

Church Discipline for Spiritual Purity

A well disciplined church has few problems among church members just as a well disciplined family has few problems among family members. Church discipline promotes spiritual purity including harmony and effectiveness in service to Christ. Church discipline involves judicious administration of the commandments of Christ, and is both formative (forms righteous behavior) and corrective (corrects sinful behavior). Jesus authorized His church to judge in matters of discipline.

Matthew 18:18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

I. Formative church discipline consists of teaching and training believers concerning their responsibilities as Christians and church members.

II Tim. 3:16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17 That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

A. The Bible specifies the following qualifications for receiving an individual into church membership:

1. New birth in Christ demonstrated by repentance and faith.

John 3:7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again... 16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Acts 3:19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.

a. Un-regenerate members pollute churches turning them into entertainment centers and

social organizations.

I Corinthians 2:14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

b. Un-regenerate members are tempted to misdirect church ministries.

John 12:5 Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?

6 This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.

2. Commitment to obey God's Word, and to submit to Scriptural baptism as a public testimony of faith in the gospel of Christ.

Acts 2:41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls... 47 ... And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

3. Submission to the Lord and His church.

Eph. 5:20 Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; 21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

B. Church members must be taught to observe all things commanded by the Lord.

Matthew 28:20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.

1. The Lord has provided churches with spiritual leaders for the perfecting of the saints.

Ephesians 4:11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

2. The Lord provides churches with pastors (Greek poimen, shepherd) who are to function as bishops (Greek episkopos, overseer) setting their churches in order while teaching sound doctrine.

Titus 1:5 ...thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting... 7 For a bishop must

be blameless, as the steward of God... 9

Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.

3. Each church member has a responsibility to submit to pastoral leadership.

Hebrews 13:17 Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you. I Timothy 5:17 Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.

a. Each church is a complete body of Christ, and members must serve in harmony.

I Corinthians 12:25 That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another... 27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

b. Each church member has a responsibility to grow in unity of faith and service.

Ephesians 4:13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: 14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; 15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: 16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

4. Each church member has an obligation to receive instruction by faithfully attending his church services.

Hebrews 10:25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much

the more, as ye see the day approaching.

5. Each church member has an obligation to submit to formative discipline for self control.

I Corinthians 9:27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

II. Corrective church discipline consists of Scriptural treatment of offences including duties of individual church members and the collective duties of the church.

A. Christians benefit from corrective discipline. Christians still have a sinful nature that fights against their new nature in Christ.

Romans 7:23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. I John 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. Even the apostles needed corrective discipline.

1. The apostle Peter received corrective discipline when he sinned in rebuking Jesus. Mark 8:32 ...And Peter took him [Jesus], and began to rebuke him. 33 But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.

2. The apostles received corrective discipline when they sinfully argued about which of them was the greatest.

Luke 22:24 And there was also a strife among them [apostles], which of them should be accounted the greatest. 25 And he [Jesus] said unto them... 26 But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.

3. Since Christians are sinners saved by God's grace, it is certain that offences will be committed by Christians.

Luke 17:1 Then said he [Jesus] unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom

they come!

B. Each church is commanded to exercise corrective discipline over its members.

Hebrews 12:15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.

1.A repentant offender must be forgiven and encouraged to live faithfully.

II Cor. 7:9 Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance... Luke 17:3 If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. Col. 3:13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. Gal. 6:1 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

2.An unrepentant offender must be expelled from church membership.

Matt. 18:15 ...if thy brother shall trespass against thee... 17 ...if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. I Cor. 1:2 Unto the church of God which is at Corinth... 5:13 put away from among yourselves that wicked person. II Thess. 1:1 ...unto the church of the Thessalonians... 3:6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. Titus 3:10 A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject.

C.Church discipline is limited as follows:

1.Church discipline is limited to offences committed by members within a specific church.

I Corinthians 5:12 ...do not ye judge them that are within? 13 But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.

2.Church discipline is limited to the guidance of Scripture. Personal preference is not a

Biblical basis for church discipline as shown by the error of Diotrephes.

III John 1:9 I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. 10 Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.

3.Church discipline is limited to matters on earth.

Matthew 18:19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

4.Church discipline is limited to exclusion as the maximum discipline by which a church is vindicated from the sin of the offending member.

