

Harvest Christian Fellowship
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Theology @ 9
"Discipline"
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Discipline

To understand why/when we as a church discipline, we first need to understand where the authority to do so comes from and the framework in which it is to be done.

Matthew 16:19 *"And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."*

Q: What is the meaning of these "keys of the kingdom of heaven"?

Throughout the NT a key always implies authority to open a door and give entrance to a place or realm.

Luke 11:52 *"Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered."*

The term lawyer is more a religious term than a legal term. Bible lawyers occupied themselves with the study of the oral and written law and were to teach or expound it. Not only did they fail to teach the people, they did not act on the knowledge they had.

Rev. 1:18 *"I am He who lives and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Death and Hades."*

In Mt 16 we find that the keys were given to the disciples and notice the term used is "keys" - plural. In the context of what Jesus is saying "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" represent at least the authority to preach the gospel of Christ and to open the door of the kingdom of heaven and allow people to enter.

Understand what this is NOT saying:

- The church does not have the final say on who does/does not enter heaven
- The church cannot save people
- The church is not the door to heaven
- The church does not draw people to Christ.

But there is another authority, in addition to this, that is implied by the phrase "the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

More than simply entrance into the kingdom is implied; some authority within the kingdom is also suggested. Jesus completes the promise about the keys with a statement about "binding" and "loosing" which closely resembles another saying of his in Matthew 18.

Matthew 18:17-18 *"If he refuses to listen to even the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer. Truly I say to you, whatever you shall **bind** on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you **loose** on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."*

It appears that if "binding" and "loosing" refer to church discipline in Matthew 18, then it would refer to church discipline here in Matthew 16, where Jesus' words are very similar. With this understanding of "binding" and "loosing," in terms of church discipline, Jesus' promise includes both:

1. The ability to admit people to the kingdom through preaching the gospel,
2. Authority to exercise church discipline for those who do enter.

In both the Matthew passages we find Jesus is not speaking specifically about discipline for someone specific, but more generally to situations and relationships that come up within the church. This does not, however, exclude the authority to exercise discipline over individuals.

Before we get to the purpose of church discipline it is critical that we understand what "binding/loosing in heaven" implies. Jesus is teaching that church discipline will have heavenly sanction.

Sanction: explicit or official approval. Formal decree, a principle or influence that impels to moral action or determines moral judgment.

The church does not have the authority, on its own, to legislate what is morally right or wrong in an absolute sense, the authority to define what is right or wrong belongs to God. We can only declare what God has already declared right and wrong in Scripture.

The church does not have the authority to forgive sins in an absolute sense, because it is clear in Scripture that that can only be done by God himself.

The authority to carry out discipline in the church is an authority that must be carried out in accordance with the standards of Scripture.

When it comes time to discipline we do not have to ask for permission to do so or wait for God's endorsement. We've been given the authority and we can be confident that when we begin the process of church discipline (binding), that God has already begun the process spiritually. The same would apply to restoration, we can be confident that when we begin the process of restoration (loosing), God has already begun restoring spiritually.

Purpose of Discipline. There are two primary purposes of church discipline: Restoration and reconciliation.

1. **Restoration**_____ to restore the offender to the right behavior.
2. **Reconciliation**_____ between believers, and with God.

Proverbs 13:24 *"He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly."*
Hebrews 12:6 *"For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son He receives."*

Just as a wise parent disciplines their child, and God our Father disciplines those He loves, so the church, in an act of love, disciplines a brother/sister who has gone astray, and rescues them from a destructive pattern of life.

Another goal of discipline is to keep sin from spreading to others

To keep sin from spreading to others.

Hebrews 12:15 ". . . lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled."

If conflict is not quickly resolved, the effects may spread to others. I Cor. 5:1-6, Paul tells the church they need to put out the man living in incest because, "*a little leaven leavens the whole loaf*"?

What message do we as a church send if we don't discipline? Sin is not that grievous or serious?

If we don't discipline early how much harder is that problem to correct later?

Protect the purity of the church.

