

*“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God...” (1 Peter 4:11).*

## CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Connie W. Adams

Church discipline is a much-neglected subject. In many places, a good lesson from the pulpit setting forth just exactly what the Bible says on the subject would be a great shock to those assembled. A failure to understand and practice corrective discipline has resulted in congregations being filled with half-converted, worldly minded, negligent people. This has robbed the church of its spiritual power, caused it to be looked upon with disdain by the world, and thus greatly hindered the spread of the gospel.

### WHAT IS DISCIPLINE?

Webster defines it as: 1. Treatment suited to a disciple or learner; education; development of the faculties by instruction and exercise; training. 2. Training to act in accordance with established rules. 3. Subjection to rule; submissiveness to order and control. 4. Severe training, corrective of faults, punishment. 5. Correction, chastisement, punishment inflicted by way of correction and training.” Church discipline would involve the whole process of training and development of the child of God in the performance of that which the word of God authorizes. The “established rules” in the case would be the

teaching of the New Testament. Every Christian must be trained in that which he is to know and to be. He must learn to develop his skills in the pursuit of his duties. In Matthew 28:20, Jesus said those baptized were to be taught to “*observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.*” Titus 2:11-12 shows that the grace of God teaches us to “*deny ungodliness and worldly lusts*” and to live “*soberly, righteously and godly in this present world.*” 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, “*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, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*” As the Christian is instructed in these matters, he is being disciplined. For this reason, we need Bible classes, gospel meetings, training programs and such like.

But while instructive discipline is needed, the New Testament also provides for corrective discipline. In the army, soldiers are expected to live by the rules. When they fail to do so, correction is meted out. In the church, God expects His people to “*follow after holiness,*” to “*love not the world,*” to “*set their affections on things above.*” Whenever one begins to walk contrary to the pattern of sound words that person needs to be corrected,

and the New Testament provides for such correction.

### PASSAGES TO CONSIDER.

1. Teachers of error are to be corrected. “*Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them*” (Rom. 16:17). Notice that these are to be marked and avoided because they are not practicing the doctrine of God. Such action was designed to awaken the one in error to his condition and also to save the church from contamination. 2. The “*unruly*” are to be warned (1 Th. 5:14). 3. True preaching includes reproofing and rebuking (2 Tim. 4:2). 4. The ungodly are to be purged out (1 Cor. 5). In this passage we have the account of a fornicator being countenanced in the church at Corinth. They had done nothing about it. This little leaven was in danger of leavening the whole lump, that is, defiling the whole congregation. For the protection of the church, something had to be done. Further, this action was to take place when the church was come together, that is, in the public assembly. They were to “*purge out*” this ungodly member. This was to be done not only for the safety of the church, but also for the good of the one who had sinned. It was for “*the destruction of the flesh.*” That is, the sins of lusts

of the flesh to which the brother had succumbed. In the destruction of the flesh, there was the hope that his soul would be saved. In the same chapter Paul wrote, *"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"*

(v. 11). Then in verse 13 he said, *"Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person."*

Such as are described in this passage are to be purged out, no company is to be kept with them, not even to eating with them, and they are to be put away from among the brethren. Now, just how many congregations do you know of which are practicing what this passage enjoins? 5.

*"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"* (2 Th. 3:6). In this passage he deals especially with the brother who would not work, who was idle, and in his idleness had become a busybody (see verse 11). Paul said, *"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. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother"* (vv. 14-15). The word *"disorderly"* denotes a soldier who breaks rank. In this context, the soldier broke rank by violating what Paul wrote about working. Now, my question is this: if a man breaks rank and is disorderly, because he violates one thing required of him in his service to God, is he not equally disorderly when he violates some other plain requirement? For example, the Lord taught that Christians are not *"to forsake the assembling"* of themselves together. To do so

is to sin. It is to break rank. I know of brethren who do not believe that a congregation can withdraw from a brother who has simply abandoned the church. Their argument is that you cannot withdraw something you don't have. It is true that when a brother so conducts himself, he has broken fellowship with God and therefore has none with others who are in fellowship with God. But that same thing is true of a brother who commits adultery or drunkenness. He cuts off fellowship with God in such matters, and therefore has none with any who enjoy fellowship with God. It seems to me that part of this confusion has arisen over the use of the wrong term. We speak of *"withdrawing fellowship,"* whereas Paul said, *"withdraw yourselves."* While a brother may abandon the church and thus cut off fellowship with God and the church, I have an obligation to mark him, note him, keep no company with him until he repents. I know of no more public sin that a man could commit than to just abandon the public meetings of the saints. What greater harm could be done the church in the eyes of the world, or with reference to the weaker members, than for a man so to do?

