



# **CHURCH DISCIPLINE**

A GFC DISTINCTIVE



**CHURCH DISCIPLINE IS THE PROCESS OF LOVINGLY CALLING A SINNER WHO PROFESSES FAITH IN CHRIST TO REPENTANCE. IT IS THE ACT OF COMPASSIONATELY RESTORING SOMEONE TO A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD. SINCE THIS IS A SENSITIVE SUBJECT, IT IS IMPORTANT TO EXPLAIN WHY IT IS A DISTINCTIVE OF OUR CHURCH. HERE ARE FOUR PASSAGES THAT TALK ABOUT IT IN THE BIBLE.**

## **MATTHEW 18:15-17**

*If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. 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.*

In this passage, Jesus gives us a four-step process for calling someone to repentance. Each step should occur in consecutive order as follows: 1). Go to someone privately (2). Go to them in small group (3). Tell their sin to the church (4). Treat them as a Gentile or a tax collector (i.e., remove them from fellowship).

It is also worth mentioning that, right above this passage in verses 12-14, Jesus tells the story of the shepherd who left the ninety-nine sheep to chase after the one. He left all of the other sheep to chase after the one who was straying and, at the end of the story, Jesus says, "it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish." In other words, God is compassionate. He is full of mercy and He does not want any of His sheep to perish which should set the tone for this whole process.

Church discipline is an act of mercy. It is a rescue operation where enough time should be given between each step to allow the individual time to repent. Furthermore, if he does repent, the process is over and full restoration is made. It does not continue indefinitely but only until the sin is dealt with. At which point, the church should extend grace because the sheep has been brought back into the fold. As Galatians 6:1 says, "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness."

## 1 CORINTHIANS 5:1, 4-5

It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife . . . In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Another passage to look at is this one in First Corinthians because it shows a different process. Apparently, the church at Corinth really struggled with sin. It had a multitude of problems and, as such, it was rife for church discipline. Its members could have been confronted on any number of things one of which was the act of adultery. Corinth was a very sinful place and it had a reputation for being promiscuous. Now, some of that had crept into the church because a man was sleeping with his father's wife. He was committing a flagrant sin so Paul tells them how to handle it.

As he does so, notice that he does not tell them to be open-minded. He does not tell them to be tolerant and begin a dialogue with this man. He does not tell them to understand his context first and find out why he did it. He simply tells them to dismiss him. He tells them to deliver him over to Satan "for the destruction of the flesh."

This does not mean that the Corinthians should give up on this man. It means that they should remove him from the church so that his sin or his "flesh" might be destroyed. One Commentator says that they should do this so that "he [will] no longer enjoy the protection which a caring Christian community provides." [1] Apparently, some sins are so grievous that they require swift action. They cannot be allowed to fester. Instead, they must be removed right away before further damage is done. Open and flagrant adultery is one of those sins.

[1] Simon J. Kistemaker, 1 Corinthians (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993) 160.

## ROMANS 16:17

*Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.*

## TITUS 3:10-11

*Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.*

These passages are much shorter than the previous ones and they are different in that they cover the same issue. They both address the sin of divisiveness. When someone threatens to divide the church, it is to be taken seriously and dealt with swiftly as well. Such a person cannot be tolerated because he threatens the life of the church. These passages show us what to do with him.

Romans 16:17 says that we should keep an eye on those “who cause dissensions and hindrances.” Those words in Greek refer to someone who causes trouble by trying to trap people with their words. They try to be a stumbling block to others in the way that they talk and argue. So, Paul’s advice is to “turn away from them” which means that you should remove them from the church. They should not be allowed to attend anymore.

Titus 3:10-11 also tells us to reject “a factious man.” The word “factious” in Greek is *hairetikos* from which we get the word “heretic.” It refers to someone who believes false doctrine. They believe things that are contrary to the Bible and they try to convince others to believe them too. Because they try to obtain followers, Paul says that we should reject a man like that after warning him twice.

In each of these scenarios, the severity of the response should match the severity of the sin. If a person is a threat to the church, then the church should act swiftly in order to protect itself. If the person is not a threat, then the church may exercise greater patience knowing “that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:20).

## CONCLUSION

Church Discipline is practiced for the purpose of restoring a wayward Christian to a right relationship with the Lord. In fact, this process could be called “church restoration” because that is the intention of it. The goal is to restore someone to the church by bringing them back to Jesus.

Although it is uncomfortable and difficult, we cannot shrink from this responsibility because it is commanded in Scripture. God is holy and, therefore, His people must be holy too. He takes our sin seriously and we have to do the same which is why this is a distinctive of our church.

If you have any questions about church discipline or anything else in this pamphlet, we would love to hear from you.



## CONTACT US

Join us Sundays @ 9:30 AM

46024 Riverside Dr.  
Chilliwack, BC, V2P 3K8

**604-426-1044**

[info@gracefellowshipchilliwack.com](mailto:info@gracefellowshipchilliwack.com)

