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RESTORING THE CHURCH - PRINCIPLES OF CHURCH LIFE

Church Discipline

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this lesson is to help believers to see the need for discipline in the family of God and that discipline is not something to be feared by the godly, but a means of positive growth and change in the life of every believer.

KEY VERSE:

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:”

2 Timothy 3:16

I. WHAT IS THE FOUNDATION FOR DISCIPLINE IN THE CHURCH?

- A. Jesus gave a commission to the Church that involves making followers of Christ into disciplined ones or disciples.

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: ²⁰ Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

Matthew 28:19-20

- B. Jesus gave instructions to the Church as to how to handle difficulties that arise between members of the church.

“Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglects to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Matthew 18:15-18

II. WHY IS DISCIPLINE NECESSARY?

- A. Discipline is necessary for order in the House of God (Colossians 3:5) and for producing order in the lives of people.

1. It has the potential for bringing about change and growth in the life of an individual when nothing else will (Titus 1:13)
2. It prohibits the leavening influence of sin from gaining a foothold in other members of the congregation (1 Corinthians 5:6).
3. It counteracts the spirit of lawlessness in our age (1 Timothy 1:9).
4. It helps the individual member deal with sin in himself that, by himself, he has been unable to eliminate (Galatians 6:1-2).
5. It underscores the value of righteousness as the basis for all relationship in the Body.

- B. Without discipline some very negative things result.

1. Without discipline there is no clear standard of right and wrong among the people (1 Corinthians 5:1-2).
2. Without discipline sinning members go on sinning, destroying their own potential fruitfulness in God.

3. Without Church discipline there is the potential for others to do outwardly what they have only been tempted to do inwardly (unjudged activity is a tacit approval of it).
4. Without Church discipline the spiritual life of the Body, as a whole, becomes greatly weakened.
5. Without Church discipline, confidence and respect for the Church leadership is lost.

III. WHAT BIBLICAL WORDS ARE USED IN CONNECTION WITH DISCIPLINE IN THE BIBLE?

Church discipline does not simply involve removal from fellowship of the sinning person. Discipline may ultimately lead to such an action, but many words are used in the New Testament to describe the kind of appeals that should be made to the person who calls himself a Christian but who maintains a sinful lifestyle.

- A. **Reprove**. To convict, to expose by conviction, to bring light, to admonish, to correct, to call into account, to show one his fault (demanding an explanation), to chasten, to punish (2 Timothy 4:2).
- B. **Rebuke**. To tax with a fault, chide, reprove, censure severely (2 Timothy 4:2).
- C. **Admonish**. To warn, disapprove or exhort (1 Thessalonians 5:12).
- D. **Correct**. To restore to an upright or right state, to raise up again, to reform, to restore, to re-establish (2 Timothy 3:16).
- E. **Judge**. To separate, put asunder, to select, to approve, to determine, to decree, to judge, to pronounce an opinion concerning right and wrong, to rule, to govern, to preside over with power of giving judicial decisions (1 Corinthians 5:3; 12-13).

IV. WHAT AREAS OF MISCONDUCT REQUIRE BIBLICAL DISCIPLINE?

The problem for which discipline is made necessary fall into three main categories.

- A. **Personal relationship**. When two people who claim to be Christians wilfully refuse to be reconciled. They are putting themselves in a place of discipline (Matthew 18:15; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18).
- B. **Doctrinal areas**. When a person persistently teaches false and damaging doctrines, he is to be disciplined (Romans 16:17; Titus 3:10-11).
- C. **Areas of practice**. When a person who claims to be a Christian leads a life of sin, immorality or disorderliness he is to be disciplined (1 Corinthians 5:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:6).

V. WHAT IS THE SCRIPTURAL PROCEDURE FOR DISCIPLINE?

In Matthew 18:15-20, Jesus gave a guideline concerning the stages of Church discipline. He gave four steps. Normally, the first step is the only step that will be necessary in the life of a sincere believer. The refusal of the person being disciplined to align themselves with the Word of God at any point always forces them to move to the next level.

- A. The problem is handled on a personal level.
- B. If there is no response, two or three are to confront the individual (preferably those in leadership).
- C. If there is no response, the church (eldership) as a whole is to get involved.
- D. If there is no response, the person is to be removed from membership in the church by the leadership of the church.

VI. WHAT IS TO BE THE ATTITUDE OF A RESTORER?

The attitude of those exercising discipline is very important.

- A. He must be motivated by love (Hebrews 12:6; Revelation 3:19; Ephesians 4:15).
- B. He must do it with gentleness (1 Thessalonians 2:1-9; Psalms 141:5).
- C. He must have the spirit of meekness (Galatians 6:1-2).
- D. They must be ready to extend mercy and forgiveness (2 Corinthians 2:6-8).
- E. He must have the heart of a father (1 Thessalonians 2:10-12).
- F. He must reprove in wisdom (Proverbs 25:12).

VII. WHAT ARE THE THREE MAIN PURPOSES OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE?

- A. To maintain the honor of God (Romans 2:24).
- B. To maintain the holiness and purity of the Church (Ephesians 5:27).
- C. To restore the repentant believer (Galatians 6:1; 2 Corinthians 2:7-10).

CONCLUSION:

Discipline is a normal part of family life. It is demonstration of faithfulness and is designed for the restoration and salvation of God's people. It is a means of instruction and grace, not destruction. It is an evidence of love, not hate or fear. The believer who sees discipline in this way will not despise it but learn to embrace it as an instrument in their life to greater productivity in the Kingdom of God (Proverbs 15:10).