

Title: How To Keep the Church Holy (Part 3)

Text: Various

Ron and Lynn Potgeter, when I called them up last week, were scared that I was calling them forward for Church Discipline!

Review the last two sermons.

Why does the church need this teaching?

To keep her and her people holy...

Main Idea: A Church Must Get Church Discipline Right!

How does she get it right?

By answering these two questions.

1. When is Church Discipline Necessary?
2. How Does a Church Correctly Practice Church Discipline?

1. When is Church Discipline Necessary?

When is love necessary?

ALL THE TIME! I think there is a misnomer with the phrase “Church Discipline.” It sounds ominous and a bit frightening.

Unfortunately, Church Discipline is viewed in a fearful light instead of the restorative vehicle of love it is intended to be.

John 13:34 ESV

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

My hope in this series was to take some of the negative, fearful stuff out of this Biblical teaching, and to demonstrate that this activity should be happening all the time and it should be rooted in love, not condemnation.

And one definite way of demonstrating love for one another is the ability to speak truth into one another’s lives.

Proverbs 27:6 ESV

⁶ Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

We are to lovingly speak truth to one another.

This is what’s behind Paul’s words in...

Ephesians 4:15 ESV

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

Ephesians 4:25 (ESV)

²⁵ Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

A godly church operates in this way. It is part of her culture.

So, it should be happening all the time at a personal level. Brothers and sisters in Christ lovingly speaking truth into one another's lives.

This is absolutely crucial for the health and vitality of the local church.

And if we are developing these kinds of loving relationships where we give one another permission to speak into each other's lives (the point of church membership), "Church Discipline" becomes a natural byproduct of helping one another to not fall into sin!

Hebrews 3:13 ESV

¹³ 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.

As a church, this must become part of our culture.

Avoidance of fellow church members...

Being fake (not honest) at church and with church members, even at Connection Group.

Instead, be open and make purposeful relationships with a few.

These steps will change the culture of our church to truly be the family of God.

Formal public discipline works best in a church culture where informal and private discipline is welcomed and practiced. Public accountability should be an outgrowth of what's already going on in the private lives of church members.

Formal church discipline works best when members already know how to give and receive loving correction. They do it in their homes. They do it over lunch. They do it gently, carefully, and always with the good of the other person in mind. Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus Chapter 4: How Does a Church Practice Discipline?

Remember, church is not an event or an appointment on our calendar.

Church is a new people group dedicated to God – learning to live together and love one another well.

So, church discipline isn't about a group of angry people who are bent on judging someone.

Church discipline is an outgrowth of gracious and loving accountability between MEMBERS of a local church.

When shall we say that church discipline is necessary? Broadly speaking, discipline is necessary whenever a disciple departs from the way of Christ by sinning. It's necessary whenever a gap opens up between a Christian's profession and life, and the so-called representative of Jesus fails to represent Jesus. Most often, discipline occurs informally and privately. A brother or sister in Christ sins, and another brother or sister, with love, quietly addresses the matter. *Church Discipline*, Leeman, 48

But what happens when a situation arises where a person is lovingly confronted regarding their sin, but they refuse to repent? They become hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. They dig in their heels and are determined to live in a way contrary to God.

This is where the process is leveled up

Formal Church Discipline...

Formal church discipline is the appropriate course of action whenever a church member's failure to represent Jesus becomes so characteristic and habitual that the church no longer believes he or she is a Christian *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus Chapter 3: When Is Discipline Necessary?*

Ultimately...the combination of Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5 suggests that churches need to arrive at one of three conclusions before determining that it's time to act:

- *When a church becomes convinced that a person is genuinely repentant, it should not proceed with any form of discipline (and I cannot think of a single exception to this principle).*
- *When a church becomes convinced that a person is characteristically (not temporarily) unrepentant, it should proceed with excommunication.*
- *When a sin is so deliberate, repugnant, and indicative of a deep double-mindedness that a congregation is left unable to give credence to a profession of repentance, at least until time has passed and trust has been re-earned, it should proceed with excommunication, determining to test for repentance after the fact.* *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus A Disqualified Profession*

Okay, So Church Discipline should be happening all the time at level one. Sometimes at level two and rarely at level three. But IT MUST HAPPEN!

How do we get a culture that is speaking into one another's lives?

You must purpose to cultivate a few relationships within the church that you can speak into their life and that they can speak into your life. How do you formally do this?

When you join a local congregation you are asking that congregation to hold you accountable to the standards set forth in the Holy Scriptures.