#### WHY IS IT NECESSARY? 1.

It is necessary because the Lord required it. We cannot respect His authority without complying with what He said on this subject. Those who deny that corrective discipline does any good in all essence are denying that what the Lord required will do good. 2. Fulfilling what the Lord requires preserves the purity of the church. Of course, the church will not be kept absolutely pure, because it is composed of humans. But we are to *"follow peace and holiness."* We are to *"press toward the prize."* With this spirit in mind, one who

stumbles along the way, will recognize his wrong, repent of it, and continue to press in the right direction. Paul said *"a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."* The whole church is liable to be injured by the ungodliness of a corrupt member. Paul said the word of a certain one would *"eat as doth a gangrene"* (2 Tim. 2:17). 3. Such action is designed to save the one in error (1 Cor. 5:5). When the brother finds himself cut off from the company and recognition of the faithful, he may be brought to his senses. Corrective discipline should never be vindictive. The purpose as it concerns the erring brother is to save his soul, when all other efforts have failed. It should be noted that the act of purging out the old leaven is not the first step in our efforts to reclaim a fallen brother, rather, the last resort. Such action should not be taken until all reasonable efforts to teach and persuade him have proved unsuccessful. Any brother overtaken in a fault is to be restored by the spiritual (Gal. 6:1). If any err from the truth, brethren are to seek to convert him from the error of his way and save his soul from death (Jas. 5:19-20). He is to be approached with meekness and dealt with in a long-suffering manner.

#### OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED.

1. Some say to withdraw from a brother simply *"runs him off."* If he has conducted himself in such a fashion as to be purged out, having resisted all efforts to win him back, then you don't run him off. He is away from God in his state. You simply let him know, the church as a unit does, and let the world know that you cannot endorse his manner of life. 2. I've heard brethren say, *"Well, I never heard the old-timey preachers say anything about this."* Now, if you didn't, that would only mean they failed to do their duty as preachers. 3.

Sometimes brethren will object by misapplying the statement of the Lord, "*Judge not that ye be not judged.*" The kind of judgment involved in that verse is forbidden. It is harsh, unkind, and unreasonable. But other passages show, yea, require, that we exercise judgment in some matters in the church. Jesus said, "*Judge righteous judgment*" (Jn. 7:24). In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul rebuked the church at Corinth because they had not judged in the case where one brother went to law with another, and he raised the question, "*Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren?*" (1 Cor. 6:5). 4. "*Let him that is without sin cast the first stone,*" some object. Certainly those enforcing corrective discipline should be striving to do right. Sometimes, when this statement is made, it indicates that there has been a wholesale neglect of discipline and that the church has become so corrupt that it would be hard to know where to start and where to stop. But if the statement, "*Let him that is without sin cast the first stone*" implies that we cannot ever purge out the old leaven, then God would have required something impossible. 5. Some say, "Withdrawing violates the parable of the tares." In Matthew 13:24-30 we have the parable of the tares in which Jesus said that both the wheat and the chaff were to grow until the end of the world and the Lord would separate them. The idea some erroneously get from this is that if you withdraw from the chaff, you might uproot some of the wheat. In the first place, true disciples are devoted to the Lord and by reason of such devotion are interested in obeying His will. In the second place, this is a perversion of the lesson of the parable. In the same chapter, the Lord explained what He meant by the parable. He said, "The

field is the world," not the church. The good seed are the children of the kingdom and the evil seed are the children of the devil. Both saint and sinner are in the world. The children of the kingdom are not to undertake the business of administering discipline to the world, as some religions have been known to do. God will take care of that matter. This passage does not deal with two classes in the church, rather, with two classes in the world.

