

**Title: How to Keep the Church Holy (Part 2)**

**Text: Various**

**Introduction**

**Church Discipline! Why in the world would a pastor preach on such a subject?**

I mean, it's not visitor friendly. It doesn't "show" well.

And we are living in such difficult times, shouldn't I focus on something that is more uplifting and encouraging?

Well, first of all, all of God's word is encouraging if understood properly - because His Word is Truth.

Second when one understands God's framework of Church discipline (in other words, the biblical components of discipline) one will understand that church discipline is instituted by God for the believer's good, the church's witness, and God's glory!

Again, I recommend the Bible first and foremost regarding this subject. We spent a lot of time walking through various important Scriptures last Sunday.

Secondly, I recommend Dr. Jonathan Leeman's book, **"Church Discipline - How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus"**

A book which I am heavily relying upon for this sermon - Chapter 2 specifically.

The elders and I believe it is crucial for us as a church to understand this biblical concept for the health and wellbeing of our church.

So, my goal with this three-week series is to give a clear understanding of this biblical doctrine.

Why? Because the more the church understands the teachings of Jesus and the bible (aka Doctrine), the better she will accomplish the Great Commission in a healthy and powerful way!

**Main Idea: If you Understand God's Framework, You Understand Church Discipline !**

How are we to understand God's framework?

We will understand God's framework when we understand the answers to four vital questions.

What are the questions?

1. What is the Gospel?
2. What is a Christian?
3. What is a Local Church?
4. What is Church Membership?

And as we understand these four questions, we will be able to clearly understand the point and necessity of Church Discipline.

### **1. What is the Gospel ?**

*Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus (Preface: A Tale of Two Gospels)*

*Here are two subtly different versions of the gospel. The first one will probably shut down any talk about church discipline. The second one will start the conversation.*

*Gospel 1: God is holy. We have all sinned, separating us from God. But God sent his Son to die on the cross and rise again so that we might be forgiven. Everyone who believes in Jesus can have eternal life. We're not justified by works. We're justified by faith alone. The gospel therefore calls all people to "just believe!" An unconditionally loving God will take you as you are.*

*Gospel 2: God is holy. We have all sinned, separating us from God. But God sent his Son to die on the cross and rise again so that we might be forgiven and begin to follow the Son as King and Lord. Anyone who repents and believes can have eternal life, a life which begins today and stretches into eternity. We're not justified by works. We're justified by faith alone, but the faith which works is never alone. The gospel, therefore, calls all people to "repent and believe." A contra-conditionally loving God will take you contrary to what you deserve, and then enable you by the power of the Spirit to become holy and obedient like his Son. By reconciling you to himself, God also reconciles you to his family, the church, and enables you as his people to represent together his own holy character and triune glory. - Church Discipline Leeman Pg. 11*

So, what is the gospel? Both definitions are correct. However, the second definition is more complete and helps us to understand that we have a responsibility with the gospel for ourselves as a church.

The best place to get the clearest answer is the Bible.

Paul lays out a clear and simple definition of the gospel.

#### **1 Corinthians 15:1-5 ESV**

*<sup>1</sup> Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, <sup>2</sup> and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. <sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.*

This depiction of the gospel is in an encapsulated form that when peeled apart and expanded is the complete picture of God's rescue plan for humanity.

Why must we understand the Gospel? Because it is the "good news" of Christ that gains us entrance into a relationship with God that was previously unattainable.

God pursued His creation with the offer of redemption. The creation could not pursue the Creator, nor would it want to pursue the Creator. Why? No one seeks after God!

**Romans 3:10–12 ESV**

*<sup>10</sup> as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup> no one understands; no one seeks for God. <sup>12</sup> All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”*

Why?

**Genesis 3:15 ESV**

*<sup>15</sup> I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”*

So, we are enemies of God!

