

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Introduction

Church discipline is based on the commands of Scripture and is part of the edification process for the building up of believers so they can be conformed to the image and character of Christ. Church discipline is initiated when it becomes evident that someone within the body of Christ is dominated by some area of sin. If unresolved informally the individual is then confronted by church leadership for the purpose of assisting and restoring them in their struggle with sin through the power of Christ. It is designed to train and restore, not punish.

Purposes for Church Discipline

Read Gal 6:1	<i>What is the goal of confrontation?</i>
Read Heb 12:11	<i>What are the results of discipline?</i>
Read 2Tim 2:24-26	<i>What are the possible results of correction?</i> <i>Why is it difficult to correct those who disagree about their sin?</i>
Read Titus 1:10-11	<i>Why is it necessary to reprove those who are teaching false doctrine?</i>
Read 1Cor 5:6-8	<i>What is Paul saying in this passage?</i>

Reasons for Church Discipline

Read Matt 18:15-17	<i>Is this passage describing a simple disagreement? Explain</i>
Read Rom 16:17-18	<i>Why should discipline apply to the people described in this passage?</i>
Read 1Tim 1:18-20	<i>What were the grounds for removal?</i> <i>What was removal intended to accomplish?</i>
Read 1Cor 5:1-13	<i>What problem was this immorality causing in the Corinthian church?</i>

The Manner of Church Discipline

Read Gal 6:1-2	<i>Why should those that are spiritual provide discipline?</i> <i>With what spirit should an individual be disciplined and why?</i>
Read 1Tim 5:19-21	<i>Why could bias be an issue when exercising discipline?</i>
Read 1Cor 4:21	<i>What choice would you prefer and why?</i>

Procedures for Church Discipline

Step 1: Seek private correction and/or reconciliation with the offender.

Read Luke 17:3-4	<i>What can we learn from these verses ?</i>
Read Rom 15:14	<i>Where does our capability come from to admonish one another?</i>

Step 2: If the first step fails, take witnesses, preferably spiritual leaders, to seek private correction and/or reconciliation through loving admonition and warning.

Read Deut 19:15	<i>Why are witnesses important? What should they accomplish?</i>
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Step 3: If the person fails to respond, take the matter to the entire Elder Board where further admonition and warnings are clearly explained and judgment made regarding further action.

Read [Matt 18:15-17](#)

*What role should the elders have in this process and why?
When should the issue become public?*

Step 4: If there is no repentance, remove the individual from church membership and intimate fellowship. Inform the entire congregation if public offences were involved or if the individual is a spiritual leader.

Read [Matt 18:15-17](#)

When should an individual be removed from membership/fellowship?

Step 5: Provide forgiveness and restoration if the individual confesses their sin, demonstrates repentance, and takes steps to cease the activity for which they were disciplined.

Read [2Cor 2:5-8](#)

When should you receive someone back into fellowship?

APPENDIX

Purposes for Church Discipline

Read *Gal 6:1* *What is the goal of confrontation?*

When someone is caught in sin the goal is restoration. The context assumes that sin was the result of succumbing to temptation so the restoration should include assistance in dealing with such temptations.

Read *Heb 12:11* *What are the results of discipline?*

Discipline is intended to result in righteousness in the individual. It is a process as indicated by the concept of training, not a once for all situation. Although discipline is not pleasant it must be endured whether administered by the Lord, as indicated in this passage, by another believer, or by the church.

Read *2Tim 2:24-26* *What are the possible results of correction?*

Correction in this passage is intended to result in “repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.” The opposition indicated may be the result of false doctrine being used by Satan to cause division. The instruction is to patiently and gently provide sound teaching to correct the one in error.

Why is it difficult to correct those who disagree about their sin?

People generally don’t like to admit they’re wrong, but it’s even more difficult when there has been satanic deception. It’s difficult to disregard what we have held to be true whether it’s due to established presuppositions or to deceptive teaching. It’s typically an emotional issue in addition to a factual issue.

Read *Titus 1:10-11* *Why is it necessary to reprove those who are teaching false doctrine?*

False teaching spreads rapidly distorting the truth and confusing people. It must be dealt with quickly to silence them because it leads people to belief and behavior which is contrary to scripture and dangerous for their faith and hope.

Read *1Cor 5:6-8* *What is Paul saying in this passage?*

The Corinthians were being told that the sin which they were tolerating would spread like yeast in dough. Others would see that they could also get away with similar sin. Paul instructed them to remove the leaven from their midst, meaning the one guilty of sin, and thus purify the body of Christ.

Reasons for Church Discipline

Read *Matt 18:15-17* *Is this passage describing a simple disagreement? Explain*

No. The passage specifically mentions sin, not a simple disagreement.

Read *Rom 16:17-18* *Why should discipline apply to the people described in this passage?*

Discipline is necessary because such people deceive others with false teaching which causes division and hinders the Lord’s work.

Read *1Tim 1:18-20* *What were the grounds for removal? What was removal intended to accomplish?*

It would appear that Hymenaeus and Alexander were self-righteous heretics who had disregarded the truth of the gospel to teach a false gospel, even denying their own conscience. They had therefore been removed from the church in order to bring them to their senses and repent. Handing them over to Satan would mean to turn them over to the world which Satan controls.

Read *1Cor 5:1-13* *What problem was this immorality causing in the Corinthian church?*

The serious immorality described was not dealt with by the church. Instead they were proud and showed no signs of mourning over the immorality. They should have judged the individual and removed him from the church. Instead, their lack of action left open the possibility that others would engage in sin as well thinking there would be no consequences. The lack of purity in the church would also make evangelism difficult since behavior in the church was just as bad as outside the church.

