

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Why Practice Church Discipline?

Selected Passages

Keywords: Church Discipline, Purity, Repentance, Sin, Excommunication

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SermonAudio Blurb: One of the least practiced responsibilities in the American church today is what is commonly known as Church Discipline yet it is one of the key characteristics of a true local church. This is something that was commanded by our Lord and was taught by the Apostles as a means to call sinning believers back to repentance and a proper fellowship with the church. However, in our times it neglected and even rejected and the cost is huge. This sermon seeks to give a broad explanation as to why any church that is truly a church of our Lord's must practice discipline.

I. Introduction.

- A. A simple "step-away" from Revelation this week to address a very important topic.
- B. Over the last three months I have had people question me regarding the purpose and nature of what is known as church discipline/excommunication.
 - 1. Along with those questions there are the very real issues of dealing with sin in our lives as a church and individuals. Just last week I and another elder had to deal very firmly with a man who is incredibly destructive to the church in so many ways.
 - 2. Add to this that there are several times in the history of our church in which we had to bring the discipline process to its fullest point and send people from this church.
 - a. Those people don't just disappear.
 - b. Often they seek to gain a hearing with members of Missio and the story given is often radically different from the truth. Sadly too often people, meaning well, end up giving both comfort and an ear to people they should instead avoid.
- C. Beloved, the key to the health of any church is the level of true holiness found within it.
 - 1. 2 Corinthians 12:19-13:10.
 - a. You don't see a concern for cultural relevance in his writing.

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- b. He wasn't worried that the Corinthian church was not becoming so seeker friendly; rather, he was concerned that they had lost the basic vision of what a church is!
 - c. It is God's great plan that we share in His holiness (Hebrews 12:10, "For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines us* for *our* good, so that we may share His holiness.")
- D. Beloved, we need to be holy, that is our calling. And to do it requires that we discipline, and be disciplined at times.
- 1. None are exempt from this process, it is simply a part of growing in our Lord.
 - 2. Just as every child must go through times where they are corrected by their parents, so too, shall the children of God.
 - 3. Oftentimes that discipline comes from God himself, such as described in Hebrews 12.
 - 4. But other times it comes through the people of God as they see a fellow believer begin to stray or rebel.
- E. It is never a pleasant task, but it is also not a terrible task either.
- 1. And the reason it is not a terrible task is because of the purpose of discipline.
 - 2. That purpose is to restore a person back to their original position. To take a believer and get them to turn from their sin and back to a faithful, obedient walk with Christ in the church.
 - 3. Therefore, this discipline is corrective in nature. It is like taking a broken bone and setting it back in its right place. Therefore we can call this "corrective" or "restorative" discipline.

Propositional Statement

So today, I want to give you six reasons why Missio Dei Fellowship must practice church discipline, restorative discipline. There are other reasons that we could consider, but I believe these six will help us understand the value and purpose of why a church is to practice discipline.

II. Six Reasons Why We Must Practice Church Discipline.

- A. First, it was the first thing our Lord commanded to be done when He first mentioned the church.

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1. Matthew 18:15.
 - a. In vss 12-14 He speaks of how the Father's desire is to bring any of His sheep who are astray back into the fold.
 - (1) That is His will, His desire.
 - (2) The question is, how does He do this?
 - (3) Jesus then answers that unspoken question in vss 18-20.
 - (4) He uses other believers.
2. Five questions related to this passage:
 - a. Who Receives It (15a)?
 - (1) It is a professing Christian (Brother) who has sinned.
 - (2) Both must be present for us to initiate church discipline.
 - (3) This means that we are not out looking for those who are unsaved to be like those saved.
 - (4) Now there are some who would say that you only deal with those who are habitually sinning, but that is not found in this text.
 - (a) The term, "sins" simply is a statement. It does not indicate a habit of sinning.
 - (b) In fact, it is better to be stopped early on in a sin, then to allow it to take root.
 - (5) We are to confront on actual sin.
 - (6) Not on personal points of disapproval. Not on issues of liberty. But on those things that are clearly sinful.
 - b. Who Initiates It (15b)?
 - (1) It is "your" brother who has sinned, therefore, it is your responsibility to go to him.
 - (2) Any believer who becomes aware of another brother's sin is now commanded to **go** to him and confront him.
 - (3) This ought to be done as soon as possible. Two reasons:

