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WHICH WAY ARE WE HEADED?

An AJET Editorial

A pastor was found to have embezzled money from his local church's treasury. The church leadership decided to transfer him to another church as pastor and required him to refund the money as a monthly deduction from his salary. Nothing more was required of him – no public confession to his members nor to the pastors who suffered without three months salary due to his dishonesty. Nor was he required to pay interest on the sum taken. His dishonesty proved to be an interest free loan with no remorse required.

A principal of a Bible School was accused of stealing money and committing immorality. But the governing board of the Bible School brushed it aside and delayed any action on the matter until the working staff placed increased pressure on the governing board. Instead of the fear of God in church leaders, it was the pressure from others that led to discipline.

One pastor was greatly blessed by God in his local church. Through his ministry there was revival with many lay leaders confessing their sins before the congregation. Hundreds of people attended the prayer fellowships each week. Through jealousy the church leadership charged that he was turning the local church into another denomination. The church leadership wasted no time in charging him with theological aberrations, though none really existed. He was forthwith removed from the ministry.

A pastor went overseas for study without permission from the church leadership. When he returned he was not only banned from preaching for six months but treated as a heathen.

Another pastor wrote an article in a magazine in which he questioned the church policy of refusing to baptise a man converted in the state of polygamy. Instead of meeting with the pastor to express their concern, the church leaders simply dismissed him from being pastor without informing the church or discussing the issue with the pastor.

One Bible School administrator was known for his immorality, doctrinal heresies and dishonesty. His reputation was widespread throughout the community but the governing board did nothing about it. When the higher church leadership did further investigation and confronted the governing board

about this problem, they continued to resist removing him from office for six months. He was only removed after much foot dragging.

Which way are we headed? Because church discipline is either neglected or improperly exercised, many churches have become a mirror reflection of the values and practices of the world rather than a reflection of the holy God whom we serve. Churches can no longer command respect from the world because so many members are no different from the irreligious outside the church walls.

There are really *only Two Ways* open to the human race: *the Way of Death* and *the Way of Life*. The *Didache* from the second century provided the catechists with the stark contrast of these two ways. The Way that leads to Death, according to the *Didache* includes: "murders, adulteries, lusts, fornications, thefts, idolatries, magic arts, sorceries, robberies, false depositions, hypocrisies, a double heart, fraud, arrogance, malice, obstinacy, covetousness, filthy language, envy, audacity, haughtiness, boastfulness..." In contrast the Way of Life is the way of the Spirit of God with holiness and love as hall marks.

Without the proper exercise of discipline, the *Way of Death* becomes the characteristic of many church members. But through the proper exercise of church discipline churches may restore and maintain purity of life among the members. According to Hayden, "Church discipline properly includes the whole work of educating, training, admonishing and correcting the members of the church in all things that pertain unto life and godliness; as well as the exclusion of members who are disorderly and refractory." Church discipline involves both discipleship and corrective discipline. Without church discipline no church has a glorious future. This issue of AJET should prod us to think seriously, **which way are we headed** in our churches and in our Bible training institutions?

In this issue AJET publishes the biblical study by Pastor Philip Mutetei on the necessity and grounds for discipline within the church.

When churches have gone far from the Way of Life there is no hope apart from revival, a breakthrough by the Spirit of God to restore the life and character of God within the church members. In this issue AJET provides an article by Scott Harbert on the importance of prayer to prepare the ground for a new work of spiritual awakening.

As the church leadership goes, so go the churches. Therefore, it is most important for church ministers in training to be moulded into men and women of God. Richard Stuebing offers stimulating insight on spiritual formation of students in our Bible training institutions.