



# Systematic Theology

A study of the major doctrines of Scripture

TOPIC 6 – THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH  
LESSON 105 – CHURCH DISCIPLINE

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# Motivation: Purity

- ▶ The practice of church discipline ought to be motivated by a positive, loving desire both to preserve the purity of the church and to restore sinning brothers and sisters to fellowship.
- ▶ Church discipline should never be motivated out of self-righteous pride, political agendas, a desire to exercise power, or with the intention of embarrassing people.
- ▶ It should ultimately be overseen by elders as they shepherd the flock, sincerely longing to see wandering sheep repent, return, and be restored.

# Motivation: Preserving Fellowship

- ▶ The goal in church discipline is restoration of a sinning believer to fellowship. The individuals and the churches must not act in the place of the Holy Spirit by demanding restoration but must humbly obey the Scriptures for the sake of proving their love for Christ (1 John 5:3 ) and their love for the one caught in sin (1 John 4:7-11; Matthew 22:39). The Spirit of God calls the sinner to repentance and grants it in the presence of godly sorrow (John 16:5-15; 2 Tim. 2:25-26).
- ▶ Those who are called on to rebuke a sinning believer are “to restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted” (Gal. 6:1). If at any point including after removing him from fellowship and membership, he repents, then we are to restore him, “forgive and comfort him” (2 Cor. 2:7), and “reaffirm your love for him” (2 Cor. 2:8). Church discipline is to be applied to all members of the Body of Christ without bias or partiality (1 Tim. 5:19-21; Gal. 2:11).

# Matthew 18

- ▶ 15 “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ 17 And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

# Matthew 18

- ▶ If any member of the church (any Christian brother or sister who is part of the Body of Christ) sins against another believer or against the Church itself –
  - ▶ 1. He is to obey the Lord and heed his conscience by repenting and being reconciled to God and to anyone else he has sinned against (1 John 1:9; Matthew 5:23-24; James 5:16).
  - ▶ 2. If he does not repent, he is to be reprovved in private by the one against whom he has sinned (Matthew 18:15).
  - ▶ 3. If he still does not repent, he is to be reprovved a second time with one or two witnesses who may confirm both his response and the spirit in which he has been rebuked (Matthew 18:16).
  - ▶ 4. If he still does not repent, the matter is to be taken before the church (Matthew 18:17).
  - ▶ 5. If he will not listen to the church, then the church is to remove him from membership (if he is a member of that local body) and from all fellowship (Matthew 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:12-13).

# Matthew 18

- ▶ 18 “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 “Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”
- ▶ Those things bound or loosed refers to determining what is permitted and not permitted in light of the understanding and right application of God’s Word to the circumstances.
- ▶ When the church follows the biblical procedure for church discipline, its verdict stands in harmony with God’s revealed will.
- ▶ This then is the church applying the rule of Christ to His church – hence when two or three witnesses are engaged in the process of discipline they have not only His endorsement but also His presence – He is in the proceedings exercising His Lordship as Head of the church.

# Division in the Church

- ▶ Church discipline promotes unity and purity in the church. We are commanded to love one another, to live in harmony with one another, to have unity of mind, to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and to follow the selfless and sacrificial example of Christ by showing preference to one another (Rom. 12:10; 13:8; 1 Thess. 3:12; 4:9; 2 Thess. 1:3; 1 Peter 1:22; 4:8; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11-12; 2 John 5; Rom. 12:16; 15:5; Col. 3:14; 1 Peter 3:8; Eph. 4:3; Phil. 2:1-4).
- ▶ Those who would cause division by disturbing the peace and unity of the church are to be confronted (Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 1:10) and disciplined if they do not repent.
- ▶ Titus 3:10 Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.
- ▶ 1 Timothy 6:3 If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, 4 he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, 5 useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.

# Proactive Protection

- ▶ We are instructed to guard the truth (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:14), to contend earnestly for the purity of the faith (Jude 3), and to watch their life and doctrine closely (1 Tim. 4:16).
- ▶ Scripture repeatedly warns Christians to be on the alert against sin (Eph. 6:10-18; 1 Peter 5:8; 1 John 2:15-17) and error (2 Tim. 3:1-9; 2 Peter 2:1-1; 1 John 4:1-3). They are not to associate with immoral people (who claim to be Christian – 1 Cor. 5:9; Eph. 5:11; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14), or those who propagate error (2 John 10; Gal. 1:8-9; Titus 3:10).
- ▶ The New Testament reserves its harshest condemnations for false teachers who would seek to undermine sound doctrine and promote immoral behavior (2 Peter 2:1-3). Such purveyors of error are variously condemned as “ravenous wolves” (Matt. 7:15; Acts 20:29), “dogs” (2 Peter 2:22; Phil. 3:2), “blots and blemishes” (2 Peter 2:13), “accursed children” (2 Peter 2:14), “slaves of corruption” (2 Peter 2:19), Pigs that “wallow in the mire” (2 Peter 2:22), “unreasoning animals” (Jude 10), “hidden reefs” (Jude 12), “waterless clouds” (Jude 12), “fruitless trees” (Jude 12), “wild waves of the sea that cast up the foam of their own shame” (Jude 13), and “loud boasters” (Jude 16).



# Proactive Protection

- ▶ By contrast, the church ought to be a place where righteousness and truth are championed and never compromised.
- ▶ Paul describes the church as “a pillar and buttress of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). Its leaders are “to give instruction in sound doctrine and also rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9).
- ▶ In the face of falsehood, believers are to use the truth to “destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5).
- ▶ True unity can only be found in unity around truth as revealed in the Word of God. True unity is grounded in sound doctrine (1 Tim. 6:3-4; 2 Tim. 4:3-4).
- ▶ At the local church level this commitment to purity and unity is primarily evidenced through the faithful preaching of the Word of God, where sin is address and confronted, and through the practice of church discipline.