

The Necessity Of Church Discipline

Introduction. The instruction pertaining to church discipline is perhaps the most neglected of all. God has a plan for the salvation of the alien sinner; He also has a plan for the erring brother. We stress His will concerning the alien, and often ignore His will concerning the erring brother. It is equally important to follow the teaching concerning the discipline in the church as to follow the teaching concerning the terms of admission into the church.

I. *Is The Church Obligated To Practice Discipline?*

- A. The church in Corinth was to discipline the fornicator (1 Corinthians 5:1-13).
 1. The expression, "when you are gathered together" in vs. 4 shows that Paul is commanding church action.
 2. The purpose of the action is seen in the expression, "that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord" (vs. 5).
 - a) Discipline is the way of letting the fallen brother know that he is considered in the same way God considers him: out of fellowship and in need of repentance.
 - b) When disciplinary action is viewed properly, as the divine plan for saving the erring, one cannot keep from supporting it and urging that it be done.
 3. When Paul dealt with the wicked man in the church in Corinth, he warned about his evil influence (1 Corinthians 5:6).
 - a) He wanted them to "purge out the old leaven" and "put away" the wicked person (1 Corinthians 5:7, 13).
 - b) The leaven of wickedness will eventually destroy the entire congregation.
 - (1) If sin is ignored, it will make it easier for the weak and babes in Christ to fall.
 - (2) If they know they will be sternly rebuked, they will fear (cf. 1 Timothy 5:20).
- B. In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus showed that the church is responsible in discipline.
 1. First, all private matters should be dealt with privately. Most problems can be successfully corrected this way.
 2. One who reveals the faults of another without first discussing them with that person is a backbiter and talebearer (Psalm 15:1-3; Proverbs 11:13; 2 Corinthians 12:20).
 3. Some hate to admit their faults and may not be convinced by your word alone. Jesus shows that witnesses are to be taken to establish the truth.

4. If that does not bring him to repentance, Jesus said, "tell it to the church."
 - a) The church must then deal with the problem.
 - b) If he will not listen to the church, he is to be counted as a heathen and publican.
 - (1) Pagans and tax collectors were widely considered by the Jews to be outside the circle of God's blessing.
 - (2) It was simply another way of indicating what happens when a person is removed from the fellowship of the church.

II. **Who Are The Subjects For Discipline?**

- A. "Disorderly" means "unruly, insubordinate, out of rank" and includes any brother who persists in sin and refuses to repent (2 Thessalonians 3:6; cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:14).
 1. It was used in military parlance with respect to negligent officers, an army in disarray, and undisciplined or insubordinate soldiers.
 2. Many believe that the term "disorderly" can only apply to one not working, but Spicq argues that the decisive usage of the verb, adjective, and adverb in the original language confirms that the word covers any breach of obligation or convention, or disorders of life in general (cf. Galatians 2:14). This shows that all who sin and will not repent are subjects for discipline.
- B. Discipline is also for those who willfully neglect the assemblies (Hebrews 10:25). They must be dealt with in the same manner as others who are guilty of sin.
 1. Christians should visit and encourage those who are unfaithful in attendance.
 - a) If the weak show signs of repentance, indicating they will try to do better, this is all that needs to be done at the present time.
 - b) The encouragement should be continued as long as they are willing to receive it and as long as they are improving.
 - c) However, if they have a rebellious attitude and indicate they will never improve, or they will never return, discipline from the church is necessary.
 2. Many churches are neglecting their responsibility in this matter in a dramatic way.
 - a) Weak members begin forsaking the services only once in a while and as time continues they began forsaking more often.
 - b) As they become hardened, they completely forsake all the services and their apostasy is complete (Hebrews 3:12-13).
 - (1) Sadly, far too often, nothing is said or done.
 - (2) Their name is simply removed from the directory and they are forgotten.

- c) Sinners are responsible for their own actions, but in these situations the church is responsible as well. If these weak members were dealt with in the beginning as they should have been, many souls could have been saved from death.

III. **What Manner Of Action Should Be Taken?**

- A. The Bible mentions several steps which must be taken in dealing with the erring brother.
 1. We should pray for them and apply the best wisdom our past experiences and study can provide when dealing with the erring.
 2. His conversion may require rebuke or strong teaching; yet, it must be done in the spirit of kindness and love (Galatians 6:1; 2 Timothy 2:24-26), remembering the purpose (1 Corinthians 5:5; James 5:20).
 3. As we have already shown, any private matter should be dealt with privately (Matthew 18:15-17).
 4. At no time should the unfaithful be given reason to think that his brethren are prompted by any other motive than a sincere love for him.
- B. Some sins become evident before the church (e.g., fornication, drunkenness), and must be handled by the church.
 1. If a church has elders, they should attend to the problem. They are watchmen in behalf of souls and shepherd the flock (Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:2-3).
 2. If a church does not have elders, they must be dealt with in the business meeting.
 - a) The men should select some of the strongest to visit the sinful.
 - b) One that is weak in attendance should not be sent to rebuke those who are not attending faithfully.
- C. How often should they go and see those whose sins are before the church?
 1. With the heretic or factious we should go no more than twice because of the danger of false doctrine (Titus 3:10).
 2. With others we should be more longsuffering (Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:12; 2 Timothy 4:2). The church should give the sinful brother ample time to repent; there is no need for extreme hastiness.
 3. After all of this effort, if the brother will not repent, the church must withdraw from him (1 Corinthians 5:4-5). He must be marked or identified; a public announcement should be made so that there is no misunderstanding as to what the church is doing (Romans 16:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:14; cf. 1 Timothy 1:19-20).

IV. ***What Is To Be Done After Withdrawal?***

- A. After the withdrawal is made, each member of the church has the responsibility toward those who have been withdrawn from to try and restore them (Galatians 6:1).
- B. The purpose for this action is revealed in 2 Thessalonians 3:14. The scriptures do not suggest nor allow any other means of punishment to cause them to be ashamed (or embarrassed) of their sin (1 Corinthians 4:14; Titus 2:8).
- C. They are to be warned, but not treated as an enemy (2 Thessalonians 3:15).
 - 1. It is easy to go too far. The well-being of the erring Christian was, for Paul, of first importance.
 - 2. They were not to feel hostile toward the him. Erring Christians are not adversaries over whom we seek to gain a victory.

Conclusion. If the scriptural procedures are carefully administered it will accomplish good. The sinful man that was mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5 repented when the proper action was taken (2 Corinthians 2:6-7). This shows that the Lord's plan will work.

Let no one say that discipline will not do any good and let no one be opposed to it. It will not lead every sinner to repentance, but it frees the faithful from their blood (Ezekiel 3:18; Acts 20:26). When those who are withdrawn from repent, we are to forgive and confirm our love toward them. In all this we prove that we are obedient to the Lord (2 Corinthians 2:8-9).