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
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
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!
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 withdrawal of fellowship isn’t the end of the process; forgiveness may be difficult, but it’s absolutely necessary!
3 JOHN 9-10

Concerns a domineering man (Diotrephes), “who likes to put 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 works
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 whose 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!
“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.
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 within the church who are not subject to the discipline of all!
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!