

A study on Church Discipline

I. The practice in the past

A. It has been neglected. Possible Reasons:

1. Misunderstanding of the loving nature of discipline
2. Misunderstanding of Biblical teaching on Judging
3. Fear of retaliation (John 12:42)
4. Procrastination - "Wait and see" or "He will come around" The problem is that many times, by the time you wait and see, the effectiveness of discipline is lost Problem is when the motivation for "wait and see" is a desire to not deal with the situation
5. Concealment - Embarrassed or ashamed of the sinners in the church, so everything is "swept under the rug" until the pile becomes quite obvious.

B. It has been abused

1. It is sometimes practiced inconsistently
2. Sometimes the one wronged is disciplined
3. Used as a silencer to those exposing sin or wrong

C. It has been practiced scripturally

1. The brother repents and is restored into fellowship by God
2. Fellowship has been withdrawn from the brother until he repents
3. *"Such procedures seem sad, but God's commands must be obeyed. I compiled some facts over a fifteen year period. This congregation withdrew from 90 people for drunkenness, adultery, worldliness and unfaithfulness. About 24% of the 90 have been restored. This congregation has prospered spiritually and numerically"*- Clarence Summers at the Ohio Valley College Lectures, 1974

II. Understanding Church Discipline

A. *"If one sees church discipline only as withdrawing fellowship, he does not even understand withdrawing fellowship."* -Jimmy Jividen in Caring Enough to Correct.

B. Church discipline is not limited to "withdrawing fellowship"

C. Church discipline involves a wide range of activities, such as teaching, exhorting, reproving, rebuking, as well as withdrawing fellowship.

D. It involves only the family and all of the family.

E. It is the loving way to respond to those refusing to obey God's will

F. Hebrews 12:5-11 - Some Principles of Discipline: 5-6 is a quotation from

Proverbs 3:11-12

1. The principle of Sonship. There are two instructions:
 - a. How not to receive discipline: “my son, do not regard lightly ... nor faint when you are reproved by Him”
 - ☐ Don't blow it off
 - ☐ Don't be discouraged
 - ☐ The next verse explains why
 - b. Discipline is an expression of sonship: “...those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and he scourges every son whom he receives...”
2. Principle of Family - Verses 7-10 show that discipline is a family matter
3. Principle of Love - Discipline is a natural part of love, there is no true love without it (se v. 6a & Rev. 3:19)

II. Who should be disciplined:A. I Corinthians 5:1-11 - Those living in immorality

1. This church was arrogant in their toleration of the immoral
2. Terms associated with withdrawing fellowship:
 - a. v. 2 Remove from your midst
 - b. Delivering to Satan
 - c. Clean out the Old Leaven
 - d. Not to associate with immoral people
 - e. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves

B. Romans 16:17-18; Titus 3:10-11 - Those who cause division

1. Turn away from them
2. They are to be rejected after a first and second warning

C. II John 9-11; II Peter 2:11; Acts 20:28-30; Revelation 2:20 - False Teachers

1. The message is clear that we are not to “tolerate” false teaching (Rev. 2:20)
2. The message is clear that we are to be watchful
3. A characteristic of this false teaching is a drawing away from Christ and from holy living
 - a. History bears this out with the Gnostic heresies and pseudo writings
 - b. Some of the characteristics of this false teaching were
 - ☐ Denial that either Jesus was a man, or God - Because all physical matter was evil, therefore a Holy God could not have been flesh, but just looked like a man
 - ☐ Asceticism - Since all matter was evil, we must punish and deprive our evil bodies
 - ☐ Sensualism - What really matters is the spirit, the evil profane body accounts for nothing, so you can indulge it,

since it is not spirit, it won't matter.

