

The Discipline of God's Children, Part 1

Scripture: Matthew 18:15–17

Code: 2330

INTRODUCTION

Matthew 18:12-20 deals with the discipline of a sinning Christian, and therefore, is a very important text for us to understand. As the very word of our Lord, it demands our response.

A. The Command of Holiness

Through the years at Grace Church, we have always believed very strongly in the purity of the church. We've always believed very strongly in the holiness of God's redeemed people. Purity of life is the goal which God has in bringing us to Himself. One cannot read the Scripture, Old or New Testament, without being

overwhelmingly convinced that God seeks the holiness of His people, not being content with disobedience of any kind. First Peter 1:16 sums up God's desire for our holiness when Peter quoted God as having said, "...Be ye holy; for I am holy."

Now, from the start of my ministry here, I was aware of that. And I endeavored in my own heart to commit myself to the Lord to prayerfully carry out His will the best way I knew how. Whenever I found any principles in the Bible that needed to be put into practice, I would do everything within my power to live it in my own life and to make sure the church lived it in its life as well. In other words, I've never been able to separate biblical truth from life, because that would demand that I live with a lack of integrity. If it says it in the Word of God, it must be lived out. And if God is so greatly concerned about the holiness of His people for the sake of His holy reputation and for the sake of the blessedness of His people, then I must be equally concerned about that as His representative. No church can preach a message it doesn't live and have any integrity at all before God, or for that matter, before the world.

B. The Compromise of Holiness

Now, I am aware because of my own experiences, that many churches preach against sin and yet do absolutely nothing about it. In fact, I think I am safe to say that most churches which speak very clearly about the fact that certain things are wrong and which call people to a certain life-style, never really move out to enforce that message. Consequently, while there has been no tolerance at all in the pulpit, there has been a great tolerance in the life of the people, so that the preaching of the church through the years has become separated from the living of the church. Much preaching has degenerated into an exercise where someone stands up and harangues about something he is not actually concerned about. Believing that preaching is unrelated to life can have devastating effects upon people; you cannot effectively call them to obey God, enforcing the reality of divine commands for their lives. That is what our Lord is teaching here. We cannot have a church wherein the proclamation of holiness is made and sin is denounced, but wherein nothing is ever done to enforce those things. There are too many people who separate preaching from reality because they have been involved in churches for years where nobody ever really seemed to care whether or not they sinned, no matter what was said from the pulpit. Such people often get the idea that the Bible is nice and that we should believe it and fight for its authority and inerrancy, but that we needn't be concerned about implementing it. To me, that is the ultimate hypocrisy.

I believe that in the church today all across our country and perhaps in other countries as well, there is a tremendous lack of integrity in the matter of holiness. While they will affirm the authority of the

Bible and identify what is sinful, they fail to enforce that affirmation in life. That is compromise of the worst sort. In fact, the disciplining of sinning members in a church body or a church family is almost unheard of in our society.

For example, early in my ministry I had a very dear man of God, who had traversed this country for years and preached in all kinds of churches and Bible conferences, say to me, "I know of not one single church in the United States of America that is involved in disciplining sinning members...not one." And I said to him, "Well, you're going to meet one, because we're committed to that." I told that to another pastor and he said to me, "If you do that, they'll never stand for it, and you'll empty the place. You can't run around sticking your nose in everybody's business. You can't go around telling others they are sinning and so forth and so on." Those who objected to church discipline would always cite for their support that misinterpreted, misapplied verse in Matthew 7, "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (v. 1).

To make matters worse, we have this American syndrome of independence that says, "Well, I take care of me and you take care of you and never the twain shall meet." This philosophy, where everybody is a law unto himself and no one wants to get involved in each other's problems, seems to be a cultural reality that has worked its way into the church to the loss of the church's purity.

C. The Confrontation of Holiness

As I studied the Bible in my early ministry, I was surprised to find how strongly it dealt with the issue of sin in the church in such passages as Matthew 18, Acts 5, 1 Corinthians 5, and 2 Thessalonians 3, and wherever else I could find anything about this idea of enforcing the standard of holiness. While trying to discover how one motivates people to be holy, I learned that one can't just preach holiness, and then be indifferent to how the people are responding to that. There had to be a way that people could be conformed to holiness by a wholesome, godly pressure.