**Romans 5:10 ESV**

*<sup>10</sup> For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.*

But Christ

**Romans 5:8 ESV**

*<sup>8</sup> but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

*The good news, in short, is that Jesus Christ has won salvation and rule for all who put their trust in him and follow him as Lord. Salvation includes the forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God in Christ, reconciliation with Christ’s people, and a new Spirit-indwelt heart that now wants to rule obediently for the purposes of representing Jesus on earth. Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus What Is the Gospel?*

What does the gospel have to do with Church Discipline?

Simply this. One must be part of the church to enjoy the protection of Church Discipline (more on this concept later).

In other words, the church does not “Discipline” those in the world. You must be a part of the family of God for Church Discipline to be utilized and effective. The gospel gains you entrance into God’s family.

On a side note...

Can you articulate the gospel? In other words, if someone were to ask you, “How can I have a relationship with God?” Would you be able to tell them?

If you cannot, today is a good day for you to commit to the Lord so that you will learn how to communicate the Good News of Jesus Christ.

**Review** - If you Understand God’s Framework, You Understand Church Discipline.

- What is the Gospel?

## 2. What is a Christian ?

A Christian is one who has been given a new nature/heart -

### **Deuteronomy 30:6–8 ESV**

*<sup>6</sup> And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. <sup>7</sup> And the LORD your God will put all these curses on your foes and enemies who persecuted you. <sup>8</sup> And you shall again obey the voice of the LORD and keep all his commandments that I command you today.*

### **Ezekiel 36:24–27 ESV**

*<sup>24</sup> I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. <sup>25</sup> I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. <sup>26</sup> And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

A Christian has a new family – a family from every tribe, nation, and tongue!

And by Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus created the opportunity for His enemies to become not just rescued from their sin penalty (justified), but His family.

And all believers are a part of the family of God.

*"I'm so glad I'm a part of the Family of God,  
I've been washed in the fountain, cleansed by His Blood!  
Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod,  
For I'm part of the family, The Family of God."*

And so, what are the implications of this? We are not just sons and daughters of God, but we are brothers and sisters in Christ.

When we are born again, we become part of the universal church - the family of God. Jew and Gentile!

### **Ephesians 3:6 ESV**

*<sup>6</sup> This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*

We connect as a family, not universally, but locally in churches.

The Gospel gains one entrance into the family of God.

How does one know if one is part of the family of God?

The church verifies your profession of faith.

A Christian has a new job description -

We are identified with Christ.

**Romans 6:4–5 ESV**

*<sup>4</sup> We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. <sup>5</sup> For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.*

**Galatians 2:20 ESV**

*<sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

What is a Muslim? What is a Buddhist? What is a Mormon? What is an Atheist? What is an Agnostic?

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

Can you explain what a genuine, born-again Christian is? There is a correct answer. And, there are many incorrect answers. Do you know the difference?

What does knowing what a Christian is, have to do with Church Discipline?

No one is born a Christian. You cannot say, *“Well, I’ve just always been a Christian.”* It doesn’t work that way. To be a Christian means you have stepped over from death to life.

This is what Jesus Himself taught in...

**John 5:24 (ESV)**

*<sup>24</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*

A Christian has passed from death to life because they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. They believe that His finished work on the cross (His death, burial, and resurrection) satisfied the wrath of God and paid their sin debt owed to God.

And because His wrath is satisfied, and that debt has been paid, they are now free from eternal condemnation. They now have a right relationship with God and, as a result, they are part of a new people group – The Church!

Non Christians cannot be a part of God’s universal church and SHOULD NOT be a part of God’s local church.

Becoming a Christian isn’t just a *“Get out of Hell free”* card. Becoming a Christian makes you part of an entirely new life and family. You are either in His family or not.

**Review** - If you Understand God’s Framework, You Understand Church Discipline

- What is the Gospel?

- What is a Christian?

### 3. What is a Local Church?

Let's first say what a local church is not. A local church is not simply a gathering of Christians.

