"CHURCH DISCIPLINE"

(Restoring an Erring Brother)

Matthew 18:16-20

8-12-2018

INTRODUCTION: The local church is to be a holy family.

***In our church family, we must uphold its purity by exercising loving discipline when needed.**

I. The <u>PROCEDURE</u> for Church Discipline (v. 15-17)

A. <u>PERSONAL</u> Confrontation (v. 15)

If Step #1 is unsuccessful:

B. <u>SEMI-PRIVATE</u> Confrontation (v. 16)

If Step #2 is unsuccessful:

C. <u>PUBLIC</u> Confrontation (v. 17)

If Step #3 is unsuccessful:

D. <u>DISMISSAL</u> from Church Fellowship (v. 17b)

II. The <u>AUTHORITY</u> for Church Discipline (v. 18-20)

The authority for an assembly to exercise loving discipline over its members is based on:

A. The Lord's <u>DECISION</u> (v. 18)

B. The Lord's <u>DIRECTION</u> (v. 19)

C. The Lord's <u>PRESENCE</u> (v. 20)

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INTRODUCTION: The local church is to be a holy family.

Like a family, a local church requires three things to have God's blessings:
Love, Truth, and Discipline

Church discipline should be as normal as disciplining children.

Discipline is a family matter, and the church is a family.

God serves as the pattern for loving discipline (Heb. 12:4-13; Prov. 3:11-12; cp. Rev. 3:19).

Today, many churches are reluctant to take disciplinary action to deal with sin among their members.

Why? It takes courage, time, effort, and love (just as family discipline). Another reason is this: It's easy to tolerate sin in the lives of others, when you tolerate it in your own life.

Discipline is really an act of discipleship.

"Is church discipline necessary? Few would dispute the necessity of pulling a drowning man from a flooding torrent or recovering a fallen climber from a mountain crevasse. Most decent people would skip the verbal exercise and give themselves to the rescue! Should less concern be demonstrated for the believer who has fallen morally and whose spiritual life is in danger? With some justification the church has been accused of being the only army that shoots its wounded." ("The Biblical Practice of Church Discipline," Bibliotheca Sacra, Oct.-Dec., 1986, by J. Carl Laney).

***In our church family, we must uphold its purity by exercising loving discipline when needed.**

I. The PROCEDURE for Church Discipline (v. 15-17)

A. PERSONAL Confrontation (v. 15)

"Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him." (Lev. 19:17).

The word ***"gained"*** (won) "is used in I Cor. 9:19-22 to refer to winning the lost, but it is also important to win the saved" (Wiersbe, p. 66)

If Step #1 is unsuccessful:

B. SEMI-PRIVATE Confrontation (v. 16)

"If he will not hear thee" -

A person who will not even listen to personal rebuke obviously has a problem he is trying to hide or harbor.

Such stubbornness requires the support of other believers to step in and loving provoke him to do right.

Many times the moral support that comes from a small group is just what a person needs to encourage him to do right (this positive peer pressure and accountability is what makes small group therapy so effective - EX: Alcoholics Anonymous, etc.)

"One or two" - These should of course be:

1) Fellow believers

2) Godly brothers who will be objective about the situation, will deal with it in love, and will keep confidentiality if needed

3) Preferably ones who know the individual at fault

"In the mouth" = i.e. upon (*epi*) their verbal testimony. The case would have more substantial evidence (than simply believing the words of the offended brother).

Even in our modern-day court proceedings, the testimony of other witnesses carries much weight.

Jesus does not permit believers to skip Step #2 and to move from personal confrontation to public (church) confrontation.

The testimony of <u>one</u> witness was never valid proof or evidence for public action to be taken (EX: Num. 35:30; Dt. 17:6).

Deut. 19:15 - *"One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established."*

I Tim. 5:19 - *"Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses."*

NOTE: II Cor. 12:20 - 3:2

"Every word may be established" - Every word <u>spoken</u> by the offender and to the offender will stand as true if two or three witnesses validate it.

NASV - *"so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed."*

The purpose of taking one or two more is "not to threaten or intimidate the sinner into repentance. The intent is to help the offender realize the seriousness of the situation" and to ensure that the testimony of the offended person was "truthful and unprejudiced" (before taking the issue to the church) (Laney, p. 359-60).

"If he shall neglect to hear them" - (v. 17) This clause implies that the two or three had also together agreed that the brother was in the wrong, and they together advised him to repent (turn from it), make restitution, ask forgiveness, etc.

If Step #2 is unsuccessful:

C. PUBLIC Confrontation (v. 17)

"Neglect to hear" = to refuse to listen

"Tell it" - one person (preferably the pastor) should act as a moderator and let the church hear the sad case.

"The church" - (*ekklesia)* this is the second and last time the word "church" is used in the Gospels.

Jesus used the term in 16:18 to speak of the whole church at large (the greater body of believers) which was to be built by Christ beginning at Pentecost and ending at the Rapture.

Now He uses the term to describe the local church (a congregation or assembly of believers meeting at a specific locality).

The clause ***"If he shall neglect to hear the church" -*** means that he must be given a chance to hear the verdict and appeal of the church. The church's decision in the matter must be conveyed to the sinner brother, and he must be given ample opportunity to respond to the church's decision.

Too often, churches move from:

1. Personal confrontation

To 2. Semi-private confrontation

Then 3. Ex-communication
(voted out of the church without giving the brother the opportunity to hear from the church at large)

"When a matter is taken to the church, the congregation should pray for the sinner, avoid a critical spirit, and beware of proudly thinking, 'That would never happen to me!'." (Laney, p. 361)

The congregation's responsibility is to "pursue the person aggressively and plead with him to repent before the fourth step becomes necessary" (MacArthur, p. 133).

