

Should we Disfellowship?¹

Introduction:

1. Marian and the Elders: Accused of fornication, a woman hales her church into court (Time Magazine, 1984)
 - a. “People lined up 45 minutes early each day to get a seat. Spillover spectators stood along the walls or perched on windowsills. A law student from California had come to Tulsa for the event; one man had driven down from Washington State. Most of the nearly 200 people in the audience, however were Oklahoma churchgoers, some of whom clutched Bibles to check out passages on sex and sin referred to by the speakers.”
 - b. “As the elders testified, Churches of Christ seek to apply literally every word of the New Testament. In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus Christ lays out the procedure for dealing with the wrongdoer. The final step: ‘If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.’ The churches interpret this as requiring the kind of treatment that was meted out to Guinn. The Tulsa jury chose a different interpretation: It sided with Guinn, and the court awarded her \$390,000, more than the Collinsville congregation’s entire proceeds for six years. ‘A wrong was made right,’ said a pleased Guinn.”
 - c. The church was dragged in front of the entire national media, even Phil Donahue decided to get involved. Every time the elder was asked a question he would begin his response with, “The Bible says...”
 - d. In 1989 the case was appealed and it reached the Oklahoma Supreme Court. It reached this conclusion: “In an action for damages from invasion of privacy and intentional emotional distress, brought by a former parishioner against the congregation and its leadership, judgment was rendered on a jury verdict for the plaintiff. On appeal by the defendants, JUDGEMENT IS REVERSED AND CAUSE REMANDED.” Continues, “The Elders carried out the biblically-mandated disciplinary procedure in three stages, with the entire process lasting more than a year.” In reference to the church the Oklahoma Supreme Court wrote: “The Church of Christ follows a literal interpretation of the Bible which serves as the church’s sole source of moral, religious and ethical guidance.”
2. The court was saying that the Church of Christ uses only the Bible as their source of authority, no creed book and no synod. The Supreme Court recognized that the church had a responsibility to the guidebook.
3. There is something that I have seen in the Lord’s church that is sinful and is wrong. For many years many churches have refused to see church discipline as a biblical mandate.
 - a. What does the Bible say about church discipline?
 - b. 2 Thessalonians 3:6

¹ Sermon material taken from Kyle Butt

- I. Church disciplined is commanded in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 3)
 - A. Verse 6a: "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ..."
 1. There are some things that are optional in the Lord's church.
 - a. Wearing a suit and tie
 - b. Sunday evening worship
 - c. Wednesday night worship
 - d. Gospel meetings
 - e. Chairs, pews, building, etc...
 2. But when you read the phrase, "...we command you..." everything after it is not optional.
 - a. Whatever the apostle is about to say is not optional, it is commanded.
 - b. There is no passage in the Bible that commands, directly, the partaking of the Lord's Supper. Acts 20:7 is a good example but not a command. We understand that through apostolic example the church is to partake every first day of the week. But, there is no emphatic command as in 2 Thessalonians 3:6.
 - c. There is no emphatic command in the New Testament that we have to use unleavened bread for the Lord's Supper. Matthew 26 and 1 Corinthians 11 are binding examples that the Lord and then Paul used unleavened bread, but there is not phrase that is as strong as Paul's in 2 Thessalonians 3.
 - B. Verse 6b: "...that you keep away (withdraw from [KJV]) every brother who leads and unruly life and not according to the tradition you received from us."
 1. One can sit in almost any Church of Christ in any part of the world and partake of the Lord's Supper almost identical to the manner that was done in the first century: Same implements and same procedure.
 2. You can visit the same churches and listen a preacher preach about baptism and how water baptism is necessary for the forgiveness of sins and that without it one cannot be saved. (ACTS 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21). This is exactly what the first century church was doing.
 3. You can worship with those same churches and join them as they praise God in an acapella fashion, just as the Bible teaches (Ephesians 5:19).
 4. But those same churches that do all of these things just as the Bible teaches: sing, pray, give, preach and partake of the Lord's Supper, just as the first century churches, but not ever witness a disfellowship.
 5. When was the last time we practiced disfellowship?
 - a. Is it because everyone is a faithful Christian.
 - b. Is it because our fellowship is so strong that there is no need for church discipline?
 - c. It is because churches in the 21st century have decided that church discipline is something we just don't do and don't need anymore. Albeit, some have never been taught. Others have been scared away like with Ms. Guinn.

- C. How many commandments of God can we ignore and refuse to implement?
1. James 2:1-4, 9-11; “My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with *an attitude of* personal favoritism. **2** For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, **3** and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, “You sit here in a good place,” and you say to the poor man, “You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,” **4** have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?” If, however, you are fulfilling the [i]royal law according to the Scripture, “ You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. **9** But if you show partiality, you are committing sin *and* are convicted by the law as transgressors. **10** For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all. **11** For He who said, “ Do not commit adultery,” also said, “ Do not commit murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.
 2. Verse 10 teaches that we are required to follow all the commandments of God.
 3. We know that if we, as individuals, obey most of the commandments that we are failing and keeping the entire law.

D. How many commands can a church refuse to obey?

1. How many Christians have been on vacation and entered a building with the name Church of Christ on it and seen a piano in the auditorium and walked out?
2. How many Christians have visited a church and seen that they sing acapella, partake of the Lord’s Supper, preach the Gospel and teach the plan of salvation, and then begin to smell the aroma of a Sunday dinner cooking in the basement and wondered, “Who would have thought that this was a liberal church?”