Brethren need to stop hunting for excuses from doing that which is their duty to do. If every congregation would properly teach and train the members and then correct those who do not heed the teaching, the church would be purer, its chastity would shine in radiance before the world, it would have a magnetic attraction to the toil worn sinner, the borders of the kingdom would be increased, and more than that, any of the fallen would be reclaimed to the salvation of their souls. May the Lord help us to do such a good job in instructive discipline that corrective discipline will seldom be necessary. Should such become necessary, let us not hesitate to fulfill our God-given responsibilities.

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## WITHDRAWING FELLOWSHIP

*Luther Blackmon*

Some years ago I went to Philadelphia to preach in a meeting. I arrived several days early to visit with a friend who lived there. On Wednesday night, one of the elders read a statement of withdrawal from one of the members. When he had finished reading, one of the ladies who was sitting about three rows back

spoke out. What she said, I dare say, has not been spoken by many mothers. But she was right. Calling the elder by name she said, "That's my son, but I want all of you to know that I am in agreement with what you are doing; you had no other choice."

I have not been in that city since, and have no further information on the matter. But I have often thought of that mother. It must have been a very painful experience for her. But with a mother like that, I have a feeling that her son likely found his way back into the fellowship of the church.

In spite of the fact that the Bible says, "*now we command you brethren in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us*" (2 Th. 3:6), sin among members of the church is often ignored.

A decision to withdraw from an unfaithful member of the church often meets with opposition. "You will drive him (her) so far away that he (she) will never come back." This is a puny argument, and the product of one whose emotions overcome his sober judgment, and his obligation to the truth. In 1 Corinthians 5, we have an example of this very thing. A man had taken his father's wife. Paul calls it "*such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles.*" The church was not doing anything about it. Paul writes a prescription for them: "*In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of the 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.*"

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## CONSEQUENCES TO FAITH ONLY DOCTRINE

Nicolas Edwards

It is widely believed and taught that all you have to do to be saved is have faith. Just believe! According to the Bible, if all you do is believe, there will be consequences.

**YOU WILL PERISH.** The Lord said, *"I tell you, nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish"* (Lk. 13:3, 5). The Lord is *"...longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Pet. 3:9).

**YOU ARE DEAD.** We are *"dead in trespasses and sins"* until we are made alive (Eph. 2:1). It is *"in Christ"* that we are made alive (1 Cor. 15:22; Eph. 2:13). We get into Christ by being baptized (Gal. 3:27). If all we do is believe, we remain dead in our trespasses and sins! Our faith is dead as well (Jas. 2:17, 20, 26).

**YOU SHALL BE PUNISHED.** *"And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from*

*heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power"* (2 Th. 1:7-9).

**YOU WILL NOT BE SAVED.** Concerning Jesus, the writer said, *"And being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him"* (Heb. 5:9). The Lord said, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned"* (Mk. 16:16). *"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation"* (Rom. 10:9-10). *"...baptism doth also now save us..."* (1 Pet. 3:21). Salvation is *"in Christ Jesus"* (2 Tim. 2:10). If you aren't baptized then you are not in Christ (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27).

**YOU WILL NOT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE.** *"And this is the*

*record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son"* (1 Jn. 5:11). Since eternal life is in Christ, if you aren't baptized into Christ you do not have eternal life!

**YOU WILL NOT RECEIVE THE CROWN OF LIFE.** *"...Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life"* (Rev. 2:10).

**YOU WILL NOT HAVE RIGHT TO THE TREE OF LIFE OR ENTER IN.** *"Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city"* (Rev. 22:14).

We must believe in order to be saved (Mk. 16:16; Jn. 3:16; 8:24; Rom. 1:16; Heb. 11:6). But faith alone will not save us! It takes more than that. *"...the devils also believe, and tremble"* (Jas. 2:19). They are not going to be saved. They will be tormented (Mt. 8:29). Just as we will be tormented, if all that we do is believe and nothing else!

**EVERY MEMBER  
AT  
EVERY SERVICE!**

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