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## Discipline in the Ancient Synagog and Matt. 18.

By the ancient synagog is meant the synagogical institution as it constituted itself at the beginning of the New Testament era. It was then a well-established, flourishing institution, deeply rooted in the life of the nation. James could say of it: "Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogs every Sabbath-day," Acts 15, 21.

The actual beginning of the synagog is shrouded in mystery. However, it is generally agreed that the period of the Captivity furnished the conditions which would most naturally lead to its genesis. The loss of the Temple and its cult, the idolatrous environment of a heathen land, the need for mutual encouragement, these conditions as well as the fact that the exiled nation to a remarkable degree preserved its spiritual inheritance and zeal point to the probability of the synagog's having had its rise and early development in the Captivity. Ps. 74, 8: "They have burned up all the synagogs of God in the land," is often quoted in support of the view that the synagog existed prior to the Captivity. But the words here used (סִנְגוֹגָאֵל) do not refer to the synagogs as later established. The restoration of the Temple and its cult temporarily halted the synagogical movement until, with the spread of the Jewish nation and the beginning of the Dispersion, the need for periodic meetings was revived. Undoubtedly the activity of Ezra, particularly his insistence on the regular public reading of the Torah, furnished the impetus for the further development of the synagog. So much is certain that at the beginning of our era the synagog had under the leadership of the Pharisees grown into a popular, influential institution of immense importance to the life of the nation. So firm a place had it won for itself in the heart of the nation that it enabled Judaism to survive the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

Synagogs were to be found everywhere in Palestine as well as in the Diaspora. The 480 reported for Jerusalem alone, though the number is probably exaggerated, indicate that their actual number was great. Each town, no matter how small, boasted a synagog, and the larger towns possessed several. In the Diaspora they were found in all the larger cities, as Rome, Alexandria, etc. Indeed, so enthusiastic was the spread of this institution that the Temple itself did not escape its presence. According to the view of many scholars there was a synagog in the Temple, although Edersheim is decidedly of a different opinion. (Cf. his *Life and Times of Jesus, the Messiah*, App. X.)

The term *synagog* is frequently met with in the New Testament, fifty-six times. Most often it simply denotes the building and its services. Repeatedly it designates "a local community in its corporate

capacity and as under religious and more or less civil jurisdiction" (*Encyclopedia Biblica*). In the Septuagint the word is used variously and extensively, translating some twenty several terms. The Hebrew equivalent was  $\text{קָהָל}$ , which strictly corresponds with the Greek  $\sigmaυναγωγή$ , the English *congregation*, and Luther's *Gemeine*.

The character of the synagog, if not antipathic, was certainly antithetic to the Temple cultus. The Temple cultus stressed ritual, the synagog instruction. The Temple worship with its priestly pomp, its animal sacrifices, and its incense was imposing, the synagog worship on the other hand plain and simple. The Temple demanded the ministry of a special class, the priesthood; the synagog was by and of the people, the layman's church. The fact that the synagog took over some forms of the Temple worship, as the Aaronic blessing, does not militate against the antipodal character of these two institutions. The people indeed yielded to the Temple the respect and reverence due it traditionally, but their religious life was focused in the synagog.

Jesus and His disciples grew up in the synagog. They came from a region where the Temple and its cult was remote, the synagog, however, near at hand. When Jesus entered upon His public ministry, He did not only occasionally teach and perform miracles in the synagogs, Mark 1, 21; 6, 2; Luke 4, 16; 13, 10, but the evangelists record that He habitually taught there, Matt. 4, 23; 9, 35; 13, 54; Mark 1, 39; Luke 4, 15. To Annas, Jesus said for His own vindication: "I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagog," John 18, 20. It was an ideal institution for itinerant teachers. Without the service of a regular homilist, the appointment of the sermonizer for each Sabbath service was left to the discretion of the ruler of the synagog. It was natural that Jesus should be given the opportunity frequently to teach in the synagogs for He taught "not as the scribes," Mark 1, 22, and "the common people heard Him gladly," Mark 12, 37. So also with Paul. In fact, the synagogs of the Diaspora furnished Paul with an audience in many cities, and the nucleus for many of his congregations consisted of the God-fearing proselytes that were gathered about each synagog. He preached in the synagogs of Damascus, Cyprus, Antioch in Pisidia, Amphipolis, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus. "He reasoned in the synagog every Sabbath," Acts 18, 4. The Christians of many early congregations were Jews. They clung to the synagog; they conformed as closely as possible to the venerable cultus of their fathers; they scrupulously observed the Sabbath, the hours of prayer, the Law. Only gradually was the union disrupted, and the Christians were no longer regarded as a sect within Judaism. When Saul went to Damascus equipped with letters from the high priest to the synagogs in that city authorizing the bearer to persecute the Christians, these letters would have been of little use but for the fact that the Christians in Damascus were members of

the synagogs and thus under the jurisdiction of the respective synagogs to which they belonged. As late as the fourth century Chrysostom upbraids his hearers in Antioch for going to the synagogs.

