



Session 6: 'What is biblical discipline?'

Questions:

1. What comes to mind when you hear the word "discipline"? Is it negative or positive?
2. Has the teaching video changed your view and, if so, how?
3. Do you think church discipline is vital for the life of the church, and if so, why?
4. Read Matthew 18:15-20 – look at the passages either side of this and think why they might relate to the key passage on discipline.
5. When is it right to go to someone to point out a sin in their life and what qualifies you to do so?
6. When is it not right to do so? (e.g. our motives or not for us to deal with)
7. How would you go about discipline? What practical steps would you take?
8. Can you give some examples of where you have been involved in church discipline, perhaps some good and bad examples of how it was handled (and the results)?
9. What are we looking for someone who is being disciplined to do for him/her to be restored to fellowship?
10. Read Galatians 6:1-5 and consider what it means to carry each other's burdens and to carry your own load in the context of church discipline.
11. Would you be bold to commit to love others in the church and share with them in love and humility areas of their life that need correction. Pray and ask God if there is anything you need to deal with now, including if someone has sinned against you.

Notes:

Introduction

Discipline is not about punishment

- but about correction and growing
- same root as disciple and discipleship.

Aim is always to restore to fellowship and good relationship with God.

The key passage

Matthew 18:15-20 (NIV):

Dealing with sin in the church

¹⁵ 'If your brother or sister sins (sins against you), go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. ¹⁶ But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that "every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." (Deut. 19:15)¹⁷ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

¹⁸ 'Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

¹⁹ 'Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.'

Context of this passage:

- follows the passages about the disciples getting it wrong about greatness in the Kingdom and of the lost sheep (God's mercy to go after one vs the 99) – humility and God's mercy
- it is then followed by Peter asking how many times must he forgive - forgiveness

The process (How does church discipline work?)

1. **If the person sins against us or generally in sin** – go on own to restore
 - This is merciful and gentle ("Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted." Galatians 6:1) - restore gently
 - Qualification – love (test your motive) and without pride, malice etc in case we fall
2. **If the person does not respond and repent** – go with one or two others as witnesses (ref to Deut. 19:15 – "One witness is not enough to convict anyone accused of any crime or offence they may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses."
 - this adds weight, but still does not make it public
 - it also covers you and tests your motives.

3. **If the person still does not repond & repent** – take it to the whole church – leadership and then announce to the whole of the local congregation (based on Greek assembly of free voting citizens).

The purpose (What are we trying to achieve?)

1. **A response and recognition of the sin** – confessing this
2. **Repentance** – turning from sin and towards God (see teaching on repentance)
3. **Restoration** – there may be things that need to be put right, but
 - welcome back to fellowship
 - forgive
4. **Right relationship with Lord & His people** – Galatians 6 talks of carrying each other's burdens, but also of each person carrying their own baggage

NB Careful not to go too far or refuse to forgive (see teaching on forgiveness) – example of the Corinthian church refusing to restore the repentant brother.

How public (How public is discipline?)

If just you that has been sinned against or affected - keep it private (listen to forgiveness teaching) & forgive.

If affects wider group (e.g. number of people or life group) – make it clear what action should be taken and require confession to the group.

If church leader or affecting the whole church – then must be dealt with publicly.

Be decisive & clear.

Conclusion

All discipline should be done **in love, to disciple and grow the person.**

Be bold – as the Lord is in this (Matthew 18:19-20)

- the Lord agrees with our judgment (guilty or innocent) to bind or loose – if we seek Him.
- in church discipline when 2 or 3 agree and come together – God is in this!

Mark Moore in **The Chronological Life Of Christ** says it this way, *The prayer of verse 19 is not for “anything” we might plan or desire, but any judicial matter. The word pragma often indicates financial matters or legal decisions (cf. 1 Cor 6:1). And the “two or three brought together” in verse 20 is not talking about worship services (the omnipresence of God and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit assure Jesus’ presence even where a Christian is alone). The word “come together” [syneghmenoi] means “united,” not merely “gathered.” So, what this text promises is that God will put his stamp of approval on judicial decisions among church members who come to a mutual agreement.*