

LESSON ELEVEN

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

A. CHURCH DISCIPLINE IS NEEDED IN THE CHURCH.

Church discipline is needed in the local assembly as well as in the church as a whole. The ministry is subject to government and discipline as well as the laity. Any man who cannot humble himself to obey those whom the Lord has placed over him is disqualified from ruling over others.

"Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves" (Hebrews 13:17). This applies to both ministry and laity; no man is exempt.

The local assembly needs church discipline to safeguard the public testimony of the church, and to deal with any known sin in the ranks of the people. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." If the pastor is careless and indifferent to such matters, it is surprising how rapidly worldliness can creep into the church and contaminate the entire flock. One rotten apple in the barrel can spoil all. Removing the one rotten apple will protect the entire barrel. This is a fact that the faithful pastor must remember. No matter how fearful and reluctant he is to deal with a matter, he must remember that the welfare and health of the entire flock must come first, and the consideration for individuals must come last. He is placed there to safeguard and protect the souls of the entire church; he dare not compromise nor lower the standard of holiness for the sake of one member. He may be accused of being without love and mercy but this will be no reason for him to be unfaithful. He may be called upon to reprimand and reprove the most influential member in his church, but he still must be faithful even if it means that he must stand alone.

B. DISCIPLINE MUST BE ADMINISTERED IN LOVE.

The pastor must remember that he is not a lord over God's heritage but he is a spiritual father. It should be with a heavy and aching heart that he uses any form of discipline. It is his first duty to try to restore the brother in a spirit of meekness (Galatians 6:1). He should watch eagerly for the first sign of repentance. The pastor should watch his own heart that it be kept filled with love for the individual. It is so easy to allow carnal thoughts to creep in and make it most difficult in dealing with wayward members especially so if they are rebellious and take a stand against the pastor himself. Whatever he does, he must never let any act of discipline on his part develop into a personal quarrel between himself and the member. All discipline must be kept above any carnal level, and, if the pastor loves the individual as his own son or daughter, he will not find this difficult.

C. JESUS GAVE US THE RIGHT STEPS TO TAKE FOR CHURCH DISCIPLINE.

In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus gave the correct order to follow in enforcing discipline in the church: *"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee thou has gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglects to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican."*

Here then is the Scriptural order that should be followed:

1. **PRIVATELY** - The pastor should first pray much about the matter and then deal with the offender personally in the spirit of love. The whole matter should be kept as quiet as possible. Many pastors err here in the fact that they preach from the pulpit against the matter in such a manner that the whole church becomes acquainted with it, the member concerned is naturally hurt and offended and withdraws from the assembly. The moment he withdraws from the assembly it actually is a defeat for the pastor, for it is his business to bring him back in the straight and narrow path, to keep him within the fold. The pastor should not do anything to break confidence, which he most certainly does if he rashly preaches in a manner, which will draw attention of all to the trouble. Let it be kept secret until he is certain that the member has no intention of repenting.
2. **BEFORE THE CHURCH BOARD OF ELDERS OR DEACONS** - When the offending member will not listen to the pastor personally, he then can bring him before the church board of elders or deacons. Even the most difficult cases generally can be dealt with here without going any further.
3. **PUBLICLY** - This is, of course, to be used only as the last resort. If he still refuses to repent, confess his wrong, and to do right, there is, then, only one thing that can be done. With aching and bleeding heart, the pastor can disfellowship him. To be effective this should be the act of the whole assembly. The pastor should be most careful here. If the individual has the sympathy of part of the church, he can easily divide the flock and bring the work of God to a standstill. Caution and great wisdom are needed. It is better to have a few tares among the wheat than to pull up some of the wheat with the tares.

The writer once heard a young worker boast that under his ministry in a certain assembly, he cleaned house, and a large number of supposed undesirables were disfellowshipped. Little did he realize that he was testifying to his own failure and ignorance in shepherding God's sheep. The moment they leave an assembly, the pastor's influence is finished and his ministry is ended as far as they are concerned. Disfellowshipping a member should only be done with aching heart when all other means have failed.

D. THE NEW TESTAMENT GIVES CERTAIN FORMS OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE.

The New Testament forms of church discipline may be classified under the following three headings:

1. **ADMONITION.**

Scriptural References:

"Warn them that are unruly" (I Thessalonians 5:14).

"Count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (II Thessalonians 3:5).

"A man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition reject" (Titus 3:10).

This is the mildest form of discipline and the one that the pastor will be called upon to use often. Paul exhorted Timothy to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

2. REMOVAL FROM FELLOWSHIP.

Scriptural Reference:

"Put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (I Corinthians 5:13).

This should be done only for very serious offences, never hurriedly, and be the act of the entire church. It simply means that the member's name is removed from the church roll. He is not permitted to testify, or partake in communion. He becomes to the church the same as an outsider, "a heathen and a publican."

3. DELIVERING OVER TO SATAN.

Scriptural Reference:

"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" (I Corinthians 5:5).

This is the most drastic form of discipline of all. Its purpose is saving his soul by bringing him to repentance through severe punishment.

E. **SOME PRINCIPLES MAY BE REMEMBERED BY THE PASTOR REGARDING DISCIPLINE.**

Here are ten rules that the pastor should remember in administering discipline:

1. Pray much over every individual case. Deal with them as sons and daughters.
2. Love, patience, firmness, discernment, wisdom are all needed.
3. Get all the facts before expressing or committing yourself.
4. Be sure you hear both sides of the story if there are two sides.
5. Be slow in forming decisions but when made carry them out; be firm but nevertheless patient and gentle.
6. Make certain every accusation is proven. Gossip, rumors, backbiting, does not make sufficient ground for discipline.
7. Jesus alone knows their hearts. Never set yourself up as a judge but deal with known facts.
8. Believe everyone innocent until proven guilty.
9. Try the less severe forms of discipline such as admonition, probation, etc.
10. Never impose discipline that you are not prepared to enforce and carry out.

LESSON ELEVEN

SELF HELP TEST

A. Give the THREE steps given in the Bible for enforcing discipline in the church:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

B. Give the THREE forms of Church Discipline given in the Bible:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

C. Give FIVE principles to be remembered by the pastor in administering discipline:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____