

Church Discipline – Spanking Ourselves so God Doesn’t Have To – Part II

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I’ve been driving since I was 17 years old. I’ve been through quite a few cars and learned the hard way that if you want to prolong the life of your engine, you need to change your oil every 3000 miles. It only costs about \$20 for an oil change and this little investment will save you thousands of dollars in car repairs.

When you don’t change your oil on a regular basis sludge will buildup in the ring grooves and all over the inside of the engine. When you don’t change your oil every 3000 miles excessive wear and tear will result on the piston rings, the rod and main bearings and the cam and lifters. When you don’t change your oil your engine may fail prematurely.

Church discipline can be compared to the regular maintenance of your car—practicing church discipline is like changing your oil every 3000 miles.

- A church that practices church discipline will keep sin from building up in the lives of its people.
- A church that practices church discipline will prevent excessive wear and tearing down of its members.
- A church that observes this biblical practice will prolong the life of its congregation.

Review

I. Elements of Church Discipline - Part One

A. The Place of Discipline - The place of discipline is the assembly of believers-- the church (Mat. 18:17).

- We are not to hang our dirty laundry outside for everyone to see.
- We are not to share with unbelievers the problems that are going on in God’s church.
- We are not to talk to someone about another person’s sin unless they are part of the problem and part of the solution.

The place of discipline is within the assembly of believers.

B. The Purpose of Discipline

- 1.) Prevention – The fear of sinning
- 2.) The other purpose for church discipline is *restoration*.

C. The Person of Discipline

Discipline is not just for church officials; it’s for everyone, including those who hold leadership positions in the church.

Galatians 6:1 tells us exactly who should be involved in church discipline: “*Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, you who are spiritual restore such an one.*”

The person of discipline is the person who is walking in the Spirit; the person who is obeying the Word; the person who is in fellowship with the Lord is the person who has the obligation to seek to restore his fallen brother or sister.

That is the end of our review of the material taught last time.

D. The Provocation of Discipline

How is discipline provoked? In other words, when does discipline start?

1) It starts every day as one goes before the Lord in prayer and during the study of the Scriptures.

If you are a Christian you are first responsible for disciplining yourself. 2 Corinthians 13:5 says *“Examine (test) yourselves to see if you are in the faith.”*

In 2 Corinthians chapter 12, the apostle Paul wrote believers in this church about the sins that some of them had been warned about in the past. They were still practicing these same sins:

(2 Cor 12:20 NKJV) For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults;
(2 Cor 12:21 NKJV) lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced.

Paul warned the Corinthian church that there would be a strict judgment if he visited the church and found these sins still being practiced. He warned his readers to examine themselves to see if they were really Christians (13:5), because a true believer doesn't habitually practice sin (1 John 3:9).

Paul was letting them know that they'd better get their houses in order so that he doesn't have to judge and purge the church from what they should have judged and purged themselves of.

God takes sin seriously. Listen to Peter's remarks on this subject:

(1 Pet 4:15 NKJV) But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters.
(1 Pet 4:16 NKJV) Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.
(1 Pet 4:17 NKJV) For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?
(1 Pet 4:18 NKJV) Now "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

God takes the believer's personal holiness so seriously that he has a scheduled time that we should purposely reflect on our walk before Him and get right with Him if need be. We call this time *Communion*.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 11 we find the passage of Scripture that is normally read during the Communion Service. In this passage we are taught that we should examine ourselves before we come

to the communion table. We are encouraged to make sure our hearts are clean with the Lord and with each other (vs. 28).

When we come to the Communion table with unconfessed sin the Bible says that we come in an *unworthy manner*.

When you come to the Communion table as one who continually practices sin, you come in an unworthy manner.

When you come to the Communion table as one who lives no different from the world, you come in an unworthy manner.

The Bible says that when you come in an unworthy manner you are placing yourself under the judgment of God.

(1 Cor 11:29 NKJV) For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

(1 Cor 11:30 NKJV) For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.

(1 Cor 11:31 NKJV) For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.

(1 Cor 11:32 NKJV) But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

Church Discipline starts each day as you come before the Lord in prayer

Church Discipline starts each day as you meditate on Scripture.