For example, if a family happens to be all born-again followers of Christ, and they are all gathered for a meal, they are not a church, and they are not having church.

*Jesus has given a kingdom authority to Christians gathered together as a local church that he has not given to individual Christians. Specifically, he has given local churches the authority to exercise the keys of the kingdom through giving and withholding baptism and the Lord's Supper, thereby doing the work of marking off God's people from the world. Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus What Is a Local Church?*

[Matthew 16](#) - Jesus discusses the church and her corporate authority with the disciples.

[Matthew 18](#) - Jesus instructs the disciples on how to use the corporate authority in the local church.

[Matthew 28](#) - in the Great Commission, Jesus instructs the disciples on how to create and operate local churches throughout the world.

The point? The church has the authority to determine who belongs in the church and who does not.

Jesus authorizes the local church to exercise the keys of the kingdom ([Matt 16](#)) by assessing the one confessing faith in Christ to see, as best they can if the confession of the one confessing is authentic. And then to declare this confession to the world as authentic.

So again, it is the authority of the local church congregation that declares its members as believers.

To be clear, the local church does not make members, that's God's job through the gospel.

We partner with God by sharing the gospel.

But the local church does not make members, the local church recognizes and declares those who are eligible for membership to, in fact, be members.

The power of the local church is *"declaratory."*

When you think of a local church, think of an embassy.

What is an embassy? An embassy is a representative kingdom inside another kingdom.

So, in England, Canada, Sweden, etc., there are embassies of the United States of America. These embassies are a little bit of America in these respective countries. And they carry the authoritative weight of our country in the foreign country.

*For example, if you are in one of these countries and your passport expires, you must go to the embassy because they have the authority to affirm your citizenship as an American.*

The local church has the same function. The local church is an embassy from another kingdom. The Kingdom of God. That Kingdom has yet to arrive, but it is coming.

Remember the Lord's prayer?

*"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. **Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**"*

His Kingdom hasn't come - but it will.

His Kingdom does exist, and for those of us here who are followers of Christ, we are SUBJECTS of His KINGDOM.

There are laws and regulations of HIS KINGDOM that we as followers of Christ must abide by. Why? because they mark us as followers of the King in whose Kingdom exists but is yet to come.

**To define the local church** institutionally, then, we could say that it is a group of Christians who regularly gather in Christ's name to officially affirm and oversee one another's membership in Jesus Christ and his kingdom through gospel preaching and gospel ordinances. [Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus What Is a Local Church?](#)

So, you can see the importance of the local church.

And as such, we do not JOIN the membership of a church like one joins the YMCA or the Rotary club. I pay my monthly dues, and I receive my monthly benefits. This is NOT the model of Christ's local church.

No, we do not join. Rather we submit ourselves to the local church.

**A couple of points of clarification.**

1. The local church is not an absolute authority in one's life.
2. The local church is not perfect - the local church is filled with redeemed, yet sinful people who will make mistakes, missteps, and even sins against her constituents.

Yet although these two points are true, they do not negate the authoritative position the local church holds in the life of the Christian.

Because remember, the primary responsibility of the local church is to exalt the Name and holy reputation of Jesus Christ.

The local church is VERY important to Jesus. Can you tell someone what the difference is between the local and universal church? Is that difference important? Can a follower of Christ avoid participating in the local church and be an individualistic Christian? Why did God institute the local church? Christian, you MUST KNOW the answers to these questions.

Study up on these questions. Listen, if you love Jesus, you must love His bride too.

*If you love me and hate my wife, we probably are not going to have sweet fellowship together!*

Jesus feels the same way!

What does understanding a local Church is, have to do with Church Discipline?

The local church DECLARES who is a believer and who is not. And you need to have your profession authenticated by a local church just like an embassy authoritatively authenticates a passport.

Jesus never meant for His followers to go it alone – He desires for all believers to submit themselves to a local church.

