

Fellowship: Guarding One Another

Congregational Discipline

Introduction: In a time when individualism often overshadows fellowship, the biblical concept of church discipline can seem outdated or even harsh to some. But what if some have misunderstood its true purpose? What if church discipline is about love—about **guarding, correcting, and even defending one another** in the faith?

The Bible presents discipline not merely as correction, but as a vital part of discipleship. It is rooted in grace, shaped by truth, and expressed through our mutual responsibility to one another in the body of Christ. As Paul writes in Galatians 6:1–2, we are called to restore those who wander away from the Lord. Yet we are not to do so with arrogance or hyper-critical judgment, but with gentleness, humility, and love.

Today, we will consider church discipline as a redemptive practice designed by God for the health and holiness of His people. It is about more than dealing with sin; it is also about protecting the flock, restoring the fallen, and pursuing unity in Christ.

This is not an easy subject, but it is a necessary one. Because we will never truly reflect the heart of Christ until we learn to care enough to correct, love enough to confront, and guard one another with the truth of the gospel.

I. Understanding Church Discipline

a. Avoiding the Unbiblical Extremes

i. Hostility and ungodly attitudes:

1. *“Do not regard him as an enemy but admonish him as a brother”* (2 Thess. 3:15).
2. It is not a means of vindictive punishment, but an attempt to admonish and warn the brother who has fallen away.

ii. Absence of teaching, exhortation and encouragement contribute to the internal problems regarding discipline (1 Thess. 5:14).

iii. Inconsistency of partiality (James 2:1-9):

1. Not every situation is the same, but every situation should be measured by the same standard (John 12:48).
2. Some wish to give preference to family members or good friends although they know them to be in error, but such demonstrates selfishness not love.

b. Refusal: Non-Use (Ignore Sin)

- i. Ignoring sin due to own inflated ego (1 Cor. 5:2).
- ii. Fearing the response (Matt. 10:28; Luke 16:15).

c. The Need for Clear Teaching and Consistent Practice

i. Clear Teaching:

- 1. In all matters of faith and practice the Scriptures must be our guide and that includes biblical teaching on congregational discipline (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Matt. 4:4; Eph. 5:17).
- 2. It is not a matter of pragmatism, i.e., what we prefer, but what God has revealed in His word (Isa. 55:8-9; Jer. 10:23).
- 3. Some have said, “We don’t do that because it doesn’t work...”
 - a. Did it purify God’s people?
 - b. Did it warn those who had departed from God?
 - c. What about the occasions when it brought the erring to repentance?
 - d. The first question should be, “What does God teach us?”

ii. Consistent practice of the apostolic tradition (2 Thess. 3:6,14).

- 1. Moral faith and courage are essential to encourage and help one another.
- 2. Fight against the influence of sin (Eph. 5:10-11).
- 3. Support preaching about the transforming grace, teaching regarding sanctification and holiness (Titus 2:11-15).
- 4. Others will fear the danger of sin (1 Tim. 5:20).

II. Church Discipline is a Process Commanded by God.

a. The Biblical Pattern – The Scriptures Leave No Doubt

- i. (Mt.18:15-17) “...Let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector” in cases of personal offense.

- ii. (Ro.16:17-18) "...Note those...and avoid them."
- iii. (1 Co.5:1-13) "...purge out ...not to keep company with...not even to eat with such a person."
- iv. (Eph. 5:11) "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather expose them."
- v. (1 Thess.5:14) "...Warn those who are unruly..."
- vi. (2 Thess. 3:6,14-15) "...Withdraw ("keep away from," NASB) ... Note that person and do not keep company with him..."
- vii. (1Tim. 5:20) "Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear."
- viii. (Titus.1:9-11,13) "...Exhort and convict those who contradict... rebuke them sharply..."
- ix. (Titus3:10-11) "Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition..."
- x. (2 John 1:9-11) "...Do not receive him into your house nor greet him..."

b. The Meaning of Discipline

i. Defining the term "Discipline."

