

The New Testament Church

Part 9: The Discipline of the Church

Matthew 18:15-17

I. INTRODUCTION: I

- I. **2** God has always required His people to be holy, separate from sinners, the world (attitude & conduct).
 - A. Under the Law of Moses this principle was sometimes taught in unusual ways.
 - (1) For example, prohibitions on “mixing” certain things:

Lev. 19:19: *“You shall keep My statutes. You shall not let your livestock breed with another kind. You shall not sow your field with mixed seed. Nor shall a garment of mixed linen and wool come upon you.”*

Deut. 22:9-11: *“You shall not sow your vineyard with different kinds of seed, lest the yield of the seed which you have sown and the fruit of your vineyard be defiled. 10 You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together. 11 You shall not wear a garment of different sorts, such as wool and linen mixed together.”*
 - (2) For example, the strict dietary laws of Leviticus 11: couldn’t eat animals that “chews the cud but does not have cloven hooves” (v. 4); couldn’t eat “swine” (v. 7); couldn’t eat seafood that didn’t “have fins and scales” (v. 10); etc.
 - B. Why such prohibitions? I certainly do not know every reason, but one thing I know is that these laws “illustrated the need to keep the nation holy—separate from heathens and their profane practices.” (Stauffer, p. 90).
 - C. “Time and again, especially in Leviticus, God warned Israel against observing the ‘customs of the nations’ which he had cast out of Canaan.” (Stauffer, p. 90).
 - (1) God was longsuffering to the heathen nations (Gen. 15:16: *“for the iniquity...is not yet full”*).
 - (2) Ultimately, however, God’s longsuffering ran out and He “vomited” them out of the land.
 - (3) God then gave very stern warnings to Israel not to follow the heathen nations otherwise He would “vomit you out” of the land; but rather that they *“shall be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine.”* (Lev 20:22-26).
 - D. “Cleansings of the flesh by offering bulls and goats were ‘types’ of the spiritual purifying of the church by the offering of the blood of Christ (see Heb. 9:11-15; Eph. 5:25-27).” (Stauffer, p. 90)
 - (1) The theme of holiness set forth in the book of Leviticus is repeated in the New Testament:

1 Pet. 1:15-16: *“but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”*
 - (2) The brethren at Corinth came out of some of the rankest forms of pagan idolatry of those times; hence, Paul warned them not to continue alliances with idolatry and immorality:

2 Cor. 6:14: *“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness?”*
 - (3) “Paul advanced this thought by a series of questions: ‘For what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? Or what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what portion hath a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement hath a temple of God with idols?’ (2 Cor. 6:14-16).” (Stauffer, p. 90)

- (4) The entire point of this section is summed up in **2 Corinthians 6:17-18**: “Therefore ‘Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.’ 18 ‘I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty.’”
- E. The idea of “unequally yoked” comes from the principles seen in Leviticus where dissimilar things were not to be joined together.
- (1) This happens anytime righteousness participates, has fellowship with iniquity; anytime light shares with darkness, anytime Christ is blended with Satan.
- (2) “Unequal yokes result when Christians compromise with sin and partake in evil deeds.” (Stauffer, p. 91)
- F. **3** The Lord’s church must be ever vigilant that unholiness does not arise within its ranks.
- (1) “Impenitent brethren, factious men, immoral or disorderly disciples, and false teachers are not to be tolerated in the church.” (Stauffer, p. 91)
- 1 Cor. 5:6-7**: “...Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened...”
- (2) “Fellowship and company with unclean brethren will defile the whole church. The leaven of iniquity must be constantly purged if the purity of the church is to be maintained.” (Stauffer, p. 91)
2. **4** The purpose of our ninth lesson concerning the New Testament Church is to examine its discipline.

II. DISCUSSION:

- I. **5** Purpose of church discipline: Purpose of church discipline is two-fold: 1) Instructive, and 2) Corrective.
- A. Instructive: Instructive discipline is preventive in nature (e.g., teaching a child; **Prov. 22:6**: “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”).
- (1) The work of the elders (i.e., aka bishops, pastors) involves instructive discipline:
- ✓ **Feed the flock: Acts 20:28**: “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”
 - ✓ **Tend the flock: 1 Pet. 5:2**: “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you...”
 - ✓ **Take the oversight: 1 Pet. 5:2**: “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers...”
 - ✓ **Rule well by example: 1 Tim. 5:17**: “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.”
 - ✓ **Watch for souls: Heb. 13:17**: “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”
- (2) The attitude of the church:
- ✓ **Esteem them highly in love: 1 Thess. 5:12-13**: “And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. Be at peace among yourselves.”