**Review** - If you Understand God's Framework, You Understand Church Discipline

- What is the Gospel?
- What is a Christian?
- What is the Local Church?

#### **4. What is Church Membership ?**

*What then is church membership? It's a declaration of citizenship in Christ's kingdom. It's a passport. It's an announcement made in the pressroom of Christ's kingdom. It's the declaration that a professing individual is an official, licensed, card-carrying, bona fide Jesus representative.*  
*Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus What Is Church Membership?*

So, then church membership is a partnership between the Christian and the local church where the church not only affirms that profession of faith of the Christian but also watches over their profession to ensure their ongoing growth and faithfulness to their Lord.

The local church helps the Christian to live out their discipleship ([Matthew 28:18-20](#)) and cares for them simultaneously.

The implications are for both the member and the church.

For the member, they are to take their membership seriously and thus pursue Christ wholeheartedly with a local congregation behind them.

For the Church and her leadership, they must shepherd the flock well.

#### **A Church body...**

1. Affirms that the believers' profession of faith and baptism are legitimate.
2. Promises to oversee the discipleship of the follower of Christ.

#### **The Individual Christian...**

1. then formally places (submits) their discipleship both to the body and her leadership.

**Church membership** - *"It's about a church taking specific responsibility for a Christian, and a Christian for a church. It's about 'putting on,' 'embodying,' 'living out,' and 'making concrete' our membership in Christ's universal Church."* Church Discipline, Leeman

These concepts are summarized well by the writer of Hebrews...

**Hebrews 13:17 ESV**

*<sup>17</sup> Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.*

Christ desires all believers to submit themselves to the local church. Not because the local church is on some power trip.

NO! It's because Christ has given the *"keys to the kingdom"* to the local church.

Christ, who has all authority has shared His authority with the local church. And for your growth in Christ, He desires for you to officially submit your membership to a local congregation so as to be discipled by the congregation and its leadership.

Also, so that you can do the same for others.

Do you understand the difference between joining the YMCA and joining the local church? Why is church membership so important to the Lord?

First, it is an act of humility on your part. Submission to a local congregation is a humble undertaking which is an admission that you cannot grow in Christlikeness by yourself.

Second, church membership is you granting the church permission to hold you accountable to the profession in Christ that you have made. So that, when the day comes that you are starting to succumb to the deceitfulness of sin, others in the congregation can call you back to the path of righteousness.

**Hebrews 3:12–14 (ESV)**

*<sup>12</sup>Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. <sup>13</sup>But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. <sup>14</sup>For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.*

The local church, the members of Allendale Baptist Church, are to do our best to help one another NOT *"be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."*

We are a war against sin because sin kills.

We need the local church in this war. We are all in this battle together!

**Galatians 6:1–2 (ESV)**

*<sup>1</sup>Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. <sup>2</sup>Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*

**Review** - If you Understand God's Framework, You Understand Church Discipline

### **Conclusion**

Okay, so I have tried to succinctly answer the following four questions...

1. What is the Gospel?
2. What is a Christian?
3. What is a Local Church
4. What is Church Membership?

And you might be asking yourself, what do the answers to these questions have to do with understanding Church Discipline?

That's what we will tackle next Sunday as I wrap up this short yet vital series on Church Discipline.

It is God's framework of the Gospel, being an authentic Christian, The Local Church, and Church Membership, that helps us understand why God has instituted the process and method for loving and gracious discipline in HIS (not ours) local church.

**In the meantime, you should do your best to understand and answer these questions.**

1. Do you truly understand the Gospel of Christ?
2. Do you know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you are a born-again Christian?
3. Do you get how important the Local Church is to Christ? Do you take His local church as seriously as he does?
4. Do you understand God's rationale for Church Membership? If you are not a member of Allendale Baptist Church, are you willing to submit yourself to this body and her leadership to help you grow in your discipleship? I realize this is a challenge for some of you. But, it is the right step to take.

### **Connection Group Reflection Questions**