

Church Discipline

Introduction

1. The church is the pillar and the ground for the truth (1 Tim. 3:15).
2. As such it is the responsibility of the church to strive to not only grow in her knowledge of the truth, but to also stand for the truth when error rears its ugly head (2 Cor. 10:4-6).
3. The scriptures show us that error is presented in two basic ways:
 - a. By men teaching error (Tit. 1:10, 11).
 - b. By men practicing error (1 Cor. 5:1-2).
4. In light of this two general questions often come to mind:
 - a. Why must we discipline those who are in sin?
 - b. How do we go about disciplining those in sin?
5. In order to understand why we must discipline those who “*walk disorderly*,” we must first understand the nature and limitations of our fellowship as God’s people.

Discussion

I. Christian Fellowship

- A. What is fellowship?
 1. The basic definition of fellowship is, “partnership, cooperation, communion, to commune together.”
 2. In a spiritual sense our fellowship is our participation in the work of the Lord. Hence,
 - a. If we are not working we are not having fellowship.
 - b. If we are doing the wrong works we do not have fellowship with God’s people.
 3. There is a fellowship in another sense, which is not applied to our fellowship as Christians, yet is referred to concerning those living in sin: Sharing.
- B. The nature of Christian fellowship.
 1. Fellowship is connected with action or work, not simply eating together as some would apply it to.
 - a. Acts 2:42: They continued steadfastly in it.
 - b. 2 Cor. 8:4: Their fellowship included ministering to the saints.
 - c. Eph. 5:11: We have fellowship with unfruitful works when we **do** those works.
 2. Therefore we have fellowship when we are working together with one another in the gospel to both learn and be edified and to edify and teach others.
 3. Since God is spirit and the works by which we have fellowship with God are of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22 ff.) our fellowship is also of a spiritual nature.
 4. As John points out in 1 John our fellowship with God is dependent upon our knowing, believing, and living the gospel (1 John 1:3).
 5. We also learn in other passages that our fellowship with God must come first in our lives. Our relationship with our brethren, therefore, is completely dependent upon our relationship with God.
 - a. Ps. 119:63: “*I am a companion of all them that fear Thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.*”

- b. Matt. 12:46-50: “*For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.*”
- 6. If men’s relationship is not right with God, then they no longer have fellowship with God, nor with His faithful ones.
 - a. 2 John 9: “*Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.*”
 - b. 1 John 1:6: “*If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth*”

II. Discipline

- A. Many have asked, “Why must we discipline people in sin? Why can’t we just let them live their life?”
 - 1. One reason is that our relationship with our brethren is dependent upon our relation with God.
 - a. When a brother is walking in darkness he is no loner in fellowship with those who are still faithful.
 - b. Yet, if we try to continue a working relationship with the erring Christian then we forfeit our relationship with God as well.
 - c. James 4:4-5: “*Know you not that friendship with the world is enmity with God.*”
 - d. 1 Cor. 5:2: The Corinthians were rebuked for continuing their relationship with the immoral man.
 - 2. The second is because sin is like a disease.
 - a. 1 Cor. 5:5: “*A little leaven leavens the whole lump?*”
 - b. 2 Tim. 2:17: It like a cancer or like gangrene.
 - c. When sin is tolerated our consciences become numb or “seared with a hot iron” (1 Tim. 4:2).
- B. Godly discipline required and explained.
 - 1. The first step, therefore, to executing the discipline God has commanded is to first examine ourselves.
 - a. Gal. 6:1: “*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.*”
 - b. Matt. 7:4-6: “*First, remove the plank from your own eye.*”
 - 2. Second is to go to that brother in a spirit of gentles and in godly fear.
 - a. Gal. 6:1.
 - b. Jude 23: “*But others save with godly fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.*”
 - c. So it says, “*Let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death an dcoOver a multitude of sins*” (James 5:20).
 - 3. If that brother will not repent then we are commanded to try again, but with a couple more witnesses.
 - a. Matt. 18:15-16: This is concerning sins against one’s person.
 - b. Tit. 3:10: “*Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition.*”

- c. By the grace of God these preliminary steps are to be taken, for every one of us will probably sin at some point in time. Therefore we are thankful for the grace of Jesus Christ (1 John 2:1).
- 4. Finally, if a brother will still not repent, there is only one thing left to do.
 - a. 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.”*
 - b. Rom. 16:17: *“Now I urge you, brethren, not those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.”*
 - c. 1 Cor. 5:1-13:
 - d. 2 Thess. 3:6, 13-15:

C. Discipline and the non-member.

- 1. Some have argued that we cannot “withdraw” from a Christians who has not placed membership in a local congregation.
- 2. However, Paul specifically sates in 2 Thess. 3:6 that we must withdraw from every “brother,” who walks disorderly, not just members of our congregation.
- 3. Consider also Jesus instructions.
- 4. Mark 6:11: Shake the dust off of your sandals
- 5. Matt. 7:6: Not cast your pearls before the swine.
- 6. Though we cannot leave them if they are visiting, we can “not even eat with such a person.” 1 Cor. 5:11

Conclusion

- 1. Brethren, God’s instructions for church discipline is for our protection that we may not be overtaken by the sin that fills the world.
- 2. If you are in sin, therefore, will you not repent of your sins today and come back into a right relationship with the Lord?
- 3. If you are not a Christian you can have the benefit of forgiveness as it says in 1 John 2:1. All you must do is repent, confess Jesus as Lord and be baptized into His name. Will you come?

October, 2004

Avondale church of Christ
 1606 Glen Willow Rd., P.O. Box 421, Avondale, PA 19311
 Phone: (610) 268-2088
 Email: info@avondalechristians.com
 Website: www.avondalechristians.com

©David Phillips, 2004