

CORE CLASS: CHURCH DISCIPLINE

14 September 2022 | *What the Church Does When Sheep Wander* | Questions 317-798-0661

I. INTRODUCTION: WHY THIS TOPIC?

- God calls elders of the church to equip the saints for the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12; 2 Tim. 4:1-4)
- Mishandling of this topic can do harm to God's people
- Unique season in our church's history
- We want to better reflect Christ to the world

"The world will draw its conclusions about Jesus based on his followers. Church discipline, fundamentally, is about making sure that Jesus's representatives on earth represent Jesus and not someone else."

- Jonathan Leeman, *Church Discipline*

Class Outline

- Week 1: Foundation & Framework for Church Discipline
- Week 2: Application of Church Discipline

II. FOUNDATION & FRAMEWORK FOR CHURCH DISCIPLINE

1) The Gospel & The Christian

Matt. 5:13-16 *"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. ¹⁴"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."*

Phil. 2:14-15 *"Do all things without grumbling or disputing, ¹⁵that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world..."*

*"Jesus has attached his name to the church. He has staked his reputation on us."
- Jonathan Leeman, Church Discipline*

2) The Local Church & Church Membership

I Cor. 5:4a, *"When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus, and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus..."*

Hebrews 10:24-25, *"and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."*

Heb. 13:17, *“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.”*

Matt. 18:17 *“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.”*

What does this mean for church discipline?

- Church discipline is not for unbelievers.

I Cor. 5:12-13, *“For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? ¹³ God judges those outside.”*

- Church discipline is not for regular attenders.

- Church discipline is for covenant church members.

III. Church Discipline Biblically Defined

Definitions

- **Church Discipline (Broad, Informal Definition):** church discipline is one part of a Christian's discipleship process where the church teaches and corrects sin so that a disciple to walk would walk in step with the Spirit
- **Church Discipline (Formal Definition):** church discipline is the formal act of a covenant community to remove an individual from membership in the church and participation in the Lord's Supper. The church makes a declaration that they can no longer affirm this person's public profession of faith that they once formally affirmed.

"(Church Discipline) is not just about correcting sin or blowing whistles. It's about correcting sin for the purposes of ensuring that church members are indeed representing Jesus rightly. It's about calling them to be what they claim to be." -Jonathan Leeman, *Church Discipline*

- **Excommunication**

What type of sin is subject to formal church discipline?

- Outward
- Significant
- Unrepentant

1) **Old Testament** (Gen. 3; Duet. 13:1-5; 19:15-21; Joshua 7; Prov. 13:24)

Duet. 19:15-21 “A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the **evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses** shall a charge be established.¹⁶ If a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing,¹⁷ then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days.¹⁸ The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely,¹⁹ then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. **So you shall purge the evil from your midst.**²⁰ And the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you.²¹ Your eye shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

2) **New Testament** (Matt. 18:15-17; I Cor. 5:1-13; Gal. 6:1; Eph. 5:11; Titus 3:10; 1 Thess. 5:14; 2 Thess. 3:14-15; 2 John 9-11; Hebrews 12:3-11)

I Cor. 5:1-13, “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife.² And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.³ For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing.⁴ When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus,⁵ you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, **so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.** ⁶Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?⁷ Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.⁸ Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

⁹I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—¹⁰not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.¹¹ But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?¹³ God judges those outside. **“Purge the evil person from among you.”**

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."*

I Thess. 5:14, *"And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all."*

IV. Purpose of Church Discipline

1. Save or restore the member (2 Cor. 5:5)

2. Warn the member (2 Thess. 3:15, Titus 3:10)

Titus 3:10, *"As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him"*

3. Expose sin

Eph. 5:11, *"Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them."*

4. Protect the body (2 Cor. 5:6; I Timothy 5:19-20)

I Timothy 5:19-20, *"Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. ²⁰As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear."*

5. Present a faithful witness for Jesus (Matt. 5:13-16; 2 Cor. 5:20; Eph. 3:10-11)

V. Principles for Conducting Church Discipline

1. The process should involve as few people as possible (Matt. 18:15-20)
2. Church leaders should lead the process (Gal. 6:1)
3. Length of the process depends on how long it takes to establish clear fruits of repentance (2 Cor. 7:8-12)
4. Individuals should receive the benefit of the doubt (James 1:19; Matt. 18:16)
5. Leaders should involve and instruct the congregation as appropriate (1 Cor. 5; Matt. 18:17)

VI. Case Studies

Case #1

Situation: Dave the doughnut man, a local celebrity, known for his famous bacon doughnuts and memorable commercials is a member of Castleton Community Church. The police recently raided his donut shop on suspicion that Dave was using his business as a cover to traffic drugs and young girls. The police found significant evidence of his crimes and are investigating multiple other felonies. They have charged Dave with multiple felonies, and he is being held in the state prison without bond. Police are suggesting that his crimes have occurred over a 10-year period. Dave has been an active member in the church since joining in 2019. Since Dave is well-known, the Indy Star has the story on the front page. At the arraignment, Dave plead guilty to his crimes and has publicly apologized and taken full responsibility for his actions. He has contacted the elders and is looking for counsel.

Assessing the Sin: How would you assess the sin in this situation? How severe is it?

Assessing the Repentance: How would you assess Dave's repentance?

Other Factors: Are there other questions/factors that need to be considered in this situation?

Decision: Weighing the gravity of his sin and the signs of repentance what should the church do with Dave? Should we immediately excommunicate Dave or should we take time to assess his repentance? Dave's wife is also asking for permission to divorce Dave. Should the elders grant her request so soon? Explain your answers with biblical support.

Case #2

Situation: Jason, a recent college graduate joined Castleton a year ago and initially was present most Sundays and served monthly on the Greeting Team. Recently, the elders noticed that they haven't seen Jason at church and checked their recent communications with Jason and realize that he hadn't responded to their last email asking for prayer requests.

Two elders send an email asking to meet up with Jason but do not get any response. They try calling and leave voicemails but do not hear back from him. One of the elders talked to the Greeting Team lead and she said that Jason didn't show up one Sunday he was scheduled and hasn't accepted any serving requests the last three months.

A few more months go by and still no one has heard from or seen Jason at church. Two different elders then call and email Jason, but two more months go by with no response. The elders decide to ask the congregation at a member meeting if anyone knows Jason and if they do, could they come privately to the elders to help them get in contact with them. A former classmate of Jason's comes to the elders that week and says he also hasn't heard from Jason either and doesn't believe he's going to another church.

One more call goes out with no response. It's now been 8 months since anyone at church has heard from Jason.

Assessing the Sin: How would you assess the sin in this situation?

Assessing the Repentance: How would you assess repentance in Jason's situation?

Other Factors: Are there other questions/factors that need to be considered in this situation?

Decision: Should Castleton Community Church remove Jason from church membership? Why or why not? If so, should they remove him in good standing or by way of church discipline?