

## Lesson 10: *Church Discipline*

There are many practices among religious people regarding discipline within their memberships. Many churches today practice no form of correction, for they have little instruction upon which to base reproof. The Bible calls on the local congregation alone to practice discipline among its members, with the oversight of the bishops. Discipline should be proactive (through teaching and example) and reactive (through reproof, rebuke, withdrawal and marking).

In academic circles, one's major focus of learning is called his discipline. Thus mathematics and science are both collegiate disciplines. We find that Christ called his followers "disciples" because they obeyed his teaching, or discipline. That body of instruction was built upon by inspired men like the apostles and collected in our New Testament. Teaching the scriptures provides a form of proactive discipline that guides and warns.

Paul told Timothy to give heed to "reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (1 Tim. 4:13). He was to "convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2). This is the most common form of discipline that the elders of local congregations provide as they endeavor to feed the flock (1 Peter 5:2).

Christians are to be obedient to this doctrine, for it originates with God. They should be "showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things" (Titus 2:10). Every time a preacher or teacher instructs an assembly or class, the local church is being disciplined en masse.

Corrective discipline is more widely recognized. It is intended for those who refuse to heed the instruction and warning that comes from the scriptures and their brethren. Paul wrote, "Warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all" (1 Thess. 5:14). Sin should not be ignored, but should be rebuked.

The first mention of this corrective discipline is in the context of handling personal, private offenses between two brethren (Matt. 18:15-17). Christ outlines the process of trying to win back a brother who has offended you, but if the problem finds its way before the entire church and the offender still will not repent, he is to be withdrawn from as if a heathen or publican.

The church at Corinth shows the seriousness of sin within the ranks of the redeemed (1 Cor. 5). They were harboring and tolerating a brother who had his father's wife and Paul demanded that, when they assembled, they should deliver his flesh to Satan that he might be ashamed and won back. Paul's fear was that his sin might influence others to lower their own standards and indulge a weakness as well. This withdrawal from the sinner demanded an end to spiritual and social fellowship and extended by context also to coveters, extortioners and idolaters. Evidently, any practice of sin is sufficient to merit withdrawal if repentance is refused.

Most clearly, Paul told the Thessalonians, who were dealing with slothful brethren to "withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us" (2 Thess. 3:6). Such a brother should be counted, not as an enemy, but as a brother in this attempt, however (2 Thess. 3:15).

The situation in Corinth showed the positive results of withdrawal. The sinning brother repented and the church was instructed to welcome him back (2 Cor. 2:6-8).

In cases where a brother was found to be divisive or teaching error, he was to be marked so that all could be aware of his danger (Rom. 16:17-18). Divisive men should be admonished once and then again, but if they will not change at this point, they should be marked as self-condemned, warped and sinning (Titus 3:9-11). Faithful men should be careful not to greet or receive teachers who go beyond the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9-11).

1. All discipline is one of two types. What are the two types? Describe them.
2. What does it take to be in the discipline (teaching) of Christ (John 8:31)?
3. How does a congregation receive discipline when it is assembled or in a class situation?
4. How is this an example of the elders “feeding the flock” (1 Peter 2:2, Heb. 5:12-14)?
5. What are some practical ways in which Christians adorn the teaching of Christ (Gal. 5:22-25)?
6. How should the following types of people be treated?
  - a. unruly:
  - b. fainthearted:
  - c. weak:
  - d. all:
7. List the steps in dealing with personal, private offenses between two brethren in which the offender does not repent (Matt. 18:15-17).
  - 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.
  - 4.
8. Why did Paul demand the sinner in Corinth be withdrawn from at once (1 Cor. 5:6)?
9. What does it mean when Paul forbids them “to keep company with” such brethren?
10. From which brother should we withdraw (2 Thess. 3:6)? By what standard of order (2 Thess. 2:15)?
11. How do we admonish such a brother without treating him like an enemy?
12. What two offenses can lead to one being negatively marked (Titus 2:10-11, 2 Tim. 2:17-18)?
13. Of what should faithful men be warned concerning dealing with false teachers (2 John 9-11)? Why?