

Keeping the Church Alive #8
Keeping the Church Pure and Strong
By Russell Earl

When the topic of church discipline comes up in the pulpit or in an article, there are a variety of reactions. Some become upset as many believe it's simply "kicking someone out of the church". Others are confused because they have never heard of such a thing. Discipline in the Lord's church today is, many times, unheard of. However, God's Word commands it. We ought to practice church discipline to please God. If we do not do such, then our worship is in vain.

What is discipline? Discipline can be defined as: *training that molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character, to penalize for the sake of discipline, to bring under control, or to impose order upon* (Webster's Dictionary).

No person in their right mind would deny the need for and value of discipline in the home and in the world in general. Since some parents have neglected to obey this command many children do not respect the authority of God or His laws. The discipline we are discussing is dealing with matters of a spiritual nature. Shouldn't children of God be diligent in administering discipline that the Bible discusses?

What are the purposes of discipline? Discipline is not to gain revenge on someone. Discipline is not to show the power of the church. There are right and wrong reasons for church discipline.

First, a church administers scriptural discipline to obey God. The Bible tells us we should use discipline in the church. "*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 Thess 3:6). If the church would obey this command with the same strong desire which it does the plan of salvation and proper worship, there would be less problems in the church today.

Second, the purpose of discipline is to bring the erring person to a realization of their sin and to instill in them a desire to repent. Church discipline isn't intended to hurt the feelings of people, it is intended to keep them pure and right in the sight of God.

Third, church discipline is practiced to maintain the glory of Christ in the presence of the world. If the church allows a person to continue in public sin it would cause the church to have the appearance of condoning that sin by their lack of discipline.

The last reason for church discipline is that it must be practiced in order to keep the Lord's church pure. In Ephesians 5:26-27 the Bible says "*that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.*" So, can the Lord's church meet those requirements if it doesn't practice church discipline? No, it can not. Thus we must practice discipline in the Lord's church if it is to be how God intended it to be. Church discipline is both instructive and corrective. It corrects problems and it causes that individual and others to learn.

Without discipline there will be chaos and rebellion in the Lord's church. We see this in our world today. Let's not allow our local congregation to become like those who

do not practice discipline, instead encourage other congregations to practice discipline so that we all will be helping the Lord's church be the church Christ intended for it to be.