

What Is Church Discipline?

- Introduction:
1. As a part of our, "You Pick It; I'll Preach It" Series, we are going to answer the question that was turned in, "What is church discipline?"
 2. Church discipline has become one of the most neglected studies in churches today.
 3. Negligence in this particular area of doctrine has caused church discipline to be dubbed, "The Forgotten Commandment."
 4. No doubt, the difficulty and unpleasantness of this command has been partly responsible for pushing this command aside, but also practical questions have also been responsible for not acting in this area (e.g. "How do we start?" "Where do we begin?" "What can we legally do?" "How far back do we reach?").
 - a. I dare say that many people cannot remember the last time they heard a sermon on church discipline.
 - b. Some Christian may not know anything about this doctrine, or that it even exists.
 - c. Yet, we will not be the Lord's church if we knowingly persist in disobeying any commandment of God (Psalm 119:160).
 5. One of the principal contributing factors to the downward slide of American society is the decline in discipline.
 - a. We don't practice self-discipline.
 - b. We don't practice family discipline.
 - c. We don't discipline our criminals.
 - d. We don't discipline our government.
 - e. We don't discipline our society.
 - f. Should we be terribly surprised that we don't practice discipline in the church?
 5. Let's examine what the Bible teaches on the biblical doctrine of "Church Discipline."

I. What Is Discipline?

- A. In a broad sense, the term "discipline" has reference to far more than just a punitive action taken by one party against another.
- B. Discipline refers to "training which corrects, molds, strengthens, or perfects; punishment, chastisement.
- C. In a broad sense, discipline encompasses positive teaching and instruction as well as punishment, the aim of which is to bring about a positive change.
- D. *Preventive Discipline.*
 1. Teaching given for the purpose of preventing mistakes before they happen.
 2. (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
 3. (1 Timothy 4:6).

- E. *Punitive Discipline.*
 1. Action taken after a mistake has been committed, for the good of the offender, and to ensure that it never happens again.
 2. (2 Corinthians 2:6-8).
 3. This punitive discipline is the ultimate disciplinary step, the last resort, in which the church is asked to discipline/punish the one who persists in sin.
 4. It is this form of discipline, punitive discipline, that we are discussing in this series of lessons.

II. Why Is Discipline Necessary?

- A. In answer to the question, "Why are we to discipline," a short answer is "Because God tells us to discipline."
 1. No less than four times in 1 Corinthians 5 is the church instructed to practice church discipline.
 2. (2 Thessalonians 3:6,14).
 3. (Matthew 18:15-17).
- B. However, I do not believe that God was simply being arbitrary. There is a reason behind the command to discipline the one who persists in doing wrong.
- C. Consider what happens to one's self, one's family, the military, and society when there is no discipline.
- D. Now consider how each one of these areas is used to describe our relationship to Christ in the church.
 1. Individual responsibility - as the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5).
 2. Family - (Mark 3:35; Ephesians 2:19).
 3. Army - (2 Timothy 2:3; 1 Timothy 6:12).
 4. Nation - (1 Peter 2:9).
- E. If all these areas of life need discipline to survive, and the church is compared to these areas, then why would we not think the church needs discipline as well?

III. Who Is To Administer The Discipline?

- A. Elders.
 1. Elders are to shepherd the flock and to keep them safe from wolves from within or without who would bring harm to the flock (Acts 20:28).
 2. Elders are to take the lead in any action pertaining to the welfare of the church (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:3).
- B. The church.
 1. Without the church's backing, discipline will never be effective.
 2. Church discipline involves more than just a public statement or declaration by the elders, but it involves the consistent participation of the entire church on a day to day basis.
 3. Often, the impact of church discipline is lessened because few people are willing to follow through with the teachings of Scripture.
 4. (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:4-5).

IV. Who Is To Be Disciplined?

- A. In short, any Christian who has been entangled in sin, given sufficient time and encouragement to repent, but refuses to do so.
- B. In practicing church discipline, we must be sure that the offense of which one is guilty is truly a sin, and not a "pet peeve" or opinion.
- C. The Bible gives us several explicit examples of those who are to be disciplined.
 - 1. One who sins against a brother and who will not repent (Matt. 18:15-17).
 - 2. One who is guilty of immoral conduct (1 Corinthians 5:1-11).
 - 3. One who is divisive (Romans 16:17; Titus 3:10-11).
 - 4. One who walks disorderly & disobey the teachings contained in Scripture (2 Thessalonians 3:6,14).
 - 5. One who persists in any sin (1 Timothy 5:19-20).

