



October 22, 2006

Who Are You To Tell Me ... ?

From time to time in the church there is a need to exercise scriptural discipline. Unfortunately that time generally passes and the problem proceeds to the point that it becomes so great that other congregations may be affected. When we then try to exercise scriptural discipline there are a few reactions that will invariably surface. One of these is the objection that marking one who causes division or practices falsehood is a lack of love. The scriptures speak otherwise. Another reaction to this is that the process is based on a dislike of the one who is so marked. Both reactions may have validity in some situations and with some individuals, but they will always surface no matter what the circumstances. Most who have been in the church for a long time and are faithful would probably agree that this is one area that needs to be understood and addressed when appropriate. Error that could undermine a group of God's children needs to be dealt with immediately and is best done on a personal level (**Matt 18.15-17**). The story of Simon the sorcerer is a good example of this. Simon desired the ability to bestow gifts of the Holy Spirit and apparently had it in mind that he could sell this (**Acts 8.17-19**). Simon had fooled people previously and made money at it. Now there was an opportunity to provide the real thing and make money at the same time. When he approached Peter and John concerning this he was sharply rebuked (**Acts 8.20-23**). The things Peter told him scared Simon so bad that he asked Peter to pray for him so that they would not occur (**Acts 8.24**). There is much from this exchange that we can learn. First of all we need to realize the nature of the error. Simple mistakes or an absence of knowledge do not make a person a "false teacher" or "sower of discord". Those who teach or engage in spiritual discussions should understand the subject at hand and then engage in discussion to the extent of our knowledge (**Jas 3.1**). One must develop the ability to say "I don't know" be taught by others who have more skill with the word of God. To persist in ignorance however leads to false teaching and a refusal to learn will result in the need for one to be instructed "more perfectly". Such was the case with Apollos who was teaching the baptism of John when Aquila and Priscilla taught him of Christ and true baptism for the remission of sins (**Acts 18.24-26**). Sometimes when one is confronted with their error, they immediately resort to pointing out the shortcomings of the one who is trying to talk to them. Aside from the fact that this is a mark of one who needs to develop in many areas, it may also be a sign of spiritual insecurity and guilt. When Simon was approached by Peter he did not try to turn the tables on him stating "who are you to tell me I'm wrong". Instead, Simon admitted his error and sought to correct it. Peter himself was no stranger to being wrong. He was rebuked directly by Christ when he assured the Lord that he would not allow him to be killed in Jerusalem (**Matt 16.21-23**). He was wrong when he stated that he would never betray Christ only a few hours before he denied even knowing him (**Matt 26.33-34,69-75**). Later, after preaching the first gospel sermons to both the Jews and the Gentiles (**Acts 2, 10**), Peter was carried away with another error and was not eating with gentile brethren for which Paul rebuked him openly (**Gal 2.11-13**). Peter made the corrections that were needed. So did Simon. Many today will stubbornly hold on to an idea that is not based on scripture and maintain that belief in spite of the teaching of the faithful who know better. When one refuses instruction we become foolish and are on the road to destruction. The problem is that for every erroneous idea that is set forth there are those who will follow such a thing and allow themselves to be led into error as well. Is there a need to make corrections from time to time? Yes there is. They should be handled on a personal level with care and respect (**Gal 6.1-2**) until such time that an individual compromises the doctrine of the new testament and exerts an influence over others in so doing. That influence may be taken up by those who passively listen and wait or allow themselves to be drawn into a discussion that seeks to "choose sides". There should only be one side that we are on and that is God's. God is talking to all of us and study, prayer and practice will take care of most misunderstandings without the need for more severe measures. When appropriate however, the measures must be taken. Failure to do so only weakens the church and sets that stage for controversy and hard feelings. These things can be prevented if we all make a commitment to speak and teach those things that God tells us through his word and to study to show ourselves approved unto God as true workmen (**2 Tim 2.15**).

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