

Church Discipline

by Micky Galloway

The Scriptures teach, *“but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin”* (I John 1:7). The emphasis is on fellowship with God, yet those who have fellowship with God also share a relationship with each other. Rebellion destroys the fellowship we have with God (Isaiah 59:1-2). Therefore, we cannot rightly have joint participation (fellowship) with those who rebel against God’s will.

Church discipline is often neglected in the Lord’s church today. Ignoring this commandment of God is sufficient cause for a local church to lose its identity with the Lord. In this study we shall establish that a local church has the responsibility to discipline its members and withdraw from those who rebel against God.

What is discipline? According to Webster, discipline involves two things: instruction as well as correction, chastisement, or punishment. Church discipline therefore, would involve the whole process of training and development of the child of God in the performance of that which the word of God authorizes. For this reason, we need Bible classes, gospel meetings and such like. However, when one rebels, walks contrary to the pattern of sound words and will not repent, that person needs to be corrected.

Passages to consider:

Matthew 18:17, *“And if he refuse to hear them, tell it unto the church: and if he refuse to hear the church also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican.”* The context of this passage describes an individual situation where one Christian wrongs another and then will not repent. The injured party is to go to the offender and try to work things out privately. If that does not work, others are to be brought in as witnesses (cf. Deuteronomy 19:15) to lend their influence. If there is still no evidence of repentance, the local congregation is to be informed. If such a person fails to heed the exhortation of concerned Christians, the offender must be withdrawn from and treated as an outsider.

I Corinthians 5:1ff, *“It is actually reported that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not even among the Gentiles, that one (of you) hath his father’s wife...”* Verse 9 says, *“I wrote unto you in my epistle to have no company with fornicators.”* This immoral brother enjoyed the fellowship of his brethren in Corinth. The Corinthians had failed in their duty to him and were tolerating his sin. They were *“puffed up”* (proud) and did not rather *“mourn”* (grieve as at the death of a friend). Discipline is not to be carried out with a spirit of vengeance. It proceeds from a heart that is broken with sorrow. Paul commands that *“he that had done this deed might be taken away from among you”* (verse 2) and *“to 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”* (verse 5). What does the expression, *“for the destruction of the flesh”* mean? This man was dominated by his fleshly desires. Withdrawal of fellowship is designed to lead one back to the truth. It should cause one to seriously reflect upon the path he is following and cause him

to realize the consequences of his sin. One cannot continue in the practice of sin and maintain fellowship with other Christians. From II Corinthians 2:6-8, we learn that the fornicator of I Corinthians 5 did repent. Paul warns that *“a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.”* He commands them to, *“Purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump”* (verses 6-7). Anytime we tolerate sin, our moral standards are lowered. Sin acts like a cancer and devours the body of Christ (cf. II Timothy 2:17). We cannot casually associate with a brother in Christ who continues the practice of sin.

II Thessalonians 3:6, *“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which they received of us.”* Verses 14-15 continue, *“And if any man obeyeth not our word by this epistle, note that man, that ye have no company with him, to the end that he may be ashamed. And (yet) count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.”* The word *“disorderly,”* denotes a soldier who breaks rank. As soldiers in the Lord’s army, we must walk according to His commandments. The authority of Christ is absolute (Matthew 28:18-20; Colossians 3:17). If we deliberately ignore His will we are guilty of *“disorderly”* conduct. One who so rebels against the teaching of Christ and will not repent must be withdrawn from. Again, we must maintain the proper attitude and *“count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.”*

Romans 16:17, *“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye learned: and turn away from them.”* These teachers of error must be corrected. Notice that these are to be marked and avoided because they are not practicing the doctrine taught by the apostles. Such action was designed to awaken the one in error to his sinful condition and to save the church from contamination.

Those who deny that corrective discipline does any good are denying that what the Lord required will do good. When we withdraw ourselves without partiality (I Timothy 5:19-21), when our motive is love for God and for the lost, then God is pleased and ultimately sinners are saved. Fulfilling what the Lord requires preserves the purity of the church and is the only means to effect repentance. We dare not shun our responsibility lest we be guilty of sin ourselves (James 4:17) and consent with them that practice sin (Romans 1:32). Do we care enough for the souls of our brethren who are away from Christ and will not repent to withdraw ourselves?