The passage that really set my study in concrete was the fifth chapter of Acts.

1. The Collection

In those days when the early church took an offering, everybody brought their money and laid it at the Apostles' feet. In the midst of doing this, "a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira, his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife also knowing of it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet" (vv. 1-2). Let me tell you what happened. This couple, who had vowed to the Lord to give all the proceeds of the sale of a piece of land to the church, apparently had second thoughts when they saw how much they received. They may have said something like, "Look, Lord, we've got this piece of property and we'd like to sell it. If You'll help us sell it, we'll give all the proceeds to You." But after selling it, they changed their minds and said, "Let's just keep some for us."

2. The Condemnation

The sin here has nothing to do with giving, but with lying to God. When they came to give their offering, they were no doubt feeling magnanimous, until "Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land?" (v. 3). Now, I don't know why we don't take offerings like that anymore, where the elders all line up and watch what everybody gives and say, "Why are you giving that when you promised this?" Peter continues his confrontation: "While it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God" (v. 4). Now would you say that was a confrontation? Right in the middle of the service when the guy's coming by thinking how great it is to give all this money, Peter stops him in his tracks and confronts him.

3. The Consequences

As a result of their sin, God killed Ananias on the spot and his wife soon after: "And Ananias, hearing these words, fell down, and died; and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wrapped him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space

of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them who have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down immediately at his feet, and died; and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things" (vv. 5-11). Well, you can imagine that such an incident would shape up a congregation very fast. In the early church, God was dealing very firmly with sin, wasn't He? In fact, it even kept unbelievers from joining, according to verse 13, because sin was seriously dealt with.

As I studied that passage the Lord impressed upon my heart that this is still His church of which He is still the head. He hasn't changed His attitude toward sin or His desire to see the church pure. But He has taken the authority and has put it in the hands of the godly men who lead the church, essentially saying, "You represent Me in that church and you be to that church what I would be to that church." So we are, in practice, the apostles of today who must confront that sin. And while God does not discipline sin with death in all cases, I am sure that in some He does. For example, we see that kind of divine discipline in 1 Corinthians 11:29-30 and 1 John 5:16-17. Though God is concerned about the holiness of His church and may still take some lives now and then, basically He's called us to deal with sin in His assembly. Paul did it continuously and so did John, even naming names, such as Diotrephes. And we see in our passage in Matthew 18 the same thing--God through Christ calling His people to purity. Heaven may still act in a very supernatural way to purge the church, but mostly the church purges itself through the ministry of the Spirit of God among its people.

D. The Correction for Holiness

The point is that sin has to be dealt with. It isn't enough to make announcements or to post rules. It isn't enough just to give commands...there has to be an enforcing of those. Matthew 18 teaches us exactly what has to happen in the family of God. This is made abundantly clear to us in Proverbs 3:11-12, where it says, "My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD, neither be weary of His correction; for whom the LORD loveth He correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth." There is an analogy of discipline between the spiritual and the physical realms: As a father must discipline to correct a child, so the Lord must discipline to correct His children. As children, we need to be taught to obey, and one way we learn to obey is to find out the consequences to disobedience, right? If there is no consequence for disobedience, there will probably be no change in behavior. For this reason, God brings to bear consequences for disobedience. He disciplines us to conform us by external or internal consequences: sometimes the pain of guilt, sometimes pain that comes on the outside. By so doing, God is able to guide us into the track of obedience that we may conform to the standard of His absolute holiness. It is an illusion to think that you can just preach against sin and never do anything about it in the lives of the people and yet expect them to conform to the pattern of holiness--children don't do that. Like children, who have a bent to disobedience in life, Christians have a bent to disobedience in spiritual life because sin is still in us, and therefore we have the tendency to drift into sin unless there is a sense in which we are pressured into the line of obedience. That is why there must be an enforcement (This may sound like a very strong word but it is an appropriate one to use.) of that principle which is articulated from the pulpit or from the teaching of the church. We have to move ourselves in the direction of implementing the message.