V. What Is The Purpose Of Discipline?

- A. To save the soul of the sinning Christian (1 Corinthians 5:5; 1 Timothy 1:18-20; Hebrews 12:9-10; 2 Timothy 2:24-26).
 - 1. Isolation and loss of fellowship should be a wake up call (1 Corinthians 5:11).
 - 2. It should also make him ashamed (2 Thessalonians 3:14).
- B. To save the church (1 Corinthians 5:6).
 - 1. From the leavening influence of sin (1 Corinthians 5:6; 2 Timothy 2:17-18).
 - 2. Silence false teachers (Titus 1:10-11).
 - 3. Remove those who are divisive (Titus 3:10).
 - 4. To cause fear (Acts 5:11-14).
- C. To save the world (Matthew 5:16).
 - 1. The church must be a guiding light to a world in darkness (Philippains 2:14-16).
- D. To deter others in the congregation from sinning (Acts 5:11).
 - 1. If the church knew sin would not be tolerated, they might think twice before sinning.
 - 2. (1 Timothy 5:20).
- E. Due to the multi-faceted purpose of church discipline, it is ALWAYS effective when practiced. It may not affect the return of the sinning Christian, but it will serve to save the church, the world, and deter others from treating sin frivolously.

VI. How Are Those Who Are Disciplined To Be Treated?

- A. We are to have no company with him (2 Thessalonians 3:14; 1 Corinthians 5:9-11).
- B. We are not to eat with him (1 Corinthians 5:13).
- C. We are to turn away from them (Romans 16:17).
- D. We are to admonish them (2 Thessalonians 3:15).
- E. Church discipline is more than a public announcement, but it is lived out in our interaction with the one being disciplined.
- F. However, we are to continue to love and treat him as a brother (2 Thess. 3:15).

VII. When Should A Church Practice Discipline?

- A. There are several factors that come to bear on the question of “when” a church should take action against a sinning member.
- B. These factors may very well demand that more time or less time be allowed before action is taken.
 - 1. How mature is the sinning person?
 - 2. How public or private is the sin among the church?
 - 3. How public or private is the sin among the world?
 - 4. How knowledgeable is the person sinning?
 - 5. Is the sin out of ignorance or is it willful?
- C. We must practice patience, forbearance and longsuffering (James 5:7,10-11,19-20).
 - 1. How much time and patience should be allowed is a judgment call. However care must be taken not to allow patience and forbearance to be a mask for an unwillingness to act.
- D. We must make distinction between the weak and strong (Romans 14, 15, 1 Corinthians 8; Jude 22-23).

VIII. Why Is Church Discipline Not Practiced Today?

- A. Because we haven't taught enough on the subject (Hosea 4:6).
- B. Sin is so widespread that it seems like an overwhelming task (Revelation 3:2-3).
- C. It is unpleasant to confront people with their sin (James 5:20).
- D. May think it will be overlooked since we're trying to do right in other areas (1 Samuel 15:22).
- E. May be afraid of the consequences (Matthew 10:28).
- F. May be lacking in courage (1 Corinthians 16:13).

IX. What Happens When Discipline Is Neglected?

- A. Sin encroaches upon the church (1 Corinthians 5:6).
- B. We disobey plain commands (John 14:15).
- C. We fail to shine as light unto the world (Philippians 2:15).
- D. We give the world reason to criticize the church (2 Samuel 12:14).
- E. We may live with a guilty conscience until we sear it (1 Timothy 4:2).

X. How Should Church Discipline Be Practiced?

- A. Step 1 - Personal Confrontation.
 - 1. Go to the person doing wrong and encourage them to repent.
 - 2. (Matthew 18:15).
 - 3. (Galatians 6:1).
 - 4. (James 5:19-20).
- B. Step 2 - A Confirmation Before Witnesses.
 - 1. Take two or three with you.
 - 2. (Matthew 18:16).

3. These witnesses are not necessarily witnesses to the sin (but may be), but to the confrontation.
- C. Step 3 - Public Confrontation By The Church.
 1. Take the matter to the church.
 2. (Matthew 18:17).
 3. (James 5:16).
- D. Step 4 - Public Rejection By The Church
 1. Let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.
 2. (Matthew 18:17).
 3. (1 Corinthians 5:4-5).
 4. (2 Thessalonians 3:6).
 5. (Titus 3:10).

XI. Objections To Practicing Church Discipline

- A. Objection #1 - I just don't think it's very loving.
 1. (Acts 5:29).
 2. It is what God commanded.
 3. A difficult, costly, last ditch effort to snatch a soul from destruction cannot be seen in as anything but loving.
- B. Objection #2 - We are all sinners, so we cannot discipline others.
 1. Paul called himself the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15); yet he commanded church discipline to be practiced.
 2. There is a difference in stumbling into sin and rebelliously persisting in sin.
- C. Objection #3 - It will do more harm than good.
 1. Granted, discipline is painful (Hebrews 12:11).
 2. But dare we pit our wisdom against the wisdom of God? (1 Corinthians 1:27-28).
 3. Have you weighed the harm that can come to a church who fails to practice discipline?
 4. How much more "harm" can you do to one who is already lost and in the grips of Satan? The maximum harm has already been done to himself, by himself. You can't hurt him any worse than he's already hurt himself.
- D. Objection #4 - The parable of the tares suggests that God will take care of the discipline.
 1. (Matthew 13:31-43).
 2. The "field" is the "world" not the "church" (Matthew 13:38).