- 1. It is a serious mistake to view "discipline" as only the withdrawal of fellowship from a disorderly brother or sister.
- 2. This misconception has undermined Biblical teaching on the subject and the practice of this aspect of congregational fellowship.
- 3. The term "discipline" reflects the concepts of "training," "teaching," "correction," and "instruction."
- 4. *"To train children (Acts 7:22; 22:3): to be instructed or taught, to learn (1Tim.1:20). To cause one to learn (Ti.2:12):2. to chastise; a. to chastise or castigate with words, to correct (2 Tim.2:25): c. to chastise with blows, to scourge (Heb.12:7)"*
- 5. *Paideia* and *Paideuo* are translated with the English words *nurture, instruction, teaching, taught, learn, chasten, chastened, chastens, chastening, chastise, chastisement.*

c. Understanding the Concept of *Discipline*.

i. Instructive Training

1. It embraces the idea of instructing, learning, educating, and teaching, as well as training that corrects molds, strengthens or perfects the mental faculties and moral character to practice self-control.
2. It is inclusive of all processes or means by which a congregation trains and educates its members to walk in the light.
3. Please Remember that Teaching is Discipline!
 - a. The term “instruction” or “training” in 2 Tim. 3:16 is translated as “nurture” or “discipline” in Ephesians 6:4.
4. Edification requires instructive and corrective discipline.
 - a. How can we build one up in his or her faith without educating, encouraging, training and instructing, yet when we do so we are engaging in discipline (1 Tim. 3:15).
 - b. Preventative and admonishing in nature (Acts 20:20-21).

ii. Corrective Discipline

1. Corrective instruction would include reproof, rebuke, withdrawal, marking, etc. (Acts 20:26-31).
2. When we properly understand what discipline is - we see that it is impossible for the local church to function properly and avoid discipline.

iii. Edification Demands Discipline

1. Such edification is not appreciated by those who demean the importance of what takes place in the assembly of worship or view fellowship merely as sitting by one another in the pew.
2. If there is “edification” there will necessarily be the process of discipline both in the instructive and corrective sense, i.e., the shaping and molding of the minds of Christians in the maturation process.
3. Edification is equipping the saints to serve God at the highest level (Eph. 4:11-16).
4. Inherent in the idea of discipline is the goal toward which one trains.

- a. Just as the athlete trains his body in specific ways to allow himself to perform actions toward success, so likewise the congregation seeks to discipline her members toward the goal of doctrinal and practical unity (1 Cor. 9:24-27; 1 Tim. 4:8; 2 Tim. 2:4-5).
- 5. Discipline begins the moment one enters the body of Christ and continues throughout their lives.
 - a. We must constantly proclaim God's word for the purpose of the developing those who hear us (Col. 1:28-29; 1 Tim. 4:16).
 - b. When a church fails to teach, instruct, admonish, encourage, exhort, convince, reprove, and rebuke it fails to accomplish God's purpose on a fundamental level (2 Tim. 4:2-4).
 - c. Perhaps this is why discipline fails so often – we fail to train as we should the new convert.
- 6. Three Categories of Church Discipline:
 - a. To the faithful – teach
 - b. To the wayward – warn
 - c. To the impenitent – withdraw

III. God's Purpose in Church Discipline

- a. The saving of souls
 - i. The withdrawal of fellowship is corrective instruction.
 - 1. Often the comprehensive principle of correction is overlooked in the carrying out of discipline.
 - 2. Corrective discipline is put off until the situation is all but irreversible, hostility has developed, and the sinner is driven away.
 - ii. The Scriptures are clear that the repentance of the sinner is the ultimate goal of the action: *"...So that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus"* (1 Cor. 5:5).
 - 1. The immediate purpose of *"delivering one unto Satan"* is *"for the destruction of the flesh"* (1 Cor. 5:5).