People have often asked me, "Why is the church in America, even the evangelical church, so unholy?" The issue isn't necessarily that we have preached the wrong message always, it is that we have never been obedient in its implementation in the lives of the people. We have said in effect, "As long as the sermon is right doctrinally, we really don't care what you do." But you can't raise children in such extreme permissiveness that only resorts to reasoning with them. I would hate to spend a day with your children if you had just told them what to do all their life and never disciplined them.

Being called in this passage to the implementation of discipline in the church in order that we might see the church follow the pattern of holiness, let us look at several elements of discipline.

I. THE PLACE OF DISCIPLINE (v. 17)

A. The Indications of the Term

Twice in verse 17, Jesus mentions "the church." In the Greek it is *ekklesia*, which means "the called-out ones, or the assembly." This is the second, third, and last time the word is used in the Gospels, the first time being in chapter 16. Used in a nontechnical sense in Matthew, it does not refer to the church born at Pentecost. It simply means "assembly" and nothing more. It was used in that way elsewhere in the New Testament to speak of "the church in the wilderness" (Ac. 7:38), referring to Israel as the assembled people of God in the wilderness. It was used in extrabiblical Greek literature to speak of a town meeting or any group of assembled people. The use of "church" by Jesus in this text anticipates the official church that was born by the baptism of the Spirit of God in Acts 2, because the root idea is simply "the assembly of the redeemed," which doesn't have to wait for Pentecost to be applied. It can be immediately applied to the assembly of the disciples who were gathered in the house at Capernaum on the day Jesus said it.

Some commentators have felt that it refers to the Jewish synagogue. But that doesn't fit at all. Nowhere in the New Testament does Jesus ever give rules for conduct in a Jewish synagogue, because He was not interested in revising the synagogues--He was interested in establishing His own redeemed people. Furthermore, verses 18 to 20 could in no way, shape, or form ever be related to a synagogue, because in no synagogue could it be said that they were gathered in Christ's name where He was in their midst.

So, it isn't a reference to a synagogue and it isn't a reference to a technical post-Pentecost church. It is simply a general usage consistent with Matthew and with a time period early in the New Testament era, which refers to the assembly of God's redeemed people.

B. The Implications Of The Text

1. Explained

I want you to note further that there's no organizational structure given here. It merely says, "...tell it unto the church..." without saying how the church is to be organized. It doesn't describe the church, saying, "Tell it to the guy who's in charge and have him pick eight people and start a committee and send out the investigators." We are not given any "how tos" or any detailed procedure to follow. That is left to each individual assembly of believers with regard to their time and place, culture, and the variety of gifts and leadership styles that might be used in a particular body of believers. Jesus is simply saying that the assembly of God's redeemed people is where discipline is to take place. After all, isn't it the church that God wants pure? Concerned about their spiritual purity, Paul said to the Corinthians, "...for I have espoused you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2b). And in Ephesians 5:27 Paul speaks of Christ's loving purification of the church: "That He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

There is no exterior court of higher authority for the issue of discipline. We don't need to establish a national church court. If we were to establish some bishop, cardinal, synod, or any group of people unrelated to the local assembly of believers to carry out discipline, we would have created a court beyond that which the Word of Christ and the teachings of His apostles allow. Because Jesus refers to the church in general terms, a hierarchical structure of ruling people who sit as judges is not in view. The disciplining of sinning believers happens in the assembly of the redeemed.

2. Expressed

This principle is illustrated for us in 1 Corinthians 6, where Paul indicts the Corinthians for suing each other: "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?" (v. 1). In other words, "What are you doing taking your grievances and problems before the courts of unregenerate men and not before your fellow believers?" Paul doesn't say, "...the court

that's been appointed by the saints," because the context of the Christian fellowship and family is the highest court there is. And he proves it in the next line: "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?... Know ye not that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life?" (vv. 2a, 3). In other words, the church is the highest court.