4. The message is clear that we are not to receive those who do not abide in the teaching of Christ
 - a. It is a subject of debate whether this is the teaching about Christ or from Christ. (See the context of 2 Jn)
 - b. We are not to receive them into our home or to give them a greeting
 - c. To do so would mean we are participating in their evil
 - d. History:
 - ☐ Teachers in the early church traveled from city to city and house to house
 - ☐ They were supported by Christians who hosted them in their home during their stay, they were fed, given shelter and bedding, etc.
 - ☐ Giving a greeting in the early church was more than just saying "hi", it was acceptance
 - ☐ This is what John is talking about, if one were to host these false teachers, then they are actually supporting them in their teaching, and participating (fellowshipping, the word used here is κοινωνεω) in his evil

D. 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 11-12, 14-15 - The unruly

1. These were unruly, undisciplined, acting like busybodies
2. Instruction is to
 - a. "Keep aloof"
 - b. "do not associate"

III. Wrong Reasons for church discipline (sometimes these, having been done in the past have in one way or another kept churches from practicing church discipline)

A. Power Politics (3 John 9-11 - Diotrephes Syndrome)

B. Retaliation

1. Does not restore the sinner
2. Does not edify or better the church
3. When someone hurts and shames you or the church by sin, the prime concern should be to restore the sinner, even if it means absorbing the shame and the hurt, even if it means giving undeserved forgiveness. Remember that Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

C. To Cover our own weaknesses - Someone tries to admonish some sin, and he winds up being the one disciplined in order to cover the other's weaknesses or sins

IV. The Right Reasons

- A. To save the sinner (James 5:19-20)
- B. To keep sin from spreading (2 Timothy 2:17-18)
- C. To sustain holiness in us (1 Cor 5:7)

V. The process of withdrawing fellowship

- A. From the above passages it is clear that it is not the first reaction, but a last resort
- B. The attitude in withdrawing fellowship should be of love (see Galatians 6:1) not a holier than thou attitude
- C. Models for handling church discipline
 - 1. Matthew 18:15-17 is a good model
 - a. If your brother sins against you, go to him in private. If he listens, you have won your brother
 - b. If he doesn't listen, take one or two more with you
 - ☐ See Deuteronomy 19:15
 - Principle of more than one in judging matters
 - Difference was that this was to be judged by a judge in the Old Testament, not church discipline
 - ☐ Having one or two more will
 - Help confirm the facts. Of both parties, maybe the one doing the accusing misunderstood or is also wrong
 - Will help to arbitrate.
 - Will help give more force in admonition
 - c. If he refuses to listen to one or two more, then tell it to the church
 - ☐ The church is to be made aware of the same things the one or two have dealt with
 - ☐ The purpose at this point is the same as the one or two, to try and arbitrate
 - ☐ The church is now involved in trying to resolve the matter between the two brothers
 - d. If he doesn't listen to the church
 - ☐ Let him be to you as the Gentile and the Tax Collector
 - Background:
 - While Jews had dealings in everyday life with Gentiles and Tax Collectors they did not share fellowship with them
 - This cannot mean to treat them with contempt

- Scripture clearly teaches us not to have contempt toward unbelievers, such as James 2
 - Jesus had dealings with tax collectors and gentiles
 - Jesus taught us to love enemies
 - However, Jew and gentile did not share in godly "fellowship," though they may have had dealings or associations with them in some capacity
- We cannot have "Christian" fellowship with an unbeliever
- To treat as a gentile or tax collector means to not have fellowship
- *For further study????:*
 - KJV - "let him be unto thee as the Gentile..."
 - In Old English:
 - ye, you, and your - were all singular
 - thee, thou, and thine - were all plural
 - Modern English does not make that distinction
 - The Greek Text bears this out, you is singular
- 2. However, an examination of all scriptures will indicate there is not a *definite* pattern for church discipline
 - a. The wisdom of the Shepherds will enter in as the lead in this process
 - b. One thing that is definite is that withdrawing fellowship is not the first reaction, but only takes place when other efforts fail

VI. Duties after a brother is disfellowshipped

- A. Maintain the withdrawal of fellowship in love (Hebrews 12:5-11)
- B. Do not hold a grudge (Matthew 18:21-35 - in the context of discipline)
- C. Pray for the brother in love (Matthew 5:44-45)
- D. Admonish them as a brother (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15)

VII. If the brother repents (2 Corinthians 2:5-11)

- A. Forgive him
- B. Comfort him, lest he be overwhelmed by sorrow
- C. Reaffirm your love for him