

Church Discipline

Matthew 18:15-17; Hebrews 12:7-11 & 2 Corinthians 2:4-11

For the next three weeks we are going to take a break from the series on heartbreak. Next Sunday is Palm Sunday and the Sunday after that is Easter. At the end of the service today we have a church discipline issue to address. It is only the second time in a decade that we have publicly addressed discipline. To help us better understand discipline, I'm going to preach on the subject and then we are going to discuss it in CGs.

Discipline is a difficult subject to address and endure

Hebrews 12:11 - *For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant...*

Public church discipline addresses known, unrepentant sin. It is never punitive but restorative.

- a) Remedial – Teaches Christians how to grow in godliness
- b) Cautionary - Demonstrates God's demands

At the end of the service we will ask our guests, any nonmembers to step out of the sanctuary and into the coffee bar to enjoy our new Starbucks coffee and make their way to their CG rooms so that we can later join them for fellowship and study about discipline.

We are not dismissing the children because we want families to have conversations about this issue. We want our children to be warned about sin and its consequences, about the purpose of the church and the joy of Christian fellowship

- c) Prophetic – It warns of a greater judgement to come
- d) Restorative – Intended to generate repentance and reconciliation

First: The Biblical Basis for Church Discipline Matthew 18:15-17 **T**

There are at least six kinds/levels of church discipline

- a) Self-discipline -

2 Timothy 1:7 – *God gave us a spirit... of...self-control*

- b) Discipline by the Word

2 Timothy 3:16 – *All Scripture is profitable for...reproof, for correction...*

- c) Discipline by the Spirit

Acts 16:6 - *And they [Paul and Timothy] went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.*

d) Discipline by a brother/sister

Matthew 18:15 - *If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.*

e) Discipline by friends

Matthew 18:16 - *But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.*

f) Discipline by the church

Matthew 18:17a - *If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.*

At Heritage, that step is to address the elders who then attempt to disciple the offender, encouraging repentance and reconciliation

Ultimately, if a person remains unrepentant -

Matthew 18:17b - *And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.*

From Genesis to Revelation, sin has caused exile:

- a) Adam and Eve were exiled from Eden
- b) Israel was exiled from the Promised Land
- c) Unbelievers will be exiled from the New Jerusalem

Second: An Example of Church Discipline 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 **T**

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. ²And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. ³For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. ⁴When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord

Third: The Motive of Church Discipline Proverbs 3:11-12

Proverbs 3:11-12 – *My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, ²for the LORD reproveth him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.*

The motive for public church discipline is love for God, the person, the church and the world.

Fourth: The Point of Church Discipline Hebrews 12:7-11 T

a) **Discipline confirms our Christianity** 7-8

7 - It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ^sIf you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

How you respond to discipline – whether it is self-discipline, by the Word or Spirit, by a friend or friends or the church - proves whether or not you are a Christian.

Simply put, children respond to the voice of their parent.

b) **Discipline ensures we live well now** 9-11

^sBesides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ^uFor they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ^uFor the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

c) **Discipline maintains the church's purity**

Galatians 5:7-9 - You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? ^sThis persuasion is not from him who calls you. ^sA little leaven leavens the whole lump.

We are all being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. When Jesus walked on the earth he reviewed Eden and he previewed the New Jerusalem. He is perfection. The church is the place where people can come to see the image of God, the reflection of Jesus.

As the world sees Jesus, they will see the beauty, love, harmony and health to which God calls the nations. Church discipline maintains the purity of that reflection.

d) **Discipline maintains the church's testimony**

We must be careful to maintain our saltiness and our light (Matthew 5:13-16).

Unbelievers often complain that the church is only serious about sin in the world. Discipline demonstrates that the church is serious about sin.

1 Peter 4:17-18 - For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ^uAnd "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

We – you and I – should be serious about all sin. But the scope of repentance is commensurate to the scope of the sin. Private sin is rebuked privately. Public sin is rebuked publicly.

Public church discipline concerns itself with known, unrepentant sin.

Fifth: Summary 2 Corinthians 2:4-11 T

Public church discipline is another step in a long process in which many people who are aware of the person and the sin work together to encourage repentance and reconciliation

It is not the last step because even after a person is publicly disciplined, the church body should continue to interact with the person for the purposes of restoring him to the church

In the case of the Corinthian man, he repented and was restored to the church

2 Corinthians 2:4-11 –

- a) Motive - *For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.*
- b) Purity - *Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you.*
- c) Hope - *For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.*
- d) Church's response to repentance - *So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him.*
- e) Test - *For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything.*
- f) Forgive - *Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ,*
- g) Warning - *so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.*

The church must discipline. A lack of discipline is a lack of love. The church must forgive. A lack of forgiveness is a lack of love. Church discipline intends to unite the church. The lack of discipline or forgiveness severs the church.

- Except for situations in which the unrepentant party's presence is a physical threat to the congregation, a church should welcome the disciplined person's attendance in the weekly gathering. Discipline hopes to provoke an unrepentant person to be jealous of fellowship and joy. To help accomplish this, there's no better place for the person to be than sitting under the preaching of God's Word.

- Though the family members of a disciplined individual should certainly continue to fulfill the biblical obligations of family life (e.g. Eph. 6:1-3; 1 Tim. 5:8; 1 Peter 3:1-2), the tenor of church members' relationships with the disciplined individual should markedly change. Interactions should not be characterized by casualness or friendliness but by deliberate conversations about repentance. (Those two points are from the article -)
<https://www.9marks.org/article/church-discipline-primer/>

Conclusion:

Church discipline not only cares about the health, purity and testimony of the church body but of the individual. Church discipline is for the good of Christians and the church body as a whole.

For Community Groups:

- 1 – Have you ever been part of a church that exercised public church discipline?
- 2 – If so, what was the circumstance?
- 3 – Why would a church be hesitant to practice public church discipline?
- 4 – What does church discipline hope to accomplish?
 - a) It is remedial – Reminding us to grow in godliness
 - b) It is cautionary – Demonstrating God's demands
 - c) It is prophetic – Warning of a greater judgement to come
 - d) It is restorative – Discipline encourages a person to repent
- 5 – Think over the 5 kinds of church discipline before it becomes public
 - a) Self-discipline – How are you exercising self-discipline?
 - b) Word – Speak to an occasion when this occurred in your life
 - c) Spirit – How has the Holy Spirit ever disciplined you?
 - d) Brother/Sister –
 - Has anyone ever spoken to you about your sin?
 - Have you ever spoken to anyone about their sin?
 - What does it say about Christian fellowship if this has never happened?
- 6 – How is public church discipline an act of love - Proverbs 3:11-12
- 7 – What does public church discipline tell the world about God? The church? Sin?
- 8 – How should we treat a person who has been publicly disciplined? 2 Cor 2:4-11