For this reason, all church discipline is to occur within the community of believing people. It can be large like ours or it can be very small. It might be on a mission field with three or four missionaries who don't even have a church established yet. They would still be considered an assembly of God's redeemed people in which the enforcement of God's principles for holiness must be carried out. It may be in your family, because that is a unit of God's redeemed people that constitutes His church. It may be in your Bible study or your fellowship group. That is not to say that the spiritual leadership of that assembly don't get involved because that would be obvious. It is only to say that the place for discipline is the church. We don't go beyond that. We're not interested in forming an inquisition committee, because the local church is responsible for the purity God desires.

II. THE PURPOSE OF DISCIPLINE (v. 15b)

"...if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother."

A. Indicated

The purpose of discipline is restoration...restoring a sinning believer to holiness. God has always been concerned with restoration, as the following verses show.

1. Proverbs 11:30 -- "...he that winneth souls is wise." Maybe the ultimate wisdom of all is to win men back to God.

2. Galatians 6:1 -- "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault [Gk. *paraptoma* = 'a fall into sin'], ye who are spiritual restore such an one...."

3. James 5:19-20 -- "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert [restore] him, let him know that he who converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death...." The goal of discipline in the church is not to throw people out, it's not to embarrass them, it's not to be self-righteous as over against their unrighteousness, it's not to play God, it's not to exercise authority and power in some unbiblical manner. The purpose of discipline is to bring people back into a pure relationship within the assembly.

B. Illustrated

1. Finding the Lost

a. A Treasure Notice in verse 15 the word "gained." It is a word from the commercial world and is used, for example, to talk about accumulating wealth in the sense of money commodities. Used in this connection, it pictures a sinning brother as a loss of valuable treasure. This is, in fact, the heart of God: God cannot let one soul go because each is to Him a treasure. And the church has to have that same sense of concern. We can't allow one to just float away as we say, "Well, I don't know where they are, but I really can't get involved." There's a loss to us. There's a treasure that's gone from us. But when restoration takes place, we regain that wealth. We need to work diligently to bring those who, by their sin, have destroyed the purity of the body of Christ. We must restore them, because they are of value to God and to us. You say, "How so?" Well, I can illustrate it this way. There have been people in my life who have sinned and thereby caused a loss in my life, because when they were in the place of obedience, walking in God's will in harmony with His Spirit, the Spirit of God worked through them in my life. God blessed me with the ministry of their spiritual gifts and fellowship. As soon as they were gone, it was a loss to me that no one else really could fill because no one else is who they are. It is as the loss of a child which another child does not make up, because each child is unique. Therefore, when one goes into sin, there is a loss. None of us can be content with that loss if we perceive the value of that soul to God and the value of that soul to us as an instrument of ministry by the Spirit of God. b. A Sheep In Matthew 18:12-14, Jesus reveals God's heart on this: "How think ye? If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth

he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more over that sheep than over the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father, who is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish [become useless]." In other words, God does not desire any believer should be rendered of no value, because they are a treasure lost and in need of being regained. Men go to tremendous lengths to regain the wealth they've lost, and to less lengths by far to regain the loss of a human life which is of far greater value.

2. Mending the Broken

Galatians 6:1, which says, "...ye who are spiritual restore [Gk. katartizo] such an one...", conveys the idea of repairing something to bring it back to its original condition. The Greek word is used in reference to mending fractured bones, putting dislocated bones in place, and mending fishing nets. To restore to the former condition is the goal of discipline. It's to see a person as a treasure, the way God, the Good Shepherd, sees them. There is something to be given to me and to you through the love and the ministry of that person that can never be given through another. For this reason, we are in the business of recovery.

Why do some people shun the responsibility of disciplining?

Whenever a church gets involved in this, people get critical of it for a variety of reasons:

1. Privacy

There are people who feel that Grace Community Church is running around checking on everyone's sin. I've had people ask me, "What do you have, the Grace CIA and the Grace Secret Service spying on everybody?" But that isn't the idea. We merely have a tremendous hunger for fulfilling God's desire to see His church holy, and we also put a very high value on the worth of a soul that belongs to God. We want not to let them go, but to bring them back for their sake, our sake, and God's sake foremost of all. We're just not content with letting them go.

