

**Title: How To Keep God's Church Holy (Part 1)**

**Text: Various**

**Introduction**

Church Discipline! When these words are uttered, they conjure up all manner of thoughts and concepts.

- Anger!
- Judgmental!
- Lack of love!
- Legalism!

There is no doubt that churches have handled the biblical concept of church discipline with anger, judgmentalism, a lack of love, and in a legalistic manner.

And so the typical response of the evangelical church is to skip it altogether.

Well, we cannot simply skip or avoid what the Lord has given us to do in his word.

Church discipline, if properly understood, is a powerful tool that keeps God's church not only holy but powerfully hopeful in a world that is slipping away in sinful decay.

The elders thought this topic was so important that they formed a sub-committee on the elder team, studied out the subject, and wrote a process paper on it. I'll share the conclusions of that paper in week number three.

So, before you tune me out and say, Pastor Mark is going the way of loveless legalism, spend the next three weeks with me understanding this very important topic.

By the way, a very helpful and biblical resource I am using for this series is written by Dr. Jonathan Leeman. It is called **"Church Discipline – How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus"**

**Main Idea: What is Church Discipline?**

It is such a scary phrase that is both misunderstood and often misapplied.

Church Discipline is a part of the discipleship process of a church. To be disciplined is in a very real sense, to be disciplined. How is a Christian disciplined? They are disciplined through instruction and correction.

This, in part, is the goal of the Christian life as articulated by Paul to his son in the faith, Timothy when discussing the power of the word of God...

**2 Timothy 3:16–17 ESV**

*<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

Do you see the list?

**Teaching** - Showing what is right.

**Reproof** - Rebuke when one is not right.

**Correction** - How to get right.

**Training** - How to stay right.

This is what the word of God does, and this is what the people of God use to help the people of God live in a way that is pleasing to God.

Church Discipline is a tool to perpetuate holiness within a congregation.

More formally, Church Discipline is the process of removing a professing Christian from Church membership and participating in the communion table.

However, it is not forbidding the one under discipline from attending the worship service or sitting under the preaching of the Word of God.

As Jonathan Leeman says in his book on Church Discipline...

*"It's a refusal to give a person the Lord's Supper. It's excommunicating, or ex-communication, the person" (pg. 28).*

He goes on to say, In the life of the church, there are two forms of discipline. There is *"formative discipline and corrective discipline. Formative discipline helps to form the disciple through instruction. Corrective discipline helps to correct the disciple through correcting sin" (pg. 27)*

**Church Discipline is first and foremost loving.**

- It shows love for the individual because it warns them about their sin and leads them to repentance.
- It shows love for the church because it protects the weaker sheep from sin and the sinner.
- It shows love for the world that is watching the church and gives hope to them as they see the church be used in transformation.

- It shows love for Christ because it exalts His holy name by our obedience to Him. (pg. 23)

LOVE then should be the motivation behind church discipline, not punishment.

My hope is to spend the next three weeks working through this important subject to bring clarity and understanding to it.

### **Why should local churches practice Church Discipline?**

- It is a command in the bible.
- It is part of the gospel
- It causes the church to be healthy and holy
- It distinguishes the church's witness before the world
- It warns sinners of a greater judgment that will come
- It protects and exalts the reputation and name of Jesus Christ. (23-24)

Jesus Christ loves His Church, and it is His goal to keep her holy.

### ***Ephesians 5:25-27 ESV***

*<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, <sup>26</sup> that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, <sup>27</sup> so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.*

Here we see Jesus' love for His bride and His desire to keep her (us) holy.

If we refuse to be a church that obeys God in Church Discipline, we are saying that we love better than God loves (pg. 24).

So, let's be a church that loves as God loves. Let's be a church that takes discipline seriously.

After all...

### ***Proverbs 27:6 ESV***

*<sup>6</sup> Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.*

Let's spend time together thinking through this very important subject and then determine to be excellent at loving each other with the truth.

This morning I want to walk through three ideas regarding church discipline.

First, it's important for us to understand what Jesus thought about Church Discipline.

Second, what did the Apostles have to say about Church Discipline?

And thirdly, I want to discover the purpose of Church Discipline.

Ready? Let's start with Jesus...

## **1. Jesus On Church Discipline**

Jesus teaches the most common understanding of what we call Church Discipline in the New Testament. Keep in mind, that the church hasn't officially started yet. So, Jesus is giving teaching for the church that will become reality soon after His death and resurrection.

Look at what Jesus says...

### **Matthew 18:15–19 ESV**

*<sup>15</sup> "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. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. <sup>19</sup> 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.*

Okay, so what is Jesus' perspective on Church Discipline? Here are some principles from this text.

Jesus wants the sinner to repent.

Jesus wants the number of people involved to be as small as necessary to bring about repentance.

Jesus wants the church to be different than the world (aka "gentile and a tax collector"). The lives of Church Members should be markedly different than the world.

Jesus wants a process of gracious warnings given to the one walking in sin by the church. If that one does not respond to the gracious warnings, then the church should exclude the one determined in their sin from the fellowship of membership. Remember, membership is different from simple attendance.

