

CHURCH DISCIPLINE AND DIVINE JUDGMENT
AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF JUDE 1:1-6 AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR
CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN CHRISTIANS

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ABSTRACT

Church Discipline helps to keep the members of the Christian community within the correct teaching of the Christian faith as contained in the Bible, and makes them escape the wrath of God through His judgment. The Church as a community, which is intended to reflect God's character in practice, custom, faith, worship, and lives of its members is different from all other social groups. Therefore, she must not imitate traits alien to God's character or conform to them. Truly all are called but few are chosen. It is, therefore pertinent for the chosen ones to exhibit the character of God who chose them.

The Church today is turning the grace of God into excuse for ungodliness in many areas of Church life. Like Barclay said, "he who rebels against God must look for judgment" (158). Contemporary Christians of this generation are abusing the grace of God as they are setting a new cultural, worship, faith and biblical patterns of living for the Church, to suit their style of living. It is a dangerous trend which calls for caution and discipline within the church in order to escape divine judgment.

But the important concern before the church is how the Christians can approach the need for renewal, in a way that is biblical and Christlike, and help them to see what must be done, and as a body, move forward in oneness and unity to function as a New Testament Church in this twenty first century. This is what is examined in the book of Jude 1: 1-6 as God judged the people of old and His creation when they refused His discipline and were living recklessly and wantonly in their wickedness, disobedience and disbelief. The implications of their actions for the contemporary Nigerian Christians are considered in this work. It is purely a library research.

5.2 CONCLUSION

It is clear then that God is God of grace, mercy and love but will not compromise His standard for any set of individuals or Christians of any age or

generation. Equally clear is the fact that Church Discipline and Divine Judgment are a fundamental part of the New Testament's teachings. So, when the Church fails in the teaching of Church Discipline, it fails in a vital aspect of the word of God. Therefore, the Church will not escape His judgment. The content or scope of Church Discipline and Divine Judgment touches on all aspect of the Christian's life, his religious life as well as his secular life. It covers sins committed against God and man, against false teaching and disobedience to the word of God and the order of the Church.

The purpose of Church Discipline as discussed is to distinguish the Church out from among the rest of the people of the world to keep the Church holy as the Lord Himself is holy, so as to escape the judgment of God. Church Discipline is intended therefore to keep the rest of the believing community from being polluted by the sin committed by erring member and to save the sinner from being condemned. Pandang noted "Church Discipline is an act of salvation and not condemnation" (34). He stressed further that it is the one who escape discipline that faces Divine Judgment and hence, condemnation, because such one remains in sin, which eventually overwhelms the person. Discipline must be the collective effort of all Christians. The Church must discipline the erring members from within to enable it continually remain holy as the Lord who calls the Church into existence. This will be the way out of God's judgment. There can be no easy road to this and there can also be no rationalization of this, except as the word of God allows for the good of His Church and the glory of his name.

Christianity is not a private affair since any Christian community is perceived in terms of a body and as a body the members are intrinsically related to one another. What and how an individual behaves affects other members of the Church. This shows that the relationship of Church members is contagious. Behaviour or attitude of

a member either raises others up to a spiritual height or pulls them down into a deep pit spiritually. It either encourages others to rise up or walk faster to catch up with the others or it discourages them or creates doubts in them as to the ability of that person to catch up. Above it all, it either sanctifies the Church as a community or pollutes it. It either expands the borders of the Church as a little yeast in a handful of flour or it destroys the community as a single drop of poison in a body system.

The Bible calls our attention to the type of Christian each one should be showing us the character and disposition of God to indicipline in the lives of people before us. The confirmation of what is written in Jude's letter is found also in II Peter 2:4-10

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them to gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment, if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others, if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly, and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by filthy lives of lawless men (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented by the lawless deeds he saw and heard) – if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the righteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment. This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of their sinful nature and despise authority (NIV).

Therefore, God will not overlook or pardon the error of any church at any age while others are punished. Definitely, the people and especially Christians of this generation will not have any excuse before God if they fail to contend for the faith as delivered to them and contained in the word of God. No rationalization.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the implication of Church Discipline and Divine Judgment as can be deduced from the book of Jude 1:1-6, to the Nigerian Christians of today, the following suggestions are put forward for consideration in this paper.

The contemporary Nigerian Christians should try and contend for their faith in the face of different heretical teachings going on in many fellowship centres or congregations which are called Churches. Believers of all ages are called by one and the same God, who will never be partial in His dealing with His people. As the Lord Jesus Christ called, loved and kept Christians of yester years, so he has called, loved and kept the present Christians. His expectation for all ages is the same.

Christians today, must be aware that the Church is facing a serious threat and of course a direct invasion of the Church by false teachers, heretic teachers, those who are majorly in ministry because of their pocket and belly. The Church must stand against evil men who are subtly and cunningly entering the Church. People who are bringing imported culture, custom and tradition to the body of Christ abound in almost all Christian denominations even among leaders. People who are changing with the world in the direction of the world. They should be resisted so as not to corrupt the Church.

All believers in Jesus Christ should learn and apply the word of God on daily basis. The daily application of God's word is the tonic for Christian and answer to the challenges of false teachers who are bringing foreign, strange and distorted doctrines that are totally anti-the-word and nature of God. Word of God makes the Church to be disciplined and provide a easy way out of God's judgment. Contemporary Nigerian Christians should therefore adhere steadfastly to the truths which are contained in the Bible.

The Church should endeavour to bring back and safe those that have been led astray by the evil ones through heretical teaching and their heart desires. But while doing this Christians should be carefully guarding themselves from the same

contamination while they sought to save others. Because it is the grace of God that is sustaining each Christian from falling away and perishing.

There should be training and examination of ministers and leaders for effective spiritual development of the members under their leadership. Since the spiritual level of a congregation is set by its minister and/or leader, who must themselves cultivate and practice the spiritual disciplines; therefore their training and examination should be seriously taken care of. The failure of academic institutions to prepare ministers in the practical areas of ministry and in spiritual formation has led local Churches to try to do the academic task for which they are not suited.

Among the contemporary Nigerian Christian, there should be training and examination of prospective new members also. Teaching of new converts should include moral behaviour expected of members as well as doctrines and practices of the Church. Too much may be assumed and too little done at the point of conversion or admission of new member.

Finally, there should be an active concern by the elders and pastors of the congregation to promote disciplined Christians living, to meet with members as individuals or families to convey concern or admonition, and to teach publicly and privately the biblical message.