

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

What Is Church Discipline?

Church discipline is very closely connected to *discipleship* (learning from and following Jesus Christ), and has to do with helping believers deny themselves and take up their crosses to follow the Lord. While every disciple is a true believer, it is not always true that every believer is a disciple of Christ. Because of the world, the flesh, and the devil, the possibility (not the inevitability) or willful and continued sin is present with us.

Church discipline is the sometimes necessary process of dealing directly with willfully sinning and unrepentant members of the body of Christ. Church discipline may be exercised in various ways. It may be a requirement placed upon a repentant congregant, which deals with the specific sins that had been committed. For example, it may require a cohabitating couple to live separately; or it may require a financial debt to be repaid according to a specified repayment schedule.

When a congregant is hardhearted and refuses to deal with his or her sin, then it may be necessary to ask them to leave the church. In such cases, the reasons for such an action will be openly explained to those who know the errant brother or sister. In addition, specific instructions will be provided concerning how to relate to the named individual, according to the instructions given in the Bible.

Why Haven't I Heard About Church Discipline Before?

The basic answer is that it has become very rare for churches to practice church discipline. Some have suggested that the decline of church discipline is among the most visible failures of the contemporary church. This may have to do with the way many churches "do church." Much of the church in America today sees itself as a voluntary association of autonomous members, with minimal moral accountability to God, much less to each other. Also, it is obvious that American Christianity has become increasingly accommodating to the surrounding culture.

This is a very dangerous situation for the church. Without church discipline and Biblical standards for acceptable behavior and lifestyle, the church will continue its slide into moral dissolution and relativism.

What Is the Purpose of Church Discipline?

The purpose of the discipline procedures within Calvary Chapel Mountain View will be to honor and obey the Lord in His directions for His church, and to restore those who have fallen into sin back into a vibrant, healthy relationship with Jesus Christ (as taught in 1 John 1:9 and Galatians 6:1).

If a congregant does not respond to loving confrontation, the steps outlined in the specific passages relating to the particular sin will be followed, which may lead to the eventual excommunication of the sinning attendee taking place, as overseen by the Senior Pastor and Elders, who comprise the church Board of Directors.

Where Do We Find Instructions for Biblical Church Discipline?

Specific instructions are found in Matthew 18:15-20, Romans 16:17, 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, 2 Corinthians 2:6-8, Galatians 6:1, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15, 1 Timothy 5:19-21, Titus 3:9-11, 2 John 1:9-11, and 3 John 1:9-11.

Areas of continual and unrepentant sin which lead to church discipline mentioned in these passages include: unwillingness to resolve personal conflicts, causing divisions or stumbling blocks, sexual immorality, covetousness, extortion, idolatry, reviling, drunkenness, disorderliness, laziness, unwillingness to work and provide for oneself, confirmed accusations against a church elder by two or three witnesses, heresy, rejection of the doctrine of Christ, and power mongering.

From this list, one can easily see that it's not difficult to remain in good standing with the church. All one must do is avoid the continued practice of any of these areas, and to maintain a soft and humble heart before God.

How Church Discipline Is Administered

We believe in church discipline administered within the Church in a spirit of meekness and appropriate confidentiality. The first purpose of such discipline is the restoration of the believer and/or the purification of the Church. The steps of discipline include one-on-one private confrontation, private confrontation with witnesses, and finally ask them to leave the Church, in hopes that separation, at some point in the future will lead to repentance and restoration back to the fellowship. See Galatians 6:1, Matthew 18:15-17, 1 Timothy 5:20, and 1 Corinthians 5:4-13.

When a congregant is disciplined, he or she is without the protection provided by being in the body of Christ. Now the person is all alone, God will deal directly with him. Hopefully, his fleshly nature will die so that his spirit can be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Why Church Discipline Is Necessary

- Because God loves His children too much to let them continue in sinful behavior (Hebrews 12:5-11)
- Because Jesus loves His church too much to see it adversely affected by sin (Acts 5:1-11, Acts 8:9-24, 1 Corinthians 5:1-13)

Authority of the Church to Discipline

All authority has been given to the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18). Having all authority, He may give it to whomever He wishes. It is clear from the New Testament that He has given the authority to exercise church discipline to the church, specifically to its leadership (Matthew 18:15-20, 1 Corinthians 5).

Here at Calvary Chapel Mountain View, we take the Bible seriously in these matters, and wish to be faithful to the Lord Jesus in His ministry to His church.