

## WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT: CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Definition: The responsibility the Lord gave to His "churches" whereby they could protect their own reputation and effectiveness by admonishing an erring brother.

Purpose: (1) To see the brother restored to fellowship.  
(2) To protect the effectiveness of a "church."

### I. "CHURCH" DISCIPLINE IS NOT PUNISHMENT.

#### A. ALL MEN, INCLUDING THE SAVED, ARE SINNERS.

1. Salvation will not keep the saved from sinning.

a. I John 1:8 & 10 states:

**If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.**

**If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.@**

b. John further states in I John 1:9 & 2:1:

**If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

**My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:@**

2. Therefore, it is of vital importance to understand that "church" discipline is not designed to get sinners out of the "church."

3. This was the very hurtful attitude of the Pharisees, and it has no place in one of the Lord's "churches."
4. In humility and compassion may all believers who have committed themselves to serving the Lord in one of His "churches" remember they sin every day.

- a. If any "church" member doubts he has sin in his life, the words of Jesus in Mark 12:29-30 will expose that error:

**And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:**

**And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.@**

- b. Jesus further stated in verse 31:

**And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.@**

5. Most parents will not stand for someone else punishing their children.
6. Chastening of a child of God belongs to God.
  - a. Hebrews 12:5-11 states the principle:

**And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:**

**For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.**

If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?

For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.

Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.@"

b. Hebrews 10:30 states further:

AFor we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people.@"

7. May the "churches" of Jesus Christ never be found guilty of violating this Biblical principle.

## II. "CHURCH" DISCIPLINE IS NECESSARY FOR THE HEALTH OF A "CHURCH."

### A. "CHURCHES" HAVE BEEN GIVEN A TREMENDOUS TASK.

1. To His "churches", the Lord gave the responsibility to take the Gospel to the whole world.
2. This is the plan of God and it will work as long as the "church" is healthy.

3. A "church" of Jesus Christ is made up of sinful people who are subject to differences of opinion, sinful living, and error in doctrine.
4. When these problems reach the point where they are hindering the work of the "church," discipline must be exercised.
5. If discipline is not exercised, the "church" is in great danger.
  - a. Differences of opinion may escalate into open anger, and divisions in the "church".
    - (1) A "church" that is divided will not manifest the kind of behavior the Lord has specified and will have little effectiveness in seeing lost people saved.
    - (2) Some of the members of such a "church" may drop out of the "church" completely.
  - b. Sinful living may reach the point where it brings reproach upon the "church" itself.
  - c. Error in doctrine (heresy) may reach the point where the message of the "church" is actually contrary to the Word of God.
6. The net result of such behavior is that the work of the "church" is left undone and many will not see a living illustration of the grace of God.
7. Because men are dying and going to hell in every community, it is imperative that the Lord's "churches" are not hindered from their work and their testimony.

8. "Church" discipline is the remedy which God Himself gave to correct such sad circumstances.

B. "CHURCH" DISCIPLINE MUST BE CARRIED OUT WITH THE PROPER MOTIVE.

1. Herein lies the reason most "churches" no longer exercise "church" discipline.
2. "Church" discipline must be carried out in a loving, compassionate manner only after every effort has been made to correct the problem.
3. "Church" discipline should only be exercised after much prayer and soul searching on the part of the membership.

a. Paul stated in Galatians 6:1-2:

**ABrethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.**

**Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.@**

b. Jesus stated in John 13:34-35:

**AA new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.**

**By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.@**

4. If "church" discipline can't be done with tears and heartache, then it must not be done!

III. "CHURCH" DISCIPLINE FALLS INTO THREE CATEGORIES.

A. FIRST, FOR A PERSONAL OFFENSE.

1. This is the most common area of trouble for any "church."
2. These offenses, if not dealt with, will fester into serious breach of fellowship that may hinder the work of the "church."
3. What is the Biblical remedy for such an offense?

