

LOVING THE BRIDE OF CHRIST: What is a Healthy Church Member?

Mark #6 – Seeks Church Discipline

I. What Kind of Discipline Are We Talking About?

“The church is called not only to a ministry of reconciliation, but a ministry of nurture to those within her gates. Part of that nurture includes church discipline . . .” - Dr. R.C. Sproul, *In Search of Dignity*, 182.

“Discipline is the exercise of authority given the Church by the Lord Jesus to instruct and guide its members and to promote its purity and welfare.” - PCA Book of Church Order, 27-1.

- A. ‘Formative’ Discipline (positive)** - The basic shaping of believers by the various influences in and by the church (i.e., preaching, teaching, modeling, encouragement from fellow members, etc.).

“...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt 28:20)

- B. ‘Corrective’ Discipline (negative)** - The judicial and corrective influence in and by the church which confronts the offending party in love to restrain sin and engender repentance.

II. Church Discipline in the Bible

1. In your mind, what is one of the most tragic examples of love-less parenting? According to Heb 12:5-8, 11, what is the love of God like towards His children?

But How Does It “Work”?

“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. 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. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸ Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed¹ in heaven. ¹⁹ Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.” (Matt 18:15-19)

1. What is the first step in dealing with another’s sin against us, according to Jesus? What do we often take as the first step?
2. When do you think this process should be done? Should we do this every time we sense someone sinning against us? What is the second step? The third step?
3. How does Gal 6:1 reinforce why discipline is a good thing?

Why Should We “Do Discipline”?

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. ² And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you... ⁴ When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ you 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. ⁶ Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? ⁷ Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸ Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. ⁹ I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people - ¹⁰ not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. ¹¹ But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler - not even to eat with such a one. (1 Cor 5:1-11)

1. What was the problem at Corinth Presbyterian Church? Why did Paul want to cast this man out of fellowship (see esp. vv. 5, 6, 7)? Was it because he hated the man?

If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:6-7)

2. Paul's response seems a little extreme at first glance. How does 1 John 3:4-9 help us understand when drastic measures of formal, corrective discipline are needed?

Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness... ⁶ No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him... No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's¹ seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. (1 John 3:4, 6, 9)

4 Ascending Degrees of Church Censure:

- 1) Admonition (a formal reproof by a church court)
 - a. To give warning of guilt and exhortation to be watchful against sin
- 2) Suspension from Sacraments (temporary exclusion from receiving the sacraments)
 - a. Administered to those who, upon conviction, remain unrepentant
- 3) Deposition from Office (depriving an officer of the Church of his office)
 - a. When the "credit of religion, the honor of Christ, and the good of the delinquent demand it" (BCO 30-3). This censure may be definite or indefinite.
- 4) Excommunication (the judicial dismissal of an offender from membership in the church)
 - a. Given "only on account of gross crime or heresy and when the offender shows himself incorrigible and contumacious. *The design of this censure is to operate on the offender as a means of reclaiming him*, to deliver the church from the scandal of his offense, and to inspire all with fear by the example of his discipline" (BCO 30-4, emphasis added).

The true church can be recognized if it has the following marks: The church engages in the pure preaching of the gospel; it makes use of the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them; *it practices church discipline for correcting faults*. In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and holding Jesus Christ as the only Head. By these marks one can be assured of recognizing the true church-- and no one ought to be separated from it. -Belgic Confession - 1561, Article 29

III. Our Response?

- A. Learn to Recognize Discipline as Evidence of God's Love - "*For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.*" (Heb 12:6)
- B. Humbly Accept Correction from Others - "*Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you.*" (Prov 9:8)
- C. Take Seriously our Responsibility to Discipline Others - "*Better is open rebuke than hidden love. ⁶ Faithful are the wounds of a friend.*" (Prov 27:5-6)
- D. Don't Forget to Rejoice! - "*My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, ²⁰ let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.*" (James 5:19-20)