Life Group Questions

The Purpose of Punishment

Passage: Romans 13:3-4

Introduction: John continued his work in Romans 13 by explaining the purpose of punishment. He said by God's design punishment restrains evil, promotes good, and administers justice. John talked about the role of punishment in the family, church, and society.

Additional passages: Genesis 9:6; Proverbs 8:15-16, 13:24, 23:13-14; Hebrews 12:5-11.

Questions:

1. **John talked about the authority structures of family, church, and government. Each of these structures has different spheres of God-given authority:**
    - *Parents of children in the home*. Parents can both require obedience and enforce it. "You will go to bed now." The Bible summarizes that power of enforcement in one word: **the rod** (Prob. 13:24; 22:15).
    - *A civil government or the state*. The state, too, can require obedience and enforce it. "You are under arrest." The Bible also describes its enforcement mechanism in a word: **the sword**.[1]
    - *Churches*. God directs churches to practice church discipline if a member persists in unrepentant sin (Matt. 18:15-20). The power of enforcement is to exclude from church membership. The Bible describes this power of enforcement in a word: **the keys** (Matt. 16:19). The keys refer to an authority to affirm a person's profession of faith or warn that it may not be valid. Ultimately, only God knows the heart, so church discipline is only done for observable behavior (not guessing at motives).

    What questions do you have about the authority of these different spheres? What stood out from John's sermon as he talked about these three areas of authority?

2. **Read Hebrews 12:5-11. How is the Lord's discipline of us an expression of love? What does this passage say is the eventual outcome of God's discipline in our lives?**

3. **Read Proverbs 13:24 and 23:13-14**. **Why is it an act of love for a parent to not spare the rod as a punishment for disobedience?**

[1] Jonathan Leeman, *Authority*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 153.

4. **John said corporal punishment (spanking) should not be the last resort parents turn to out of frustration, but a measured consequence for bad behavior. Do you turn to spanking only as a last resort or as the standard consequence for willful disobedience?**

5. **How is it going with clear communication of expectations and consequences? How is it going with consistent follow through of punishment?**

6. **Read Genesis 9:6-7. What authority does God give to men in this verse? Do you have specific questions about the validity of capital punishment?**

7. **John said clearly presented law, clearly presented consequences, and consistent follow through with punishment are all needed to foster a just and peaceful society. Between law, consequences and follow through, where do you see the breakdown occur most often in our society? How can we make a difference in addressing these breakdowns?**

8. **John noted that we cry foul if a judge lets a guilty man go free, yet our hope of salvation is based on God doing exactly this for us. How does the death and resurrection of Christ give you confidence that God will not require you to serve time for your sins one day? Talk about the wonder of God's justice met and grace poured out in the gospel.**