As you come before the Lord in prayer, you ask the Lord to forgive you for the sins you have committed that day (not that week or that month).

As you read and meditate on Scripture, you examine yourself in the light of God's holy commands and precepts and you adjust your life and your conduct as needed.

Discipline starts as we discipline ourselves.

2.) Discipline also starts when we sin against a brother or sister or a brother or sister sins against us.

*Matthew 18:15 "And if your brother sins [Gk., **hamartano**, "to sin"], go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother."*

Notice that Jesus doesn't mention any *specific* sin. The basic New Testament word for sin is used here. In other words, it doesn't matter what kind of sin it is—if your brother or sister sins, you are under obligation to act.

The context of Matthew 18 (cp. vs. 21) tells us that this sin is a sin "against you." There are two ways a fellow believer's sin can affect you:

Directly.

If someone punched you in the face because he was upset with you or if he stole from you, deceived you, lied to you, abused you, slandered you, committed a crime of immorality against you, those would be sins against *you*.

Jesus commands us Matthew 18 to point out to the offending person that what has done is sin. Not only are we to tell him his sin, we are to encourage him to confess and repent of it.

When someone sins against you, the natural thing for them to do is to wait for you to retaliate—they expect for you to get even or to hold a grudge. When you graciously obey Matthew 18:15, rather than try to get even, you show the love of Christ.

Notice in verse 15 that you don't go to anyone else, you go to the person who has sinned against you.

Some of us have a habit of going to someone else with a “prayer request” or to get “advice”. Someone told me several years ago that if you are going to someone “who is not part of the problem or part of the solution” then it is gossip or slander. We need to go straight to the person who has sinned against us.

Have you noticed that when someone sins against you it is easier to hold a grudge against that person than to go to him? It is easier to avoid that person and refuse to speak to that person rather than to confront her?

When you respond in this way it is like sweeping dirt under the carpet-- every now and then you or someone else will trip over the lump until you get rid of it. Confronting the person who sinned against you allows you to get rid of your bitterness and allows the person to grow and the assembly becomes purified.

Ephesians 4:32 says we should be “*kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven us.*” If God has forgiven us for so much, who are we to hold a grudge and to not be willing to forgive?

There are two ways a fellow believer's sin can affect you. We looked at the first—directly. The second way one is affected by a fellow believer's sin is *indirectly*.

Indirectly

Not all sins against us are direct. Any sin that brings reproach on the assembly of God's people stains us all.

When someone who professes to be a Christian is contentious or jealous or displays outbursts of anger or demonstrates selfish ambitions, backbites or gossips, the reputation of the Body of Christ is damaged—Christianity is marred. Some of us may remember the PTL Scandal.

When our brothers and sisters have fallen into sin, they are in danger of being lost to our fellowship-- a loss that affects us all.

Several years ago I was called to minister to a family where the husband had been cheating on his wife. This family had a high standing in their church. The husband had been a great encouragement to the church as worship leader. When the husband and father's sin was uncovered (persistent sin is always discovered and uncovered), the church was devastated and many were discouraged.

Furthermore when *any* believer is living a disobedient life, he brings reproach to the glorious name of Christ.

Any sin-- whether direct or indirect-- is a sin that stains the fellowship. As the apostle Paul says in Galatians 5:9, "*A little leaven leavens the whole lump*" (cf. 1 Cor. 5:6). Therefore if you know about sin in a fellow believer's life, you need to go to that brother or sister and lovingly confront him or her.

I need to tell you that one doesn't go snooping around to find sin. You need not go looking for sin in the church or in the life of a fellow Christian; sooner or later one will most definitely sin against you. When it happens (not *if* it happens), Paul says in Galatians 6:1 to make sure you have the right attitude.

Check think of how you might feel if your son or daughter began experimenting with drugs or alcohol. Just think of the emotional turmoil you would experience as you saw the way his or her life was being torn apart by their addiction.

If this is an adult child with a family, try to imagine the impact of their addiction on their spouse and children. Your heart would bleed for your child. You would have sleepless nights. You would be in constant prayer and there would be times of pleading with your child to stop this kind of devastating behavior.

The Christian needs to have a similar attitude towards a brother or sister who is in sin.