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- (a) First, it turns the brother from his sin quickly, not letting it take root.
- (b) Second, it does not let the sin begin to “leaven” the body.
- (4) What is it that you are doing when you go to that brother?
 - (a) You are to literally “show him the sin for what it is.”
 - (b) This involves rebuking him and calling him to forsake the sin. It also involves trying to convince him.
 - (c) This is important for it is too easy to begin to rationalize our sin away.
- c. What Is The Goal Of It (15)?
 - (1) “If he listens to you, you have won your brother.”
 - (a) This is the goal. The winning of your brother.
 - (b) There is nothing better than to be used by God to turn another Christian away from sin and into a proper, healthy walk with God.
 - (2) Proverbs 11:30 says, “he who wins souls is wise.”
- d. What Is The Process?
 - (1) We have seen the first step, one on one confrontation.
 - (2) The second step is in verse 16.
 - (a) You take witnesses.
 - (b) The purpose of this is so that the witnesses can determine the factual nature of the claims.
 - i) They function essentially and pre-judges.
 - ii) Is he really guilty? Are your facts valid?
 - iii) If he is guilty, then they are able to note if he properly repents.
 - (3) The third and fourth steps are then given in verse 17.

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- (a) The first time is private, the second is semi-private, but now the sin is entrenched and the confrontation becomes public.
 - (b) The sinning brother is brought before the entire church to be rebuked and encouraged to repent.
 - (c) The congregation is not to be determining that validity of the charges, that has already been done.
 - (d) Note, therefore, that the entire congregation is responsible for this.
- (4) If the person still holds to his sin, then he is sent out of the body of believers.
- e. Who Authorizes It (18-20)?
- (1) This passage has been often misunderstood and mistreated through the centuries.
 - (a) The Roman Catholic church uses it to teach that the church has the power to forgive sin.
 - (b) Many within charismatic churches and also what is called the “word of faith” churches use it to teach that we possess some divine ability to demand and prevent certain things from happening.
 - (2) To understand this is simple, it merely requires an understanding of Jewish history.
 - (a) It simply means that when the church acts to send out a person who is in sin, that person is not just “bound” on earth, but in heaven. In other words, God is active in the sending out.
 - (b) All the church is doing is sending out a person who has already been sent out of the church by God.
 - (3) In the same way, when two or three agree, Christ is in their midst.
 - (a) Not speaking of the bare minimum for the presence of Christ to exist, or the definition of a church.

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- (b) Remember when we have two or three witnesses?
 - (c) Well this verse correlates with it by saying that when I go to a sinning brother for the second time, along with witnesses, we are not going alone, Christ is with us.
 - (d) To do or say something in the name of Christ simply means that they are doing or saying something that is in accordance to the known will of the Lord.
 - (4) You listen, when the church has faithfully administered church discipline it does so with the full assurance that the Lord has given it His energy, authority, and approval.
 - 3. This process is NOT the only process described in the bible. It is the normative passage, but not the ONLY passage on discipline.
 - 4. I agree with Mark Dever who sees that this is the passage and process that is used with private sins and those committed against individuals.
 - a. There is the ability to move slowly and with care.
 - b. It can be a quite lengthy process, ours have, as we seek to give ample room for repentance.
 - 5. But there are other sins, that are public in nature, or so serious that they require fast action. We will see in the following points some of those situations.
- B. Second, seeing it practiced is a lesson to all others in the church.
- 1. Acts 5. Ananias and Sapphira.
 - a. Here is the brand new church, just starting out.
 - b. If this situation followed the advice that I have been often given by some over the years, it would have been, “don’t rock the boat.”
 - c. But the very opposite was the action of the Spirit.
 - d. Discipline was swift and fierce, and the result is found in verse 11, “and great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.”

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2. This is a good passage for those who believe that it is unloving to confront and discipline. Here we see the seriousness that the Lord regarding the holiness of his church.
- C. Third, it promotes the health and holiness of the local church body.
1. 1 Corinthians 5 (enlarge the following points).
 - a. They were proud that they were “open-minded” but Paul was sickened.
 - b. When a person is in sin the body ought to mourn.
 - c. (3) Note Paul’s statement if you are one to say that we aren’t allowed to judge another person.
 - d. Notice also the means by which it is accomplished.
 - (1) The whole church is involved.
 - (2) By Christ’s power.
 - e. Lastly, note the goals:
 - (1) His soul saved (5).
 - (2) The church is purified (6-8).
 - (a) This teaches that your sin is not private, it becomes a cancer to the body of Christ.
 - (b) There is no way that we can say, “it is none of your business” when sin is involved.
 2. This sin is not your run-of-the-mill sins. It is scandalous in nature and Paul is quick to act.
 - a. There is no need to take a lengthy process of examination and witnesses.
 - b. Judgment is simple and fast.
 - c. An example would be a person in a homosexual relationship, or adultery, or abandonment.
 - d. These require no head scratching, wondering if all the facts are in. Rather a fast and certain judgment is proper and expected.

