

Take It Home

Applying the Preached Word



Church Discipline: Redemptive Care for God's People

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Andy Farmer

Text: Matthew 18:12-22

Main Point

Restorative (Church) discipline is an activity of God correcting his people's thoughts, words, and behavior so they can grow in godliness and spiritual fruitfulness.

Key Ideas

Seven Questions Matthew 18:12-22 addresses:

1. When does Church discipline start?

"In truth, real church discipline starts with BAPTISM. Baptism is the commitment of a person to walk as a disciple in the church, and a commitment of the church to welcome someone into the fellowship of disciples and help them walk as disciples."

2. What happens when someone who says they are a disciple starts living contrary to God's word?

"Sin manifesting in this way indicates someone is trapped and deceived and heading down a path of destruction. At stake is their own soul. At stake is the health of the church. At stake is the witness of the Gospel. So what do we do? We move forward - we go to them, not as judges but as compassionate brothers and sisters."

3. But what if he doesn't listen?

"If listening isn't happening witnesses - usually trusted friends - help make sure that our brother hears the call of God AND the heart of God and that we don't become part of his problem."

4. What if someone doesn't repent and follow Christ through our appeals?

"What is being held out by Jesus is a merciful process of appeal that takes place over time. Sometimes the hearing will come after the confrontation. Sometimes we need to allow time for the Spirit to work. Sometimes there may be many small conversations. But the result of this appeal process should be that a person has a clear understanding of what obedience to Christ looks like, and they are put in a position to choose whether they want to follow Christ or pursue sin."

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5. What happens if a person rejects the appeal of the church?

“In short, the most loving words Jesus said to pagans and tax collectors – the most loving words we can ever say to someone who has chosen to live in willful disobedience to God are these: Repent, and believe.”

6. What about all this binding and loosing stuff?

“The binding and loosening language speaks to the delegated authority of the church to define who is a disciple and who isn’t. Not just about church membership, but about standing in or out of the kingdom community. Jesus is commanding his church in this text and then he says ‘What you say I will back.’ It is the church who determines who is the focus of fellowship and who is the focus of evangelism. And the church does this in the authority of the King.”

7. What happens if a person repents after they have been removed from the church?

“Preach on the awesome forgiveness of God. The God who seeks the wandering sheep doesn’t scold it in the wilderness, shame it with a scarlet letter, make it earn its way back to the flock. There is no more profound testimony to the grace of God than the wandering sheep, the prodigal son, restored and making an impact for the Kingdom of God.”

Fellowship Starters

Treasure - Application to stir our love for Christ

1. Why is church discipline important in the body of Christ?
2. What are some ways can we demonstrate the love of God toward someone caught in their sin? (Be creative in your answers and consider what you can practically do to help and serve another person caught in their sin rather than simply what you can say.)
3. What are some of the lies that the enemy and our flesh whisper to us when we are caught in our sin, tempting us to justify our unrighteous behavior as righteous?

Grow - Application to stir our obedience to Christ

3. How can a study of Church discipline and active practice of church discipline stir our obedience toward Christ?
4. What most stirred you to think about your own life from Andy’s message?

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5. How has the process of restorative discipline helped you grow in your Christian life? (Remember, any time a person has brought a correction to you they have engaged in the restorative process of church discipline in your life.)

Proclaim - Application to stir our witness for Christ

6. How can the practice of restorative church discipline preserve and promote the gospel?