II Thessalonians 3:6 ...withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. 14 And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. a.God is the author of eternal salvation, and church discipline cannot cause a sinful Christian to lose his salvation in Christ. John 10:28 And I [Jesus] give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

b.Corporal punishment is administered by God, never by a church.

Hebrews 12:6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

c.Capital punishment is administered by God, never by a church.

I John 5:16 If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. I Cor. 5:5 ...that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord

Jesus. Samson is an example of a Christian who is in heaven but lost his life due to sin (Judges 17:28-30, Hebrews 11:33).

D. Church discipline of private offences involves differences between church members. Scripture requires all parties to equally seek reconciliation.

Matthew 5:23 Therefore if thou... rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; 24 ...first be reconciled to thy brother... 18:15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. 16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. 17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

1.Offenders who repent are to be forgiven.

Luke 17:4 And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.

2.Minor disagreements which affect neither the testimony nor tranquility of the church should be settled in love by the parties involved.

Philippians 4:2 I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord. Proverbs 10:12 ...love covereth all sins... 17:9 He that covereth a transgression seeketh love... I Corinthians 13:7 [Charity] Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. If settlement does not occur, then the church must decide the issue following Matthew 18:15-17.

E.Church discipline of public offences concerns members' morals, spirituality, or general disorderliness.

II Thessalonians 3:6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and

not after the tradition which he received of us.

1.Disorderliness of an immoral nature must be disciplined.

I Cor. 5:9 I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators... 11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner... 13 Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.

2.Churches must require members to avoid the appearance of evil.

I Thessalonians 5:21 Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. 22 Abstain from all appearance of evil.

F.Church discipline of heresy concerns the departure from sound doctrine. Any deviation from Scripture is cause for examination and exclusion by the church if the guilty member will not repent of his sin.

Galatians 1:9 As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. I Timothy 5:20 Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear. Titus 3:10 A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject. II Thessalonians 3:14 And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. 15 Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

1.Heresy is not the same as ignorance and error. New Christians often sin through ignorance of truth and error of misinterpretation. Mature Christians should help young Christians learn truth.

II Peter 3:18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ... James 5:19 Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; 20 Let him know, that he

which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

2. Christians must study the Bible and be teachable or else ignorance and error may become heresy. Heresy develops from persistence in error that destroys the unity and fellowship in a church.

I Tim. 6:3 If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; 4 He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, 5 Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.

III. The treatment of church members who have been disciplined by expulsion must be guided by Scripture. The wrong attitude of church members toward a disciplined member often leads to continued sin by the offender, to church splits, and possibly to the destruction of one of the Lord's churches.

A. A church member unwilling to submit to the decision of his church is to be considered as if he is an unbeliever.

Matt. 18:17 ...if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. II Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?

B. The influence of the expelled church member is to be avoided.

Romans 16:17 ...mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.

C. The expelled church member who continues in immorality is not to be recognized as a Christian, even by eating with him when such an act would imply support of his rebellious behavior. It is not

the act of eating with such persons that is forbidden. Jesus ate with publicans and sinners (Matthew 9:11), but Jesus did not recognize them as his followers. So we may eat with such persons as here described, provided we do not thereby recognize their Christian character. The command is simply that we are not, in any way, to recognize openly rebellious persons as Christians. Only God knows if they are truly Christians when their behavior is Biblically improper.

I Corinthians 5:11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.

D. The expelled church member is no longer to be a member of the church company even if he is still believed to be a Christian. The expelled member is to be treated with genuinely warm concern without compromise.

II Thessalonians 3:14 ...note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. 15 Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

IV. The purpose of corrective church discipline is to maintain purity in the church with the desire for the repentance and reconciliation of the guilty party, even if it has been necessary to remove him from membership in the church.

Gal. 6:1 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

A. Some disciplined members experience an emotional sorrow of the world, but this is not spiritual repentance and only causes death.

II Corinthians 7:10 ...the sorrow of the world worketh death.

B. Disciplined members who experience godly sorrow and repent must be restored to membership and encouraged to live faithfully.

II Corinthians 2:6 Sufficient to such a man

is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. 7 So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. 8 Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him.

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Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:13)

by Dr. Gail E. Terrell

The Bible is our guide for life, a road map of holiness! We will help you learn more about God's Holy Word! Come to church this week!