In 1 Corinthians 5:1-2, the Apostle Paul was admonishing the Corinthian believers for their attitude concerning the sin of incest in their assembly. They were arrogant-- bragging about the sin, rather than mourning about it and dealing with it.

Sin is nothing to brag about. Sin is nothing to gossip about. Sin tears families apart. We have experienced how sin has the potential of dividing a church—many of us wept and mourned over our losses a couple of years ago.

If one day you have to confront a person about his sin, you need to go to the person in true humility.

You need to go, sensing some of what Jesus Himself is feeling when one of His little ones is out of fellowship with Him.

Jesus died to take away our sin-- why should we continue to allow it to persist in the local assembly and then brag and gossip about it.

Church discipline is rooted in the love of God. Because God loves us, He disciplines us...

(Heb 12:5 NKJV) And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;

(Heb 12:6 NKJV) For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives."

(Heb 12:11 NKJV) Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Because God loves His children, He disciplines them and thus has called His church to fulfill a role in the disciplinary process. A church that loves the Lord and loves His people will discipline straying sheep.

A local body of believers will discipline straying sheep not because they think they are more righteous but rather because God commands them to in His Word.

A local body of believers will discipline straying sheep not because they think they "have arrived," but rather because they love their brother or sister and will push through the difficult process of discipline that a fallen believer might be led to repentance and forgiveness for their sins.

Last week we discovered that Church discipline is never to get even or to expose sin. "*Brother So-and-so is in sin—we're going to nip it in the bud!*"

No! Church discipline is always restorative. It exists for one purpose—to lead God's people to repentance and faith that they might experience the grace of Jesus Christ found in the true Gospel and be restored to full fellowship and joy in His church.

This week we will be introduced to the steps or the process of church discipline. In summary, here they are:

1. The sinning Christian is first to judge himself. If we all did that regularly, there would never be any need for further discipline.
2. If that doesn't happen, a mature believer is to confront the sinning Christian privately and seek to lead him to repentance (Repentance is a turning "about face" from sin—it also includes a change of mind and heart about the sin).
3. If step #2 doesn't work, the mature believer is to take one or two others with him and again confront the sinning Christian.
4. If step #3 doesn't work, the church elders are to be informed of the situation, presumably leading to excommunication or "*excommunication*"—the taking away of the privileges of membership in the Body, such as being served the Lord's Supper.
5. And if step #4 doesn't bring the offender to repentance, there is the final step of social isolation i.e., the act of not fellowshiping with the person as if they were a Christian.

We must never forget that the goal of Church discipline is never punishment but rather correction and restoration of the sinning member and the protection of the purity of the Church. This leads us to the Process of Church Discipline.

II. Elements of Church Discipline - Part Two

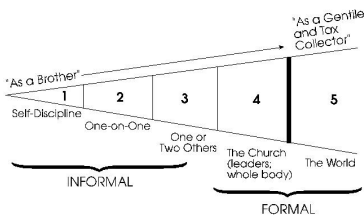
A. The Process of Discipline

In this section we will learn about the *process* of church discipline. As I already indicated, it is in five steps. They are:

1. Examine yourself.
2. Tell him his sin alone.
3. Take some witnesses
4. Tell the church.
5. Treat him as an outsider.

The intent is that if you practice step one (examining yourself), then you won't have to go to step two. "I was wrong, I sinned; Let me get right with God and my brother."

Hopefully if you confront a brother or sister who sinned against you (step two) and they repent of their sin and you forgive them, then you don't have to progress to step three, and so on.



CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Step One - Examine Yourself. (Self-Discipline)

In Galatians 5:22-23, we find the list of the Fruit of the Spirit. In verse 23, we find that "self-control" is a fruit of the Spirit. This word is probably the closest term to what we call "self-discipline." The idea of the root of the word group has to do with "holding" or "gripping" something. In athletics you have to maintain a hold or grip on yourself or the equipment you use in the contest—ball, baton, disc, javelin, parallel bars. One has to maintain a grip on his or her endurance, muscular strength; emotional disposition, etc.

The *self-controlled* person is one who has a hold or grip on himself, especially on his desires or habitual responses.

