

Institute for Christian Learning  
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## **DISCIPLINE IN THE ADVENTIST SCHOOL**

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Sixteen-year old Samson was in trouble. The administration decided to send him home as he had been involved in homosexual activities with younger boys. Several parents had complained to the school regarding this, but the guilty party remained anonymous for a long time. Finally, Samson was identified as the guilty one.

The administration had to do something to correct the boy as well as to satisfy the upset parents. Samson, a Hindu boy who had very recently accepted Jesus as his personal Savior, dared not go home because of communal problems that were rising in that area. Not only that, but his parents were unhappy about this change of religion. What a difficult task it was to think about sending Samson home under those circumstances. On the other hand, some parents were so upset about the situation that they had threatened to withdraw their children. How could the administration please these upset parents and at the same time correct Samson without damaging his new-found faith?

Eventually Samson was called into the principal's office and questioned

about the affair. He had no response. Since there was confirmation from several witnesses, they finally decided to send Samson home. The principal explained the situation to him and counseling was given. A number of the staff felt sorry for Samson; his parents could make him hate his new religion so much that he would renounce his faith. A few of the Adventist teachers felt Samson should be severely punished and never allowed in the school again. Fortunately, there was another group who showed him their Christian love before he left campus. They helped him understand his mistake and the opportunity he was being given to correct it by repenting and accepting God's forgiveness . They reminded him that he could return to continue his education as a changed person, if he was willing to give up his bad habit. Thus Samson was comforted and given hope for a better future as he realized his mistake. He left school with loving memories of those who showed their Christian love.

Johnny, a fun-loving five-year old, lived to play. In his kindergarten class he refused to do any kind of academic work. When his teacher explained the situation to John's parents and recommended that he be retained for another year, his parents were upset. They insisted that their son should be promoted to first grade. In reality he needed another year to mature, but his parents would not agree to the teacher's suggestion. Since he had just turned six, they

felt he should begin learning to read and write.

From the first day John had academic problems. Reading was his biggest difficulty. When the teacher introduced the alphabet, John realized that most of his friends had already learned it. He would have some catching-up to do. As the sounds of phonics were presented he fell even farther behind. Before long the class began to read some simple words. Many of the children were able to do it all, but John was still trying to learn his alphabet.

After some time the teacher divided his class into three reading groups according to their reading ability. She gave them camouflage-names of lions, tigers and giraffes. The teacher's motive was noble, but the students soon realized that the giraffes were all behind the rest of their classmates. John began to worry about his lack of progress and felt there was something wrong with him.

During the first parent-teacher conference, the teacher told John's parents about his problem. John was immature and unable to concentrate or even sit still in class. His father believed that all John needed was a little more drill. He insisted that John bring his books home so that he could sit with his son for an extended academic exercise. However everything John did irritated his father. His childish mind wandered; he forgot the things he was "taught" moments before. Finally his father exploded in anger and, banging his hands

on the table, exclaimed, "You're just stupid!" That was it. Gradually John lost interest in studying. He would look out of the window. He doodled with his pencil when he should have been writing sums. Since he could not read, spell or write, he could not understand what was happening. He became frustrated and bored. Was he really stupid?

One day John's teacher asked him to read a paragraph. He stood, shifted his weight from foot to foot, and struggled to identify the first word. He heard the girls laugh; the boys called him a dummy. John's problem, which had started as a developmental lag, had become an emotional problem. He had developed a hatred of school. The tragedy is that John need not have suffered this humiliating academic failure. One more year of growth and maturity would have prepared him to cope with the educational responsibilities which later destroyed him.

How does a Christian teacher respond to John's situation? What will happen to him if Teacher fails to recognize his problem? How can she discipline John? For his academic failures or his misbehavior? If the teacher is impatient or ignorant of John's background, she can make his school experience miserable.

Disciplining a student like Samson or John should be done very carefully. For such problems teachers should use a redemptive approach to discipline.

This means helping students control their behavior and preventing the recurrence of a similar mistake.

According to H. J. Eager in *The Journal of Adventist Education* redemptive discipline requires teachers to be in control of themselves and their procedures at all times. If teachers show students respect, patience, trust, approval, love or personal interest, the student will respond in kind. When teachers are concerned about their students, the student can feel it; they do not want to disappoint their teachers by not meeting their expectations. Students like to please their teachers by doing their best.<sup>1</sup>

Sri Lanka's schools practice two forms of discipline which are not redemptive. When a student makes a big mistake, the school expels that student permanently without any mercy. Besides that the school issues a certificate stating that he cannot return nor should he be accepted in any other school. The student is not forgiven. His future is completely ruined. Many administrators practice this.