- a. The expression *“deliver unto Satan”* is analogous to other phrases in the context under consideration which help explain the concept:
 - i. *“...Might be taken away from among you...” (5:2).*
 - ii. *“...Not to keep company with...” (5:9).*
 - iii. *“...Put away from among yourselves...” (5:13).*
- b. *“Destruction of the flesh”* – does not refer to physical afflictions but references the idea of turning one back into the world where Satan rules and allow them to experience the full consequences of their choices.
 - i. 1 Timothy 1:20 – *“... Whom I have delivered to Satan, so they will be taught not to blaspheme”*
 - ii. Romans 1:24-27 – God gave them over to their vile passions to *“receive in their own persons the due penalty of their error.”*
 - iii. It means to publicly recognize and declare the real spiritual condition of the impenitent sinner.
 - iv. Remember, the declaration does not make him a child of the devil; his actions have done so (John 8:44).
 - v. Sin is self-defeating and for some the only way to repentance is to realize their condition by way of the comforts and blessings of the local church being removed.
 - vi. The rebellious Christian needs to learn by experiencing the consequences of their sin.
 - vii. The removal of fellowship may cause them to realize what they are really missing in a right relationship with God and His people.
 - viii. But if a person is accepted by the people of God along with his sin, he can unintentionally be encouraged and enabled to continue in his sin.
 - ix. *“Have no company with him, that he may be ashamed...” (2 Thess. 3:14-15).*

1. *“Ashamed, i.e. to turn one upon himself and so produce a feeling of shame, a wholesome shame which involves a change of conduct” (W.E. Vine).*

c. “So that...” is an adverbial clause which indicates purpose or result to demonstrate that these things are done that the soul might be saved.

i. Animosity and hatred have no part in this teaching (2 Thess. 3:15).

b. The Preservation of the Purity of the Local Fellowship (1 Cor. 5:6-13).

i. The Lord is not pleased with a congregation which intentionally extends fellowship to those who are rebelliously practicing sin.

ii. God always has required sanctification of His people: *“Rise Up! Consecrate the people and say, ‘Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, for thus the Lord, the God of Israel, has said, “There are things under the ban in your midst, O Israel. You cannot stand before your enemies until you have removed things under the ban from your midst” (Josh. 7:13).*

iii. Christ warns local churches of receiving those in overt sinful actions or who are teaching error which if practiced would lead others into sin (Rev. 2:12-16; 2:18-23).

iv. The carnal and tolerant attitude toward sin in the church at Corinth had led to a dismissive disposition toward the commands of God as delivered by the apostle Paul.

v. This mindset was working through this congregation as leaven through bread (1 Cor. 5:1, 2, 6, 7, 13).

c. The Purging of God’s People is a Command

i. “Command” (2 Thess. 3:6) - “to announce what must be done, ‘to order, to command.’¹ (2 Thess. 3:4, 6, 14 – warning about disobedience).

ii. “Withdraw yourselves” (3:6):

1. “Withdraw”—literally, “to furl the sails”; as we say, “*to steer clear of.*”

2. “To keep one’s distance, keep away, stand aloof.”

iii. “Do not associate with him” (3:14).

1. “To mix up together...to keep company with, be intimate with one.”

iv. “Mark” (Romans 16:17)

1. “Mark” (*skopeite*): Keep an eye on to avoid.
2. Identification of erring brethren with the purpose of avoiding them.
3. The term “avoid” means to “stand aloof” or “to turn away from” which is basically equivalent to the term “withdraw.”

d. There is to be no defense of public sin (1 Tim. 5:19-20).

- i. The well-being of the flock must be protected (Acts 20:28).
- ii. Elders are to be stewards, not hirelings and be able to answer those who teach dangerous error (Tit. 1:7, 9-11).
- iii. Why would shepherds allow those who are teaching jeopardizing and dangerous error to enter their pulpits and influence both young and more experienced believers?

e. That Others May Fear (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Tim. 5:19-20).

f. To Exalt and Magnify the Authority of Christ (1 Cor. 5:4).

IV. The Process of Congregational Discipline

a. Who is Responsible for the Action of Church Discipline?

- i. Individual and personal responsibility toward self-discipline.
- ii. Remember that it is the failure to exercise self-discipline which brings about the need for corrective discipline.
- iii. “Therefore, I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified” (1 Cor. 9:26-27).

b. There is individual responsibility toward a sinning brother.

- i. Seek reconciliation with brother whom you have offended (Matthew 5:23, 24).
- ii. Seek reconciliation with brother who has offended you (Matthew 18:15-17).
- iii. Express genuine grief for their sinful condition (1 Cor. 5:2).

