

Matthew 18:15-17

1. Is the term “church discipline” proper to apply to this passage? What do you mean by discipline? Explain.

Yes. The term “church discipline” although a more modern term than the writing of the Gospels, is still a quite old term used throughout church history (it was used in the Belgic Confession in 1561).

Discipline can be defined by the passage in Heb. 12:7-9. Discipline from God’s perspective is the loving chastening of a child for the ultimate correction and benefit of the family relationship that has been broken.

■ The Biblical Practice of Church Discipline – J. Carl Laney -- BSac—  
V143 #572—Oct 86—354

2. Is the local church in view here? How can Jesus be talking about the local church before Pentecost?

Yes. Jesus is not limited by time and space and has the ability to speak of things future in present tense. He sees all and knows all, therefore He can give a standard for church discipline before the Local Church is in existence without creating any conflict in His mind.

3. What is the reason for “discipline”? What is the intended result of discipline? (Hint: study the context closely.)

The reason for the discipline is unrepentant sin. Although, the first step is taken as a result of a sin by a brother, all the subsequent steps are taken as a result of an unrepentant attitude and heart.

The intended result of all disciplinary matters is restoration and reconciliation. The person is only put out of the fellowship of the local church after they have chosen by their lack of repentance that they do not want to be a part of the body.

Given the fact that restoration is the goal of church discipline, this is a strong challenge to us as leaders in the church to take things at a pace that will encourage restoration and does not just “force the person out”, so to speak.

■ Handbook on Church Discipline, Jay E. Adams  
■ Perimeters of Corrective Discipline – Ted G. Kitchens -- BSac—V148  
#590—Apr 91

4. Explain the process to be followed? How many steps are there (three or four)?

There are four steps involved in the process of church discipline:

Step 1: Private Reproof:

The first step is a private loving confrontation between me and my brother. I should go asking questions seeking to understand and to be understood. The goal is restoration, so either I need to understand all the circumstances and conclude that in fact sin did not occur, or my brother will understand how he has sinned and repent, therefore restoring the relationship and ending the process.

We must keep in mind that this may in fact take more than one conversation or confrontation. I may need to speak with the individual on a couple of different occasions, making sure that all the facts have been shared as best as I can.

However, if neither of these things happen I must proceed to step two.

Step 2: Private Conference

This is a time when, if I believe that my brother is still unrepentant of the sin, I need to take two or three others with me who can help make sure that all the facts are understood by both of us. The responsibility of the other persons now involved in the process is to confirm all the facts. They are to listen to both sides and in an unbiased fashion give their conclusion to the situation.

If they conclude that in fact my perception of the situation has been wrong and no sin has occurred on our brother's part, then I am responsible to ask his forgiveness.

However, if the two or three witnesses agree that a sin on our brother's part has occurred, and he repents, reconciliation has occurred and the process stops.

If on the other hand, the two or three witnesses agree that sin has occurred and our brother is not willing to repent we must proceed to step 3.

It is important to keep in mind that we may actually have to have more than one private conference in order to get all the information out and allow time for repentance.

Step 3: Public Announcement

At this point the fact finding and gathering part of the process is concluded. The first two steps should have been followed so thoroughly that all the facts are known and there is no doubt that sin has occurred on the part of our brother. Also, at this point the actual reason our brother is being brought before the church is not for the initial sin that started the whole process, but the sin of unrepentance.

The facts should be given to the whole church, including all relevant details of the initial sin, the account of the private reproof and private conferences.

At this time the church body has the opportunity and responsibility as a family to go to their brother and reprove him for the sin in his life, with the goal of restoration.

If the brother hears the church's reproof and repents publicly of his sin and the sin of unrepentance, then restoration will occur.

#### Step 4: Public Exclusion

If, however, the brother does not head to the reproof of the family and does not repent, he is to be put out of the church and removed from fellowship.

There is not set timeline on how long this process must last or how much time must be in between each step, including step 3 and 4. However, there must be enough time for all the facts to be known and reasonable time for repentance to occur, without publicly ruining the testimony of the church.

Once a person is excluded from the body he is to be treated like an unbeliever. This does not mean that we do not talk to him or pray for him. We should talk to him, pray for him and have relationships with him to the same extent as we would with any unbeliever.

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5. What things might necessitate discipline today? How serious must an offence be in order to begin the process?

Any sin against me specifically or in general that adversely affects my relationship with my brother ought to be handled by this process.

Ultimately the thing that constitutes the continuance of the steps is not the severity of the initial sin, but the fact that it has been made clear by the facts and witnesses that sin has occurred and there is no repentance on the part of the one who has committed the sin, and the public testimony of the body is being adversely affected.