This kind of open and honest communication will have a transformational impact on the local church because problems will be resolved at a lower level before they evolve into greater situations.

Give example...

So, when is church discipline necessary?

ALL the TIME!

So that problems are being addressed and solved all the time!

Review - Main Idea: A Church Must Get Church Discipline Right!

1. When is Church Discipline Necessary?

2. How Does a Church Correctly Practice Church Discipline?

The reality is there will be times when someone is committed to their sinful desires more than they are to the ways of the Lord. What do we do in this situation?

Here are five general principles for the church leadership and congregation to follow...

Five Principles for Loving Church Discipline (Leeman, Church Discipline)

1. The Process Should Involve As Few People As Possible.

Matthew 18:15–20 ESV

¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

- Sometimes sin needs to be publicly addressed ([1 Cor 5](#), [Phil 4:1-4](#)) (e.g. pregnancy out of wedlock)
 - This can teach positively about the Christian view of marriage and sexuality only within the confines of marriage.
 - So the leadership and church can celebrate the couple's repentance and restoration.
 - So the church can celebrate the arrival of the precious little life.
Saying nothing breeds gossip, mistrust, and sanctions sin. “What happens teaches.”

2. Church Leaders Should Lead The Process.

Galatians 6:1–2 ESV

¹ 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. ² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

- Paul has the spiritually mature lead the less mature in this process. The older and wiser in the Lord must take the lead in solving problems biblically.
- Notice I didn't simply say, "Hand the problem over to the elders." Paul says the spiritually mature.

3. The Length Of The Process Depends On How Long It Takes To Establish Characteristic Unrepentance.

- [Matt 18](#) calls for at least three warnings before a person is removed from the congregation.
- [1 Corinthians 5](#) calls for immediate removal from the congregation.
- Titus lands in between

[Titus 3:10 ESV](#)

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

Coming to the conclusion of repentance may take a minute or it may take a month, or three, or more.

The question of "how long" is not difficult for theoretical reasons; it's difficult for real-life reasons. We cannot see into people's hearts, and we feel the burden of being tremendously careful whenever we are called upon to inspect the fruit and make a determination on a matter as important as whether the church can continue testifying that someone belongs to the kingdom of God. [Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus The Length of the Process Depends on How Long It Takes to Establish Characteristic Unrepentance](#)

Humans can sometimes fool themselves into believing that they can have both Jesus and their favorite sin. It takes several rounds of escalating confrontations to help them realize, "No, I cannot. It's one or the other." [Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus The Length of the Process Depends on How Long It Takes to Establish Characteristic Unrepentance](#)

Repentant people have a strong desire to get rid of their sin.

And, this is Jesus' strong advice for the one wrestling with sin...

[Matthew 18:8–9 ESV](#)

⁸ And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. ⁹ And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.

A truly repentant person does WHATEVER is necessary to rid themselves of the sin that is destroying them. They don't coddle it. They refuse to cultivate and grow it. They do not justify and rationalize it.

If they are convicted by the Spirit of God by what the Word of God says, there is no stopping them from pursuing the righteousness of God.

4. Individuals Should Receive The Benefit of the Doubt.

Matthew 18:16 ESV

¹⁶ 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.

- The keywords are “established” or “verified.”
- In other words, innocent until proven guilty.
- This is true in the corporate sense as well as the one-on-one sense. Questions should be used in the process, not accusations. Knowing the whole story is the goal before pronouncement is made.

James 1:19 ESV

¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;

5. Leaders Should Involve and Instruct the Congregation

- Matt 18 - Jesus involves the whole church
- 1 Corinthians 5 - Paul instructs the whole church to be involved.

1 Corinthians 12:21–26 ESV

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” ²² On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, ²⁴ which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, ²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Ephesians 4:16 ESV

¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

- Time lapse between “tell it to the church” and then “even if he refuses to listen to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”
- Why the time lapse? So the church can lovingly go after the wandering sheep.
- The church should be instructed on how to interact with the one who refuses to repent.

The basic counsel the elders of my own church give is that the general tenor of one's relationships with the disciplined individual should markedly change. Interactions should not be characterized by casualness but by deliberate conversations about repentance. Certainly, family members should continue to fulfill family obligations (see Eph. 6:1–3; 1 Tim. 5:8; 1 Pet. 3:1–2). Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus Leaders Should Involve and Instruct the Congregation

d. Of course the prayer is for heartfelt repentance on the part of the one under discipline.

The Elders of Allendale Baptist Church have agreed on the following process...

Section 4.