Use of physical force to educate students is the normal practice in many schools. A majority of teachers feel that the most effective way to discipline a student is to inflict pain. This is an integral part of Sri Lankan culture. Poets have written about teachers bringing branches from different trees in order to punish those who do not learn their lessons. They believe this will help the

child to learn. Unfortunately, some teachers in Seventh-day Adventist schools still practice this traditional method. They walk into the classroom with a stick. Their students are publicly humiliated in the name of learning and discipline.

Methods of discipline provide the teacher with an opportunity to demonstrate to his/her students his faith in action. The classroom should be a place where love, kindness, long-suffering, and all other Christian virtues abide through the influence of the teacher. Every disciplinary measure should draw students to Christ, not drive them away from the Christian faith. In this paper I attempt to explain what discipline is, what educators say about discipline, how the Seventh-day Adventist should view discipline and how this view should permeate the entire school.

### What is Discipline?

Discipline should train the person to be self-controlled and self-reliant. Etymologically, the word *discipline* comes from the same Latin root that gives us the word *disciple*. Historically the problem of discipline has been to bring the impulses and conduct of the individual into harmony with the ideas and standards of a master, a leader, or a teacher.

## Discipline: What the Educators Say

The Thorndike Barnhart Dictionary defines discipline as the training of the mind; order among school pupils, soldiers, or members of any group; punishment, chastisement; training brings to a condition of order and obedience.

According to Arun Bhattacharjee in *Misconduct of Students* discipline means "instruction imported to; scholars, teaching, educating, schooling; instruction having for its aim to form the pupils to proper conduct and action; the training of scholars or subordinates of proper and orderly action by instruction and exercising them in the same correction and training."<sup>2</sup>

W. C. Bagley writes that for a long time school discipline was quite similar to the subservience of the individual's will to the will of the teacher. He divided school discipline into three related yet distinct functions:

(1) The creation and preservation of the conditions that are essential to the orderly progress of the work for which the school exists.

(2) The preparation of the pupils for effective participation in an organized adult society which, while granting many liberties, balances each with a corresponding responsibility, which will allow each individual much freedom in gratifying demands that the individual inhibits these desires and repress those ambitions that are inconsistent with social welfare.

(3) The gradual impression of the fundamental lessons of self control, especially through acquainting the pupil with the importance of remote as contrasted with immediate ends and through innumerable experiences which will lead him to see that persistence and sustained effort bring rewards that are infinitely more satisfying than can be attained by following the dictates of momentary desire.<sup>3</sup>



W. R. Smith looks at discipline as a part of all human association; in modern society this is called social control. School discipline is nothing more than social control within a school setting. It includes all the forces that mold the emotional attitudes and inspires the conduct of pupils.<sup>4</sup>

A general notion is that discipline is concerned with the learning and observance of rules as J. W. Docking indicates. He calls it a contention issue. For some it is associated with repressive regimes and brutal punishment, as in disciplining and being a disciplinarian. For others, discipline deals more with ideals and principled behavior, as in discipline and discipline thinking. He lists four reasons why discipline is necessary in schools: (1) Discipline is necessary for social and economic needs of the country. (2) Discipline is necessary for the psychological needs of the individual. (3) Discipline is needed for successful classroom management. (4) Discipline is needed for educative learning. School discipline often performs an important function of ensuring that children conform to the mores of their society, internalizing the behavioral values of the dominant culture and acting accordingly. Without discipline, society would cease to be an orderly community, and would suffer in terms of industrial efficiency and world competition.<sup>5</sup>

Children need discipline for the sake of their happiness and emotional security. Discipline is seen in terms of consistent application of external

constraints so that children develop stable personalities and do not become maladjusted. Certain rules must be enforced in the classroom in order that instructions and learning can get off the ground. Submission to rules is central to the development of a disciplined mind. Thus Docking considers discipline a multi-faceted concept. It may refer to training for a society, to consistent application of external constraints in order to promote a stable personality, to something teachers do before they teach in order to bring about a proper attitude to work, or to the adaption of certain kinds of behavior that the pupil himself understands to be morally right or necessary for deepening interest in a particular activity.

Despite the volume of literature on the subject, Howard M. Knoff indicates that there is still no comprehensive model for the principle that conceptualizes discipline as a psycho-educational problem and provides a framework for teachers, administrators, and other staff such as school psychologists, social workers, and mental health workers.

### **Discipline: The Adventist View**

According to the Bible, discipline saves the mind or gives soundness of mind. Through the Spirit of Prophecy God has enlightened us as to how one should conduct discipline in Christian schools.<sup>6</sup> E. G. White uses discipline in

the sense of training, development, and education more often than as punishment or maintaining order. She says that Christian discipline or dealing with the human mind is the most delicate work which has been entrusted to teachers. To do it correctly teachers should constantly seek help from the Holy Spirit. Teachers should seek patience and understanding as they deal with students. Great tact yet firmness must be used with students.