The Manner of Church Discipline

Read [Gal 6:1-2](#) *Why should those that are spiritual provide discipline?*

The spiritually mature would be more likely to have the wisdom to discern the truth, identify patterns of sin, and have the humility to bring grace to the situation. They would be more prepared not only to admonish the individual but also to provide a step by step plan for recovery and reconciliation.

With what spirit should an individual be disciplined and why?

In the spirit of humility knowing that you can also be tempted. Also, in the spirit of gentleness knowing that harshness might drive the person away rather than restore them. Those who are in sin need to understand their guilt and be guided along the path of repentance ([Gal 6:1-2](#); [2Tim 2:24-25](#)).

Read [1Tim 5:19-21](#) *Why could bias be an issue when exercising discipline?*

Bias could show up in one of two ways. First, discipline could be inflicted with excessive harshness as an example to others. The example would still exist with balanced discipline, appropriate to the sin. Also, bias can show up as leniency extended to a fellow elder. This is also wrong and would make a mockery of discipline that would be objectionable to the congregation and undermine confidence in the leadership.

Read [1Cor 4:21](#) *What choice would you prefer and why?*

Paul was giving the Corinthians a choice. If it was me I would consider the admonition seriously rather than receive a harsh and embarrassing confrontation which might be public. Failure to respond to love and gentleness would show arrogance, pride, and a lack of concern for my sin. Not a good place to be.

Procedures for Church Discipline

Step 1:

Read [Luke 17:3-4](#) *What can we learn from these verses ?*

These verses can be difficult; not to understand but to follow. Obviously, we should rebuke our brother who sins against us and forgive him if he repents. What's hard is to repeatedly forgive him when there is a pattern of sin against us even if he repents. It would seem that our rebuke should not only be for the sin but also for the apparent lack of effort to break the pattern of sin. Maybe he needs our help to break the pattern. At any rate we should continue to forgive if he repents. Fortunately, God follows His own teaching because we are people that repeatedly sin, yet find forgiveness through Christ who died to pay the penalty for our sin.

Read [Rom 15:14](#) *Where does our capability come from to admonish one another?*

What Paul wrote to the believers in Rome applies to us today. He mentions two things while saying that they are able to admonish one another. First, he says that they are full of goodness. This implies that they would only do what would be good for one another and nothing that would harm. Secondly, he says that they are full of knowledge. This implies that they had an understanding of scripture which teaches them right from wrong from which they would be able to judge behavior. Not mentioned, but certainly understood, was the fact that they were indwelt by the Holy Spirit who would guide them in such a role as admonishing one another.

Step 2:

Read [Deut 19:15](#) *Why are witnesses important? What should they accomplish?*

Witnesses are important to establish evidence of sinful behavior. They must determine whether the accusation is based on a simple disagreement or actual sinful behavior. In context we are talking about someone who actually witnessed the behavior in question and can testify to that affect. The New Testament also speaks of witnesses in a second context where the sin may not be observed by others ([Matt 18:16](#)). In such cases the witnesses must determine the facts if evidence is available or

discern the truth between disagreeing parties. They should also facilitate repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation if possible.

Step 3:

Read [Matt 18:15-17](#) *What role should the elders have in this process and why?*

This passage doesn't mention elders but they are the gateway for bringing the matter to the church. It should be kept in mind that every situation is different and must be handled with wisdom and grace. There are different ways that a given situation may be handled depending on the circumstances.

1. The individual is admonished by the elders which results in repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation.
2. The individual is warned that further action would occur if the inappropriate behavior didn't stop. This would give the offender time to consider their behavior and time for the Holy Spirit to bring conviction of sin. It may be appropriate to remove the individual from areas of responsibility until they demonstrate appropriate attitude and behavior. Counseling or mentoring may be necessary to help with a pattern of sin.
3. The congregation is informed of the situation and instructed not to socialize with the individual but to admonish them in hopes that they would repent. This seems to be the case in Paul's writing to the Thessalonian church about those who were undisciplined about working ([2Thes 3:6-15](#)). We see in this passage that Paul had previously addressed the issue when he was with them. The same issue was also hinted at in a previous letter ([1Thes 4:11-12](#)). Now Paul is telling the congregation not to associate with such individuals but to admonish them as believers. This is a gracious way of giving such individuals chance to recognize their shame and come to their senses. Several other passages provide instruction not to associate with those in sin which may be taken to apply at this point as well as after possible removal from church membership ([Rom 16:17-18](#); [1Cor 5:11-12](#); [2Thes 3:6](#)).
4. If the inappropriate behavior is grievous and there is no repentance it may be appropriate to proceed directly to step 4.

When should the issue become public?

If the accusation is public then the resolution must be public ([Acts 15:1-29](#); [Gal 2:11-14](#)). Public means something that extends beyond the individuals actually involved in a dispute. It could be a handful of people, such as those in a Small Group or class, or the entire congregation if the inappropriate behavior occurring in public. The situation may also be made public by the elders as in items 3 and 4 above.

Step 4:

Read [Matt 18:15-17](#) *When should an individual be removed from membership/fellowship?*

If the individual ultimately refuses to repent, even with public admonition, then they should be removed from membership and treated as an unbeliever. The purpose of this step is not to eliminate a problem, although important, it's primarily to help the individual to come to their senses and repent ([1Tim 1:18-20](#)).

Step 5:

Read [2Cor 2:5-8](#) *When should you receive someone back into fellowship?*

Provide forgiveness and restoration if the individual confesses their sin, demonstrates repentance, and takes steps to cease the activity for which they were disciplined.