

# LOCAL CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Compiled by Paul R. Blake

## 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 for 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.