch a red hot stove your discipline is immediate, with warning, consistent and impersonal" (p.267). There are four characteristics in this analogy, "When you burn your hand you are angry with yourself. Sometimes you are angry with the stove too but not for long. Strauss and Sayles point out that you learn your lesson quickly because:

1. The burn is immediate. There is no question of cause and effect.
2. You had a warning. If the stove was red and hot, you knew what would happen if you touched it.
3. The discipline is consistent. Every one who touches the stove is burned.
4. The discipline is impersonal. A person is burned not because of who he is, but because he touched the stove. (p.268)

These two authors suggest that the act and the discipline

seem almost one. The person is disciplined not because he/she is bad but because he/she committed a particular act. Here discipline is directed towards the act and not towards the person. This reduces a lot of resentment. The culprit will realize that he/she was looking for trouble and he/she got what he/she was looking for (Strauss & Sayles, (1972)).

God's discipline always has prior warnings which are very explicit. I believe in the process of integrating faith and learning teachers need to be very explicit, with their demands, requirements and standards. White (1952) suggests, "When God says, Thou shalt not, He in love warns us of the consequences of disobedience in order to save us from harm and loss" (p.287)

General Management Principles

In a Christian institution clear rules should be established in the areas where they are needed. This helps to solve problems that recur on a regular basis. The advantages of establishing clear rules are:

1. Rules that are understood and accepted are likely to be followed.
2. The purpose of rules should be to maximize productive work rather than to establish control over students.
3. The teachers will help students to move from external control to self control.
4. Clear rules help students to engage in meaningful activities rather than following meaningless routines. (These advantages were adapted from Good and Brophy, 1978).

White (1952) ;continues to suggest that once rules have

been established they should be enforced. According to her rules should be few and well considered. Rules should represent the voice of the school, so she says. Students should be requested to obey the rules rather than commanded to. This allows them a choice in the matter. While this is done students need to be aware that "... the government of God knows no compromise with evil." (White, 1952, p.290)

To sum it all in one sentence, the government of a Christian school should be a fore-taste of the government of God.

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