

# 18 The Church - Discipline

## Text

**Matthew 18:15-17** If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

## Discipline

Johnny had an abusive father. The family never had much because Johnny's father would never keep a steady job. It was a constant changing of jobs. His father would come home irritated most nights, if he came home at all. There was a constant tension in the home. Johnny never knew when his dad would blow up. There was regular verbal abuse for everyone.

On nights when he went drinking with his buddies, Johnny would just hide under his bed counting the minutes till closing time. The door would slam and the hollering would begin.

Johnny would hear the blows from his father and the cries from his mother but he was too afraid to move. He was racked with feelings of guilt for not doing anything, but he was just too scared. He grew into a young teen before there was a breaking point for him. He had had enough. This time when his dad came home he would confront him. Johnny was beaten so badly that he does not even remember the details of that night. When the swelling in his face had subsided enough to see again Johnny ran away from home never to return.

Johnny eventually got married and they had some children of their own. Johnny vowed never to be like his father. He never turned down a request from his children. If they asked for something he would try to get it. If he asked them to do something and they refused, Johnny would never push it. He was so afraid of being like his abusive father that Johnny never laid a hand on his kids, never spoke harshly with them, never even raised his voice.

Johnny's son Robert grew up used to getting his way. His whole life everyone gave him what he wanted when he wanted. He was never called to account for his actions. Consequently Robert could never hold a steady job. No one would tell him what to do. Robert got married to a pretty young girl and had kids. But Robert could not tolerate their neediness. Their crying, their fussing, their demands. It wasn't long before Robert slapped one of the babies. His wife intervened and paid the price.

Johnny, so afraid to be his father, created the same kind of self-centered character in his son that leads so readily to abuse.

Prov 12:1 Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid.

Prov 29:17 Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart.

Children are not innocent creatures. They are sinful just like the rest of us and God has given them parents to discipline them and to raise them in the fear and admonition of the Lord. A healthy family will be a family that disciplines.

What is true of the physical family is also true in the family of God. The author of Hebrews remarks:

For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.

11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

God will bring discipline into your life to lovingly correct you. Rev 3:19 says, " Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent." We see that love is an integral part of discipline. If God did not love us he would not discipline us. He would let us go our own way. He would let us walk in our sinful paths until destruction came upon us. But he is a loving God who will bring correction to his children.

If it is true in our physical families, and if it is true in the family of God, it is also true in the church family. If we actually love each other, we will exercise discipline.

In fact, this is one of the historic marks of the church. In Article 29 of the Belgic Confession states:

The marks by which the true church is known are these: if the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin; in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the church. Hereby the true church may certainly be known, from which no man has a right to separate himself.

This is a difficult subject, but one worth our consideration. It is a difficult subject, but it is a biblical one and we are not free to ignore it. God sent his Spirit to inspire this book. God's servants have with their blood, preserved this book for us. Who are we to then pick and choose what we want to believe? Who are we to keep one part of the Bible but then take a pair of scissors and cut out the parts we don't like? If we are going to be people of the book, we must abide by all of the book.

## **Preliminaries**

Before I actually get to the process of discipline, I'd like to make some preliminary comments. First, as God exercises discipline in love, so to must we do it in love. As with disciplining your children, do not discipline in anger. If you are angry then it is retaliation, not biblical discipline. If you are eager to discipline, you should not do it. You need to make sure that your own heart is in the right place.

Second, do not discipline in hypocrisy. Jesus, in Matthew 7 says:

Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. 3 Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

Notice verse 5. Jesus here assumes that we will judge this person, or at least that we should. The issue is whether you are judging hypocritically. Not only is hypocrisy an issue in itself, but it also reveals a lack of credible correction. I knew of a pastor who used to go to the bars and get absolutely hammered. He would stumble down the street drunk. When talking to one of the congregation members about it they said, "Oh I think it is great because he can really identify with some of the struggles that we have." I was floored at such an answer. I thought to myself, they must not think much of Jesus since he never sinned.

Ladies and gentlemen, being righteous is like holding a heavy load. Imagine a man is pulling something up out of a well. He is straining hard at the rope. That struggle represents our struggle with sin. I ask you, which is easier, to give into temptation or to keep fighting? Which is harder, to let go of the rope or to keep holding on? Jesus is to be admired because he was tempted in every way as we are, except without sin. We all let go of the rope. He held it fast. When the weight of the world was attached to the rope, his muscles were shaking, his hands were bleeding, his fingers were aching and yet he held firm and never sinned.

This man who continually gets drunk is in no position to offer advice since he has obviously not found out how to overcome. Once you have removed the plank from your own eye, then you can see clearly to help your brother. This is why Paul says:

**Gal 6:1** Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

Third, when you discipline, it is with a view toward restoration. With your own children, you discipline them to bring about repentance. You want to see them conformed to the image of Christ.

## The Process

(Rom 16:17; 1 Cor 5:1-13; 2 Thess 3:6; 2 Tim 2:16-21). Matthew 18 presents the method of discipline in these four steps:

1. One-on-one confrontation. When a member becomes aware of sin, he or she has the responsibility to approach the sinning person privately. The sin must be clarified and the sinner must be lovingly admonished and exhorted to repent demonstrated in the putting off of sin and the putting on of Christ. (Mt 18:15; Lk 17:3; Gal 6:1)  
This step should happen frequently. We normally think of discipline as a rare thing; and when taken through all these steps it should be rare. But this phase of one person talking to another should be a regular occurrence. This is part of what it is to be in community with one another. We share our lives, we offend, we repent, we forgive. We encourage, we admonish, we correct.
2. Two or three witnesses. If the sinning person continues in sin, the matter shall be brought to the offender by one or more additional witnesses who offer further reproof

and spiritual counsel (Mat 18:16; Deut 19:15). If the offender repents, exhibited in the confession of sin and the obedience of faith in Christ, the matter is dropped. However, if the offender refuses to repent, continuing in the pattern of his or her sin, the witnesses stand as additional evidence to the sinning person's unwillingness to repent.

3. The admonition of the church. After reasonable attempts toward restoration have failed, the church body will be informed of the individual's sin (Mat 18:17a). The church will be encouraged to admonish the sinning person to turn the offender from his or her sinful ways to walk in the sanctification and holiness of Christ.

**1 Timothy 5:20** As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.

4. Exclusion from the church. If however, the sinning person refuses to repent, the offender shall be excluded from the attendance, participation, fellowship and membership of the congregation at large as well as from individuals of the local assembly (Mat 18:17b).