How natural therefore and indeed necessary the conclusion that the first Christian communities formed themselves on the same lines as the synagog. It was endeared to them by sacred associations and tender recollections. It had Christ's indorsement; at least He uttered no word of criticism against it. Here was an institution whose democratic character would appeal to all nations. Here was an institution which adequately served the requirements of religion: it invited to the reading of the Scriptures and prayer, to exhortation and praise. Here was an institution which for generations had proved itself most effective in nourishing the religious life of the people. How inevitable therefore the conclusion that the first churches should tend to model themselves on the pattern of the synagog! The much-deplored poverty of information in the New Testament concerning the constitution and organization of the primitive churches is thus readily explained. For the early Christians there was little of novelty in the constitution of their communions.

It seems that at first the church was also called synagog. Because the church, however, adopted the name *ἐκκλησία*, a term with Greek rather than Jewish associations, it has been asserted that the church was modeled after Greek institutions. But the horror with which Jews regarded everything pagan suffices to discredit this assertion. Why should they turn to paganism for a type of organization which they already possessed? The influence of the Greek *ἐκκλησία* was more evident in the congregations recruited from pagans.

The similarity between the ancient synagog and even present church forms is often striking. The services of the synagog consisted of prayers and responses, Scripture-readings, the recital of the *Sch'ma*, the creed, the sermon, or homily, and the Aaronic blessing. As regards the organization, each synagog was presided over by a ruler, who had general oversight of the services; an interpreter to translate the Hebrew lesson into the vernacular; an attendant, minister, who had charge of the building and frequently taught school; a number of elders; a number of deacons, who collected and distributed the alms; one or more clerks, called messengers. In smaller communities the attendant often was required to fill a variety of offices — that of preacher, judge, schoolmaster, sexton. There is a familiar ring to all of this.

Hence, with a few exceptions, authorities have asserted the indebtedness of the Christian Church to the synagog in regard to forms of worship and constitution. A careful study of the latter cannot fail to be of value for a better understanding of the constitution of the primitive Church. We shall inquire what light the ancient synagog casts on church discipline as directed by Christ in Matt. 18.

Synagogal discipline of course embraced much more than church discipline as instituted by Christ. Synagogal discipline included the administration of justice, of judgment, and of punishment. The Jewish economy was a theocracy. A distinction between the secular and religious is foreign to Jewish thought. The Torah was more than a body of religious truth; it was the law-book of the land. The scribe was not only a theologian, but also a lawyer. The officials of the synagog were not only the leaders of the religious assembly, but civil authorities as well. To the Jew, law and religion were one. This practise could naturally be realized only in communities where the population was preponderantly Jewish. Where this was not the case, synagogal discipline was more or less restricted.

Synagogal discipline had for its object and purpose the preservation of the character of the community as a "holy congregation of the Lord." Any attitude or action on the part of a member of the synagog which militated against this character of the communion was regarded as deserving of discipline. Hence the exclusion of those who persisted in, or tried to justify, their sinful attitude or action. This principle applies also to church discipline. The character of the congregation as a holy people and a communion of saints is to be safeguarded by the institution of church discipline. If this object is kept in view, the sins properly demanding disciplinary action are defined, *i. e.*, sinful deeds or attitudes which are not only destructive of the spiritual life of the guilty member, but which, if persisted in, would lead others to sin (give offense, Matt. 18, 6—10) and thus undermine the character of the congregation as the *Kahal* of the Lord. Church discipline endeavors to convince an erring brother of the error and danger of his way not only to himself, but also to others.

The foundation of church discipline is brotherly admonition. This in Jewish Law was obligatory on all. The Law runs: "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor and not suffer sin upon him." Lev. 19, 17. It was looked upon as a difficult duty, but a duty nevertheless. This duty was much discussed because of its difficulty. Several Rabbis at the beginning of the second century "give strong expression to this difficulty, one declaring that in that generation there was no one able thus to reprove his fellow, another that there was no one who was able to accept the reproof, and a third that there was no one who knew how to administer reproof." They all agreed, however, that "a man is bound to persist in his admonitions until the offender violently repulses him and positively refuses to hear him; but it must be in all kindness and, above all, not in a way to put him to shame." (Moore, *Judaism*.) In later times Rabbis began to frown upon this duty as inimical to humility.