Membership is willful submission to Christ's local church. This is very pleasing to our Lord.

The particular sin that Jesus discusses is interpersonal, "against you."

But we mustn't fixate on the interpersonal part of Jesus' illustration. Instead, we must focus on the repentance of the individual in sin. Are they repentant or are they determined in their sin.

What is repentance? It is a change of mind (a mind that agrees with God) that leads to a change of direction (the way one lives their life).

There is a bigger issue that must not be missed in this passage from our Lord.

The Church has authority.

This authority was given to the church by Jesus in [Matt 16](#)...

### **Matthew 16:13–20 ESV**

*<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" <sup>14</sup> And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." <sup>15</sup> He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." <sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. <sup>18</sup> And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." <sup>20</sup> Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.*

This passage is not about Peter becoming the first Pope and then the bizarre inauguration of apostolic succession.

This is about Peter's confession that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah (King). And Christ will build His Church on the fact that He is KING!

And those subjects in this institution called the CHURCH will exercise His authority to bind and loose on earth (make decisions in the local church) and God will agree in heaven. The point? The local church, the leadership, and the constituents have authority.

[Matt 18:19](#) is a throwback to [Deuteronomy 19](#) where Moses lays out the process for how to judge criminal cases.

### **Deuteronomy 19:15–21 (ESV)**

*<sup>15</sup> “A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established. <sup>16</sup> If a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing, <sup>17</sup> then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days. <sup>18</sup> The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, <sup>19</sup> then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. <sup>20</sup> And the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you. <sup>21</sup> Your eye shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.*

**Matthew 18:19 ESV**

*<sup>19</sup> 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.*

So, when the church is confronted with those in her membership that confess Christ, but their lives are contrary to the holiness required by Christ, the church must do something. And the Lord lays out a process that doesn't just drive people from her midst but attempts to draw them back to the one who died for them.

So, the church is called to play a role in the lives of her members.

What is the church trying to determine in the life of the one resolute in living in a way contrary to God's way?

Do they have a valid gospel profession?

What does the way they are living their lives suggest?

Can we as a church continue to affirm that this person is indeed a follower of Christ or have they shipwrecked their faith and walked away from Jesus?

Remember this - Church discipline is about confirming that Jesus' representatives are genuinely representing Jesus.

One profitable thing that happens as a result of this discussion is serious self-reflection. As the Psalmist says in [Psalm 19:14](#), Are *“the words of your mouth and the meditations of your heart pleasing to the Lord?”*

Remember, if you are a member of ABC, that means you are a born-again ambassador of Christ - The church has confirmed this. You must continue to pursue Christlike holiness.

But also, if you are not a member of ABC, why not? It is God's will that you are a member of a local church for your protection and spiritual growth. God's plan does not include individual Christianity only. His design is that Christians are members of a local body for their own spiritual growth and the protection of His church.

**Review** - What is Church Discipline?

Jesus on Church Discipline

## **2. The Apostles on Church Discipline**

Explanation - Jesus isn't the only one to bring up the concept of Church Discipline. His disciples, the Apostles had something to say as well.

Let's start with the Apostle Paul...

### ***Galatians 6:1 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.*

Again, to Jesus' earlier point, there should initially be as few people involved as possible.

In this verse, Paul says "any transgression"

Those in the church who are walking with the Lord have a responsibility to restore - IN A SPIRIT OF GENTLENESS.

Paul's admonition is two-fold. Discipline also helps the restorer stay on track.

Now, look at Paul's letter to Ephesus...

### ***Ephesians 5:11 ESV***

*<sup>11</sup> Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.*

The Christian must expose sin. Again, not in a spirit of judgment, but in the spirit of protection for the person and of the church.

How about Paul's letter to Titus?

### ***Titus 3:10 ESV***

*<sup>10</sup> As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him,*

It seems the sin of divisiveness has a special distinction in Paul's mind. If the divisive person will not hear after two warnings, then three strikes and he's out.

Divisiveness is that serious because God desires humility and UNITY within His church body!

How about Paul's letter to Thessalonica?

### **2 Thessalonians 3:14–15 ESV**

*<sup>14</sup> If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. <sup>15</sup> Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.*

Paul's letter is the word of God. Thus, it is worthy of the obedience of those in the church of Thessalonica.

People that choose to consistently live contrary to the Word of God need to be addressed.

In other words, this sin isn't the occasional slip-up, it is, rather, a pattern in their life.

Paul says *"take note of this person and have nothing to do with him"* in the Christian fellowship sense.

In other words, don't pretend that they are right with God and act like nothing is wrong. Instead, go to that person and warn them because they are a professing member of the church of God.

Yes, this is difficult.

However, this is necessary for their good and the good of the body. Picture yourself as a *white blood cell* rooting out infection in the body.

Hopefully, when confronted, they will repent and walk again as a follower of Jesus.

The Apostle John...

### **2 John 9–10 ESV**

*<sup>9</sup> Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. <sup>10</sup> If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting,*

What is the standard according to John? *"the teaching of Christ..."*

John says the standard is to abide in or live in the teaching of Christ. If they do not, they do “NOT HAVE GOD.”

