

CHURCH DISCIPLINE IS NOT OPTIONAL

THERE WAS ONCE A TIME when the Church took Christianity very seriously. People actually chose *death* over compromise. They were willing to follow the Lord even if it cost them their very life. They would stand up for Jesus and obey Him no matter what the cost.

Sadly, we now live in the Age of Laodicea. In this age of church history, people simply do not care. Many church members don't care about what the Bible teaches, what God commands, or even about the sin in their life. They simply can't be bothered to care. The Bible calls these kind of churches "lukewarm" – they are neither cold nor hot.

The solution to this problem is something called "church discipline". Sadly, things have become so bad that even this has been thrown right out the window. Church discipline simply isn't practiced anymore. If two unmarried church members move in together, no one is going to do anything about it. If one married church member has an affair with someone else, no one is going to raise a fuss. The only time you might get in trouble is if you are the pastor – and even then you practically have to do something illegal before the church will respond. Churches just don't care anymore. Has a church member left his wife, moved in with his girlfriend, and gotten her pregnant – all while still being married? Oh well. It's just "one of those things".

This “who cares?” attitude about sin is *not* biblical. The Scriptures are very clear about what should be done in cases like this. In 1 Corinthians 5 we are told about a man in the church who was caught committing a very serious sin:

1 Corinthians 5:1: "It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife."

If this happened today the odds are good that not much would be done about it. It might be the subject of gossip, but that would probably be about it. The Corinthian church didn't really care about it either – and that fact really upset Paul:

1 Corinthians 5:2: “And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.”

Paul criticized the Corinthians for not doing anything about this serious situation. He told them that this sin ought to have bothered them. In fact, it should have bothered them so much that they should have *removed this person from their fellowship*. Since he was committing a terrible sin and had refused to repent, he should have been removed from their congregation. Because the Corinthians couldn't be bothered to expel him, Paul did it himself:

1 Corinthians 5:3: “For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed,
4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the

power of our Lord Jesus Christ,
5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”

What did the apostle Paul do? He removed this unrepentant person from the congregation *and them turned him over to Satan so that Satan could kill him*. That is how seriously Paul took this! Paul was *actually willing to allow Satan to kill him* so that he would turn from his sin and be saved.

In our day this may seem like a dramatic overreaction, but that is only because sin doesn't bother us anymore. Paul went on to explain why he did it:

1 Corinthians 5:6: “Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?

7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:

8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

Paul is telling us that *sin is serious business*. You see, sin is contagious. If one person is allowed to sin without any consequences, other people will be tempted to start committing the same sin. “After all,” some people might say, “it's working out just fine for them, so why not try it myself?” All it takes is a little leaven to leaven the whole lump. Once sin is allowed within the church, it doesn't take long for it to begin poisoning others. That is why the apostle commanded the Corinthians to remove such people from their midst. Leaving that person in the congregation wasn't going to do *him* any good, but it *was* going to put a lot of

other people in danger.

In fact, Paul commanded the Corinthians to avoid *all* Christians who were caught up in sin and who refused to repent:

1 Corinthians 5:9: “I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators:

10 Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world.

11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.”

The message is clear, simple, and direct: *Christians ought to take sin very seriously*. If a Christian is caught up in sin and refuses to repent, God commands that the sinner be removed from the church. Not only that, but He commands us to avoid that person altogether *to the point of not even having meals with them*.

This is how one person put it:

“Corrective church discipline is enacted against unrepentant people because people who have been born again repent of their sin. Those who refuse to repent show that they have never been born again.”

“Only those who have been born again are united to Christ by faith and truly members of his body, the church; so when it becomes evident that someone has not been born again (by their refusal to repent), they are to be

removed from church membership. This action is for the salvation of those who are expelled from the church." (Dr. James Hamilton)

Church discipline accomplishes three things: it confronts the sinner with the seriousness of what he is doing and urges him to repent; it shows the other church members the seriousness of that sin and warns them against following it; and it keeps the rest of the church from thinking that sin is fine and that it doesn't really matter.

Removing church discipline from a church is exactly like removing a person's immune system. When a person has no immune system, disease is given free reign to do its destructive work. The person falls prey to all sorts of diseases, and death can easily result. Likewise, when a church refuses to restrain its members from sin and does not remove the guilty party, the church becomes weak, poisoned, and diseased. Sin runs rampant and the church becomes good for nothing. It may continue to function on paper, but it has stopped being a church:

"By implication, [church discipline] necessarily requires the presence of godly leadership (elders) who provide a safe place for the sheep to grow in Christ and who can ward off any wolves who seek to devour (see Acts 20). That is why Christians simply getting together for fellowship, though wonderful, without the oversight and care of elders, it does not constitute the gathering of a true Church. Christ, the Chief Shepherd has established His under shepherds for the care, protection and spiritual well being of His precious sheep. . .

"There are many essential elements for healthy church life. Yet unless the Word of God is rightly

preached and taught, the sacraments rightly administered, and church discipline is faithfully exercised, there is no true church present. Where these marks are absent, true holiness will be absent too. If even one of these three marks are missing it should not be considered to be a true church of Christ." (JS)

If the church refuses to evict those who will not repent, the congregation is left in danger. If the church refuses to remove those who are teaching heresy and lies, the congregation is left in danger. At that point the church is like a shepherd who does nothing to protect his sheep and who lets wolves and disease have their way with the flock.

This is one of the key reasons why our churches are in such bad shape: *the shepherds have stopped protecting the sheep*. Since sin is allowed to run rampant, the congregations are diseased and dying:

Revelation 3:17: "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent."

Are you going to be zealous and repent, or will you instead continue to do nothing and allow the devil to have his

way with the church? Are you going to fight the disease, or give it free reign? After all, the only thing that is hanging in the balance is *the souls of the entire congregation*.