- iv. Show gentleness in reproof to promote the restoration process (Gal. 6:1-2).
- v. There is individual responsibility in receiving correction.
 - 1. Rebuke a wise man and he will love you (Pro. 9:8).
 - 2. Teach a just man and he will increase in his learning (Pro. 9:9).
 - 3. He that hears reproof gets understanding (Pro. 15:32).
 - 4. He who regards reproof will be honored (Pro. 13:18).
 - 5. Faithful are the wounds of a friend (Pro. 27:6).

c. There is the responsibility of gospel preachers and teachers

- i. *"...Instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines"* (1 Tim. 1:3).
- ii. *"In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following..."* (1 Tim. 4:6).
- iii. *"Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction"* (2 Tim. 4:2).

d. The responsibility of elders.

- i. *"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood"* (Acts 20:28).
 - ii. *"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you"* (Hebrews 13:17).
 - iii. *"Therefore, I exhort the elders among you ... shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness"* (1 Peter 5:1, 2).
 - iv. Elders are appointed to protect the innocent and even naïve babe in Christ (Titus 1:5-11).
- e. The Responsibility of the Church as a Whole (Matt. 18:17; Rom. 16:17-18; 1 Cor. 5:4, 5, 13; 2 Thess. 3:6-15).
- i. The term "mark" as it is used in Romans 16:17 - does not refer merely to the notice of the sinner, but the withdrawal from the sinner.
 - 1. "Keep an eye on so as to avoid" Robertson
 - 2. "Literally, 'to furl the sails'; as we say, to steer clear of..." (Jamison Faucet Brown)
 - 3. The force of the term is seen in the remainder of the verse "and avoid them"

4. 2 Thess 3:14 - note that man and have no company with him
5. The notion that some may hold that we simply point out this one's sin and go on with no change in relationship is fallacy and in direct contradiction to Scripture.
- ii. As we have learned regarding instructive discipline, so corrective discipline is the responsibility of the entire congregation.
 1. 2 Thess. 3:6-14 - We noticed earlier that the instruction of this chapter carries the weight of a necessary command to the church.

v. Who Should Receive Corrective Discipline By The Local Church (Or From Whom Should Fellowship Be Withdrawn)?

a. Word of Caution

- i. There is a difference between the mature Christian and the new convert and there are distinctions between absolute moral principles and sins regarding to stage of growth (Gal. 5:18-21; Heb. 5:11-14).
- ii. The babe in Christ should be given sufficient time to grow and develop (Jude 22, 23).
- iii. Fellowship is never severed until all other means to affect repentance and restoration of the sinning brother have been exhausted (James 5:19-20).
- iv. As patient and loving as we may be there will be circumstances that demand us to take further action in the discipline process out of concern for brethren in Christ.
- v. Fellowship is impacted when brethren refuse to repent of sins that are jeopardizing their souls and hurting the body of Christ (1 John 5:16-17).

b. Those who are to be disciplined:

- i. Those who refuse to hear a brother's conviction of sin (Matt. 18:17).
- ii. Those who continue impenitently in immorality (1 Cor. 5:9-11; Gal. 5:19-21).
- iii. False teachers and all who cause division (Rom. 16:17-18; 2 John 9-11; Titus 3:10-11).
- iv. Elders who continue in sin (1 Tim. 5:17-20).
- v. Those who walk disorderly (2 Thess. 3:6, 14).
 1. To walk disorderly or unruly is to walk out of step with the Lord's will and people.

2. In the NT the adjective occurs in 1 Thess. 5:14, the adverb in 2 Thess. 3:6, 11 and the verb in 2 Thess. 3:7.
3. The term as mentioned is a military term referring to those who are out of step with the formation and instructions of the commanders, whether through retreat or disobedience.
4. The proper idea of the word used here is that of soldiers who do not keep the ranks.