The adduction of one or two witnesses was not so much in the

interest of joint admonition as for the purpose of establishing the declarations made by the person being admonished. This procedure was synagogal practise according to Deut. 19, 15: "One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth; at the mouth of two witnesses or at the mouth of three witnesses shall the matter be established." The confirmatory character as an important function of the witnesses must not be overlooked in church discipline. However, with the duty of brotherly admonition incumbent upon all Christians at all times, it is but natural that with the duty of establishing the words the witnesses should combine the duty of admonition.

Synagogal discipline was administered by the elders, collectively called the court, council, sanhedrin. The number of presbyters varied with the size of the community, twenty-three in the larger towns and seven in the smaller ones. Being elected by the synagog, they represented the congregation, as in the Christian congregation the body of voting members acts in disciplinary cases in the name of the entire congregation.

Much controversy has raged over the proper understanding of the phrase in Matt. 18, 17: "Tell it unto the church." Because He uses the word *ἐκκλησία*, it is maintained that Christ here departed from synagogal precedence and advocated a less localized disciplinary arrangement. But this is an unwarranted conclusion. The term *ἐκκλησία* implied no antagonism or challenge to the synagog at that early date. It was a term with which Judaism was quite familiar from the Septuagint, the terms *συναγωγή* and *ἐκκλησία* being used interchangeably, and was adopted by the Church because of its deeper ideal and spiritual significance (Schuerer).

The chief methods of punishment in the ancient synagog were scourging, excommunication, and death. For obvious reasons, Christ in instituting church discipline retained only excommunication as analogous to the spiritual character of His kingdom. The punitive exclusion of members from the Jewish communion is met with already in Ezra 10, 8 as a measure by which to keep Judaism exclusive. In New Testament times there was but one form of excommunication, the so-called *herem*, Greek *anathema*. In later times two milder forms of excommunication, the *niddui* and *nezifah*, were adopted, involving expulsion for a certain period of time, at the expiration of which the culprit, if repentant, was reinstated. "*Herem* marked an object as 'devoted,' or under the curse of God and deserving death" (*Encyclopedia Biblica*), and wherever Judaism was autonomous, the death penalty followed the *herem* as a matter of course. "The *herem* was not hastily pronounced. The transgressor was repeatedly warned to mend his ways, to repent, or to make restitution. It was only after every mode of remonstrance had been exhausted and the offender's

pertinacity had become evident that the corrective powers of the *herem* were invoked." (*Jewish Encyclopedia*.)

The treatment of those excluded from the synagog was, if the death penalty could not be inflicted, essentially the same as that prescribed by the Lord in Matt. 18: "Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." The amixia of the Jews at the beginning of our era is sufficiently attested by the complaints of contemporary profane writers. In general Jews had a horror of heathenism. To sit at table with a heathen was prohibited, Gal. 2, 12. According to John 18, 28 the Jews would not enter into the judgment-hall "lest they should be defiled." Peter says to Cornelius, Acts 10, 28: "Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company or come unto one of another nation." Most likely the law handed down by the Mishna that no land should be sold to a heathen man was already in effect in the first century. One of the phases of the Messianic hope was the expectation that at the coming of the Messiah Palestine would be cleansed from all heathen and foreigners. Publicans were held in little better repute. In the New Testament, publicans are classed with sinners, Matt. 9, 10; Luke 5, 30; 7, 34, and even with the most degraded persons, Matt. 21, 31. They were not taken as witnesses. To take money from them was regarded as undesirable.

Sincere repentance and confession, much stressed in Judaism, restored the excluded to membership. Tests of repentance belong to a later period both of Judaism and Christianity.

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### Zu Röm. 16, 17 f.

Im Laufe einiger Verhandlungen in letzter Zeit ist die Frage aufgeworfen worden, ob der Gebrauch von Röm. 16, 17 f. (und andern Stellen) zur Charakterisierung von sektiererischem Wesen oder von Separatismus im eigentlichen Sinne mit Recht angewandt werden dürfe oder ob es sich nur um Zwiſtigkeiten und Parteiungen von geringerer Tragweite, vielleicht nur auf dem Gebiete der *Abiaphora*, handle. Es wird darum gewiß angebracht sein, wenn wir besonders den Text im Römerbrief sowohl an sich wie in seinem Zusammenhange einer genauen Prüfung unterwerfen, um in der vorliegenden Frage klar entscheiden zu können. Achten wir dabei zunächst auf die einzelnen in Betracht kommenden Wörter, sodann auf die grammatische Konstruktion, dann auf den Kontext und schließlich auf die obengenannte Parallelstelle.

Das erste Wort, das wir näher ansehen müssen, ist das Verbum *σκοπεῖν*. Es heißt auf etwas achten, es genau ins Auge fassen, sein Augenmerk auf etwas richten, 2 Kor. 4, 18, und zwar um sich gegebenen-