

## CHURCH DISCIPLINE PRINCIPLES

### SCRIPTURE:

The Biblical Authority for church discipline: Josh. 7; Matt. 18:15-20; Acts 5:1-14; Rom. 16:17-18; 1 Cor. 5:11-13; Gal. 6:1; Eph. 5:11; 2 Thess. 3:14; Titus 3:10-11.

### SEPARATION:

1. From personal sin or from breaking one's conscience
2. From a "brother" in sin (after Matt. 18)
3. From a local church in sin
4. From a denomination or "Christian" org. in sin

### SINS:

We discipline for unrepentant sins clearly stated so in the Bible: e.g., Ex. 20:1-17; Mk. 7:21-22; Rom. 1:28-32; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:3-7; 1 Tim. 1:8-11; false doctrine, Legalism, Phariseeism, Antinomianism, etc.

### STEPS:

#### **Normal Steps:**

1. Judge yourself (1 Cor. 11:31)
2. One-on-one
3. Two or three witnesses
4. Tell the church: Phase one – tell the leaders Acts 15:2; Phase two – tell the true Christians Acts 15:22
5. Deliver such a one to Satan (1 Cor. 5:5); Break Fellowship (1 Cor. 5:11-13).

#### **Exceptional Cases:**

Special Note: Certain sins are so obvious and/or so destructive to the body of Christ that we are commanded in the Bible to deal with them swiftly and severely. The following are some examples:

1. **Achan** (Josh. 7). Secret sin which has to be revealed unwillingly demands instant judgment.
2. Divisiveness (Titus 3:10). One who sows discord is to be dealt with immediately.
3. Serious theological false teaching.
4. **Annias & Saphira** (Acts 5:1-11). Willful, planned lying to the church leaders.
5. **Simon Magus** (acts 8:14-25). Infiltrating the church for financial gain.
6. Sexual Immorality (1 Cor. 5:3).
7. A pattern of sin which demonstrates false conversion and impenitence (Num. 15:30, 31; Heb. 10:26).

We are to disassociate from all who say they are brothers yet display a consistent pattern of sin (1 Jn. 3:6-10).

### STEWARDSHIP:

The shepherds in a church are delegated the responsibility from God to:

1. **Protect** the flock from wolves, false teachers, and false brothers (Acts 20)
2. **Purge** the flock of the disease of sin and its defilement and consequences (Josh. 7:10-26; 1 Cor. 5:6).
3. **Purity**. Maintain unity (Eph. 4:3), pure doctrine and holy lifestyle in the flock.
4. **Power**. Maintain the power of God in the church by not grieving the Spirit (Josh. 7:13).

### SPIRITUAL GOALS:

1. Communicate our love for the one in sin.
2. Bring the sinning person to genuine repentance: mind, emotion, will, action (2 Cor. 7:11).

3. Communicate that sinful, rebellious, disunifying actions will not be allowed to continue in the church.
4. Communicate to the careless sinner the seriousness of their sin.
5. Restore the sinning profession Christian to true fellowship with the one they sinned against.
6. Restore peace and power to the church (Josh. 7:13).

#### **STANDARDS OF TRUE REPENTANCE:**

First, 2 Cor. 7:11 sets out seven characteristics which must be evident in the life of the sinning person before they will be allowed to return to fellowship.

Second, this repentance normally takes a significant period of time to determine.

Third, all church members are not to socialize with them (1 Cor. 5:5, 9, 11, 12).

Fourth, the attitude and actions of the one under discipline will reveal their repentance (1 Jn. 5:3).

Fifth, all churches are supposed to break fellowship with the person in sin. Many do not.

#### **DISFELLOWSHIP AS IT RELATES TO OTHER CHURCHES**

Historically, a person who was disfellowshipped from one church was automatically disfellowshipped from all churches of like precious faith. This principle is rejected by most modern churches. Modern churches seek numbers and argue that the blessing of God is demonstrated by the number of people attending their building. Baptist churches historically hold (according to the oldest Baptist doctrinal statements, e.g. The 1689) to the doctrine of “a regenerate church membership”. A person who has been disfellowshipped from their home church, (which knows them, or should know them better than any other church), has been put into the category of an unregenerate person (Matt. 18). They have been delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh (1 Cor. 5).

For them to be received into membership in another church, without being restored to fellowship, opens that person to the following:

1. The communion of the saints – e.g. agape feasts
2. The Lord’s Supper
3. Ministry positions – leadership, teaching, etc.

The church which disregards biblical disfellowship by another Bible believing church opens their membership up to the leaven which Paul commanded them to purge out (1 Cor. 5). Furthermore, that church now undermines the pressure which God intends to put on an unrepentant person who has been turned over to Satan. The new church now shields that person from certain disasters which are intended to produce true repentance and genuine sorrow. The new church now gives the unrepentant person a false assurance that they are actually Christians. They undermine the work of God by saying that what their home church has done is irrelevant and actually unbiblical, since this new church is treating the disfellowship as a light and meaningless thing.

Additionally, the new church demonstrates shocking pride and arrogance in thinking that they know better than the home church which has worked with the person and pled with them repeatedly to repent and be restored. Furthermore, the home church receives no “closure”. The unrepentant person can simply go to church after church which will then reopen the case and dredge up all of the hurts and wounds that unrepentant sinner has caused to those with whom he was in covenant fellowship. Once the case has been biblically tried and the unrepentant professing Christian has been found obstinate and once they have been disfellowshipped there is no ground for reopening the case. The only solution is for the disfellowshipped person to repent and be restored to fellowship with Christ and His Bride.

This hard hearted disregard for biblical church discipline stems from an ignorance of the devastating effects of sin on a church (remember Achan!). In their insane grab for any warm body which comes along, no matter that person has been tried and found guilty of unrepentant sin, they throw their sheepfold open to the wolves. Woe to the flock whose shepherd invites wolves into the sheepfold!