VI. How Should Corrective Discipline Be Carried Out?

- a. We do not just pray for them and then forget about them.
 - i. The certainty of the guilt or innocence of the accused must be ascertained (Deut. 13:14; 17:2-6; 1 Tim. 5:19).
 - ii. The disorderly must be warned and vividly impressed about his wrong (1 Thess. 5:14; Matt. 18:15-17; Titus 3:10-11).
 - iii. There must be sufficient, sincere, diligent and patient efforts to restore the disorderly (Gal. 6:1-2).
 - iv. If, after guilt has been clearly established, warnings have been issued, and sincere efforts toward restoration have been made, yet the individual continues in unrepentant disobedience, then the church must withdraw fellowship as a final, loving act—aimed at leading them to genuine repentance.
 - v. This is to be done as a congregation: *“In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together...”* (1 Cor. 5:4; 2 Cor. 2:6; Matt. 18:17).

VII. How Should Those Who Have Been Disciplined Be Treated?

- a. “... Let him be to you as a Gentile or Tax Collector” (Matt. 18:17).
 - i. We are to treat the individual as we would treat those who are not in fellowship with the local church.
 - ii. Note the context of Matthew 18:15-17:
 1. Concern for the lost (Matt. 18:10-14).
 2. Both forgiveness of those who come to repentance and the granting of forgiveness for those who return to the Lord (Matt. 18:21-35; cf. Luke 17:3, 4).
 - iii. We have responsibilities to erring brethren that we do not have to unbelievers (1 Cor. 5:9-11).
- b. We are to “mark and avoid them” (Rom. 16:17).
- c. We are to admonish him as a brother, rather than count him as an enemy (1 Thess. 3:14-15).

- i. He should be treated in such a way that he finds reassuring signs of love from his brethren, but no signs of weakness toward sin.
- d. We are to deliver such a one to Satan (1 Cor. 5:5, 11, 13).
 - i. Allow him to see his true spiritual condition.
 - ii. This firm reproof is to be offered in love and sincerity, but without compromise.
- e. We must stand ready to forgive and receive him back into fellowship when he repents (2 Cor. 2:6-8).

VIII. Church Discipline Is Effective When It Is Done Biblically.

- a. The case of the Corinthians proves that the divine plan works as God intended (1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Cor. 2:1-11).
- b. Regardless of the brother's repentance – the church at Corinth exercising discipline would have:
 - i. Maintained the authority of Christ (1 Corinthians 5:4).
 - ii. Made a sincere effort to save the brother (5:5).
 - iii. Proved their love (5:2; 2 Corinthians 2:4).
 - iv. Proved their faith (2 Cor. 2:9).
 - v. Protected the church from evil influences (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

IX. Answering Objections to Church Discipline

- a. The Parable of the Tares [*"This parable opposes church discipline by teaching us to let the saint and the sinner to grow together in the church, lest while we gather up the tares we root up the wheat with them!"*] (Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43).
 - i. First, regardless of one's interpretation of this parable, it cannot be interpreted, to contradict other clear teachings of both Christ and His apostles (Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Thess. 3:6).
 - ii. Proper Interpretation of the Parable (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43):
 - 1. "The man who sowed" (24-30) – "The Son of Man" (36) – "The Son of Man" (41)
 - 2. "The field" (24) "the world" (38) "the Kingdom" (41).
 - 3. "The enemy" (25) "The devil" (39)
 - 4. "The tares" (25) "sons of evil one" (38) "stumbling blocks" (41)

5. "The wheat" (25) "sons of the Kingdom" (38) "righteous" (43)
6. The "field" (38) is equated with "the Kingdom" (41) and if such is equated to the church then:
 - a. First, this contradicts Jesus' explanation that "the field" is "the world."
 - b. Secondly, the non-intervention of 13:29-30 would contradict 18:15-17 which calls for disciplinary intervention in the local church (1 Cor. 5).
 - c. Third, to make the field the church is to put the children of the devil in the kingdom.
 - d. Wicked people may enjoy the fellowship of a local church, but they are not in the universal church in any real sense.
 - e. In the parable of the tares, "kingdom" (41) should be understood in its universal sense of encompassing God's rule over all men (I Chronicles 29:11-12; Psalm 103:19; Isaiah 37:16).

iii. Purpose of the Parable:

