

DISPENSATIONAL DISCIPLINE

Dispensational discipline refers to God's discipline of His children in the next age. The New Testament shows that God judges His own children (1 Pet. 1:17; 4:17), and the Lord Jesus makes it abundantly clear that His followers will be rewarded or disciplined at His return (Rev. 22:12; Matt. 25:14-30). Therefore, those who claim that the teaching that a believer may spend a thousand years in outer darkness is a kind of fearmongering designed to enable control err greatly by denying the plain word of Scripture in the New Testament (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30). In doing so they have become those referred to in 2 Timothy 4:3 who "will not tolerate the healthy teaching." The ministry of the Lord's recovery faithfully presents what the Bible itself teaches regarding dispensational discipline, the intent of which is to motivate the Lord's believers to be faithful in their life and service to the Lord until His return.

Shown in the New Testament

From the very beginning of His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus warned that He will reward or discipline His followers according to their faithfulness to His word. In Matthew 7 the Lord says that not everyone who says to Him, "Lord, Lord," or who prophesies or does works of power in His name will enter into the kingdom of the heavens as a reward. It is not reasonable to say that all such ones who call on, prophesy, or do works of power in the Lord's name but are not able to enter into the kingdom of the heavens are not true believers. Rather, some of these the Lord approves of, and some of these He does not. According to the context of these verses, the crucial matter is whether or not those things were done according to the will of the heavenly Father (v. 21).

Later in Matthew the Lord Jesus presented a number of parables that indicate different aspects of His relationship with His believers. He is not only the Savior but also the Thief coming at an unexpected time to take the "precious things," that is, those who are ready (24:43-44). He is also the Bridegroom who takes only the wise virgins, that is, those who have sufficient oil in their vessels, into His wedding feast (25:1-10). He is the Master gone abroad who returns to settle accounts with His slaves, and He is also the King who, having prepared a wedding feast, requires that all those who attend be clothed with a wedding garment (22:1-14). In many places the Lord, both through parables and in plain words, warns the believers to be watchful for His return in relation to their life and service.

According to the Lord's word, those who are not faithful will be cast into the outer darkness. It is simply not correct to say that all who suffer such punishment are unbelievers. The Lord would never liken unbelievers to pure virgins lovingly awaiting His return or to slaves doing business for Him until He comes. Clearly, both the virgins and the slaves in Matthew 25 refer to believers, some of whom are faithful and deserving of a reward, and some of whom are unfaithful and deserving of discipline, although they are still eternally saved by the Lord's irrevocable gift of salvation (Rom. 5:16; 11:29). Therefore, the Bible indicates that the dispensational punishment of being cast into the outer darkness applies to the believers and is intended to motivate them to faithfully keep the Lord's word and be watchful for His return (John 14:23; Mark 13:37; Rev. 3:3, 8).

This is why in his Epistles Paul likens the Christian life to a race that must be run so that the believers may obtain a prize (1 Cor. 9:24; Heb. 12:1). Paul speaks of how he pursued, knowing that it was possible that even he himself could be disapproved by the Lord (1 Cor. 9:26-27). He also warns that every believer will appear before the judgment seat of Christ in order that He might judge their life and work (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10, 12). The thought of the Lord judging the believers' work appears also in 1 Corinthians 3:10-17, where we see that the true nature of every Christian's work and the Lord's evaluation of it will be revealed by fire. Those whose work is consumed will still be saved "yet so as through fire." This indicates that though the believers are eternally saved, the Lord will discipline those whose work is judged to be worthless. This is a somber warning.