The warning? Avoid false teaching! Do not welcome false teachers in your home or church for that matter. Do not greet them.

Side application here - be careful about whose teaching you listen to on podcasts and such. You bring them into your home through the internet, and they teach you a false Gospel. Please be discerning.

The Apostle Peter...

### **Acts 8:17–24 ESV**

*<sup>17</sup> Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. <sup>18</sup> Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, <sup>19</sup> saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." <sup>20</sup> But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! <sup>21</sup> You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. <sup>22</sup> Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. <sup>23</sup> For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." <sup>24</sup> And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."*

While the church is just starting in this chapter, discipline is already part of its DNA.

Simon, a professing believer gets off track, and Peter, in a not-so-gentle fashion gives him the path back to the Lord.

Simon at least gives a wise prayer request. *"Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."*

This is a sampling of verses demonstrating that Church Discipline isn't relegated to one passage in [Matthew 18](#). No it is a theme throughout the New Testament.

What should we do with this?

Be a people committed to personal holiness.

Be a people committed to helping our fellow church members to walk in holiness. And for some of you, this means you need to take the step of church membership

This means we need to get involved in one another's lives.

This means we need to be willing to lovingly speak the truth.

**Ephesians 4:15 ESV**

*<sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,*

In a sense, church discipline should be happening all the time at a personal level. Like level one that Jesus talks about. In other words, going to the person and resolving the sin issue before it grows and takes greater root.

**Review** - What is Church Discipline?

Jesus on Church Discipline

The Apostles on Church Discipline

**3. The Purpose of Church Discipline**

Let's go back to Paul in [1 Corinthians 5](#) and we will see 7 purposes for Church Discipline.

**a. Discipline's Purpose is to EXPOSE -**

**1 Corinthians 5:1-3 ESV**

*<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. <sup>3</sup> For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing.*

**b. Discipline's Purpose is to WARN -**

**1 Corinthians 5:4-5 ESV**

*<sup>4</sup> When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, <sup>5</sup> 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.*

**c. Discipline's Purpose is to SAVE -**

**1 Corinthians 5:5 ESV**

*<sup>5</sup> 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.*

**d. Discipline's Purpose is to PROTECT -**

**1 Corinthians 5:6 ESV**

*<sup>6</sup> Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?*

**e. Discipline's Purpose is to PURIFY -**

**1 Corinthians 5:7–8 ESV**

*<sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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.*

**f. Discipline's Purpose is to make Christ's Church HOLY -**

**1 Corinthians 5:9–11 ESV**

*<sup>9</sup> I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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.*

**g. Discipline's Purpose is to be a distinct WITNESS for Jesus to outsiders -**

Again, notice the judicial role the church plays in the sinning member of this church.

**1 Corinthians 5:12–13 ESV**

*<sup>12</sup> For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? <sup>13</sup> God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."*

The evil person can no longer enjoy the benefit of being considered a member of the local church until they repent and are restored. Until this repentance takes place, they will live in a limbo of knowing the truth, but not be considered full participants in the truth.

Purging the evil person means to make certain the membership of your church is regenerated, spirit-filled, born-again, followers of Jesus Christ. Because the local church is a representation of

God's universal church. And there is no question that anyone that is part of His universal church is, in fact, born again!

What does this have to do with a distinct witness?

**1 Peter 2:9 (ESV)**

*<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*

As a purified and holy people, we are uniquely positioned to communicate the gospel that changes us and brings us from death to life.

And because of this, we are now salt and light.

**Matthew 5:13 ESV**

*<sup>13</sup> "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.*

So, there they are. Seven purposes behind Church Discipline.

Did you notice what the purpose of Church Discipline isn't? It isn't about humiliation in ex-communication. It isn't about angry retribution toward the sinner.

Instead, it is all about the restoration of the one who has gone astray from the revealed word of God. And, most importantly, it is about Keeping God's bride the church, HOLY and PURE!

*The prodigal son came to his senses and went home. The father, who was taken advantage of by the son, ran after him...*

Are you willing to be involved in Church Discipline? We should all be willing to participate in level one and two of church discipline on a regular basis. Remember the levels Jesus gave?

**Matthew 18:15–19 ESV**

*<sup>15</sup> "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. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in*

*heaven. <sup>19</sup> 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.*

Do you see how you can be involved?

1. If someone sins against you go and get it right. Gain your brother or sister by solving problems with them.
2. If it doesn't work, bring someone with you to get your relationship right.
3. If he or she refuses, bring it to the church (leadership at first) for their help to resolve this situation.

But also recognize that church discipline isn't only Matthew 18. Based on the other passages I shared with you, you can see it is more nuanced and calls for discernment, patience, and grace.

### **Conclusion**

We want to be a unified church. This will only happen if we are a gracious problem-solving church.

Jesus and the Apostles have given us the tools. We must know and use them to keep the Church of Christ holy.

**Church discipline, if properly understood, is a powerful tool that keeps God's church not only holy but powerfully hopeful in a world that is slipping away in sinful decay.**

Action – Will you start by understanding the tools God has given in his word and prayerfully use these tools for the glory of God and the purity of His bride, the church?

### **Connection Group Reflection Questions**