The child is to be trained for self-government, self-reliance and self-control. Therefore as soon as the child is capable of understanding, he should be taught to obey through reasoning. It should be explained that everything is under law; disobedience to the law leads to destruction. It is the responsibility of adults to show young people that their parents and teachers are the representatives of God; they are working together with God. By obeying these adults they are also obeying God.

Mrs. White recommends strict discipline, but it should be administered kindly and fairly rather than harshly. Rules should exist, but they should be flexible, practical and formulated by the students themselves. Adventists aim to develop a mature, well-integrated personality manifesting itself in good deportment and worthy citizenship.

Even though love and tenderness are advised by Mrs. White, no thought of allowing them to go uncontrolled is implied. There must be a standard of

conduct for the school just as there is one in society.

Teachers are counseled to bind their students to their hearts by cords of love and strict discipline. In fact these cords are worthless unless they are united with discipline. Students are to be disciplined for service--trained to make the best use of their powers. The success of the school is dependent on this dedication of staff and students to aim high and exert all their efforts to reach the mark.

Having a clear concept of the desired goals is vital to the parent or teacher acting as disciplinarian. Self-reliance, guided by reason and a healthy respect for authority is important to develop. Self-control or self-government, developed in the child, is the main goal of discipline. Sometimes it is necessary to use discipline to motivate the student to good behavior and citizenship. This is where object lessons and examples can be used to appeal to his reasoning abilities. Here he can be reminded of his religious ideals.

### **Bringing This View of Discipline into the Adventist School**

Adventist teachers should follow Christ's method in dealing with students who make mistakes. The following are twenty principles or guidelines for disciplining students in Adventist schools:

- (1) Discipline should be administered with love.

- (2) Rules should be few and well chosen.
- (3) Deal with positive behavior.
- (4) Do not punish the child publicly.
- (5) The discipline of a human being should differ from the training of a dumb animal.
- (6) Too much management is as bad as too little.
- (7) It is better to request than to command.
- (8) To break the will of a child is a terrible mistake.
- (9) It is not God's purpose that any mind should be dominated.
- (10) Follow Christ's method in dealing with human mistakes.
- (11) Failure to correct faults is a great wrong.
- (12) Reading portions of Scripture and praying are forms of correction.
- (13) Use of compulsion, public exposure, criticism, taunting, nagging, coaxing, bribing, and shouting are unsound corrective measures.
- (14) Kindness, humility, gentleness, and tact characterize effective correction; *never* anger.
- (15) Correcting an individual should be done with great care to preserve his self-esteem.
- (16) Inconsiderate correction causes children to lose respect.
- (17) In correcting a child, it is better to err on the side of mercy.

- (18) The goal of discipline is self-control.
- (19) Prevention is the best method of discipline.
- (20) Work is a safeguard against disciplinary problems.

### **Attitudes for Disciplinarians**

Successful discipline maintains good behavior at school and develops self-control. This success depends on the teacher's attitude toward his/her students as well as an understanding of normal and rational behavior. If pupils cause problems, it is well for the educator to have a problem-solving attitude toward that misconduct rather than feeling frustrated when his/her charges violate the rules. The teacher cannot stand on his dignity, but must be willing to be a model of self-control. The golden rule is for the teacher, too. Tolerance, affection, empathy and courage are prime attributes for the teacher to possess. Finally, the attitude that his/her students are Christ's children, who have been entrusted to him/her to be educated, is necessary for each teacher in the Christian school .

### **Conclusion**

The focus of this paper is how to maintain the proper form of discipline: a balance of love, tenderness and discipline. Two case studies involving

discipline were presented. I have endeavored to explain what discipline is and briefly tell what educators have said about it. Other topics covered include the Adventist view of discipline, how to bring the Adventist view into the church school including twenty principles or guidelines drawn from the Spirit of Prophecy, and described the attitudes disciplinarians should possess.

The author would recommend further study of this subject. James Dobson<sup>7</sup> and William Glasser<sup>8</sup> are two authorities that have a positive form of discipline which educators can emulate.

#### FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

1. H. J. Eager, "In Control or Being Controlled," *Journal of Adventist Education* 54:5 (Summer 1992), pp. 12-15.
2. Arun Bhattacharjee, *Misconduct of Students* (New Delhi: Deep & Deep, 1981), p. 101.
3. W. C. Bagley, *School Discipline* (New York: MacMillan, 1993), p. 10.
4. W. R. Smith, *Constructive School Discipline* (New York: American Book Co., 1924), p. 41.
5. J. W. Docking, *Control and Discipline in School* (London: Harper & Row, 1987).
6. E. G. White has published several volumes which are excellent sources for reading on this topic. See *Adventist Home, Child Guidance, Counsels to Parents, Teachers and Students, Education and Fundamentals of Christian Education*.

7. James Dobson, *Dare to Discipline* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale, 1970).
8. William Glasser, *Control Theory in the Classroom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986).