1. Explains that in human society in the world the wicked and righteous dwell together (I Cor. 5:9-10).
 2. There is no teaching in all the Bible that offers condemnation of church discipline, rather there is a direct command to practice such.
- b. "The Bible Condemns Judging and That Is What We Are Doing When We Discipline Someone" (Matt. 7:1).
- i. This argument is a gross misinterpretation and misunderstanding of the text (Matthew 7:1-5).
 1. The "judging" condemned by Christ is hypocritical and hyper-critical judgment (Matt. 7:1, 3-5).
 2. However, this passage does condemn any judgment in the sense of drawing logical conclusions but rather demands us to do so (Matt. 7:5 – "log" vs. "beam"; Matt. 7:6 commands us to discern what is "holy," "swine" and "pearls"; Matt. 7:20 teaches us to judge based on "fruit").
 3. John 7:24 Jesus teaches us to judge accurately, rather than superficially (John 7:24).

4. Paul judged without being present regarding the sinning brother in Corinth (1 Cor. 5:3).
 5. Paul condemned the Corinthians for not judging the condition of the man based on his conduct (1 Cor. 5:1-2, 12).
- c. Withdrawing From the Withdrawn? (*"We cannot withdraw from those who have withdrawn from us"*).
- i. The answer depends on what is meant by one *"withdrawing himself."*
 1. One may withdraw his or her membership, in good standing, having been a faithful member and place membership in another local congregation in the same city or community or elsewhere submitting to another eldership.
 2. One may withdraw his or her membership and move to another location altogether, having left a sound local church in good standing.
 3. In general, however, the question probably has reference to a member who ceases to assemble for public worship with the saints where he or she has sustained fellowship and membership.
 4. So we are talking about administering corrective discipline to those who have forsaken or abandoned the fellowship of the local church where they are members (Hebrews 10:25).
 - ii. The evasion of accountability?
 1. The notion that the local church and elders no longer have responsibilities to a brother or sister because they have chosen not to sit on a pew with us any longer is not found anywhere in scripture.
 2. Often when the elders are in the process of offering corrective instruction toward a brother or sister who is not following the teaching of Christ, who is rebelling against their counsel and refusing to submit to truth – the individual will stop attending services.
 3. In some cases they will refuse to meet with the elders.
 4. The concept that such action can trump the discipline process or relieve them of accountability is unacceptable Biblically –

5. Fellowship is not unilateral – it is a mutual commitment on the part of brethren to receive a brother or sister into fellowship and the desire to be received by the one placing membership (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 1:9; 12:12-27).
6. Therefore, the concept that one can abandon the fellowship without accountability violates the principle of fellowship.
7. This view would render any church discipline as impossible because the disorderly could always just beat the church to the draw: “You cannot withdraw from me; I have already withdrawn from you...”
8. The action is not about physical presence – it is about influence, association and ensuring that mixed messages are not sent to the unfaithful believer.

d. Important Terms: “Marking,” “Withdrawing” and “Avoiding”

i. “Mark” (Romans 16:17):

1. When impenitent brethren are “marked” or “identified” to the congregation – then the local church is to take “note” of the brother or sister with an understanding that they have departed from truth.
 - a. “Mark” - Keep an eye on to avoid.
 - b. Identification of erring brethren with the purpose of avoiding them.
 - c. The term “avoid” means to “stand aloof” or “to turn away from” which is basically equivalent to the term “withdraw.”

ii. “Withdraw Yourselves” (KJV) – “That you keep away” (NASB).

1. The identification of a disorderly brother initiates/ begins the “withdrawal” process which not only the elders, but the church is to carry out.
2. This does not necessitate one to be assembled with the church to carry out God’s will in the matter.
3. This is initiated at a point in time but is a process that is carried out as opportunity avails itself.
4. Regardless of a brother’s physical presence in the assembly – it is the church’s decision to pull access to its fellowship away from a disorderly believer so that entrance into that fellowship again requires correction.