- ✓ **Submit to them: Heb. 13:17:** “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”
- ✓ **Obey them: Heb. 13:7:** “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”
- ✓ **Count them worthy of honor: 1 Tim. 5:17:** “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.”
- ✓ **Imitate their faith: Heb. 13:7:** “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.”

It is essential that we recognize and apply these principles and in doing so we will maintain God’s order. If we reject these principles the results will be anarchy, souls will be lost and the church will suffer greatly!

B. **6** Corrective: chastising or penal in its nature.

(1) Its importance:

- ✓ **The Lord wants a pure church:**

Eph. 5:25-27: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.”

2 Cor. 11:2: “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”

- ✓ **A little leaven leavens the entire lump** (To harbor sin, disorder, rebellion, wickedness in the church brings frowns and displeasure from the Lord on those guilty of such):

1 Cor. 5:6: “Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?”

(2) Corrective discipline therefore has a three-fold purpose:

- ✓ **Message to the world** (the church will not tolerate sin in the camp):

1 Cor. 5:1: “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles — that a man has his father’s wife!”

- ✓ **To purify the church:**

1 Cor. 5:7: “Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump,”

- ✓ **To save the guilty party:**

1 Cor. 5:5: “deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”

2. **7** Objects of church discipline:

A. Impenitent brother: refuses to repent

Matt. 18:15-17: “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ 17 And if he

refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.”

- (1) Here Jesus Himself tells us the proper procedure for dealing with an unrepentant brother.
 - (a) At first it is a *private matter*, the *offended brother* is to take the initiative and take it directly to the brother at fault (v. 15); if the sinful brother hears and responds positively the matter is settled and “*you have gained your brother.*”
 - (b) If not, the Lord tells us to take a couple of witnesses with us to establish before others the brother’s sin and impenitence (v. 16); if that works the matter is settled and over.
 - (c) If not, the entire congregation becomes involved and the is to be told “*to the church*” (v. 17); if that works the matter is settled and over.
 - (d) If not, “*if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector*” (v. 17).
- (2) “To an audience of Jews the Lord’s sentence against the brother could not have been clearer.” (Stauffer, p. 91)
 - (a) The Law of Moses set up a “*wall of separation*” between Jew and Gentile such that Jews had absolutely no association with Gentiles and considered them as “*dogs*”—unclean and unfit for acceptance (Matt. 15:26; Jn. 4:9).
 - (b) Tax collectors, although Jews, were even considered worse than “*heathen*” (i.e., Gentiles); they greatly resented Roman rule and tax collectors worked for the Romans.
 - (c) To eat with a “*heathen*” or a “*tax collector*” would have been to eat with sinners and thus defile oneself. Hence, it should be obvious the same would be true of an unrepentant brother who refused all attempts to restore him.
 - (d) “Jesus’ message is plain. Impenitent brethren are not worthy of company with faithful brethren and must be cut off absolutely. To let them ‘be unto thee as the Gentile and publican’ meant to ostracize them completely—not to eat with them, fish with them, do business with them, ride in a chariot with them, welcome them into their homes. There may be no fellowship or company between unrighteousness and iniquity in the Lord’s church.” (Stauffer, pp. 91-92)
- (3) **Note:** not applicable to “public” sins; only private matters.

