

Church discipline - explanation.

Discipline:

1. The community of faith exercises discipline over its members. They are members one of another, fellow members of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:25). This body is to be marked by unity (Eph. 4:3), 'orthodoxy' ('one faith', v. 5) and purity. When believers refuse to be reconciled they deny the unity of the church and thus become subject to discipline by the assembly (Matt. 18:17). When the truth of the gospel is denied church discipline is to be exercised (2 John 7–11; cf. 1 Tim. 1:20). When there is open and scandalous sin it cannot be tolerated; severe action must be taken (1 Cor. 5:1–5) but always with a view to bringing about repentance.^[1]

2. In three separate passages, the apostle explains that a member needs to be disciplined for gross immorality that is publicly known (1 Cor. 5:1-13), doctrinal heresy (Rom. 16:17-18), and intentionally creating division in the church (Titus 3:10-11). Though the purpose of church discipline is always restoration (Gal. 6:1), when the persons in question will not admit that they have been in sin, they should be put out of the fellowship of the church and denied any privileges of church membership, including but not limited to partaking of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 5:11). This action removes the spiritual protection of the church from them and allows satanic attack to reveal their true spiritual status "for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the Day of the Lord" (1 Cor. 5:5 HCSB). Paul holds out the hope that the satanic assault may drive them back to the church in repentance.^[2]

Why church discipline isn't against the Lord's command to "not judge"

In the following, judgment is mandatory;

Mt 7:15–16- "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?"

John 7:24- Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

Gal 1:8–9- 8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! 9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

Commentary: Matthew 7:1 "Do not judge lest you be judged"

"Human nature encourages us to pay far more attention to the shortcomings of others than to our own faults. We tend to evaluate others on the basis of a lofty standard of righteousness that somehow is not applicable to our own performance. Jesus says, Do not judge. The Greek construction (mē plus the present imperative) carries with it the idea of ceasing what you are now doing. Williams translates, "Stop criticizing others." Judging, in this context, implies a harsh and censorious spirit. If you insist on condemning others, you exclude yourself from God's forgiveness. Although it is psychologically true that a critical spirit receives from others a harsh response, Jesus is here speaking of final judgment. The NIV correctly translates, or you too will be judged. The admonition not to judge is often taken incorrectly to imply that believers are not to make moral judgments about anyone or anything. That this is not what was intended is clear from verses 15–20, which warn of false prophets who can be known

[1] "Discipline," New Dictionary of Biblical Theology, 450.

[2] "DISCIPLINE," Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, paragraph 4640.

by the fruit they bear. Jesus does not ask us to lay aside our critical faculties but rather to resist the urge to speak harshly of others. The issue is serious in that God will judge us by the same standard we apply to others. This rather frightening truth should change the way in which we tend to view other people's failings". Robert H. Mounce, Matthew, NIBC 1; Accordance electronic ed. 18 vols.; (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 64.

"A person once said to me, "If the devil is not able to destroy a Christian's witness by making him apathetic, he will try to do it by making him a fanatic." I believe that is true. In the midst of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus talks about failures which will render a Christian apathetic in regard to Christian service. They are a love of money, and anxiety. Both of these will have a desensitizing effect in his witness, for if a Christian has his mind centered on things (either to accumulate them or to worry about them) he will not see God and, hence, he cannot serve him. At this point, however, Jesus goes on to show that there is also a type of zeal that can ruin a believer's witness. That is a zeal for judging others. It is harmful because it will turn him into a sharp and unjust critic of his Christian brothers." James Montgomery Boice, The Sermon on the Mount, Boice Expository Commentary 14; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1972), 224.

Biblical samples of discipline:

Prov 13:24- He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly.

Ideal fathers have the obligation, privilege and responsibility to pass on to their children wisdom, knowledge, manners, and behavior that is becoming to his personhood, that will establish him in the right way and prepare him to propagate his life and family into future generations. Some fathers do poorly at this, but we would all agree that this is what a good father and what a good mother does.

Prov 15:10- Harsh discipline is for him who forsakes the way, And he who hates correction will die. severity is proportional

Sometimes a child is so stubborn we would leave them to "their own demise", knowing that they will face a more difficult correction in their workplace, their peers, from the law or utter ruin, some kids we will say, only learn the hard way. Do you know a kid or two like that?

Maybe you yourself have a little stubborn streak in you. When there is rebellion, a more severe action is required.

Heb 12:9- Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? Good fatherliness compels trust.

Young people do not become great adults by accident. They are trained. Some aspects of training is called discipline. Discipline corrects them and their corrections are generally without major incident. Every act of discipline is not a duel or a fight to the death. Generally it is a simple, "hey bud, please don't forget to put away the tools" responded to with "ok dad, I won't forget". Church discipline is the same. it is our training, generally not severe. We submit to it because we love and trust God, and His word.

Gal 6:1-2- 1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Can you see here how sin can be seen like an antagonist? Overtaken here comes from a word meaning "to do ahead of time, to be surprised" It is as if the sin is done before you even know it has happened. Usually, you will immediately confess it- to your wife, to your friend, to your

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[2] "DISCIPLINE," Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, paragraph 4640.

kid. But something would prevent you from repenting. What is that? Your pride. When you see a brother overtaken, know that pride could be lurking there and be gentle. Also, be careful. Sin may use this to snare you as well.

Eph 5:11–12- 11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.

What if your friend was planning how to take advantage of some situation, and profit from it.

When you hear about it, you know it is wrong, but as your friend talks to you about it, you are thinking about doing the same thing yourself. You begin to fellowship with this sin. We expose it. We say, “its wrong”, “its sin”. Just talking about secret sin is shameful. It is not the subject of conversation, of casual interest. It is to be abhorred.

1 Cor 5:1–5- 1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father’s wife! 2 And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. 3 For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. 4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 5 deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Discipline will be severe in severe circumstances- it is not judgmental in the worldly sense because it does not claim to know the heart. It does judge right from wrong and it knows the Lord’s will in the face of sin. We call it sin.

That Satan had power to afflict the body is evident from frequent NT references to the effects of demon possession (cf. Matt 9:32, 33; Luke 9:39-42) and to satanic activity in causing affliction or limitation (2Cor 12:7; 1Thess 2:18). This bodily punishment by Satan, Paul hoped, would have the effect of causing the man to repent so that his spirit (his person) might be saved in the day of the Lord—i.e., at the second coming of Christ. W. Harold Mare, 1 Corinthians, EBC 10; ed. Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), paragraph 53731.

Elders have a greater degree of accountability!

1 Tim 5:17–22- Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. 18 For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer is worthy of his wages.” 19 Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. 20 Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear. 21 I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality. 22 Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people’s sins; keep yourself pure.

Principles:

[1] “Discipline,” New Dictionary of Biblical Theology, 450.

[2] “DISCIPLINE,” Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, paragraph 4640.

Jesus' teaching on discipline:

Matt 18:15–20- “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that “by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ 17 And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. 18 “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 “Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

4 steps involved in this passage: see verses 15-17

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

a loving, godly brother will speak in private to a person who has sinned. Goal? _____

2 or 3 will go a 2nd time if the 1st did not end with the truth being heard and restoration begun. An elder should be involved at this point.

If these do not help the sinning brother receive this correction, this warning not to sin, then they are to bring in one more plea. _____

If this person will not listen still, they this person is to be treated like _____

Notes:

[1] “Discipline,” New Dictionary of Biblical Theology, 450.

[2] “DISCIPLINE,” Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, paragraph 4640.