That is precisely what the reference to the first step in the process of discipline is all about-- persons who have such a grip on themselves that they are able to handle problems and relationships in the church and world.

The self-controlled Christian is someone who knows when to seek help himself rather than waiting for others to offer it. He is self-disciplined and, as a result, self-controlled even in that.

To be self-controlled does not do away with the strength and wisdom the Spirit gives through His Word. Self-control is the fruit of the Spirit (i.e., the result of the Spirit's work) in a believer. It is the Spirit's work to make the Christian a sturdy, dependable person to who others turn for encouragement and help.

Self-control makes you the sort of person who rarely gets into trouble with others because of indiscretions of word or deed, and who, if and when you do offend, you quickly rectify the situation *on your own*.

As was mentioned in our first message on church discipline, self-discipline or self-examination is accomplished as you go before the Lord in prayer and meditation of the Scriptures and adjust your life to the precepts of the Word of God.

Step Two - Tell Him His Sin Alone. (One-on-One)

In step one--self-discipline, no one else is involved; the believer deals with his or her sin alone before God.

If, for example, the Christian has sinful thoughts relating to another person, he doesn't reveal them to that person ("*I've been lusting after your car*" "*I've been wanting to knock you upside your head*"); the Christian handles these thoughts in confession and repentance before God alone.

Step Two begins the first of those stages of church discipline in which others participate. It is the stage where one believer confronts another about what he believes to be the other's sin.

Matthew 18:15 "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother."

First we want to note here that Matthew 18:15 is an *imperative*-- a direct command from our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is leaving no options whenever sin separates the brethren. He commands informal discipline to bring about reconciliation. Whenever a rift or a condition exists between two believers where one is at odds with another, there is no option left: discipline must be pursued.

Jesus uses the word "*reprove*" (NASB) or "*tell*" (KJV). The Greek word for this verb (*elengcho*) means "to expose to the light."

When you "expose a person to the light" you confront the person, exposing the sin so that the person is aware that it is sin and understands that they need to deal with it. Remember the words of Paul in Galatians chapter 6. He says you go to the person with a spirit of humility and gentleness.

Now we have to pause for a moment and place our magnifying glass over the relationship between the two brothers. Jesus commanded that if a brother offends you go to him in private. The offended brother is required to go privately to the brother that offended him and shed light on his sin.

Now in Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus tells the offender to go immediately to any brother whom he may have offended and be reconciled to him-- even holding up on his worship while he attends to this important task.

So we find in Scripture the offended brother and offending brother both being commanded to get right with each other. When disagreement between believers takes place, ideally they ought to meet each other on the way to one another's house to seek reconciliation.

If you have ever been offended by someone you may be wondering, "*Why do I have to go? I wasn't the one who did the damage; I was the one that was hurt.*" There are two answers to this question:

(1) The first being that the offender may not obey Matthew 5:23-24 and cause further tension between himself and his brother.

Matthew 5:23-24 "If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering."

(2) The second reason is that the offending brother may not even realize that he offended anyone.

Jay Adams gives a good illustration about this second reason.

Mary has not seen Jane for some time since Jane has been out of town on a vacation. Now Jane has returned. Mary spots her in church and determines to say hello after the service. After the benediction, Mary hurries to the other side of the church to where Jane has been sitting. By now Jane is on her way out of the church. Mary calls to her. *"Hello, Jane. Wait for Me!"* But Jane sticks her nose up in the air and sails out of the church as quickly as she can, without so much as a "Howdy do" to Mary.

Adams goes on to write "Mary can respond in one of two ways. If she does what many Christians do, she will say, *"Hmmp! Well! If that's the way she wants to act, then let her go! She can come to me the next time; that will be the last time I go after her!"* And so a friendship is ruined, the work of Christ is hindered as the body is weakened, and the honor of God is compromised.

