

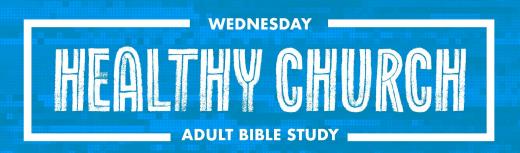
# Church Discipline

#### I. What Is Church Discipline?

- Church discipline has as its most basic goal local church members holding one another accountable to live as disciples of Jesus.
- Functionally, a person undergoes church discipline when he or she exhibits a continual, unrepentant pattern of sin that becomes known to the local church.
- The purpose of church discipline is to remove patterns of known sin from among the local congregation.
- The process of church discipline begins with a private call to repentance, but it can
  escalate to removing someone from church fellowship (meaning membership and
  attendance).
- The desired result of church discipline is always repentance and restoration.

#### II. Where Does the Idea Come From?

- The cornerstone passage for church discipline is Matthew 18:15-18, where Jesus describes a four-step process building up to and including discipline:
  - Step 1 the offended party (or the one who discovers the sin pattern) privately addresses the situation with the offender. This is not yet church discipline.
  - Step 2 if the offender refuses to repent, the offended party gets a few church leaders to address the issue again. This is where discipline technically begins.
  - Step 3 if the offender again refuses to repent, the matter is brought before the church.
  - Step 4 if the offender remains defiant, he or she is to be removed from the community.



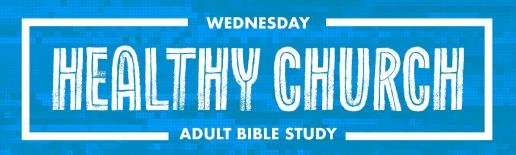
- Note that 18:18 is part of this saying. Jesus puts heavenly authority behind the
  decision of the church to remove a member given the proper process has taken
  place.
  - The offender does not have the right to defy the church's decision by denying that the community has authority to remove him/her.
- Matthew 18 is not the only passage to address discipline. The other New Testament writers address it regularly:

*Note: most of this list comes from chapter 5 of Mark Dever's* Nine Marks of a Healthy Church.

- 1 Cor 5:1-11 Paul calls the Corinthian church to remove a man who is sleeping with his stepmother
- Galatians 6:1 Paul calls the church to restore a sinful brother gently
- 2 Thess 3:6-15 Paull calls the Thessalonian church to stop meeting with brothers who are lazy and will not work
- 1 Tim 1:20 Paul has already put two church members out for blaspheming.
- 2 Peter 2 Peter gives a list of people in the church whose behavior shows they "will be destroyed" (see Jude for a similar list)

### III. Background for Church Discipline

- While church discipline is a distinctly New Testament concept, it is really a continuation of a long-standing biblical pattern:
  - Genesis 3 God exiles Adam and Eve from the garden for their rebellion
  - Exodus 32:25-29 Moses commands the deaths of those who led Israel into idolatry
  - Numbers 15:30 Defiant sin results in being cut off from the Israelite community (see also Ex 12:15; Lev. 17:10-16)
  - Deuteronomy 29:14-21 A person who defiantly proclaims that he can live in open sin and still get the blessing od God's land will be cursed and "blotted out"
- Church discipline continues that pattern of God working to make a holy people for himself and removing those from his community who refuse to walk with him in that project.



### IV. The Context for Discipline

- Church discipline only occurs within the scope of church membership. A church cannot discipline someone who is not a member.
  - Only members have covenanted together to be a congregation under mutual accountability.
  - The fear of discipline should not keep anyone from joining a church as a member. We all benefit from community accountability.
- Church discipline only occurs when a pattern of continual, *unrepentant* sin is discovered.
- The discipleship efforts of a local church and the shepherding efforts of its elders should be the most effective means of preventing the need for discipline. They are not foolproof means, though.

## V. Biblical Purposes for Discipline

- The most immediate and tangible purpose for church discipline is the repentance and restoration of a sinful brother or sister.
- Discipline also serves as a warning against to the rest of the community (see 1 Cor 5:6).
- Discipline serves to help the church be what God means for it to be, a community of his people reflecting his glory and holiness to the world.