

MESSAGE NOTES

August 23, 2009

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Tough Stuff

Part 2

Drastic Measures

There is no question that fellow Christians will sin against God and one another. The question is - how should fellow Christians who are in relationship with such a person respond?

Responding to the non-repentant attitudes and lifestyles of fellow believers is one of the most misunderstood and yet most desperately needed ministries in the church. It is not an optional ministry, but required by Scripture. There are multiple mandates for what is sometimes referred to as 'church discipline' throughout the New Testament, from both Jesus and Paul. It is imperative that unrepentant sin and false teaching by professing Christians be addressed by fellow brothers & sisters. Discipline is a responsibility of the entire church body. It is intended to bring believers in line with God's standard for His glory the progress of His kingdom and the protection and the blessing of the wayward individual.

It is sad, but what most people think of when they hear the phrase 'Church Discipline' is dis-fellowshipping, but that is just the final stage of the biblical process. Dis-fellowshipping is what happens when loving correction fails to result in someone turning around and reconciling. Biblical discipline is first and foremost training. Discipline and Disciple are from the same root word - meaning to learn a disciplined life. Proverbs 12:1 says, "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid".

There two majors kinds of Biblical Discipline; Formative and Restorative. Formative training is positive, instructive and encouraging. It comes through teaching and preaching, prayer, personal bible study, small group fellowship, and other positive means. Restorative Discipline has a corrective purpose. When we forgot or disobey what God has taught

us, He corrects us. One of the ways he has designed this to happen, is that He calls the church - our brothers and sisters in the faith - to seek after us, to lead us back on the right track. This is like a shepherd seeking after a lost sheep. So, Restorative Discipline is never to be done in a harsh, vengeful, or self-righteous manner, but always to be carried out in humility and love with the goal of restoring someone to a closer walk with Christ.

Why Discipline is Beneficial

1. It shows we really love God by obedience to His instructions. Matthew 18:15-19; Romans 16-17; 1 Corinthians 5; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; 1 Timothy 5:20; 1 Timothy 6:3; Titus 1:14, Titus 2:15
2. It allows us to reclaim and restore people who have wandered from the faith. Whether it is gentle correction, admonition, rebuke, or dis-fellowshipping, we're seeking the restoration of the person. This is in keeping with the mandate to make disciples and to present everyone mature in Christ. Matthew 18:15; 1 Corinthians 5:5; Galatians 6:11; Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 4:11
3. It validates or protects the integrity and honor of Christ by showing fidelity to life and teachings. The church that refuses to exercise discipline cannot command the world's respect or the confidence of its own members. 2 Corinthians 2:9 & 17
4. It helps deter others from sin. 1 Timothy 5:20
5. It helps protect the church from false teachers that cause heresy and divisiveness. Acts 20:25-31; Titus 1:10 & 11
6. To prevent giving God cause to set himself against a continually sinful local church. Revelation 2:14-25

We are going to hurt other people and we are going to be hurt by other people because we are sinners. The Gospel provides a means for reconciliation between God and people, and between people and other people.

1 Corinthians 5:9-13 talks about actions toward an unrepentant brother or sister. This kind of correction is not vindictive or joyful. This kind of action should happen as sparingly as possible, but in such cases as the following:

- When a brother or sister sins against another Christian and it cannot be overlooked in love. Proverbs 19:11, Matthew 18:15-22
- When a Christian who professes faith chooses to willfully live in sin without repentance. Galatians 6:1-5; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11
- When someone encourages or promotes false teaching Acts 20:25-31; Galatians 1: 6-9; 1 Timothy 1:4-7; 1 Timothy 4:1-8
- When a Christian is a habitual doctrine debater 2 Timothy 2:14-26
- When a teacher or an elder is living in moral sin or doctrinal error James 3:1; 1 Timothy 5:19-21
- When a Christian is divisive or an idol busybody Titus 3:10-11; 2 Thessalonians 3:6 & 11
- When a Christian promotes legalism Galatians 5:7-15; Philippians 3:2-3

The Treatment of an Unrepentant Believer

Jesus said to treat someone who chooses not to repent as a "gentile" or "tax collector". Although this may seem harsh, this response is simply a means by which the individual may come to an acknowledgement of his or her sin and turn around. The idea is not to stop caring for them. We can find this kind of response in 1 Timothy 1:20, Titus 3:10, 1 Corinthians 5:1-7.

Paul instructed church members in the 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 3:14 to withdraw from a brother or sister who continually lives disobediently and have nothing to do with them. 1 Cor 5:9-11 says not to associate or even share a meal with people who have adopted a life of sexual immorality, greed, idolatry, drunkenness, or swindling because sharing a meal is symbolic of hospitality and cordial fellowship. When a person is living in such a way, you don't act as if nothing is wrong, but you don't treat them like an unbeliever either. We don't regard them as personal enemies, but people who are living opposed to the life and good news of Jesus Christ. When we see them, we loving warn them, remind them they

are acting out of character, that they are missing out on God's best, and ask them to reconsider their ways (repent).

There is a sense that you never really let an unrepentant sinner go. You keep calling them back, reminding them that both you and God love them and want the best for them. Such people have been 'let go' for the purity of the church, but also, in hopes they will return. Practically speaking, it's fine for someone to see and speak with an unrepentant believer as long as our speech and actions don't dismiss the gravity of their sin or imply that reconciliation has been completed when they are not yet repentant. They are a brother/sister, but because of persistent sin, they have chosen to live separate from the blessings of God and the Body of Christ. Let's remember Romans 12:18. It instructs us that we should be at peace with everybody if we are given the chance. Believers should be willing to forgive everybody of everything and accept them back into full fellowship as soon as the individual humbly turns back to God. We should welcome him/her back into the body with open arms as a demonstration of the gospel truth that where sin abounds, the grace of God much more abounds.