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- D. Fourth, It protects unity, rather than destroys it.
1. Titus 3:1:10.
 2. 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15, “If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame. 15 *Yet* do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.”
 - a. Note command—do not associate with him.
 - (1) It means to mingle or mix.
 - (2) The idea is allowing yourself to be around this person in such a way that they influence you. You begin to draw back from them.
 - (3) We see it said slightly differently in vss 6.
 - (a) There were some who were expecting the return of the Lord and would not work.
 - (b) Others are having to support them, and Paul says “no.”
 - (c) 10-11 gives us a sense of what was taking place there.
 - b. Note the reason—they are not obeying the Word of God.
 - (1) Paul gave them many instructions in this letter and these were not suggestions. They were commands to be obeyed.
 - c. Note the familial concern here.
 - (1) He is no enemy to be crushed or destroyed. He is a brother who needs to be corrected.
 - (2) You don’t mock or speak condescendingly at him. But you also don’t speak to him as some distant acquaintance. He is a brother, she is a sister in Christ.
 - (3) In fact this whole section speaks of the closeness of the people in the church there. They were sharing meals together frequently. So much so that those not working could sponge off of the others.

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- d. Note the goal of this—to bring shame.
 - (1) We don't like shame today and see it as something that ought never to be done.
 - (2) And it is wrong when done for the wrong motives, to simply humiliate and dishonor a person.
 - (a) But it is proper for the church to expect obedience from its members. It is proper for us to hold one another accountable for the things taught.
 - (b) We cannot simply ignore and turn our backs upon those in sin—for then we are guilty of not loving them as a brother or sister.
 - (c) When you see an enemy moving toward something that is bad you simply shrug your shoulders, but not so with your brother.
 - (3) And what Paul was envisioning here was that these undisciplined people would come over for a meal, expecting to get a meal and be refused.
 - (4) He would try to get in on the conversation, and they would ignore him or tell him to be quiet.
 - (5) They would not accept his advice (being a busybody). They would not bring him into a close fellowship and allow him to simply sit there and look foolish.
 - e. There is an assumed goal, that when this occurred that the person would repent, come back into obedience and be restored.
3. Romans 16:17.
- E. Fifth, it protects doctrinal purity within the church.
- a. 1 Timothy 6:3-5.
 - b. 1 Timothy 1:18-20.
2. 2 Timothy 3:1-9.
- F. Sixth, it protects the office of elder.
- 1. 1 Timothy 5:17-21.

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2. Nothing worse than an elder in sin and being stubborn in it.
3. But though the office of elder is to be respected, it is not above the law of Christ.
4. As elders understand that they are accountable as well, the office remains pure and the standards are kept high.

III. Conclusion.

- A. The Lord did not save us from the wrath of our sin so that we would remain in sin and practice sin.
- B. Rather, he has saved us to walk in righteousness and to grow in Christ.
- C. Repeatedly we are exhorted to grow and live properly as believers.
 1. Ephesians 4:1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,
 2. Read Ephesians 4:17 to the end.
- D. Mark Dever makes a powerful point when he says that if we do not practice restorative discipline, then we contribute to the self-deception of a seriously sinning member.
 1. Membership in the local church is that church's public affirmation of a person's salvation, as far as the leadership of the church is able to affirm it on the basis of good visible fruit.
 2. When we refuse to discipline serious sin committed by members, we deceive people into thinking that the church can happily affirm, by uninterrupted membership, the salvation of someone whose unrepentant sin contradicts their verbal profession.
 3. In other words, neglecting church discipline tacitly affirms the lie that verbal profession of Christ is saving even when unaccompanied by a lifestyle of genuine repentance and progress in practical holiness. It gives false assurance to people who have no biblical reason at all to feel sure about their salvation.

Small Group Questions

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- Summer Break