But if Mary understands church discipline and is willing to obey Christ, she will not settle for that. Instead, she will follow Jane from the church and search her out. When she finds Jane she says, *"Jane! What's wrong? I was so glad to see you that I hurried over your nose in the air and left the church, ignoring me, as if I didn't exist. What's wrong? I must tell you that I was greatly hurt."*

In this fictional episode Jane responds. *"Oh, Mary! I'm so sorry! I didn't have the faintest idea what was happening. Let me explain. I was sitting through church thinking about one thing. I have a bad cold and my nose began to run. But I left my handkerchief here in the car. I was so afraid that since the preacher preached so long I'd drip all over my new dress and my Bible, so as soon as the benediction was over, oblivious to everything else, I put my head back so I wouldn't drip and rushed for the car."* After a good laugh and a hug or two Mary and Jane are reconciled. Indeed, there was no offense at all-- only a misunderstanding.

Things to remember: Only the offended party knows that there is a problem when there has been a misunderstanding. That is why the offended party must go. If someone steps on your toe, you may be the only one that knows.

When you go to the person who offended you, what do you say?

According to the Matthew 18:15 text, one is supposed to tell him his sin (*elengcho*) but if we examine a parallel passage in Luke 17:3 we find there the offended brother or sister first going to the offender and rebuking him in a *tentative manner*. The Greek word used in Luke 17:3 (*epitimaō*) means "to rebuke tentatively."

When you approach the brother or sister that offended you, you do not run in and tell the person his or her sin. You approach them, giving them the benefit of the doubt. According to Luke 17:3 you must first go and explain the situation as you have perceived or experienced it, saying something like this: *"As far as I can see, you have wronged me in such and such a way, but if you have an explanation, I am ready to hear you out before I come to any conclusions."*

- This tentative rebuke allows for an explanation. As in the case of Mary and Jane, there is opportunity to clear up any misunderstanding. And even if there was a real offense, it may not have been on purpose.

- The tentative rebuke allows for the communication and discussion of the facts and the working out of the solution to any problems that may have developed because of the incident.
- The tentative rebuke allows the offended party to check his or her attitude before going to the offender. This more than likely will lead to a quicker reconciliation rather than if the offended party runs up to the offender with accusations, not allowing the person an opportunity to explain.

Privacy:

When the offense is between two persons, and between them alone, no others should be brought into the picture; it is possible to bring about reconciliation without them.

Before, during and after the period in which the second step of Church Discipline is in force, the issue should not be mentioned to anyone else if reconciliation takes place.

Why? (Two reasons)

1.) Because Jesus commands it.

Jesus says, “*Mat 18:15 "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private...”*”.

2.) Because once people are drawn into it, if and when reconciliation takes place between the original two people the others who were infected with the knowledge still may need to be reconciled with the offending believer.

This kind of thing happens many times in marriage. The wife or husband shares a problem with a parent or a friend. Later, after the couple has reconciled, the in-laws or friends are still carrying the grudge.

It also happens in the church where one member tells another member about the offense. The two original people patch up their differences and are reconciled but now several others who were told of the offense (that were not a part of the original problem) are holding a grudge against the offender.

A vow of confidentiality...?

Jesus says, “*Go and reprove him in private...*” But does telling your brother his sin in private mean that a vow of absolute confidentiality should be made? No.

How do you know that the brother or sister is going to repent and be reconciled? You don’t know.

In the event that reconciliation does not take place, church discipline will have to proceed to the third step in which others, meaning the witnesses will have to be told. The only promise that can be made is that this stage, step two, will be kept confidential in the hope that reconciliation will happen.

Reconciliation vs. an Apology

Jesus says in Matthew 18:15, to win your brother is to be reconciled with him. The word reconciliation is *diallasso*, which means, "to exchange enmity (hostility or bad feelings) for friendship."

Jesus does not say the sinning brother is to "apologize." Apologizing and forgiveness are two different things.

When you say, "I'm sorry" this only tells another how you feel; he is not asked to do nothing about the defense. When you say, "*I sinned against God and He has forgiven me; now I want to confess that I have also sinned against you; will you forgive me too?*" you ask for a decision on his part.

When apologizing, you keep the ball in your own court; when you seek forgiveness, you toss the ball to the other party. He must now do something with it.

When the one who was offended says, "*I forgive you,*" he makes a promise (which is what forgiveness is) never to raise the matter again.) He promises not to bring it up to you, nor to anyone else, and not to sit and brood on it. The matter, he assures you, is closed. A promise can be made whether one feels like it or not; and it can be kept whether one feels like it or not.