

The Discipline Of The Church

One of the more difficult responsibilities of a local church is discipline. It usually entails heartbreaking decisions against brethren whom we have known for many years. Nevertheless, discipline is essential if a congregation wishes to remain faithful. But because of the difficulty, many local works have not disciplined rebellious members in many years. To strengthen the resolve of brethren who perhaps need to discipline, this article will look at two types of this command of God.

The first type of discipline we will analyze is instructive discipline. This discipline is preventative in its nature. The work of elders includes feeding the flock (Acts 20:28), tending the flock (1 Peter 5:2), taking the oversight (1 Peter 5:2), ruling well by example (1 Timothy 5:17) and watching for and giving an account of souls (Hebrews 13:17). All of this means that elders will take care and make sure that weak brethren are built up through proper channels of edification.

As we have seen, elders have a responsibility, but it does not end with them. The attitude of the church should be that they esteem elders highly in love (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13), count them worthy of honor (1 Timothy 5:17), obey and submit to them (Hebrews 13:17) and imitate their faith (Hebrews 13:17). A recognition of these duties will maintain God's order. To reject them results in anarchy in the church. It is so sad to see these good men despised by the very ones they are trying to help and strengthen!

The second type of discipline we will analyze is corrective discipline. This discipline is chastising or penalizing in its nature. The importance of discipline is seen in several ways. First, the Lord wants a pure church (Ephesians 5:25-27; 2 Corinthians 11:2-3). Second, to harbor sin, disorder, rebellion and wickedness in the church brings the displeasure of the Lord on those guilty of doing so (1 Corinthians 5:6). Third, corrective discipline both saves the church (1 Corinthians 5:5) and saves the guilty party (1 Corinthians 5:5).

The subjects of discipline include those who walk disorderly and who persist in sin and rebel against sound teaching (2 Thessalonians 3:6; 1 Corinthians 5:11-13). This would include brethren who refuse to attend worship services. It amazes me how many saints so can virtually everything they wish except faithfully attend! A busybody, troublemaker and one who will not tend to his own business is also included in those whom we discipline (2 Thessalonians 2:11-15). Finally, a local congregation should discipline those who cause division (Romans 16:17; Titus 3:10-11; 2 John 9-10). False

teaching destroys the glorious truth and good congregations as well. We are not to coddle or tolerate it!

The scriptural course to pursue when it relates to discipline is to go to them (Matthew 18:15-18) and try to convert them (James 5:19-20). We must do this because we are to restore them if possible (Galatians 6:1). Christians are also told to admonish or warn the wicked and rebellious (1 Thessalonians 5:14). As a last resort, if they will not repent, we must withdraw from them (2 Thessalonians 3:6; 1 Corinthians 5:5-13). In which case it is the duty of the church as a whole to support such action (1 Corinthians 5:9-13; 2 John 10-11; Matthew 18:17). Too many church splits have occurred over the years because of disgruntled brethren relating to a case of discipline. But discipline is commanded and brethren must have the moral backbone to demand and uphold disciplinary action upon brethren who are weak and in sin.

God knew what He was doing when He commanded discipline. Churches will be far stronger and will thrive when discipline is properly exercised. Yes, we must be patient, but brethren who have been negligent and rebellious for years have had more than enough patience extended to them.

Kyle Campbell