

LOCAL CHURCH DISCIPLINE

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I. FELLOWSHIP IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

- A. It is essential that we understand what constitutes local church fellowship before we attempt to study withdrawing fellowship.
 - 1. "Fellowship" - a sharing or commonality.
 - 2. "Church" - a called-out group; an assembly.
 - a. Any assembly - Acts 19:39.
 - b. All of the saved - Heb. 12:22-23.
 - c. A local body of Christians - Rev. 2:1.
 - 3. "Local church fellowship" - the sharing or commonality of spiritual matters between members of a local group of Christians.
- B. How is fellowship established in:
 - 1. The universal church? Fellowship is Divine in origin, maintenance, and severance; human cooperation necessary - 1John 1:6-7
 - 2. The local church? Fellowship is originated, maintained, and ended by man; Divine guidance is necessary - Acts 9:26; 1Peter 5:1-2; 2Thes. 3:6
- C. Perversions of local church fellowship.
 - 1. Accepting those whom God has rejected - 2John 9-11
 - 2. Rejecting those whom God has accepted - 3John 9-10

II. WHAT IS LOCAL CHURCH DISCIPLINE?

- A. Definitions of discipline.
 - 1. Secular - "Training that develops; orderly conduct; submission to control; a particular system of rules; treatment that corrects."
 - 2. Biblical - "To bind, discipline, correct, chasten, restrain; to reform by words or actions; the training of a child, including instruction; hence, discipline, correction."
- B. Types of local church discipline.
 - 1. Instructive discipline: preventative in nature (includes all teaching, edification, admonition, and instruction).
 - a. Christ commanded it - Matt. 28:18-20.
 - b. Early church practiced it - Acts 2:42.
 - c. Apostolic examples - Acts 20:20-27.
 - 2. Punitive discipline: corrective in nature (reproving, rebuking, correcting, warning, withdrawing fellowship).
 - a. Christ commanded it - Matt. 18:15-17.
 - b. Paul was inspired to command it - 2Thes. 3:6.
 - c. Holy Spirit gave an example - Acts 5:1-14.
 - 3. Misuses of local church discipline:
 - a. Should not be used for revenge or getting even - Rom. 12:19; 2Thes 3:15.
 - b. Is not intended to shun or get rid of a dislikable person - 2Thes. 3:14; Gal. 6:1
 - c. Should not be a spring cleaning process - 1Cor. 14:40.

III. THE NEED FOR LOCAL CHURCH DISCIPLINE

- A. Is seen in the effects of tolerated sin:
 - 1. Sinner loses soul - 1Cor. 5:5.
 - 2. Church loses influence - 1Cor. 5:6.
 - 3. God is displeased - Rev. 2:20.
 - 4. 1Cor. 5:1-6 - exegete
- B. Is seen in the need to respect Divine authority.
 - 1. Under the Old Law, those who rejected Divine authority died – Lev. 10:1-2; Heb. 10:28.
 - 2. Under the law of Christ, congregations who reject His authority are digressive - Rev. 3:1-6.
- C. Is seen in the purposes of punitive discipline:
 - 1. To maintain the authority of Christ - Luke 6:46.
 - 2. To maintain the purity in the church - 1Cor. 5:6-7; Eph. 5:27.
 - 3. To maintain unity in the church - Acts 20:29-31; Rom. 16:17-18.
 - 4. To maintain the good influence of the church - Acts 5:1-14.
 - 5. To save the erring - Matt. 18:15; 1Cor. 5:5; 2Cor. 7:10.

IV. HOW TO PRACTICE LOCAL CHURCH DISCIPLINE.

- A. Five steps of local church discipline:
 - 1. Public instruction - Acts 20:20,27,31.
 - 2. Private instruction - Heb. 3:13.
 - 3. Private rebuke and admonishment - Matt. 18:15-16; Luke 17:3-4.
 - 4. Public rebuke - Gal. 2:11-14; 1Tim. 5:20.
 - 5. Withdrawal of spiritual & social fellowship - Rom. 16:17; 1Cor. 5:9-13; 2Thes. 3:6; 2Tim. 3:5; Titus 3:10-11; 3John 10.
- B. Procedure in a matter of private sin - Matt. 18:15-17.
 - 1. Private meeting and instruction - Matt. 18:15.
 - 2. Private rebuke with 2 or 3 witnesses - Matt. 18:16.
 - 3. Private warning by the church (elders) - 1Thes. 5:14.
 - 4. Public withdrawal of fellowship by the church - Matt. 18:17.
- C. Procedure in a matter of public sin - 1Cor. 5:11; 2Thes. 3:11,6; Heb. 10:25; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:3-11.
 - 1. Public instruction (for a large group) - Gal 1:6, 3:1.
 - 2. Private instruction (for a single individual) - Acts 8:20.
 - 3. Private warning by the church - 1Thes. 5:14.
 - 4. Public warning by the church - 1Tim. 5:20.
 - 5. Public withdrawal of fellowship - 1Cor. 5; 2Thes. 3.
- D. Procedure with a heretic or factious brother - Titus 3:10-11.
 - 1. Who are the factious and heretical?
 - a. False teachers - Rom. 16:17; Acts 20:29-31; 2John 9-11.
 - b. One who binds private opinion as doctrine - Rom. 14; 1Cor. 8.
 - c. The dominators & self-willed - 3John 9-10.
 - 2. These are to be granted very little patience - Gal. 2:4-5; Ecc. 8:11.
 - 3. A short procedure; two warnings only.
 - a. Private instruction - Acts 18:24-26.