2. Permissiveness

Some say, "Well, so-and-so went astray, but I'm not going to say anything to them, because who am I? They chose their way. I'm not going to run their life."

3. Pride

Others secretly relish in the fact that those who are disciplined tarnished their own reputation, because it makes them feel spiritually superior. But that is really a sickness called pride. If you feel yourself more spiritual than your sinning brother, and you can smugly remain in indifference to his sin with the idea that you're better than he is, then you are really far afield from the heart of the Shepherd. In fact, you are guilty of sinning as much as he.

4. Persecution

One Christian said, "I've often thought that if I ever fall into a sin, 'O God, don't let me fall into the hands of those censorious critical judges in the church. Let me fall into the hands of the barkeepers, streetwalkers, dope peddlers.' Why? Because so often the church people would tear me apart with their long, wagging, gossipy tongues, cutting me to shreds." Now, I don't know what church he went to, but I'm sure there are a lot of people who have had that experience.

Rather than seeing discipline criticized and avoided, we need to see its purpose...

C. Implemented

Instead of making excuses why we don't carry out our responsibility to discipline, we need to be obedient, having the heart of the shepherd who goes out and beseeches those who have sinned to repent. We are to be involved in restoration. And if God makes the effort He makes as indicated in verses 12 to 14, who are we to make less of an effort? I really believe that even though we may preach a lot about holiness, it will never happen until we get personally concerned enough with the people who fall into sin, instead of relishing in their fall or indifferently letting them go their own way and not getting involved. We must really pursue those kind of people to pull them back into the fold

or we are never going to know the holiness that we keep preaching about.

If the place for discipline is the church, and the purpose is for restoration, who is the person that is supposed to carry it out? The pastor? A discipline committee? Let's find out who is...

III. THE PERSON OF DISCIPLINE (v. 15)

"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 hast gained thy brother."

A. The Person Identified

Who is the star of verse 15? That's right, it's no discipline committee...it's you. You say, "Me? Why, I just can't do that; I'm not a confrontive-type person. I'm too loving." That's all fine and dandy, but this involves you, not just me. This doesn't refer to some committee or spiritual CIA...this is you.

Discipline is not just for church officials, it's for everybody, including those who lead in the church. In fact, Galatians 6:1 tells us exactly who should do it: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye who are spiritual restore such an one...." In other words, those who are walking in the Spirit, who are walking in obedience, and who are in the fellowship, should restore him. And how should it be done? "...in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." You don't do it with spiritual superiority dripping all over you. You do it in meekness and loving humility. It starts with you. You're the key.

Beloved, we must be concerned with bringing sinners back to God. We can't let them go. And if you're not concerned, then you're not concerned with the things that God's concerned about, allowing yourself to have false pity, indifference, smug and contented self-righteousness, contempt for someone because maybe their sin was against you and you're glad they're gone, pride, cowardice, busyness, or anything else that might prevent you from being faithful in the work of Christ to confront a sinning brother. If such is the case, you have failed, and if I ignore the restoration of the wandering sheep, I have failed too.

B. The Prerequisites Investigated

The purity of the church is our concern. But it never is going to happen until we become committed to the loving and humble confrontation of that which makes it impure. It should not just be, "Well, we're praying for them that they'll see the light." That may not be enough. You've got the light, take it and shine it in their eyes.

Now, in order to do this you need three things which are practical prerequisites for effective discipline.

