

What Is Church Discipline?

- Introduction:
1. The doctrine of church discipline stands in counter distinction to the primacy our culture places on tolerance today.
 2. Consequently, 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” or “The Great Omission.”
 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).
 - 1) The “sum” of God’s word is truth, not “some” of God’s word.
 - 2) Many will say, “All we can do is teach and warn.” But that’s just “some” of God’s truth, not the “sum” of his truth.
 - 3) We must also discipline.
 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?
 6. 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 mistakes as 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 to have them “taken away from among us” (1 Corinthians 5:2).
- C. We are to turn away from them (Romans 16:17).
- D. We are not to eat with him (1 Corinthians 5:13).
- 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 Cor. 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.