If one refuses to listen to the verdict and appeal of the local church, there remains no other court of appeal (I Cor. 6:1-8). There is no higher authority (Ex: bishop, cardinal, pope, synod, convention, fellowship, board, etc.) than the local church.

Baptists believe in the autonomy of the local church. It governs itself; makes decisions under Christ's oversight (v. 17-20) and no other. Congregational church government is supported by this text. The power to handle church matters is given to the local church.

If Step #3 is unsuccessful:

D. DISMISSAL from Church Fellowship (v. 17b)

The word ***"as"*** is important, because it shows that he should not be considered a heathen, but treated as if he were a heathen (because he is acting as such).

II Thes. 3:15 - "*Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."*

Only someone as obstinate, stubborn, and rebellious as a heathen would refuse to submit to his church's decision.

Jesus was saying that an unrepentant sinner should be regarded as heathen (Gentiles) and tax-gatherers -- outside of the circle of God's people. . . No longer is the unrepentant sinning saint to share in the activities and privileges of being a part of the church fellowship (Laney, p. 362).

II Thes. 3:6 - *"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly and not after the tradition which he received of us."*

II Thes. 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."*

"Heathen" - (pagan) ***and a publican*** (tax collector) - In other words, such an individual should be treated as if he/she was not saved.

How should we treat someone who is not saved?

1. They can't be members of the church

(Hence, the sinning brother is to be <u>dismissed</u> from the fellowship; SEE: I Cor. 5:1-13)

Why should a sinning (one practicing a known, sinful, unrepentant lifestyle) brother be disciplined out of the church?

a. So that God may get his <u>attention</u>, as he is outside of the umbrella of the protection of the church and will feel the loneliness; the onslaught of Satanic oppression, etc. (cp. I Tim. 1:20).

I Cor. 5:5 - *"The destruction of the flesh"* would happen from sickness due to the sin (cp. James 5) and this may be effective in God getting the attention of the person, perhaps showing him his need of Christ for salvation.

b. To maintain the <u>purity</u> of the Body (Cor. 5:6-8)

c. To <u>obey</u> the clear command of Christ (I Cor. 5:9-13)

2. They should be <u>prayed</u> for and <u>restored</u> to fellowship after repentance is evident

The goal of church discipline is not a permanent shunning or lifelong excommunication, but <u>restoration</u>. (SEE: II Cor. 2:5-11)

When genuine repentance is evident by the offender's public acknowledgment and pursuit of Godliness, we cannot keep the offender at a distance. We must joyfully restore the person back into the fellowship (NOTE: This does not necessarily mean a restoration to public office - Ex: pastor or deacon. Total forgiveness does not necessarily mean restoration to leadership privilege if one becomes disqualified).

We must always *"forgive"..."comfort"...*and "*reaffirm"* our *"love"*

Unlike the "Scarlet Letter" in Nathaniel Hawthorne's classic novel, Biblical church discipline is designed to restore not to punish" (Laney, p. 354).

We must never give up on people!

In reality the church discipline process should not end until the "brother has either repented or died. . . the purpose of the ostracism is not to punish (or rid ourselves of the sinner), but to awaken" (and restore) (MacArthur, p. 136-137).

II. The AUTHORITY for Church Discipline (v. 18-20)

The authority for an assembly to exercise loving discipline over its members is based on:

A. The Lord's DECISION (v. 18)

The context of church discipline does not end with verse 17 but moves into verse 18.

"Ye" - the plural indicates the members of the local church.

"Bind" - to come to a binding decision about something.

"Shall be bound" - (perfect, passive, participle) lit. shall have been bound in Heaven.

In other words, the vote of the church body reveals the decision of God. God has spoken through the decision of the church body.

God is not saying that the church dictates His decision, but that the church carries out a decision that has already been made in Heaven. The church does not have authority over God's decisions; rather, the church is given the authority to confirm and declare what has already been decided by God (cp. Mt. 16:19; Jn. 20:23).

"Bind" - to forbid to be done

"Loose" - to permit to be done

How does a local church know what to allow and what not to allow? The Word of God - the Bible (the Bible is our only authority for faith and practice).

B. The Lord's DIRECTION (v. 19)

"Again" - In verse 19, Jesus adds an expanded application of the principle of the power of corporate decisions made by His children.

Just as an assembly (group) of believers has power (under God) to make Godly decisions, a group of believers also has power on earth to be assured of answers to prayer.

Two conditions must be met:

1) Agreement (that what you request is God's will - I Jn. 5:14-15)

2) Unity in Christ's name (what you request is what Christ would want and would glorify Him)

The particular request that is being "asked" for (v. 19) in context most likely refers to asking god about any ***"matter"*** (*pragma)* related to restoring the wayward sinner back to a life of holiness. Such a request definitely conforms to God's will and therefore gives us the assurance of answered intercessory prayer in God's time.

The word ***"agree"*** in the Greek gives us our English word "symphony." The church must agree in prayer as it seeks God's wisdom and direction in disciplining the erring member (Wiersbe, p. 66)

C. The Lord's PRESENCE (v. 20)

"There am I in the midst of them" - "I stand with them in what they agree on; I am in agreement with their requests and their decisions."

CONCLUSION:

Church discipline is not fleshly revenge, nor cruel punishment, not an act of hatred but to the contrary it is a humble, gentle, truthful, loving response to seek to save a *"soul from death"* and to *"hide a multitude of sins"* (Ja. 5:20).

"There is a vast difference between putting your nose in other people's business and putting your heart in other people's problems" (unknown)