- Conclusion:
1. If we are serious about being disciples of Christ and restoring New Testament Christianity, we must be willing to do all that he asks us to do, even when it is difficult.
 2. May God grant us the wisdom, patience, love, and courage to obey his commandments, regardless of the cost.

Question: Does it matter where you go to church?

- Introduction:
1. As a part of our, "You Pick It; I'll Preach It" Series, we are going to answer the question that was turned in, "Does it matter where you go to church?"
 2. Before Jesus left this world, he promised to build his church (Matthew 16:18), and that death itself would not prevent him from doing so (Matthew 16:18).
 3. Jesus was true to his word, and did exactly that (Acts 2:38).
 4. However, there are many people who are cynical when they speak of the church.
 5. They see church as a cold, sterile, formal, institution that will run over people if they get in the way.
 6. Let's consider what the Bible says.

I. Do I Have To Be A Member Of The Church?

- A. Sometimes questions can reveal a wrong attitude.
 1. Do I have to hug my kids?
 2. Do I have to kiss my wife?
- B. Why would one not want to be a part of something that God gave us and was intended for our good?
- C. (Acts 20:28).
 1. The church meant so much to Jesus that he gave his life for it.
 2. It is inconceivable that a follower of Jesus, knowing how much the church meant to Jesus, would turn around and think the church is unimportant.
- D. (Ephesians 5:23-27).
 1. People will sometimes say, "The church isn't our Savior, Jesus is."
 2. In response to this statement, I would say they are absolutely correct.
 2. Consequently, some see it as dispensable.
 3. However, while it is true that the church doesn't save, it is the church that Jesus said he will save.
- E. Therefore the church is indispensable if we want to go to heaven.

II. Does It Matter Which Church I'm A Member Of?

- A. There are so many from which to choose.
- B. Note that this plurality of churches, wearing different names, teaching different doctrines, and practicing different things was not a part of God's plan.
 1. (John 17:20-21).
 2. (1 Corinthians 1:10-13).
 3. (Ephesians 4:4-6).
- C. It has always mattered what church you're a member of...even in the first century.
 1. (Revelation 3:1).
 - a. The church at Sardis was dead.
 - b. Would we want to be part of a dead church?
 2. (Revelation 3:16).

- a. The church at Laodicia was lukewarm and sickening to Jesus.
- b. Would you want to be a part of a church that made Jesus sick?
3. The rest of the churches mentioned in chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation give a warning that if they don't repent, Jesus would "remove their candlestick."
 - a. Would you want to be a part of a church that exists, but that Jesus had "removed their candlestick?"
4. Would anyone want to be a member of a church that distorts God's plan of salvation?
5. Would anyone want to be a member of a church that usurps the authority of its head, Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:18).
- D. The often heard statement, "Attend the church of your choice" isn't as good a piece of advice as you may have thought.

III. How Do I Select A Church?

- A. First of all, proceed with caution.
 1. As we have already noted, even churches in Bible times were not what they should have been.
 2. Realize there are "counterfeits" out there that look like and sound like the church that Jesus built, but closer examination will reveal differences.
- B. Ask questions.
 1. Part of the problems people experience in finding the Lord's church is not that they don't ask questions, but they ask the wrong questions.
 - a. Do they have a gymnasium?
 - b. Do they participate in church sports leagues?
 - c. Do they have an early service?
 - d. Do they have a day-care?
 - e. How big/small is it?
 2. There is nothing inherently wrong with any of these questions, but surely they miss the heart of what the church is all about, don't they?
 3. Instead, these are better questions to be asking:
 - a. How do they view the Bible? (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
 - b. Do they teach and practice the truth? (1 Timothy 3:15; James 1:22).
 - c. Are they evangelistic? (Matthew 28:19-20).
 - d. What can I do to help this church? (Romans 12:4-8).
 - e. Will the leaders discipline me and hold me accountable? (Heb. 13:17).
 - f. Will this church require me to sacrifice? (2 Samuel 24:24).

IV. Why Do I Need The Church?

- A. Because of family.
 1. We are "children of God" (Galatians 3:26)
 2. "Brothers and sisters" (1 Timothy 5:1-2).
- B. Because we're family, we have support.

- Conclusion:
1. May God bless those who are search for a church home.
 2. There is a sea of confusion out there.
 3. Don't minimize the value of the church.
 4. As great as John the baptist was, Jesus said that the least in the kingdom of heaven (the church) would be greater than him (Matthew 11:11).
 5. A court jester, played the part of a fool to entertain his king for many years. Because of his foolishness and ability to make the king laugh, the king awarded him a scepter that contained an engraving that said, "The World's Greatest Fool." As the years past, the king found himself on his death bed and called for the jester one last time. In a moment of seriousness, the jester asked the king if he had made preparation for his journey into eternity. The king solemnly said, he hadn't made any preparations for eternity. The court jester then handed his scepter to the king and said, "This belongs to you. There was a time when I may have been the "World's Greatest Fool," but this scepter now belongs to you.
 6. Don't devalue the church knowing that you must someday stand before one who gave his life's blood for it.