1. Willingness

a. The Process Explained You have got to be willing to do it. The main verbs in verse 15 are "go and tell." You need to go and tell him. You say, "Well, if I see a brother in sin, what am I suppose to do?" Go and tell him. That's what it says. You are to go and tell him he is sinning. "But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more..." (v. 16a). "And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church..." (v. 17a). So the whole process, in a nutshell, involves going, telling, taking, and telling again if it needs to go that far. Every one of those commands implies a response, because God doesn't give commands to people who have no capacity to respond to them. So, they indicate that there must be a willingness on our part. Discipline is dependent upon us to act willfully in response to His command.

b. The Priorities Evaluated Now we have a lot of people in the church who say, "Oh, I wish I could teach in the church. I'd like to be a minister of holiness." Teaching is a great ministry and we have many teachers in our church as well as others in training. And other people say, "I want to preach like you, John. I want to teach, but also yell now and then, and do whatever you do. I want to preach and call people to repentance and to holiness and all of that stuff." Other people say, "Oh, I want to be involved in evangelism and go out and win the lost." Others want to be involved in ministering to the needs of people, or praying, and so on. But there's a ministry in the church that's just been totally lost. In fact, I don't think I have ever heard a message or read an article or book on

the subject of church discipline. However, there is a great need for ministers of holiness whose task it is, as seen through the eyes of Jesus Christ, to confront the sin of the church and call it back to purity. We not only need a church with people who preach and teach the doctrine, but also one that has ministers of holiness who, when enforcing the truth that is taught, become awesome weapons in the hand of God, expressing His heart of concern and loving compassion for the straying sheep.c. The Practice EstablishedThis isn't anything new, by the way. Back in Leviticus 19:16, the Lord instructed Moses to tell the Israelites, "Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people; neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbor: I am the LORD." In other words, "Don't go around just bad-mouthing people and gossiping or joining in on the condemnation of somebody. And in case you're wondering if this is serious, I'm the One that said it...and I'm the Lord."Continuing in the next verse, He said, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt surely rebuke thy neighbor, and not allow sin upon him." In other words, if you hate your brother, it will be manifest in the fact that you'll never bother to rebuke him for his sin. You say, "Oh, I'm too loving to rebuke." Don't tell me that. You're too uncaring to rebuke. When you see a parent who never ever disciplines a child, that parent doesn't really love that child enough to provide him with the necessary guidance. The same thing is true in the spiritual dimension. He's saying, "Don't hate your neighbor by never rebuking him of his sin and confronting him with his evil, because if you loved him you'd want to restrain him from the consequences of sin and restore him to the place of blessedness."Now I believe this willingness is born out of a second thing:

2. A Zeal for God

In John 2, there is an illustration of the willingness to confront sin born out of zeal for God.

a. The Confrontation"And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money, sitting. And when He had made a scourge of small cords, He drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; and said unto them that sold doves, Take these things from here; make not My Father's house an house of merchandise" (vv. 13-16). Now what in the world made Him do this? Why did He have such a reaction to this sin of grossly overcharging the people who needed to buy sacrificial animals? Why did He have such a tremendous desire for the holiness of the house of God?b. The Cause"And His disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me up" (v. 17; cf. Ps. 69:9a). The rest of Psalm 69:9 says, "...the reproaches of those who reproached Thee are fallen upon me." In other words, "I have such a zeal in My heart and a longing for Your glory that when You are dishonored, God, I feel the pain." Now the willingness to confront sin is born out of this zeal for God's reputation and glory. Jesus made it clear that He couldn't tolerate sin in the house of God. And if that were true for a physical temple, how much more should it be so now that we are the temple of God (1 Cor. 6:19). Because the assembly of the believers is a holy habitation in which God dwells (Eph. 2:21), we should have the heart of Christ, who can no more tolerate unholiness in us than He could tolerate it in His Father's Temple in Jerusalem. We can't find the willingness to confront sin in a vacuum--it is born out of zeal for God.Well, where does zeal for God come from? That's a third point. In order to be engaged as a minister of holiness for the sake of the purity of the church there must be...

3. Personal Purity

You are not going to be filled with zeal for God's house and consumed with a desire for the holiness of His name unless you are walking in that holiness. Let's examine Matthew 7:3-5, which although is in a somewhat different context, has the same principle, which bears repeating. "And why beholdest thou the mote [splinter] that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam [plank] that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast the mote out of thy brother's eye." Now what do we learn here?