E. Is church discipline a biblically mandated procedure?

1. 2 Thessalonians 3:6.
2. Yes, it is!
3. If we are going to obey the commandments of the Lord and be the church that God wants us to be, then church discipline is something that has to be done and it should be done properly.

II. Paul’s admonishment to the Corinthians:

A. 1 Cor. 5:1-4: The setting and the judgment -

1. Verse 1: Sexual immorality that was not even heard of in the gentile community. It was a so well known fact that people hundreds of miles away knew about it.
2. Verse 2: The Corinthians were puffed up. What does this mean?
 - a. Paul had already talked about the church being arrogant (1-4). They had been blessed with all of the gifts (1:4-11).
 - b. It seems like this church had become arrogant and bragged about how blessed they were, how strong they were and how much love they had

(1 Cor. 13), that they would never hurt the sinner's feelings by removing them from the fellowship. They probably thought that they would never do anything so unloving as disfellowship.

- c. Do we use the same idea today? Do we refuse to even talk about it because it is such a harsh thing to do to a brother or sister.
 1. Do we have the attitude that if we disfellowship someone we will be unloving?
 2. It is so cruel and mean spirited to disfellowship; we love them too much.
 3. This attitude is a lie and there is no love when discipline is not practiced. If we love to the degree that God loves we would disfellowship those who walk in an unruly manner.
 4. A church that refuses to practice church discipline is all but loving, it is unloving.
 - a. In parenting this can be seen: Proverbs 13:24; "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly."
 - b. If we as a church do not discipline wayward members we do not love them! **It is never true that a loving church disobeys a command of God.**
3. Verse 3: Paul had already judged this person.
 - a. Matthew 7:1; "Judge not, lest you be judged."
 1. Misused passage.
 2. The context of the passage teaches that the judgment that you use will be used against you. He is talking about being a hypocrite. He never said don't ever judge, but get your life straight before you judge someone else.
 - b. John 7:24; "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."
 1. As a Christian we have the responsibility to judge with righteous judgement.
 2. John 12:48; "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him-the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day."
 - a. Righteous judgement is taking the words that are recorded in the Bible and applying them to our lives and the lives of others.
 - b. This is how we determine if something is right (righteous) or wrong (unrighteous); and we have the right to point it out.
 4. Verse 4: Paul uses the name of Jesus Christ twice to show us that it is Jesus Christ who was responsible for church discipline, and yet it was Paul who had already judged this wayward brother.
- B. 1 Corinthians 5:5-7: The two reasons for church discipline:
 1. Verse 5: That the spirit of the wayward Christian may be saved!
 - a. Many brethren have argued with Paul on this point and said that disfellowshipping an unruly Christian will not help them at all.

1. That they will just go to another church...
 2. That they have already broken fellowship with us to begin with...
 3. That we will just run them away if we do practice church discipline...
 4. Gene Warman used to say (paraphrasing): "Where are we going to send them? Hell number 2?"
 5. When did God ever give us the prerogative to decide if one of His commandments was going to do any good or not?
- b. God has never asked us for our opinion when it comes to His commandments. He knows better (Father knows best!). Who do you think you are to declare a commandment of God as insufficient, deficient and subject to our opinion. Read the O.T. and see how many times people decided that their way was better than what God had commanded: Cain, Nadab, Abihu, Samuel...
 - c. God loves the unfaithful Christian more than you and I do combined.
 - d. Some have argued that they have seen church discipline before and that it never worked.
 1. If they mean that it has not brought back a wayward Christian then maybe. In this respect it won't always work but there is a second reason for church discipline.
 2. Let me assure you that it does work, albeit not all the time but it does work.
 - a. Do heart surgeons have 100% success rate? No! But what if after they fail several times they just give up heart surgery all together?
 - b. Cancer treatment?
 - e. Who knows the best way to bring back a wayward Christian, you or God? Who wants them to come back more, you or God? This is most effective way of getting them back.
 2. Verse 6: To prevent the rest of the church from practicing the same sin!
 - a. One of the reasons of practicing church discipline is to prevent others from practicing the other sin.
 - b. As an example: adulterous relationships.
- III. What is the problem with us, the church in not practicing church discipline?
- A. Arrogance?
 - B. Do we know better than God?
 - C. Is our way more effective?
 - D. Do we love our brethren enough, like God loves them, to do what is difficult in the best attempt to save them from hell?

Conclusion:

1. Paul encourages us to practice what God has commanded.
2. We have a responsibility to God, the wayward sinner and the entire church.
3. Plan of Salvation
 - a. GOD'S PART
 1. The great love of God for man (John 3:16)

2. He gave His Son, Jesus Christ, as the Savior (Luke 19:10)
 3. Sent the Holy Spirit as a guide (John 16:13)
 4. Gave the Gospel as "the power" unto salvation (Romans 1:16)
 5. Provided atonement by the blood of Christ (Romans 5:9)
- b. MAN'S PART
1. Hear the Gospel. (Romans 10:17, John 8:32)
 2. Believe the Gospel (Hebrews 11:6, John 20:31)
 3. Repent of past sins (Luke 13:3, Acts 17:30)
 4. Confess faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 10:10, Matthew 10:32)
 5. Be Baptized (Galatians 3:27, Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38)
 6. Be faithful unto death (Revelation 2:10)