B. 8 *Immoral brother:*

I Cor. 5:1: “*It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles — that a man has his father’s wife!*”

I Cor. 5:13: “*Therefore “put away from yourselves the evil person.”*

- (1) The Israelites fell into immorality, at least due in part, for their failure to fully drive the heathen nations from Canaan (I Cor. 15:33); hence, “*Idolatry inundated the land, the law was forgotten, and the ‘holy nation’ succumbed to the grossest immortality.*” (Stauffer, p. 92) Recall Phinehas (Num. 25:7-8).
- (2) The brethren in Corinth also were surrounded by pagan idolatry and gross immorality.
 - (a) “Corinth, a Gentile city and seaport, was unequalled among most ancient cities for immorality. Their heathen religion hired a 1000 prostitute priestesses with whom men honored the gods in sexual immorality.” (Stauffer, p. 92)

- (b) When Paul came to Corinth (Acts 18) he found the city with all types of degrading sin (see **1 Cor. 6:9-11a**: “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. *And such were some of you.*”), but some received the gospel message and obeyed it (**1 Cor. 6:11**: “*And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.*”; Acts 18:8).
- (c) This immorality made its way into the church and when it happened at Corinth it was even worse than among the heathen—a man was committing sexual immorality with “his father’s wife” (i.e., stepmother? 1 Cor. 5:1).
- (d) “Sadly, the brethren treated it as nothing, were ‘puffed up’ about it, and did not even ‘mourn.’” (Stauffer, p. 92)
- (e) What should they have done?
1 Cor. 5:2: “*And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.*”
1 Cor. 5:4-5: “*In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 5 deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*”
- (f) “The brethren by the authority of Christ should gather the church together and ‘deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus’ (1 Cor. 5:3-5).” (Stauffer, p. 92)
- (g) In an effort to save wayward the brethren must reject fellowship with him (i.e., “*deliver such a one unto Satan*”); let him know that the faithful no longer consider him faithful and acceptable to wholesome brethren.
- (h) To ignore sin is a disservice to the erring brother (**Jas. 5:19-20**: “*Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.*”).
- (i) “To turn our heads and ignore such blatant sin among them was to encourage the practice generally. As ‘a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump,’ so a little sin will infect the whole body. ‘Purge out the old leaven’ and ‘put away the wicked man from among yourselves.’ (1 Cor. 5:7, 13).” (Stauffer, pp. 92-93)
- (j) We cannot have “*company*” with a brother or sister who persists in sin; we cannot associate with them in any way, shape or form.
- (k) “No relationship with immoral brethren may prevail until repentance is evident. This assures the purity of the church.” (Stauffer, p. 93) AND, has the intended effect of awakening the immoral brother from his lost condition (**1 Cor. 5:5**: “*deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*”

C. 9 Disorderly brother:

2 Thess. 3:6: “*But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.*”

- (l) Paul’s orders to the church at Thessalonica are very similar to those given to Corinth.

- (a) “Here the military term ‘disorderly’ is introduced to describe an erring brother. The word suggests marching out of rank or out of step and denotes insubordinate behavior.” (Stauffer, p. 93)
- (b) Disorderliness is defined as not following the apostolic doctrine “and cannot be limited to the specific incident at Thessalonica.” (Stauffer, p. 93)
- (c) The specifics of this case were “*not working at all, but are busybodies*” (v. 11).
- (d) “Refusing to provide for himself, he sponged off of other brethren and went about speaking concerning matters of private business.” (Stauffer, p. 93)
- (2) Paul said three things must be done:
 - (a) First: 2 Thess. 3:14a: “And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person...”; in other words, specifically identify the brother so all the brethren are aware.
 - (b) Second: 2 Thess. 3:14: “And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed.”; like Paul taught at Corinth, wholesome, faithful brethren are not to associate with one “who walks disorderly.”
 - (c) Third: 2 Thess. 3:15: “Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.”; “The apostle reminded the church that erring brethren are still brothers and are not to be objects of hate or evil doing. They are to be loved and every effort must be made to convert them from their error and restore them (see Gal. 6:1; Jas. 5:19, 20).” (Stauffer, p. 93) Tough love!

D. **10** Factious brother:

Rom. 16:17-18: “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. 18 For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.”

- (1) Factious men endanger the purity of the church and like the disorderly must be noted or “mark them.” (KJV, ASV).
- (2) “The word here means ‘to look at’ or ‘behold’ as though eyeing the man or drawing a bead on him; another way of saying the brother must be identified.” (Stauffer, p. 94)
- (3) “These men cause divisions and occasions of stumbling among brethren. They serve the flesh rather than Christ and deceive innocent brethren by flattering words.” (Stauffer, p. 94)
- (4) They sin in three ways:
 - (a) Create division,
 - (b) Cause offenses (i.e., cause weak, innocent brethren to stumble),
 - (c) Teach “*contrary to the doctrine which you learned*” (i.e., teach error).
- (5) Such persons, when unrepentant, the church must “avoid” (i.e., ASV “turn away from them”); refuse to associate with them.
- (6) Paul told Titus how to deal with such men:

Titus 3:9-11: “But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless. 10 Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, 11 knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.”

