
CHURCH DISCIPLINE

HELPING GOD'S PEOPLE TOWARD HOLINESS



Session 1

A Matter of
Repentance

“CHURCH DISCIPLINE”: A DEFINITION

- Not “spiritual disciplines” in general (teaching, prayer, etc.), but *corrective* discipline
- *Corrective discipline occurs when an individual or church acts in a specifically corrective or defensive manner in response to deviant behavior and/or teaching by a member of the Christian community or by outsiders who threaten the church’s well-being.”*
- Not “negative” vs. “positive,” since the intent of *all* church discipline is positive

OVERVIEW OF NT TEACHING

- Many are surprised to learn that there is approximately *the same amount of teaching in the NT on church discipline as there is on baptism!*
- Yet we *insist* on the one but mostly *ignore* the other.
- Something is wrong!

MATTHEW 18:15-18

from Jesus Himself

- Occurs in context of discussion of “Kingdom Relationships”: Humility, Discipline, Forgiveness
- Says to keep disciplinary action limited to as few people as possible
- Widen the circle as necessary, to the point of “telling it to the church”
- NOTE: Goal = to “gain your brother,” not “get rid of your brother”
- “As a Gentile & a tax collector” – 2 categories of “unclean”

GALATIANS 6:1

- Teaches both the required *action* & *attitude* when someone “is caught in any transgression”
- “You who are spiritual” - not some special group, but those who haven’t departed from the Spirit’s way
- “Restore” – used of mending nets; exactly how to restore not specified
- “In a spirit of gentleness” – not as the “morality police”
- “Keep watch on yourself” – don’t act as if you could never do such a thing
- Goal = restoration, not punishment

2 THESSALONIANS 3:6-15

- From context, specific problem was refusal to work, but the term is “disorderly conduct”
- If people refuse to work, they shouldn’t be allowed to eat (at communal meals? From the church pantry?)
- “Take note of” those who won’t obey & “have nothing to do with” them
- Not a complete avoidance, however, since continued brotherly warning is to take place
- ***Suggests that not all discipline is the same; action is to be suited to the situation***

1 CORINTHIANS 5:1-8

- A shocking case of sexual immorality at Corinth, “a kind that is not (tolerated) even among pagans” – i.e., incest
- Church’s attitude was equally shocking. Apparently proud of their broad-mindedness
- Paul speaks authoritatively, “in the name of the Lord Jesus”
- Gives specific instructions: “when you are assembled. . . deliver this man to Satan”

“DELIVER HIM TO SATAN??”

- Obviously = removal from the church's fellowship – vs. 2, 9-11, 13
- Passover imagery shows urgency: the Passover Lamb has already been sacrificed, but they haven't “removed the old leaven”
- Why not the “3 steps” as in Matt. 18? (1) Urgency (2) Common knowledge (3) Danger to rest of the church
- V. 11 – These instructions apply to more than just incest!

2 CORINTHIANS 2:5-11

- Someone has been disciplined “by the majority,” but has now repented
- Church seems to think Paul is the one offended, but he says it’s them
- Paul is concerned that the church receive him back by a formal act (suggested by the verb – “to ratify or confirm”)
- Goal = to prevent him from being “overwhelmed (lit., “drowned”) by excessive sorrow”
- A reminder that w/drawal of fellowship *isn't the end of the process*; forgiveness may be difficult, but it’s absolutely

3 JOHN 9-10

himself first”

- Contrasted with Gaius, who does a “faithful thing” by welcoming missionaries
- Diotrephes refuses to do so, & tries to prevent others as well
- Also defies apostolic authority & makes ridiculous accusations against John
- John says he will “bring up what he is doing” when he comes; no intention of letting Diotrephes get by with this
- Note: No charge of heresy or immorality, only of being domineering, speaking evil against others, & stopping good

TITUS 3:10-11

- Foolish controversies” were creating division; Titus is to “avoid” them
- “A person who stirs up division” – KJV, “heretick” – but the term denotes divisiveness, not (necessarily) false teaching
- Warn him not more than two times. Why? B/c such behavior is dangerous to the church, & those who endanger the church in this way are “warped & sinful”
- “Have nothing more to do with him” – may refer either to an individual avoidance or congregational discipline; possibly progressive from one to the other
- Circumstances will dictate what kind of action is necessary; what is NOT allowable is ignoring such people!

ROMANS 16:17-18

- “Watch out for” false teachers; unclear if already present
- *Skopeo* = observe carefully. Not “mark” as in KJV. This isn’t about *labeling*, but about *caution*
- Problem = causing division & creating “obstacles *contrary to the doctrine* that you have been taught”; so, not just foolish controversies, but actual false teaching
- Such people don’t serve Christ; rather, deceive others in the interest of serving their own appetites (for attention, power, money?)
- “Avoid them” = literally “turn away from them.” Personally? Collectively? Probably both

1 TIMOTHY 5:19-21

- Elders are not be treated unfairly by being targets of false accusations
- “Those who persist in sin” are to be rebuked “in the presence of all”
- Question: In the presence of *all the elders*, or in the presence of *the whole church*?
- Idea not to treat elders more harshly, but to treat them impartially
- There is no hierarchy w/in the church who are not subject to the discipline of all!

“WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IS IT??”

- Notice that neither Jesus nor Paul ever singles out elders or other leaders as being solely responsible for discipline
- Every member has a role to play; discipline may need to start with YOU going to someone who is in sin
- Obviously, if it comes to congregation-wide action, the elders need to take the lead
- Even if there are no elders, the church can – and must – still act

“SO WHY DON'T WE??”

- Lots of potential reasons, but when we don't discipline, we are clearly being *disobedient* to God's will
- As with any other situation of disobedience, we simply need to REPENT of our refusal!