

# Church Discipline

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## LOCAL CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Before we discuss this tender subject, let's get things in perspective. The Bible says "GOD IS LOVE". More than anything else, we should strive to make our churches SAFE, LOVING PLACES where people can make mistakes but still be loved. People need to be accepted. People can't grow in a judgmental climate. People need to "BE BELIEVED IN". We must offer people unconditional love, acceptance, and forgiveness. We must separate people from their performance. Like Jesus, we must be able to relate to people based on their potential instead of their problems. When people manifest behavioral problems, our attitude MUST remain: LOVE THE PERSON; DEAL WITH THEIR PROBLEM. We must endeavor to maintain a LOVE ATMOSPHERE. Nevertheless, as leaders in the local church, we must not have a one-sided view of the love of God. Discipline is a real aspect of the love of God when the other's best interests are at heart. For example: The Bible says that the man who spares the rod hates his son. The natural conclusion is that if a father really loves his child, he will discipline that child. Failure to discipline makes the child feel rejected. As undershepherds of the Great Shepherd Himself, pastors should aim to be like Jesus in Psalm 23. Psalm 23:4 says, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." The shepherd's staff is an instrument of LOVE, or safety. The rod is an instrument of AUTHORITY against enemies, but also discipline of the sheep. The sheep of a local congregation feel comforted and secure when they sense their pastor's love and authority. The people feel loved as the pastor gently draws them to Christ with his staff. But the pastor's love is not enough. Even if love is present, God's people can still feel insecure if they are unsure of the pastor's willingness to use his rod. God's people want a lover, but they also want a leader. They want a leader who leans into leadership. They will enjoy security only to the degree they know their pastor will use his authority to protect the flock from "outside" intruders and to discipline an "inside" rebel who threatens to unravel the local church.

## HOW DOES A PASTOR HANDLE BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS THAT ARE CREATING DIVISION?

Answer: Titus 3:10 (NIV) "Warn a divisive person once, then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him." When a person manifests such behavior as criticism, backbiting, talebearing, gossiping, undermining leadership authority, drawing away disciples, etc. a pastor cannot let the problem go unchecked. Most people make the criticism mistake from time to time, so usually that can be taken care of by communicating. Nevertheless, when a person is actively divisive they should be warned - meaning to correct, offer godly counsel and pray that the root cause may be healed. If it happens again, warn them the second time by offering counsel and prayer. Also teach them the gravity of their behavior using this scripture. Explain to them that their behavior pattern is jeopardizing their friendships, damaging the unity of the Spirit, and if repeated, will leave you no option but for you to ask them to leave the fellowship. If it happens the third time, God commands that the person be given no more "space to repent". The pastor should boldly require the person to leave the church, lest that person poison the unity of the fellowship. Then according to Romans 16:17, the pastor is to "MARK" them as troublemakers. "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned and avoid them." This is what the Bible says to do. God is always right and knows what is best for the congregation, the pastor, and the troublemaker. Later, because of the church rejecting them, the troublemaker may come to true repentance. Other scriptures you may refer to: Matthew 18:15-20, Acts 20:28-31, Jude – the whole book, Galatians 6:1, Numbers 14-16, Proverbs 22:10, II Thessalonians 3:6-7.

**HOW DOES A PASTOR HANDLE BLATANT SIN IN THE CONGREGATION?** (Adultery, fornication, drunkenness, witchcraft, child abuse, wife abuse, prostitution, drug abuse, etc.).

Answer: Again the answer is Titus 3:10 (NIV) plus 1 Corinthians chapter 5. Read the entire chapter to get the whole picture. Verses 4,5: "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." These verses don't mean we throw out the baby with the bath water every time a believer sins. This is not discussing believers who stumble or fall occasionally and who are trying to lead a Christ-like lifestyle. Rather these verses apply to a person who has been repeatedly warned, counseled, and prayed for, but who makes no effort to change and shows no fruit of repentance. Such a person who names himself a Christian must not be allowed to continue in the fellowship lest "a little leaven leaveneth the whole congregation". As long as this person remains under the covering of the local church, he will not be disciplined. But if he is turned over to Satan by prayer and by disfellowshipping him, life will get so bad out in the world where the devil rules that it will usually cause the person to repent after a period of time. (This man in the Corinthian church repented later --2 Cor 2:1-11). If a spiritual leader will read 1 Corinthians 5 and 2 Corinthians 2, he will discover that the brother living in blatant sin was not "forgiven" by Paul and the spiritual leaders for his sin against God and the church. Instead, like John 20:23 says, the spiritual leaders **RETAINED** the man's refusal to repent, rather than **REMITTING** his sin. Disfellowshipping was the modus operandi for **RETAINING** his sin. Then later, the leaders forgave the man after misery drove him to repentance. I have a minister friend who backslid for seven tortuous years but is now restored. He has said to me, "I wish someone over me in spiritual authority had turned me over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that my repentance could have been accomplished quicker, instead of it taking seven years for me to come to my senses." The implication in 1 Corinthians 5:4,5 is that if allowed to continue in the blatant sin, the person won't make eternity in heaven; but if disciplined, repentance might come. Thus from an eternal perspective, the act of disfellowshipping for divisiveness or blatant sin is actually an act of mercy.