Steps of Discipline for ABC

Step 1: The first step is to speak one-to-one as when Nathan confronted David about his sin with Bathsheba ([II Samuel 12:1-15](#); [Matt. 18:15](#) and [Gal. 6:1](#)).

This first step should be done by any believer in Christ. If the brother listens to you, you've won your brother. This one-to-one implies that in confronting a sinning brother, we are not being hypocritical as stated in [Matthew 7:5](#) prior to reproofing the other individual. Such a meeting is to be done in private. The purpose of this step is for the individual to recognize his/her sin, repent, and be restored to a right relationship with the Lord and others who may have been impacted by the sin. [Luke 17:1-3](#) records the importance of rebuking a sinning brother because the sin of one may be a spiritual stumbling block to others. When one repents, [Luke 17:3](#) also requires forgiveness on the part of the one(s) being sinned against.

Step 2: If the one-to-one results in the one not listening and responding to correction and reproof, Scripture ([Deut. 19:15-17](#); [Matt. 18:16](#)) requires that one or two other believers are to be present at the next meeting as witnesses to confirm the conversation and the charges against the sinning brother.

It is desired in this second step that the sinning individual will recognize his/her sin and repent. Failure to do so may result in the matter being brought before the congregation in the future.

Step 3: This step may require communication to the congregation and will occur if the sinning individual refuses to listen and respond to what Scripture says about their sin and behavior.

It is desired that the individual evidences a spirit of repentance or contrition from the first two steps. In the absence of such a spirit of repentance, the elder board bears the responsibility of communicating the matter before the congregation ([Matt. 18:17a](#)).

In some cases, the congregation may be to the entire congregation during a worship service if the sin and individual were widely known. In other instances, the "congregation" may be limited to a fellowship group, Bible Study or Connection Group in which the person participated. Those in such a group who know the individual and the sin are to pray for the individual and, if contact occurs, plead for the individual to repent and be obedient to God's Word before the next step occurs. Should repentance take place, the sinning believer is forgiven and restored to fellowship. Such joyful news is to be made known to those with whom the discipline was made known. See [Luke 15:7](#); [II Cor. 2:6-8](#); [7:9-10](#). At this step, a letter may be mailed to the person if repentance has not taken place. The letter will express the concern of the elders and indicate that unless this person seeks the loving counsel and shepherding by the elders, their name may be shared with the congregation as one who is refusing to repent.

Step 4: The last step is to have the sinning believer removed from church fellowship ([Matt. 18:17b](#)).

Scripture teaches that the individual is to be treated as a tax-gatherer or outcast. Those in the church are not to have fellowship with this person nor encourage this individual to participate in the blessings associated with Christian fellowship. It does not mean that believers are to demean or treat this person disrespectfully. By all means, contact with this sinning person should lead one to fervent prayer for the sinning person.

This is the process the elders have adopted and will implement moving forward. We absolutely must be a church that walks in discipline. God will bless our efforts beyond what you can think or imagine!

You must commit to this to be a part of ABC. It must become part of our culture.

How? By pursuing Christlikeness with one another! And when one of us gets off track, we do our best to lovingly and honestly bring them back on track. Remember the point of Church discipline is two-fold.

One is to ensure the membership of Christ's local body is regenerated or born-again.

Second to help the erring one to regenerated again with the Lord.

Review - Main Idea: A Church Must Get Church Discipline Right!

1. When is Church Discipline Necessary?
2. How Does a Church Correctly Practice Church Discipline?

Conclusion

Imagine our church becoming a church that has open and honest communication with one another. To the point that we are comfortable speaking the truth in love to each other. Imagine being able to lovingly appeal to a brother or sister in Christ who is living contrary to the word.

Having no fear to do so because you love them and the Lord more than you desire to protect your feelings and emotions.

Our church must develop a loving church discipline culture.

- This kind of culture honors Christ.
- This kind of culture protects the Purity of His Body, the church.
- This kind of culture is refreshing because everyone's yes is yes and their no is no.
- This kind of culture saves the individual caught up in sin.

James 5:19–20 ESV

¹⁹ My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, ²⁰ let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

By God's grace may we be this kind of people and this kind of Church. It calls for everyone to have humility and grace. May God grant us both in superabundance.

Connection Group Reflection Questions

1. What in this three-part series has stood out to you?
2. Why do you think "Church Discipline" is such a difficult concept for churches to understand?
3. Why is it challenging for a church to develop a culture of "Church Discipline?" How does an emphasis on love make it easier?
4. What can you do to promote a culture of loving church discipline?