

Anyone who would make the above statement is either ignorant of the Bible's teaching on discipline or is willing to cast aside the word of God for personal and selfish reasons. Discipline permeates just about every page of holy writ. As a general rule, when we talk about discipline our thoughts center around the act of withdrawing from a brother or sister who is walking contrary to the word of God. However, discipline falls into two categories: first, there is preventive discipline and secondly, there is corrective discipline.

The most common form of discipline found in the Bible is preventive discipline. In fact, the first discourse that God had with man was preventive discipline. In Genesis 2:17, God told man not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, under the punishment of death. This would be an example of preventive discipline. In Genesis chapter 3, when man partook of the forbidden fruit God exercised corrective discipline when he cast them from the garden and they were separated from his fellowship. We could follow the same pattern throughout the Bible. Paul said, in Second 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, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." The purpose for the word of God is preventive discipline. Reproof, correction, and instruction, are all forms of preventive discipline. Notice, that Jesus taught preventive as well as corrective discipline in Matthew chapter 7:20-27. Those who heard and obeyed were the wise builders who would be rewarded. Those who heard the word and obeyed not would be the foolish builders and be punished. We could go on and give many examples of both corrective and preventive discipline from the word of God, however, time does not allow such an exhaustive study.

The Purposes Church Discipline Fulfills

It is important that we understand church discipline has a vital and active part in our spiritual lives. Following is a list of some of the purposes for church discipline:

1. It is needed to produce sound faith. Titus 1:13, "This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, (discipline, jws) that they may be sound in faith."
2. It promotes godly fear among the faithful and the congregation. "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear." (I Timothy 5:20). Acts 5:1-11, tells of the incident involving Ananias and Sapphira, how that they lied to the Holy Ghost, were struck dead and the result was that fear came upon all the church.
3. It is the means through which false teachers and those who would lead others astray are to be stopped. Titus 1:10-11, reads, "For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers especially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert all houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake."
4. It is a means of, "... instructing those that oppose themselves: if God pre-adventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth. And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil..." (Second Timothy 2:24-26).
5. It is designed to restore broken fellowship between brothers in Christ (Matthew 18:15-20; James 5:20; Galatians 6:1).
6. It is a means of maintaining and in some cases, regaining the purity of the church. Revelation 2:1-7, the Lord used preventive discipline to encourage the church at Ephesus to regain their first love under the threat of corrective discipline. The same is true of the congregations at Pergamos (Revelation 2:12-17), Thyatira (Revelation 2:18-29), Sardis

(Revelation 3:1-6) and Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22). Notice with the congregations at Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11) and Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13) preventive discipline is used with no corrective discipline warnings.

Who Is To Be Disciplined?

As the word of God identifies the purpose for church discipline, it also identifies the reason for church discipline and our duty to follow the letter of the law.

1. Matthew 18:15-17, is a case that covers a situation in which one brother does evil to another brother in Christ. Efforts are to be made privately by the offended party to rectify the situation by bringing the offender to repentance. If that effort is unsuccessful, then he should take two or three witnesses with him and if that fails the matter should be brought before the congregation.
2. Second Thessalonians 3:6, says that we are to withdraw ourselves from every brother that walks disorderly. Second Thessalonians 3:14-15 identifies the disorderly as anyone who will not follow that which is written.
3. Romans 16:17-18, tells us that we are to mark and avoid those brethren who cause division and offenses contrary to doctrine. First Timothy 6:3-5, "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmising, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself."
4. In Second Corinthians 5:1-2, we are to withdraw from those who commit acts of immorality.

We could go on and list various sins such as is listed in Galatians 5:19-21 that would be just calls for corrective discipline. However, time and space does not permit a lengthy discussion along this line. Any person of reasonable mental facilities would be able to see that the passages cited above cover about every situation we could find ourselves involved in where corrective measures must be taken.

Church Discipline Won't Work

There are several reasons why church discipline won't work:

1. Church discipline will not work if it is not practiced. It does not matter what subject we are talking about that is found within the word of God, if we do not put it into practice, the desired goal will not be met.
2. Church discipline will not work if we do not practice it consistently. Consistency is the basis for all our practices. We cannot be faithful some of the time.
3. Church discipline will not work if we do not love the souls of the lost. We cannot expect the world to come into the light if our candle is out and our light does not shine.
4. Church discipline will not work if we do not have love for the brethren. Hebrews 12:6, "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."
5. But perhaps the greatest reason church discipline does not work is because we are not committed to God and His people. I feel many times that we do not have the same sense of fellowship and devotion that the first century Christians had. When they said goodbye at the end of the Lord's day and journeyed back to their homes, there was in a real sense the possibility that they would never see each other again. In Acts 6:8, we find Stephen doing great wonders and miracles among the people. Then we find that he was arrested and brought

before the Council and in chapter 7, stoned to death. At one moment he was with the disciples preaching the word of God. The next moment he was being dragged out of the city and his life was taken from him. From that point on the saints could only remember the fellowship they had with this gallant warrior for the cause of Christ. According to Acts 8:1, "and Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church, which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles." They never knew when someone would come and drag them out of their house and take him outside the city where they would meet martyrdom. What that implies is that when they were together, they developed a rich relationship, deeply rooted in faith that was encouraging and edifying. You cannot just fellowship those to whom you have not had fellowship with.

We have seen that church discipline is taught in the Bible. Discipline was practiced by God, Christ, the apostles and Christians. It takes a great amount of love for God, Christ, the Church and each other to enact discipline. There is no love where there is no discipline.

Church discipline is not to be done when a problem develops. If preventive discipline is a regular part of our preaching and teaching each time we come together, the need for corrective discipline is reduced. However, we cannot afford to ignore corrective measures when they arise.

This tract is condensed from a lesson presented at the
29th Annual Mid-West Lectures,
"They Shall Be Turned Unto Fables"
To hear or view the complete lesson go to
www.39thStreetChurchOfChrist.org
or contact the
39th Street Church of Christ
15331 East 39th Street
Independence, MO 64055-4240 USA

**"They Shall Be Turned
Unto Fables"**

"Church Discipline Won't Work"

by
Jesse Stephens

© 2011



*International Bible Studies
Tract Series*