Before you can go to confront anybody else about their sin, you have to take care of your own. This is a very important principle. Whenever a church moves out to enforce holiness and moral purity by confronting sin, it will automatically be in the process of self-purification. The end result will be that less discipline will be necessary, even though the church is more committed to doing it, because when you begin to move in that direction, the demand that it makes on you is to purify yourself. This is a difficult ministry, but it ranks with all the rest. We hear a lot about teaching and preaching, training, serving, singing in the choir, helping here and there, leading this and leading that, but where are the ministers of holiness? Where are they? Our Lord calls for them in His church.

Focusing on the Facts

1. For what two reasons is God so greatly concerned about the holiness of His people?
2. Unfortunately, what do many churches which preach about living a holy life-style fail to do?
3. For what sin did God discipline Ananias and Sapphira (Ac. 5:3)?
4. Though God may still take some lives now and then in disciplining for the purpose of the church's holiness, how has He designed for sin to be dealt with for the most part?
5. What is one way that Christians learn to obey according to Proverbs 3:11? When will there probably be no change in behavior?
6. Why do Christians have a bent towards disobedience in their spiritual lives?
7. In what sense does Jesus use the word "church" in Matthew?
8. What is the implication of the fact that no organizational structure is given for the process of discipline?
9. Who did Paul say was responsible for solving the problems in the Corinthian assembly (1 Cor. 6:1-3)?
10. What is the purpose of restoration?
11. In what sense can a disciplined person be as a lost treasure to the church?
12. What illustrative idea is conveyed in the command to restore a believer who has been disciplined?
13. Who is the one identified as initially responsible for confronting a sinning believer according to Matthew 18:15? In light of Galatians 6:1, in what manner should the discipline be carried out?
14. Briefly explain the three stages of confrontation as indicated in Matthew 18:15-17.
15. What two types of ministers of holiness does the church need?
16. How does Leviticus 19:17 indicate that hatred of someone else can be manifested?
17. When we confront sinning believers, from what do we restrain them and to what do we restore them?
18. What motivated Jesus to confront the Jews' abuse of the Temple in John 2? If Jesus couldn't tolerate sin in the Temple, why can He not also tolerate it in us (1 Cor. 6:19)?
19. Before you confront anyone else about their sin, what must you first do?

Pondering the Principles

1. God is greatly concerned about the holiness of His people for the sake of His holy reputation. How do we affect God's reputation? If we willfully sin as His representatives, what type of reaction will nonbelievers probably have to Christianity? Based on the fact that God is holy and therefore commands us to be holy (1 Pet. 1:15-16), would you prefer to be in a church indifferent to disciplining sinning members or one that is committed to it? Why or why not? Is there anything in your life now that does not reflect the holiness of God? If so, prayerfully confess it to the Lord, asking God for victory in your pursuit of moral purity. Why do you think that would be a prayer God would answer?
2. Do you know how to avoid the divine discipline of our loving Father (Heb. 12:5-9)? By diligently disciplining yourself. Read 1 Corinthians 11:27-32. What does Paul say that we should do so that "we should not be judged" (v. 31b)? What two words in verse 32 describe what the judgment of

believers is and what it is not? Now read 1 Timothy 4:6-10. What kind of discipline holds relatively little value from the perspective of eternity? What type of discipline has benefits in the present and in eternity? What does Paul suggest as the means to godliness in verse 6? Are you self-disciplined like Paul exhorted Timothy to be? If not, what steps do you need to take to establish and maintain a program of spiritual fitness?

3. Read over the reasons that some people shun the responsibility of disciplining discussed on page 9. What reason has kept you from confronting sinning believers whom you know personally? If you now understand the divine purpose behind disciplining, take time to prayerfully deal with the attitude that has prevented you in the past from carrying out this important ministry.

4. Have you been guilty of the "prayer cop-out"? Many times when we hear that someone is in sin, we sit back with a degree of concern and say that we are praying for them. Prayer is fundamentally important, but don't forget that God may want to use you as the answer to that prayer. Meditate upon the following verses as you consider some situations in which you can be used of God: Proverbs 3:27; James 2:15-16; 4:17; 1 John 3:16-18.

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