The Ministry's Faithful Presentation

In light of all these passages, it is very foolish for anyone to insist that the dispensational discipline of the outer darkness is merely a peculiar teaching of the Lord's recovery. From the Lord's words in Matthew 7:21 to the Spirit's call for overcomers in the Revelation 2 and 3 and the Bible's final warning in 22:11-12, there is overwhelming scriptural basis in the New Testament to indicate that the Lord will judge His followers when He returns, rendering both

reward and discipline as He sees fit. However, the ministry in the Lord's recovery is faithful to not only present the fact of dispensational discipline as seen in the Bible, but even more to provide a way for us to practically receive and apply the Bible's exhortations. For example, of the virgins in Matthew 25, Witness Lee says:

Although we have the oil in our lamp, we need the extra portion of the oil in our soul. This signifies that the Spirit must spread from within our spirit to every part of our soul. Then in our soul we shall have an extra amount of the Holy Spirit. If we have this extra portion, we are prudent. If we do not have it, we are foolish. In other words, if we are indifferent to the infilling of the Holy Spirit, we are foolish. If we are wise, we shall pray, "Lord, have mercy on me. I want to have Your Spirit not only in my spirit, but also in my soul. Lord, I need the infilling of the Spirit. I need the extra portion of the Holy Spirit to fill my entire being." (*Life-study of Matthew*, 751)

Regarding Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 3:10-17, Brother Lee taught that "the believers in Corinth were not to build with their Greek culture, philosophy, or makeup. To build in that way is to build with wood, grass, and stubble, not with gold, silver, and precious stones. What does it mean to build with these precious materials? We may say that it is to build with Christ Himself" (*Life-study of 1 Corinthians*, 249). Concerning building uniquely with Christ, Brother Lee gave this clear speaking: "Although I came from China, I am very careful not to build with anything Chinese, but to build only with Christ. It is crucial for us all to learn to build upon Christ as the foundation with the Christ we have experienced in a practical way" (232-233). Are these not two examples of faithful words that we can all apply in our Christian life today? Without such speaking, how would we properly respond to these passages and the strong word of warning they convey? We thank the Lord that the ministry provides a way for us to practically heed the many warnings and exhortations in the New Testament, showing us the important spiritual principles that govern how the Lord will evaluate the life and work of His followers at His return, so that we may be those who walk wisely, redeeming the time that the Lord has given us on the earth (Eph. 5:15-16).

The Response of the Believers

The Lord desires that all His followers have a proper fear of His return that motivates them to pursue Him faithfully in this age. We should not think that fear is a purely negative thing, for there are many verses in the Bible that indicate that there exists for the believers a certain kind of proper and healthy fear of the Lord (Prov. 9:10; Luke 12:5; 1 Pet. 1:17,2:17; Phil. 2:12; Heb. 4:1; 12:28; Rom. 11:20; Acts 9:31). Positively, we are certainly motivated by our love for the Lord and our desire to be approved of by Him. On the other hand, we must also fear the Lord in a healthy and proper way. For the ministry in the recovery to ignore this matter or gloss over it would be a great disservice to God's people. Since it is possible for us to have an improper and unhealthy fear, Brother Lee was careful to make such a distinction:

There are two kinds of fear of the Lord. One is wholesome; the other is to be rejected. If we contact the Lord through prayer and His Word, we will have a proper, holy fear lest we offend Him by disobedience. We need such a healthy fear. The other fear is that the Lord may punish or reject or forsake us. This is of Satan, and we must overcome it. We must declare, "I am a child of God, chosen, redeemed, and cleansed by the precious blood. I have nothing to fear. God will not forsake me or cast me away." This second fear is the enemy's threat to rob you of your rest. If you are not at rest, you cannot enjoy the Lord or grow. You must be at rest from all such unnecessary fears. (*Life Messages, Volume 1 (#1-41)*, 57)

In addition to our love for the Lord and our desire to gain Him, a healthy fear helps to know Him as Lord and motivates us to fully cooperate with Him in this age so that we can grow and mature in life. It motivates us to buy the oil, allowing the Spirit to spread from our spirit throughout our soul (Matt. 25:1-13). It motivates us to be the prudent and faithful slaves who invest our talent by using our spiritual gift to serve the Lord (vv. 14-30). It motivates us to cooperate with the Spirit's transforming work so that we will become precious materials fit for God's house and participate in God's building work (1 Pet. 2:4-5; 1 Cor. 3:9-17). It causes us to abide in Him continually so that when He is manifested in glory, we will be those who match Him and are not put to shame (1 John 2:28). In every way and at all times we are motivated to cooperate with the Lord so that we can be those who enter into the joy of our Master at His return (Matt. 25:21).