

Welcome to Tuesday's edition of "Leftovers", a follow-up from Sunday morning's lesson.

Sunday morning we took a look at the issue of church discipline. The following is an excerpt from a Christianity Today interview with Rod Sider dated April, 13, 2005.

Hope it is helpful.

For the entire article see

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/CT/2005/004/32.70.html>

Sider: .Salvation is a lot more than just a new right relationship with God through forgiveness of sins. It's a new, transformed lifestyle that you can see visible in the body of believers.

CT: Obviously to be a disciple means there's discipline. Do you see the neglect of church discipline in our day as a factor in this moral crisis?

Sider; It's part of the larger question of recovering the New Testament understanding of the church. This culture is radically individualistic and relativistic. Whatever feels right for me is right for me; whatever feels right to you is right for you. That's the dominant value. It's considered outrageous for somebody to say somebody else is wrong.

But historic biblical faith understood the church as a new community. The basic New Testament images of the church are of the body of Christ, the people of God, and the family of God. All these stress the fact that we're talking about a new community—a new, visible social order. That new community in the New Testament was living so differently from the world that people would say, "Wow, what's going on here?" Jews were accepting Gentiles. The rich were accepting the poor and sharing with the poor. Men were accepting women as equals. It just astonished people because the church was so different from the world. It was countercultural. Furthermore, [the New Testament church] understood that being a member of the body of Christ meant that you were accountable to each other. If one suffered, you all suffered. If one rejoiced, you all rejoiced. There was dramatic economic sharing in the New Testament, and there was church discipline. Jesus talked explicitly about church discipline in Matthew 18. Paul clearly had his churches live that out. All of the great traditions at the core of American evangelicalism, whether the Reformed tradition, the Wesleyan Methodist tradition, or the Anabaptist tradition, understood church discipline when they were strong and thriving. But very few evangelical churches these days have any serious appropriation and practice of church discipline.

CT: Isn't that at least in part because church discipline has been abused or become legalistic and mean-spirited?

Sider: Sure, that's a part of it. But we don't give up on marriage just because a lot of people have messed it up so badly. And we shouldn't give up on church discipline just because we've so often done it in a legalistic way. We have to recover the New Testament understanding. John Wesley put it wonderfully when he said church discipline is watching over one another in love.