

Put Away the Evil Person

The Hard Task of Discipline

Introduction. Church discipline is a topic we often avoid — not because it's unimportant, but because it feels uncomfortable. It can sound harsh, judgmental, or even unloving. Yet when we turn to Scripture, we discover that church discipline isn't about punishment — it's about love, restoration, and the holiness of God's people.

The New Testament doesn't present discipline as an optional practice for especially strict congregations. Rather, it's part of what it means to be a faithful, healthy church. Just as a loving parent corrects a child, and just as a doctor addresses illness rather than ignoring it, so the church is called to address sin.

Therefore, instead of asking, "Why would a church do this?" we should ask, "What kind of love refuses to intervene when a brother or sister is wandering away from life?" To get a fuller picture of the church's duty, let's look at the instances of discipline in the New Testament, objections to discipline, and keeping discipline in balance.

I. Instances of Discipline

- A. A brother who sins against another (Matthew 18:15-17).
- B. Lying (Acts 5:1-11).
- C. Brethren turning to worldliness and false teaching.
 - 1. Immorality was being ignored in Corinth (1 Corinthians 5:1-13).
 - a) Public announcement: no longer recognized as faithful in Christ, and is delivered to Satan (vv. 4-5).
 - b) Purpose: bring the erring believer to repentance, and keep the church of Christ pure (vv. 5-6).
 - c) Personal application: church members support the process of discipline instead of undermining it (vv. 9, 11).
 - 2. Paul later taught that you forgive the penitent (2 Corinthians 2:5-11).
- D. Idle busybodies (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; cp. 1 Thessalonians 5:14).
- E. A factious man (Titus 3:9-11).

II. Objections to Discipline

- A. We're told not to judge people (Matthew 7:1-5).
 - 1. The passage actually forbids hypercritical and hypocritical judging.
 - 2. Jesus upheld judging, but it had to be righteous judgment (John 7:24).
 - 3. Our main passage indicates that members judge within (1 Corinthians 5:12).
- B. Leave the tares in the field (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43).
 - 1. Some will say that discipline does more harm than good (vv. 28-30).
 - 2. In v. 38 the "field" is the world, not the church. Therefore, the church exists in a sinful world; the parable isn't a contrast of faithful and backsliders.
- C. The church hasn't practiced it in the past.
 - 1. So many churches exist for decades and have never exercised discipline.
 - 2. Don't repeat failings of the past, but correct them (cp. Revelation 2:5).
- D. The church can't act if the backslider withdraws membership.
 - 1. They must be "among you" (1 Corinthians 5:1, 13; 2 Thessalonians 3:11).

2. But the expression “among you” refers to membership status, not physical presence (some are always sick, traveling, etc.).
 3. The scriptural order to be received as member of local church is found in Acts 9:26-28. A local church controls membership: members are accepted or rejected based on Bible principles, not on physical presence.
- E. Discipline is limited to a few specific sins.
1. Some say only sins listed in verses on discipline.
 - a) Two cases of disorder in 2 Thessalonians 3:11: they weren’t working and were busybodies (someone who meddled in someone else’s business).
 - b) However, all sins are “disorderly” because they don’t conform to the “tradition” (truth, the faith, divine will, gospel) in 2 Thessalonians 3:6.
 - (1) “Tradition” is explained in 2 Thessalonians 2:15: the doctrine and the principles of the Word transmitted to others.
 - (2) When a Christian disregards and forsakes this teaching, they’re walking “out of line” or disorderly.
 2. Some say only false doctrines specified in the New Testament.
 - a) Christians say the resurrection is past (1 Corinthians 15:12), but other false doctrines violate 1 Corinthians 15:1-2.
 - b) Christians bind the Law of Moses (Galatians 5:4), but other false doctrines violate Galatians 1:8.
 - c) Christians deny the deity of Christ (2 John 7), but other false doctrines violate 2 John 9.

III. Keeping Discipline in Balance

- A. We must keep discipline in the context of love (2 Thessalonians 3:15).
 1. We can’t act in bitterness, and we should seek opportunities to admonish.
 2. We can show common courtesy as neighbor in sickness, death, etc.
- B. We must focus on discipline’s purpose in order to apply it correctly.
 1. Discipline brings the erring saint to repentance and it purifies the church (1 Corinthians 5:5-6; 2 Thessalonians 3:14).
 2. The social relationship undermines discipline (1 Corinthians 5:11).
 - a) Discipline doesn’t nullify civil duties (Romans 13:1).
 - b) Discipline doesn’t nullify career duties (Ephesians 4:28; 6:5).
 - c) Discipline doesn’t nullify family duties (Colossians 3:18-19).
 3. We don’t avoid the presence of the erring saint under all circumstances. The key is to not sympathize with fallen brothers or sisters. If we do, we’re open to the judgment of God.

Conclusion. We have to show Christians in a demonstrative way that they’re acting against the Bible. We also have to let discipline stand as a warning to other Christians in the assembly. But the goal is always restoration, never rejection. We want fallen Christians to know that this isn’t the end of their story. The same Christ who calls them to repentance stands ready to forgive, to cleanse, and to restore.

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