

King's Way Christian Fellowship & Biblical Church Discipline

- ◆ *Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me.* John 14:21a
- ◆ *...count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.* Romans 5:11
- ◆ *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.* Galatians 5:24
- ◆ *It is God's will that you should be sanctified...* 1 Thessalonians 4:3a
- ◆ *...you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God...* 1 Peter 2:9
- ◆ *As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."* 1 Peter 3:14-16

Scripture is clear that those who claim to follow Christ are to be distinctive from the world around them in their mindset and their lifestyle. Jesus requires all Christians to be disciples (Matthew 28:19-20; Luke 14:26-27,33). As the word suggests, this lifelong process requires discipline - a matter of learning, training, and knowledge.

However, discipline has a negative as well as a positive aspect. Webster's Dictionary explains that discipline is "training that corrects, molds, and perfects...the moral character." Scripture teaches that there are times when a Christian can wander so far from their calling as a disciple, that it is the responsibility of the church to administer corrective discipline to hopefully correct the error in that Christian's behavior/lifestyle.

Paul discusses specific instances of the application of church discipline: at Corinth (1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11) and at Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:19-20). Discipline in the New Testament church was taken seriously and was a practical matter, not just a theoretical one.

The Bible explains two main purposes of discipline:

- For the individual: to bring those who are caught in sin back to a better relationship with God.
My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.
James 5:19-20 (see also Galatians 6:1)
- For the community: to protect the church from corruption.
(1 Corinthians 5:1-13; Romans 16:17; Galatians 1:8-9;
1 Timothy 1:3-4, 19-20; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; Titus 3:10-11;)

The ultimate goal of church discipline is the total restoration of the church member.

Discipline should be motivated by the overarching biblical theme of forgiveness - a realization that, if God can forgive a man or woman that sins against Him, then the church certainly can offer forgiveness to him/her by Christ's authority and love (2 Corinthians 2:5-11). The church desires redemption for all people.

Discipline is directed towards...

- those who are involved in activities that are defined by the Bible as immoral:
...you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. 1 Corinthians 5:11
- those who are responsible for significant disruptions of order within the church:
Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. Titus 3:10
- those who spread teachings contrary to the Gospel.
I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. Romans 16:17 (Galatians 1:8-9; Ephesians 5:6-7)

While all Christians still live with a fallen, sinful nature and will continue to sin (Romans 3:23; 7:14-25; 1 John 1:9), the issue in church discipline regards those in the church who willfully live in an on going lifestyle of sin, refusing to change and repent.

We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin... 1 John 5:18
Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching." John 14:23a, 24
We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 1 John 2:3-4 (also 1 John 3:6,9)

In the issue of willful, continual sin, church discipline is to be applied according to the Biblical injunctions against sin, not cultural standards or church tradition. Romans 13:13-14; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 4:31; 5:5; Revelation 21:8; 22:14-15 are among the many passages that clearly teach about unacceptable behavior on the part of Christians.

Jesus provides a model of church discipline in Matthew 18:15-18:

"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Accordingly, our order of church discipline is modeled after Jesus' instructions:

1. If a church member is clearly sinning, an appropriate member of the church should lovingly and privately confront him/her with the issue.
2. If the confronted person refuses to change, then s/he must be confronted by a group of two or three, preferably including the pastor or an elder as appropriate.
3. If this small group is unsuccessful and did not include the pastor, they should seek guidance from the pastor, who may find it necessary to confront the person directly.
4. If the person still refuses to change, the matter must be taken before the entire church.

5. If all else fails, the person must be removed from the church membership, until s/he has made substantial progress in correcting the situation.
The pastor and elders will determine reinstatement of a member.
(Substantial progress in most cases will include not only correction of physical circumstances, but a period of counseling and accountability under the guidance of the pastoral staff to substantiate spiritual, emotional, and mental change, as well as a physical change in the circumstances.)
6. Because church discipline requires the utmost in sensitivity, discretion and Christian maturity, discipline should be a matter entrusted to the elders and pastor by the church body.
The elders have been chosen and ordained to serve as lay ministers for the body, based on their Christian maturity and leadership. Church discipline cases often involve lurid and sensitive details that do not need to be revealed to the entire church body.
The point of discipline is restoration, not humiliation. Therefore, the decisions both to exclude and restore to fellowship, based on intimate knowledge of details, should remain the responsibility of the elders in consultation with the pastor.

What church discipline is not:

- Church discipline is not a way to get revenge or to cause embarrassment;
it is an act of love in humility.
- Church discipline is never physical; it addresses the spirit.
- Church discipline is not a matter for those outside the church (1 Corinthians 5:9);
it is designed for the members of the local church and is enacted by that church alone.
- Church discipline is not optional; at times it may seem like an unpleasant task,
but a church without discipline would be in far worse condition:
No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.
Hebrews 12:11
- Church discipline is not to be initiated in anger; the church should discipline with tolerance,
patience, and gentle correction (Galatians 6:1).
- Church discipline is not only to protect the reputation of the church but also to express
the truth of Christ to the individuals within the church.
- Church discipline is not a primarily a matter of style, method, or procedure;
it is a matter of purity and orderliness within the church.

Every matter of church discipline will depend upon a number of factors, like the flagrancy, severity, repetition, and duration of the problem. Therefore, to some extent, each instance of church discipline will call for different responses from the pastor, elders, and church members. Each case is to be handled with the utmost love, respect and discretion and always according to clear Biblical standards.

I have read the policy statement on church discipline at King's Way Christian Fellowship and agree, as a member of this fellowship, to submit to the Elders of this church regarding the use of church discipline according to the Biblical pattern, whether it ever need be exercised toward me or anyone else in the church.

Name

Date