- a. Jesus stated in Matthew 18:15-17:

**Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.**

**But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.**

**And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.@**

- b. It is very important to note the order of the solution that Jesus prescribed.
  - (1) First, the offended individual must decide if the offense is important enough to bring to the attention of the offending person. It has been the experience of this writer that most are not.
  - (2) Second, if the offense cannot be overlooked, then the offended individual MUST go ALONE and tell the offending brother.

(3) Third, if the one who has offended will not listen and make things right, then, and only then, the offended member is to take two or three impartial brethren.

(4) Fourth, if the member who is determined by the impartial brethren to be wrong is not willing to apologize and make things right, then the offense MUST be brought before the "church."

(5) Fifth, and finally, if the one who has been found at fault will not listen to the will of the "church," then, with sorrow, he must be excluded.

4. This is the Biblical manner in which personal offenses between "church" members MUST be settled.

B. SECOND, FOR A PUBLIC OFFENSE.

1. When a member of a "church" behaves publicly in such a way as to cause the lost or unchurched to mock the "church", discipline MUST be exercised.

2. This conduct is so open and blatant as to be Areported commonly.@"

3. Although these types of sin are most often viewed as cause for "church" discipline, there are times when gossip should fit into such a category.

4. All of these types of behavior will adversely affect the work of a New Testament "church."

5. What is the remedy for a public offense?
- a. Paul addressed this issue in writing to the "church" at Corinth in I Corinthians 5:1-13 which states:

It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife.

And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.

For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed,

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,

To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?

Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:

Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators:

Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world.

But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.

For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?

But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.@"

- b. In light of these facts, Paul told the "church" there that they had no choice but to exclude this man.
- c. What is best for the one caught in the trap of sin?
  - (1) First, if he is a child of God, he will experience the chastening of his Heavenly Father.
  - (2) The greatest needs of the erring brother are the earnest and sincere prayers of his brethren, and the restoration of fellowship with God.

C. THIRD, FOR THE TEACHING OF HERESY.

- 1. Heresy will destroy a "church" from within.
- 2. As discussed in the introduction of this study, the Bible is the Word of God; it is infallible and inspired by God Himself.

- a. Paul stated in 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

**All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:**

**That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.@"**

- b. Peter stated in 2 Peter 1:20-21:

**Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.**

**For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.@"**

3. Many today say that since there are no original manuscripts, there is no serious consequence for not adhering exactly to the Word of God. Well, it is a very serious problem for believers if their confidence in the Bible is shaken because:
- a. All that is known about God is written in His Word.
  - b. All that is known about the forgiveness of sin and eternal life is written in His Word.
  - c. All that is known about His "churches" is written in His Word.
  - d. All that is known about acceptable service, to the one who died to redeem humanity is written in His Word.
  - e. All that is known about heaven and hell is written in His Word.

4. This is the reason why the Word of God is so emphatic about "churches" of Jesus Christ tolerating NO HERESY!

5. The remedy for heresy in the "churches" of Jesus Christ:

a. Paul wrote regarding this subject to Titus in Titus 3:10-11 which states:

**AA man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject;**

**Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.@**

b. Paul further stated in 2 Thessalonians 3:14:

**And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.@**

c. Still further he stated in Romans 16:17:

**Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.@**

D. TREATMENT AND RESTORATION OF AN EXCLUDED "CHURCH" MEMBER.

1. How the Bible says an excluded "church" member should be treated:

Sadly, the most common practice by a "church" is to avoid, or shun, the excluded member.

2. First, and most importantly, the members of the "church" should earnestly pray for the excluded member. (A vote to exclude should

be a commitment to pray for the one disciplined.)

3. Second, he should be treated with kindness and love.

- a. Paul stated in 2 Thessalonians 3:15:

**AYet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.@**

4. What if he asks for forgiveness?

- a. Paul stated in 2 Corinthians 2:5-11:

**ABut if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved me, but in part: that I may not overcharge you all.**

**Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many.**

**So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.**

**Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him.**

**For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things.**

**To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ;**

**Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.@**

5. Jesus stated this principle of forgiveness in Matthew 18:21-35:

"Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.

And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.

But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.

The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.

And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.

Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me:

Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?

And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

6. The plan of God for "church" discipline will work because God said it would. The only question is, will His "churches" trust His Word?