5. “Withdraw yourselves” (3:6):

- a. withdraw—literally, “to furl the sails”; as we say, “*to steer clear of*”
- b. “To keep one’s distance, keep away, stand aloof”
BDAG.

e. The Purpose of Church Discipline is Served Whether the Disorderly is in Attendance or Not:

- i. Action communicated to the erring brother his spiritual condition to save him (1 Cor. 5:5).
- ii. Remove any possible ungodly influence from the flock (1 Cor. 5:6).
- iii. Promote godly fear of God and respect for the truth (1 Tim. 5:20).
- iv. Cause the brother or sister to be ashamed (2 Thess. 3:14).
- v. Fellowship of the Lord’s people extends beyond the assembly.
 - 1. Paul meant more than the assembly when he said, “Put away the wicked man from among yourselves” (1 Cor. 5:9-11,13).
 - 2. A member might “withdraw himself” by forsaking public worship for any number of sinful causes, yet still desire the company, endorsement and fellowship of faithful brethren.
 - a. But Scriptural discipline denies him such company to make him ashamed of his condition before God.

f. The Shepherding Principle (I Peter 5:1-4).

- i. A good shepherd goes after sheep which have strayed away from the fold (Luke 15:4-7; Ezek. 34:4-6).
- ii. A good shepherd does not conclude that his hands are tied in the matter and there is nothing he can do because the sheep left the fold first.
- iii. He makes every effort to save them including the withdrawal of fellowship to save them.
- iv. Certainly, we would not think that a good shepherd would say “Those unruly sheep jumped the fence and got into the enemy’s pasture, so there was nothing we could do...”

- g. “It will tear up the congregation and do more harm than good.”
 - i. It was not discipline that was tearing up the church in Corinth; it was the negligence to discipline that was tearing up the church there.
 - ii. If withdrawal or marking is needed there is already trouble in the church and in the spiritual well-being of a brother or sister in Christ.
 - iii. This is a foolish statement by those who more concerned about numbers than they are the salvation of souls and purity of the church.
- h. “It May Harden Them So That They Never Return.”
 - i. It may soften them toward truth if they still have a good conscience.
 - ii. Regardless it is a matter of doing what God says and trusting His will.
- i. “No one is sinless”
 - i. True, but there is a difference in one who is willing to repent as he walks in the light and someone who is impenitent (1 John 1:6-7, 9).
- j. “This Will Cause Trouble in the Community or in a Family”
 - i. How many churches have had their influence decimated and destroyed because they would not discipline their members in love.
 - ii. Families striving to live for the Lord all know of the trouble of sin dominating their relationships.
 - iii. **As difficult as it may be, I would rather endure tension in a family relationship and speak the truth in love, than remain silent and allow my loved one to continue in sin—risking their soul—without having made any sincere effort to restore them to the Lord.**
- k. “We have so many sinful situations why start now?”
 - i. Apologize to the church, teach the brethren and start practicing the truth.
 - ii. If restitution or other situations need to be revisited then do all you can!
- l. “I Never Heard Older Preachers Preach On This”
 - i. I know plenty that have, but even if I grant your argument then I would simply respond by saying that if they did not preach the truth on this subject, let’s do better.

- ii. Paul encouraged brethren to “learn in us not to think of men above that which is written...” (1 Cor. 4:6).
- m. Why Is Plain Biblical Teaching On Discipline Neglected?
 - i. Because so little is taught on the subject in many places.
 - ii. Because our faith can weaken and compromise in times of controversy.
 - iii. Because of lack of concern for our brethren who have fallen away.
 - iv. Because of fear of being rejected by others.
 - v. Because we do not want to get involved in rebuking sin.
 - vi. Because of lack of leadership.

Conclusion: God has not called us to be passive about sin or indifferent to the holiness of His people. Church discipline is not optional—it is **a command** from our Lord Jesus Christ. When we ignore it, we disobey Him. When we compromise truth to maintain comfort, we trade God's glory for man's approval. We are failing to show love, mercy, and active goodness toward others.

Let's be clear: church discipline is not about control. It is about **obedience**. It is not about pointing fingers; it is about **rescuing souls**. It is not about control, but it is about **repentance** and **restoration**.

A church that refuses to practice discipline is a church that refuses to love as God loves. He disciplines those He loves (Heb. 12:6). And if we love one another, we will not stay silent when sin is destroying someone's life and damaging influence of the people of God.