

Body Life - #6

Biblical Love and Church Discipline

Introduction – The way the world handles the word ‘love’, it would seem that love and discipline could never be understood except as opposites. And the world has learned this from the church which adds words like ‘acceptance’ and ‘tolerance’ as synonyms for ‘love’. And then there are those that careen the other way, emphasizing discipline, but according to their own standards. The Word must be our guide and protection for everything we believe and do. “*He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly*” (Prov 13:24, also Eccl 8:11).

Love and Discipline – “*He who hates correction will die*” (Prov 15:10b). We live in a fallen world where sin will seek to corrupt. If we choose to address sin as the Scripture instructs us, we will be involved in discipline. If we choose to ignore the sin, we will be disciplined. Loving one another requires that we understand how to address one another with wisdom.

Begins with Self-Discipline (Rom 8:13, Gal 5:23) – God grants us the fruit of self-control and we are called to put to death the deeds of the flesh. We discipline ourselves.

Love Covers (Prov 10:12, 1 Pet 4:8, 1 Cor 13:7) – We are called to love one another, which means that often, we simply forgive and let it go. The instructions in Matthew on discipline are followed by a parable rebuking those who lack forgiveness (Matt 18:21ff).

Gentle Admonishment (Matt 18:15, Gal 6:1) – There is a time when a brother needs to be corrected. But you must be spiritually qualified before you approach him.

Bringing in Support (Matt 18:16) – These may be witnesses to the sin, or witnesses to how the Word is being handled in your dispute or accusation.

Before the Elders (Matt 18:17, Heb 13:17) – This is one of the many reasons you want to set biblical standards for choosing your elders. Here, the elders still seek repentance and reconciliation with the fallen brother, but if it fails, the so-called ‘brother’ is to be declared not-a-brother.

Getting Excommunication Right (1 Cor 5:9-13) – Most evangelicals get this backwards. We don’t put up with immorality outside the church and remove ourselves from the world and we indulge sin inside the church claiming that it would be unloving to judge a brother.

Notice the List (v11) – Some of these are easier to spot than others, and all require wisdom to judge. In addition, you should notice that ‘but for the grace of God’ you would be in that list. Excommunication is not just for the axe-murderer.

What We Seek to Accomplish in Discipline – The Scriptures give us reasons to pursue this in the church.

To Obey and Glorify God (Matt 5:16) – We see that God intends there to be church discipline. We do not do it on our own authority, but submissive to the Word of God which is to His glory.

To Restore the Offender (1 Cor 5:5, Gal 6:1) – Restoration is not promised, but it is one of the purposes and, by God’s grace, can be the outcome. And so like every other step of discipline, the goal of putting the offender out is to bring him back in and the motivation is love.

To Maintain the Purity of the Church (1 Cor 5:6-9) – Sometimes the offender is not restored, but biblical discipline always contributes to the purifying of the church. Notice that discipline is required to answer the common objection of ‘hypocrisy’ in the church.

To Prevent God from His Discipline (Rev 2:14-25) – If we ‘put up with’, and ‘allow’, and refuse to discipline, then God will come and discipline us.

To Deter Against Further Sin (1 Tim 5:20, Eccl 8:11) – If you are struggling with sin, open, godly discipline of others will aid you in that struggle.

Church Discipline Requires Church Shepherding (Matt 18:10-14) – This passage precedes the Lord’s teaching on church discipline. Care for the sheep, even the lost sheep, is the context. Church shepherding requires –

Sound Doctrinal Teaching (Acts 20:25-28) – What we teach, and what we neglect, matters.

Pastoral Prayer (Acts 6:4, Col 1:9, James 5:16) – Prayer works. It is effective in caring for the flock.

Shepherding Those ‘Among You’ (1 Pet 5:1-2) – If this is not in place, church discipline will not have an appropriate context.

Final Thoughts – The church cannot speak with any moral authority today, because the church has refused to discipline its own. The church is impotent because it has not stopped the spread of so many diseases in its own body.

In addition, when godly church discipline occurs, there is no place for arrogance or bitterness. The offender must not be denied kindness and courtesy. With fear and humility, we must obey the Lord and ‘*put away from yourselves the evil person*’.