- b. Public rebuke - Titus 3:10; 1:9-14.
 - c. Mark and avoid - Rom. 16:17-18; 2John 9-11.
- E. If at any point in these procedures the sinner repents and confesses his sins, the process of punitive discipline ceases - Luke 17:3.

V. WITHDRAWING FELLOWSHIP

- A. Have the proper attitude.
 - 1. Right action can be negated by wrong attitude - John 4:24; Matt. 18:7-9.
 - 2. Do not lose sight of the purpose of discipline - 1Cor. 5:5-7; Matt. 18:15.
 - 3. Discipline with love - John 13:34.
 - 4. Discipline with firm resolve - 1Cor. 15:58.
 - 5. Discipline orderly - 1Cor. 14:40.
 - 6. Discipline in unity - 1Cor. 5:4, 1:10.
 - 7. Discipline consistently - 1Tim. 5:21.
- B. Maintain individual Christian duties toward the disciplined.
 - 1. We are our brother's keeper - Gal. 6:1-2; James 5:19-20.
 - 2. Respect the marking by the church - Rom. 16:17.
 - 3. Avoid association that implies endorsement of their manner of life - 2John 9-11; 1Cor. 5:11; 2Thes. 3:14.
 - 4. Consider them as erring Christians to be prayed for and admonished - 1John 5:16; 2Thes. 3:15.
 - 5. View them as unsaved (Matt. 18:17), but not as an enemy (2Thes. 3:15).
 - 6. Seek to restore them by means of repentance and confession - James 5:16-20.
 - 7. Forgive completely when they repent - 2Cor. 2:5-8, 7:9-12.

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS

1. "We can't withdraw from them until every member has been to see them."
 - a. Jesus taught in Matt. 18:15-17...
2. "The parable of the tares teaches us to leave them alone and not bother them."
 - a. Parable of the tares does not void the direct command to discipline.
3. "We might get sued."
 - a. Since when was that ever a consideration?
4. "It will just drive them further away from the church."
 - a. They are already leaving the church.
5. "It will make folks angry with us (inside or outside of the church)."
 - a. Should we change baptism to keep folks happy?
6. "They have already withdrawn from the church."
 - a. Doesn't change the Divinely mandated duty of the church.
7. "Everyone sins; what sins will you start with?"
 - a. Sins in which one persists without repentance.
8. "We have several people that need withdrawn from years ago. Are you going to go back and get them too, too?"
 - a. Should past mistakes determine present action? Repent of neglecting discipline and start doing it the right way.

9. "We don't have elders, so we can't withdraw from anyone."
 - a. We can't do anything commanded of the church, if this is true. Discipline is work of the church, not merely the elders.
10. "You're judging people. God decides who's in the church & who goes to heaven."
 - a. John 7:24 – You had to make a judgment when you received them into fellowship, didn't you?
11. "You can't talk about others sins."
 - a. 1Tim. 5:20
12. "What if withdrawing from someone does more damage than good?"
 - a. The damage has already been done by the sinner. Sin has consequences, and the responsibility for those consequences fall to the sinner
 - b. Discipline is the God ordered means of healing the damage.
 - c. God's people do God's will regardless of how unpleasant it may seem.
 - d. What of those who have lost family and friends because they stood for truth against institutionalism, the instrument, etc.

What Must The Disciplined One Do In Order To Be Restored To Fellowship?

1. Dropping back in isn't enough. Time does not remove sins.
2. When it gets to the point that a congregation is about to withdraw from someone, that one must make a public confession of wrong.
 - a. He must confess the sins for which he is being disciplined.
 - b. The repentance and confession must be genuine. ("bring forth fruits meet for repentance")
 - c. The confession is invalid when it contains the word "if".
 - d. Denying the authority of the elders or business meeting in which one was disciplined does not constitute a confession.
 - e. An accusation of other brethren does not constitute a confession.
 - f. One who has made an invalid confession is still under the aegis of the disciplinary action. He is still withdrawn from.
 - g. The members of any congregation who continue to have fellowship with him commit sin and become candidates for discipline themselves.