

Questions Concerning Church Discipline

Introduction. This subject is perhaps the most neglected one in the Bible. Few preach on the subject of discipline, and fewer churches practice discipline. It is inconsistent to insist on following the law for admission to the church in Acts 2 and to ignore His laws for exclusion from fellowship. Thus, it will be helpful to every congregation to consider the subject of discipline.

I. *What Is Discipline?*

- A. More people would be in favor of discipline if they understood its broad meaning. It simply means "education," "development," "instruction," "correction," "chastisement" or "reformatory or penal action."
- B. Old Testament usage:
 - 1. The Old Testament word for "discipline" means "to bond, to tame; hence correct, chastise, instruct, admonish."
 - 2. The word is used concerning parental discipline (Proverbs 3:11-12; 13:24; 22:15; 23:13) and of God's disciplinary action (Deuteronomy 8:5; Job 5:17; Psalm 94:12).
- C. New Testament usage:
 - 1. The New Testament word for "discipline" means "to bring up, rear a child; to train and teach, educate; to chasten, discipline."
 - 2. The word refers to bringing up a child (Ephesians 6:4) and in Hebrews 12:5-11, where the writer shows the necessity of discipline by earthly parents and by God.
- D. So church discipline includes instruction, training, admonition, correction, chastisement and reformatory or penal action. There are two kinds of disciplinary action:
 - 1. Instructive discipline is preventive in nature.
 - 2. Corrective discipline is punitive in nature.

II. *Is Discipline Really Necessary?*

- A. Where no penalty is attached to the violation of the law, there is neither respect for the law nor for the lawgiver.
- B. A school teacher must have discipline in the classroom and civil government requires punishment for evil doers (Romans 13:1-4). Juvenile delinquency results from a lack of discipline (Proverbs 13:24; Ephesians 6:1-4).
- C. God has never allowed trifling with His laws.
 - 1. Confusion would result without discipline (1 Corinthians 14:33).
 - 2. A penalty was imposed on Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:17).
 - 3. God brought a flood upon the ungodly (Genesis 6:1-7).
 - 4. God punished the sin of Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1-2).

D. The scriptures command discipline:

1. Matthew 18:15-17.
2. Luke 17:3.
3. Romans 16:17-20.
4. 1 Corinthians 5:1-13.
5. Galatians 6:1.
6. 1 Thessalonians 5:12-14.
7. 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15.
8. Titus 3:10-11.
9. James 5:19-20.

III. What Are The Means Of Discipline?

- A. Public instruction (Hebrews 10:25; Acts 20:20; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 14:26 ; 2 Timothy 2:2). Many sins are committed because of ignorance.
- B. Private instruction and exhortation (Acts 20:20; Acts 18:26; Galatians 6:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:14).
- C. Private rebuke and admonition (Luke 17:3; Matthew 18:15). It is not necessary to parade every sin before the public.
- D. Public censure (2 Peter 2:13; Galatians 2:11-14; 1 Timothy 5:20; 1 Timothy 1:18-20; 2 Timothy 2:17; 4:10). The action becomes progressively sterner. Brazen and public sins merit public condemnation.
- E. Social isolation (Ephesians 3:6; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15; 2 John 9-11). In order to obey this demand, the sinner involved must be publicly named. The objective of this is "that he may be ashamed."

IV. What Is The Purpose Of Discipline?

- A. The purpose is not:
 1. To take vengeance on anyone (Romans 12:19).
 2. To throw somebody out of the church (2 Thessalonians 3:15).
- B. Reasons why discipline is important:
 1. To maintain the honor and authority of Christ (Ephesians 1:22; Matthew 28:18; 2 Thessalonians 3:6; Luke 6:46). We must do what He says.
 2. To maintain the purity of the church. The church is made up of "purified" souls (1 Peter 1:22; Romans 6:17; Revelation 7:14) and the church must be kept pure (1 Timothy 5:22; 4:12; 2 Corinthians 6:17-18; Ephesians 5:25-27).
 3. To maintain the respect of the world (Acts 5:1-11; 2 Peter 2:2; 1 Timothy 5:20). Increased respect would result if ungodliness were not tolerated!
 4. To save the erring brother or sister (James 5:19-20; 1 Corinthians

5:5). Evangelism is to save the alien; corrective discipline is to save the erring.

V. *What Is The Manner Of Action?*

- A. It must be in a manner calculated to accomplish the objectives in view (Matthew 18:15; James 5:20; 1 Corinthians 5:5). Discipline will usually require strong teaching, but should be done in gentleness, kindness and love (Galatians 6:1; Romans 13:10; 1 Corinthians 16:14; Colossians 3:12-14; John 13:34-35).
- B. It must be practiced according to the law of Christ (Galatians 6:1-2). Discipline fulfills a commandment of God; hence, it must be done.
- C. It must be practiced steadily and constantly. Otherwise, the "disorderly" will accumulate. A faithful Christian in a congregation should not wait to clean house until it becomes a stench to the nostrils and a reproach.
- D. It must be practiced impartially and without discrimination (1 Timothy 5:21; James 3:17). The rich and prominent should receive the same treatment as the poor and quiet.

VI. *Who Are The Subjects Of Discipline?*

- A. Those who refuse to correct personal offenses (Matthew 18:15-17).
- B. Those who cause division contrary to the gospel (Romans 16:17-18; Psalm 133:1; Proverbs 6:16-19). Who causes division (1 Kings 18:17-18)?
- C. Those who are factious or who teach heresy (Titus 3:10; 2 Peter 2:10).
- D. Those who are guilty of sins of the flesh (1 Corinthians 5:11). This would include fornicators, adulterers, drunkards, the covetous, idolaters, revilers, talebearers, and the idle.
- E. Those who are "disorderly" (2 Thessalonians 3:6).
 - 1. Disorderly means "out of rank, irregular, inordinate, deviating from the prescribed order or rule."
 - 2. Disorderly Christians are impenitent, defiant, and show a disposition to continue in sin. This would certainly include those who habitually absent themselves!

VII. *What Is Our Duty Toward The Disfellowshipped?*

- A. Our public duty:
 - 1. Those who have been disfellowshipped should not be used in the public services for this would make a sham of our action.
 - 2. They should be given no recognition so as to imply endorsement as a faithful Christian. Instead, a local congregation must mark him (Romans 16:17) and treat as a Gentile or publican (Matthew

18:17).

B. Our private duty:

1. We are to keep no social engagements with such a person (1 Corinthians 5:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:14). This is done to make him feel ashamed (2 Thessalonians 3:14).
2. We are to count them not as an enemy (2 Thessalonians 3:15).
3. Pray for them (1 John 5:16).
4. Convert them (James 5:19-20).
 - a) This means that we do what we can to restore them (Galatians 6:1).
 - b) If one feels insufficient effort was made to restore sinner, then get out there and make your own additional effort.
5. When one repents, forgive him (Luke 17:3; 2 Corinthians 2:4-11).

Conclusion. Brethren who are reluctant to apply these passages out of love are like gloating parents who pamper their children (Proverbs 13:24). If we are really interested in saving the lost in the church, will follow God's plan for salvation and for discipline.

Passages have been shown that demand discipline and that tell how it is to be administered. Now let us follow them. A congregation sometimes becomes stronger by becoming smaller in number. When discipline is practiced by all churches as it ought to be, the authority of Christ will be honored and maintained, the church will be kept pure, the world will respect us, and the souls of sinful brethren will be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. May it be so.