The third purpose of church discipline is that the purity of the church is to be protected, so that Christ will not be dishonored.

Romans 2:24 - "*For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.*" Jews were boasting about the law but did not keep it and led unbelievers to mock God's name.

2 Peter 3:14 ". . . be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blemish."

Eph. 5:27 ". . .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 blameless."

He is the head of the church and its character reflects on His reputation. There are cases in Scripture where we find that since the church did not exercise discipline the Lord did it Himself.

It resulted in sickness and death in 1 Cor. 11:27-34, and in Rev. 2 he warned He would discipline the churches at Pergamum and Thyatira. In the last two cases He was displeased with the whole church for tolerating outward disobedience.

The early church provides an example of the carrying out church discipline, and the present church is not excused from this duty.

Romans 16:17 "*I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.*"

2 Thess. 3:14-15 "*If anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.* Comes back to the primary reason for discipline which is restoration and reconciliation.

How should church discipline be carried out?

Knowledge of the sin should be kept to the smallest group possible. This seems to be the purpose behind the gradual progression from a private meeting, to meeting with 2-3 others, to telling the whole church. In Matthew 18:15 the hope is that if you go alone that discipline will stop at the first step. If church members are actively involved in each other's lives and praying for each other, when the first sign of sinful conduct appears, very little formal church discipline will have to take place, because the process would begin and end with a conversation between two people. Although restoration and reconciliation are the primary goals, it will not always come about.

In Matthew 18 Jesus teaches that we cannot stop with a private conversation if it has not brought about satisfactory results. Disciplinary measures should increase in strength until there is a solution. It may start with a simple admonition but progress to being excluded from the Lords Supper to being removed from the church.

The text in Matthew does not specify that elders be included in the process of church discipline, but it seems to be appropriate in keeping with the principle of keeping the knowledge of the sin to the smallest group possible.

If the situation cannot be resolved Jesus says to tell it to the church (Mt. 18:17). In this case the church would be assembled to hear the facts of the case and to come to a decision.

Church leaders.

1 Tim. 5:19-21 *"Never admit any charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without favor, doing nothing from partiality."*

Paul here gives special caution to keep elders from individual attacks: action regarding sin in this case should require the evidence of 2-3 witnesses. Those who persist in sin are to be rebuked in the presence of all. This is because the sin will very likely have a widespread negative effect on others who see their lives. Paul's command to rebuke the elder publicly means that some statement must be made to the church. On the other hand, not every detail of the sin has to be disclosed but the church should be told enough that:

1. They will understand how serious the offense is,
2. They will be able to understand and support the discipline process
3. They will not feel the sin was covered up or minimized if more details leak out later

Leaders are to be treated differently because their lives are to be "above reproach" (1Tim.3:2) and their lives should be examples for Christians to imitate (1 Tim.4:12).

Once discipline has occurred.

As soon as there is repentance at any stage in the process, Christians who know about the discipline should welcome the person back into the fellowship of the church. Once again the purpose of church discipline is not punishment but restoration and reconciliation. The attitude with which the discipline is carried is also very important. It must be done with gentleness and humility, and with a genuine appreciation of our own weakness with a fear that we might fall into similar sin.

Galatians 6:1 *"If any man is overtaken in trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted."*

We should also notice that immediately following the passage on church discipline in Matthew 18, Jesus strongly teaches the need for personal forgiveness of those who sin against us. We are to forgive them "seventy times seven" (vs. 22), and Jesus tells us that our heavenly Father will punish us if we do not "*forgive our brother from the heart*" (vs. 35). As Christians we must always forgive in our hearts and not bear grudges. Yet we can forgive someone in our hearts and still seek church discipline for the

good of the person, for the good of the church, and for the honor of Christ – because God’s Word commands it.

Forgiveness is never easy – even when someone apologizes and asks for it – Corrie Ten Boom.

Concise Theology – J. I. Packer

Systematic Theology – Wayne Grudem

The Analyzed Bible Matthew – G. Campbell Morgan

Tyndale N.T. Commentary Matthew – R. T. France