- (a) If such men are allowed to continue unchecked/unchallenged they can tear up a church.

- (b) The church cannot allow evil men to divide brethren and cannot accept them and keep the church pure.

E. **11** False teacher:

1 Tim. 1:3: “As I urged you when I went into Macedonia — remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine,”

1 Tim. 1:19-20: “having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, 20 of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.”

- (1) “Paul named three despicable men who were a danger to the church in Ephesus. He, for that reason, left Timothy there to ‘charge certain men not to teach a different doctrine’ (1 Tim. 1:3)
 - (a) Hymenaeus and Alexander caused some to “put away concerning the faith have made shipwreck” (1 Tim. 1:19).
 - (b) As a result Paul tells Timothy he had “delivered [Hymenaeus and Alexander] to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme” (1 Tim. 1:20).
- (2) A man named Philetus was also part of this false teaching threesome as he and Hymenaeus taught “the resurrection is already past” (2 Tim. 2:18).
 - (a) Paul describes their false doctrine as “gangrene” (2 Tim. 2:17).
 - (b) This is very similar to Paul’s description of sin as “leaven” in 1 Corinthians 5:5
 - (c) “Leaven” and “gangrene” are both things that spread and effect the entire “lump” or entire “body” if left unchecked.
 - (d) The same is true with any and all sin; whether its impenitence, immorality, walking disorderly, factionalism, false teaching, etc.; if left unchecked and unchallenged they negatively affect the entire congregation.
- (3) “Timothy is told to ‘fight the good warfare’ and deliver these two men to Satan ‘that they might be taught not to blaspheme’ (1 Tim. 1:20).” (Stauffer, p. 94) **False teachers, as impenitent, immoral, disorderly and factious brethren are to be marked and avoided.**
- (4) “John, the apostle of love, faced and dealt harshly with false teachers toward the end of the first century, when Gnosticism was making a strong move against the faith.” (Stauffer, p. 94)
 - (a) John first warned the brethren that they needed to be on guard “because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 Jn. 4:1).
 - (b) These false prophets had left the inspired apostolic teaching/doctrine and that is how they are identified (1 Jn. 4:6; **Eph. 5:11**: “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.”; 1 Pet. 4:11).
 - (c) False teachers had “transgressed” “the doctrine of Christ” and anyone who does that is not in fellowship with God and thus we cannot be in fellowship with them!

2 Jn. 10-11: “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; 11 for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.”

3. **12** Scriptural pattern for discipline:

Matt. 18:15-17: “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ 17 And if he refuses to

hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.”

A. **Pray for them (1 Jn. 5:16):** “If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that.”)

B. **Try to “convert” them:** This would include following the procedure given in Matt. 18:15-18

Jas. 5:19-20: “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.”

C. **Admonish them:**

1 Thess. 5:14: “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.”

D. **Last resort, if they are unrepentant, is to withdraw fellowship from them (1 Cor. 5:4-5, 13):**

2 Thess. 3:6: “But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.”

(1) If that is done it is the duty of every member of the congregation to support that action:

1 Cor. 5:9-11: “I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. 10 Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 11 But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner — not even to eat with such a person.”

2 Jn. 9:11: “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; 11 for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.”

Matt. 18:17: “And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.”

(2) But we must always keep in mind that one of the main purposes of these actions is to restore the erring back to faithfulness:

Gal. 6:1-3: “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. 2 Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

2 Thess. 3:15: “Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.”

III. CONCLUSION: 13

1. It is not pleasant to dispense discipline on wayward brethren; but it is just as much a part of God’s revealed plan as baptism or observing the Lord’s Supper.
2. If we would truly lay claim to following the New Testament pattern for the church we must follow the New Testament pattern for discipline (1 Pet. 4:11).
3. To fail in this regard is to fail the sinner, to fail the church and to fail our Lord and Savior.
4. Invitation

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