

Separating from Those Who Walk “Disorderly”

What is a church to do when the ministry slows to a crawl while time and energy is being sapped away by critical spirits, willful sin, and conflicts between people?

II Thessalonians 3:6 instructs the people of the church of Thessalonica "to withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us." Throughout the history of Israel and the New Testament church, the toleration of willful sin among supposed believers brought dire problems to God's people. Hidden and tolerated sin robbed the people of the power of God. Achan's hidden sin in Joshua 7 led to ignominious and decisive defeat at the hands of the enemy at Ai.

Today as we look around at the many weakened, stagnant, and declining churches, there is reason to question the cause of such apparent defeat. Many churches have been split by unchecked carnality and the willingness to allow individuals, families, deacons, lay elders, and even pastors to continue on in "disorderly" conduct. Pastors or people who gossip, spread false rumors, and mount political "gang wars" against other Christians for personal gain bring insult and reproach to the name of God. These must be separated from by church discipline if they will not respond to the corrective admonition of those who walk in the light of Scripture. But how is church discipline to be handled? The following are some principles that may assist our understanding.

I. What constitutes an act qualifying for church discipline?

- **False Doctrine**
Galatians 1:9 - "other Gospel"
II John 10 - "does not bring this doctrine"
Titus 3:10 - "a divisive man"
- **Disrespect for the Church and its Leaders**
Matthew 18:17 - "refuses to hear"
I Thes. 5:14 - "unruly"
- **Contention and Strife - Criticism**
Romans 16:17, 18 - cause divisions with selfish misuse of Scripture
I Cor. 11:16 - contentions and theological hobby horses
- **Immoral Conduct** - I Cor.5:11 - unrepentant fornicator
- **Lazy Spongers** - II Thes.3:6-11 - not working but busybodies
- **Being Money Hungry & Unwilling to Give to God**
Ephesians 5:5 - covetous
I Cor. 5:11 - covetous
- **Etc.**
Disciplining should be for those actions that are contrary to explicit teaching of the Bible!

II. Procedure for Church Discipline

(beyond settling personal problems)

Problems between two believers can **usually** be dealt with by the two parties involved. But if not, then here is a pattern to follow:

- **Confront the person privately** - with one or two church members - Matthew 18:15. These should be those who have also been wronged in the same way, or who have observed the same thing in him (not simple "neutral parties").
- **If there is no positive resolution, discuss openly with church leaders** - Pastors and deacons (Matthew 18:17) Pray for repentance.
- **Make it a matter of church business** (as a very last resort) - Matthew 18:18 and I Cor.5:13

- **If at any point confession occurs or charge is disproven - drop procedure** - I John 1:9; Galatians 6:1-2
- **Repentance should be observable and welcomed** - full restoration is the goal - I Cor. 7:8-13

III. Principles for Church Relationships

- **Love one another** - John 13:34
- **Most conflict can & should be resolved one-to-one** - Matthew 5:23-24
- **Confession resolves conflict** - Matthew 5:23-24
- **Exhibit a forgiving spirit** - Luke 17:3-4

IV. Basic Passages on Church Discipline

- **I Corinthians 5** - "Put away from yourselves the evil person."
- **I Timothy 5:20** - "Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear."
- **I Corinthians 12:26a** - "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it."
- **Romans 16:17** - "Note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them."
- **Galatians 6:1-3** - "If a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness."
- **I John 1:9** - "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Deliberate and unrepented sin in attitude as well as action must be dealt with if a church is to experience the blessings of God. This brief article is a starting point for developing a consistent policy of continually purifying the Body.

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