

# CHURCH DISCIPLINE

By Royce U. DeBerry

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CONTACT HER AT SARAH@SPIRITBUILDING.COM

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*New King James Version used throughout the book, unless otherwise noted.*

# Church Discipline

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## LESSON ONE: Introduction to Church Discipline

### Introduction:

Church discipline is probably one of the most misunderstood and neglected subjects in the Bible. Few sermons are preached on the subject, there are few classes in which church discipline is discussed, and therefore there are congregations that do not practice it! There is a lack of knowledge on this subject due to a lack of proper teaching which leads to **misuse** or **non-use**.

Many people within the church feel that discipline is an ugly and negative word, but if they understood its true biblical meaning, they would be in favor of carrying it out. The only way to understand it is to study God's word!

**PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY** - To examine the word of God and see if the subject of church discipline is taught. If it is taught, we also want to examine the other particulars (who, why, where, when, and how) that go along with it.

**OUR ATTITUDE** - We should enter into this study with an open mind and receptive heart. We should be as the Bereans, "These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). We should enter this study not to prove or disprove our own human ideas, but to see what God hath said concerning church discipline. Whatever God says concerning it is **final**! Let us do as Paul directed Timothy, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

### I. The Necessity of Discipline.

The following few paragraphs are from a tract written by Cecil Willis entitled "Church Discipline." These paragraphs show the need for discipline as taught by God's word. Read them carefully:

Where there is no penalty for violation attached to a law, there is neither respect for the law, nor for the lawgiver. Much of the juvenile delinquency rampant today is caused by parental

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delinquency, because no discipline was practiced upon the child in the home (Proverbs 13:14; Ephesians 6:1-4). Every school teacher recognizes the essentiality of discipline in the classroom. Society sees the necessity of discipline in that it provides laws, as well as trials and punishments for violators (Romans 13:1-4).

God has never tolerated trifling with His laws. He is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33), but such would result if one could disregard with impunity the divinely imposed laws. Hence, God told Adam and Eve that they would “die” if they disobeyed (Genesis 2:17). He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly that destroyed every wicked person (Genesis 6:1-7). Nadab and Abihu suffered death as a consequence of their presumptuous rebellion (Leviticus 10).

Similarly, there must be discipline in the church; else there will be neither respect for God nor for His laws.

So we can see that not only is discipline **good**, but it is a **necessity**. Just as both the home and civil government are to have discipline, **so is the church!**

### II. Is Discipline a Bible Subject?

We want to find out if “church discipline” is taught by God. Remember that God is the **final** word in spiritual matters—whatever is found in His word is **it**. If discipline is taught, the local congregation must comply or suffer the consequences. On the other hand, if it is not taught, the local congregation has no right to exercise it. What does God’s word have to say?

Listed below are the verses concerning discipline:

“...But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector” (Matthew 18:17).

“note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them” (Romans 16:17).

“...I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person” (1 Corinthians 5:11).

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“But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us” (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

“And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed” (2 Thessalonians 3:14).

“Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition” (Titus 3:10).

Here we have listed six verses which point out that discipline is to be exercised. Therefore, because it is to be exercised it **must** be the will of God. Since when do we question God? If we are striving to be acceptable to God, then we must “speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent.” We must do those things which God expects of us!

### III. Should the Church Exercise Discipline Today?

Further along in our study, we will discuss some objections that are made to exercising church discipline, but at this point there is one that needs to be examined and answered. This will help us set the stage for the remainder of our study. The question is, “Should the Lord’s church exercise discipline **today**?” There are some who contend that discipline was only to be used in the time of the apostles and other inspired writers. They say that only an apostle has the right (authority) to “deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Corinthians 5:5). Therefore, because there are no apostles living today, discipline is not to be exercised. But these people who are objecting fail to fully understand 1 Corinthians 5. Who was to exercise the discipline on this brother who was a fornicator? Paul or the church at Corinth? Paul commanded that it be done, **but the church was to carry it out!** Read carefully 1 Corinthians 5:4-8, 13. This command to “put away from among yourselves that wicked person” applies to the church today just as it did the church at Corinth. Let’s take a look at some other commands in the New Testament and see if they are binding today.

Today, what are the terms of admission into the church? Are they not the same as they were in the first century? Hearing (Romans 10:17); believing (Mark 16:16; Acts 8:12); repenting (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30); confessing (Matthew 10:32, 33; Acts 8:37; Romans 10:9, 10); baptism (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21). Do not these very terms hold true

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today? Indeed they do! God's law concerning admission into His kingdom has remained the same. Then does this not hold true for discipline? Just as God has a plan to save those who are alien sinners today, He also has a plan to save His erring children! We practice the law of God as far as admission into the kingdom, why not concerning discipline?

Today, do we not partake of the Lord's Supper on the Lord's Day? Yes, we do! Why? Because we follow the apostolic example given to us in Acts 20:7. That verse says, "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread...." Jesus commanded us to partake of the emblems

(1 Corinthians 11:24, 25) and here in Acts 20:7 it tells us when. Do we question this command? No, we simply obey it as we should. Is there any reason not to exercise discipline as we should? The commands are there (1 Corinthians 5:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14).

What of the church's responsibility to preach the gospel? Is this the work of the church today? Yes! Was it the work of the church in the first century? Definitely, yes. The church of today bears the same responsibilities of the early church. Discipline is one of those responsibilities we are to carry out!

By looking at God's word we can see how the church is to function. We can see its duties and responsibilities. The church today would be remiss in its actions if it did not discipline **when needed!**

### QUESTIONS

#### TRUE OR FALSE:

1. Christianity is an individual thing, separate from the church. True / False
2. It is not a necessity that we carry out discipline today. True / False
3. Discipline is not inconsistent with the law of love. True / False
4. Discipline (marking, withdrawal) is an optional matter to be determined by the elders or leaders of the congregation. True / False

#### WHICH IS CORRECT?

1. God's laws have never changed. \_\_\_\_\_
2. God's principles have never changed. \_\_\_\_\_

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### THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. How big a role does our attitude play in this study and our understanding of it?
  
2. Why is discipline neglected?
  
3. Is it necessary for church discipline to be a Bible subject before the Lord's church can exercise it? Why?
  
4. List the three dispensations of time.
  - a) How did God speak to the people in these ages?
  
  - b) What law governed the people in these ages?
  
  - c) List examples of people that God disciplined in each of these different ages.
  
5. List the three great institutions ordained by God and show how discipline plays a vital role in each of them.



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6. What way has God provided for an alien sinner to be saved?

List scriptures other than those used in the lesson.

7. Can a local congregation be pleasing to the Lord if it does not exercise discipline when needed? Why or why not?

**NOTES, SCRIPTURES, & QUESTIONS FOR CLASS:**