

Church Discipline - Biblical Discussion

What is discipline?

Have you been disciplined before? And how?

Does God discipline his people?

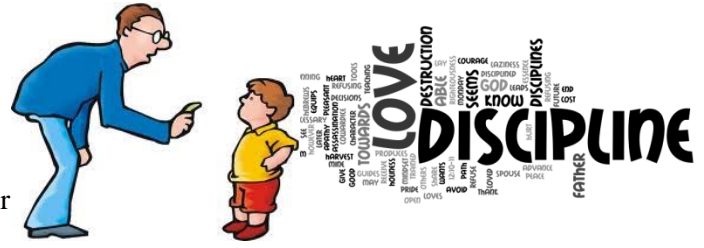
Are problems in life a form of discipline?

Can a church, Christian organization discipline its members?

When and how should a church discipline its members?

What do you think will happen if a church does not discipline its member?

What should be done to with members who refuse to discipline?



Church discipline may be broadly defined as the confrontive and corrective measures taken by an individual, church leaders, or the congregation regarding a matter of sin in the life of a believer. *Discipline in the church is not punishment. It is discipline and discipline is designed to train and restore.*

The Pattern and Basis for Discipline

(1) The discipline of the church is first patterned after the fact that the Lord Himself disciplines His children (Heb. 12:6) and, as a father delegates part of the discipline of the children to the mother, so the Lord has delegated the discipline of the church family to the church itself (1 Cor. 5:12-13; 2 Cor. 2:6).

(2) Discipline is further based on the holy character of God (1 Pet. 1:16; Heb. 12:11). The pattern of God's holiness—His desire for the church to be holy, set apart unto Him—is an important reason for the necessity of church discipline. The church is therefore to clean out the leaven of malice and wickedness from its ranks (1 Cor. 5:6-8). A failure to exercise discipline in the church evidences a lack of awareness of and concern for the holiness of God.

(3) Church discipline is to be patterned after and based on the divine commands of Scripture (1 Cor. 4:6). We have numerous passages of Scripture which both command and give us God's directives on the how, why, when, and where of church discipline. Again, a failure to exercise this responsibility demonstrates a lack of obedience and belief in the authority of the Bible (1 Cor. 5:1-13; Matt. 18:17-18; Titus 3:10; 2 Thess. 3:6-15; 1 Tim. 5:20; Gal. 6:1).

(4) Another basis for the necessity of church discipline is the testimony of the church in the world (1 Pet. 4:13-19). The world observes the behavior and life of the church. When the church acts no differently than the world, it loses its credibility and authenticity (1 Pet. 2:11-18; 3:8-16; 4:1-4).

The Purposes of Church Discipline

(1) To bring glory to God and enhance the testimony of the flock.

(2) To restore, heal, and build up sinning believers (Matt. 18:15; 2 Thess. 3:14-15; Heb. 12:10-13; Gal. 6:1-2; Jam. 5:20).

(3) To produce a healthy faith, one sound in doctrine (Tit. 1:13; 1 Tim. 1:19-20).

(4) To win a soul to Christ, if the sinning person is only a professing Christian (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

(5) To silence false teachers and their influence in the church (Tit. 1:10-11).

(6) To set an example for the rest of the body and promote godly fear (1 Tim. 5:20).

(7) To protect the church against the destructive consequences that occur when churches fail to carry out church discipline. A church that fails to exercise discipline experiences four losses: ***The Loss of Purity, The Loss of Power, The Loss of Progress, and The Loss of Purpose***

The Practice of Church Discipline The Manner

The above goals or purposes automatically govern the spirit in which all disciplinary action is to be given. Thus:

(1) Discipline must be done by those who are spiritual, truly walking by the Holy Spirit and growing in the Lord (Gal. 6:1).

(2) Discipline must be done in a spirit of humility, gentleness and patience, looking to ourselves lest we too be tempted (Gal. 6:1-2; 2 Tim. 2:24-25). (3) Discipline must be done without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality (1 Tim. 5:21).

Reasons for Church Discipline

In church discipline we must exercise extreme care. Scripture does not warrant the exercise of discipline for an individual's or a church's taboos or pet peeves—the “dirty dozen” or the “nasty nine.” Scripture, not our opinions or dislikes, must be the guide for what is sin. Further, we must not become hypercritical or “speck inspectors.” (1) General Causes: Disorderly conduct, conduct clearly out of line with the prescribed commands of Scripture and which negatively impacts the testimony and unity of the church (2 Thess. 3:6-15). (2) Specific Causes: •Difficulties between members (Matt. 18:15-17). •Divisive or factious people causing divisions in the church (Rom. 16:17-18; Titus 3:9-11). •Immoral conduct; sins of the type mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5 such as incest, immorality, covetousness, idolatry, abusive speech, drunkenness, swindling, or idle busybodies who refuse to work and run around spreading dissension (1 Cor. 5:1, 11; 2 Thess. 3:10-15).•False teaching; erroneous teaching and views which concern the fundamentals of the faith and not lesser differences of interpretation (1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17-18; also implied in Rev. 2:14-16; Phil. 3:2-3, 15-19; Rom. 16:17-18).

The key concerns that guide us in this are: (a) the holy character of God, (b) the testimony of the flock, (c) the effect upon the unity and purity of the flock, and (d) the edification and restoration of the individual.