

2. Congregational Discipline: To Love Is To Discipline

The New Testament is very clear: local churches are to discipline erring members. To fail to do so would place the congregation in violation of the direct teaching of God's word. However, beyond the sin of this violation, the congregation that ignores the erring member shows a lack of love for that member. Of the Lord's love of us, we are told in Heb 12:4-11:

4 In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 5 And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons:

"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline,
and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,
6 because the Lord disciplines those he loves,
and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? 8 If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. 9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! 10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. 11 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. NIV

The Foundation of Discipline

This scripture describes the foundation of good discipline. This passage includes the discipline of God to his children and the discipline of earthly fathers to their children. The insights here apply equally to the church members who are disciplining unfaithful and erring members:

- We should never regard the discipline of the Lord lightly.
- We should not faint (pull back when we are reproved). How often it is that a disciplined child sulks and pouts when disciplined, even when the child is wrong.
- God deals with us as sons; true and good fathers discipline their children.
- If God did not discipline us, we would be as illegitimate children for whom He did not care.
- Children respect earthly fathers who discipline them; therefore, we should accept the discipline of God, our heavenly Father, and live.
- God disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.
- Discipline seems sorrowful at first, but afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

Rejecting Discipline

As the congregation takes action in order to discipline the divisive, disorderly, or immoral

member, we should expect that this member might regard it lightly, discounting and discrediting our efforts. The member might, as a spoiled child, pout and blame others for the circumstances, choosing to ignore the sin that has entangled this member. On the other hand, the member might regard it lightly and respond to the church in a ridiculing and haughty manner. All of this is an effort to discredit the congregation's exercise of discipline. The congregation must remain strong and know that it is a loving church when it disciplines, and unloving when it does not. The loving Lord, the loving earthly father, and the loving congregation have this in common: when they love, they discipline.

Accepting Discipline

Most often the erring member knows and accepts this. On many occasions the erring members are waiting for the church to take action and help them stop their erring ways. One member who had engaged in sexual immorality, and eventually left his wife and two young adopted children, said to the elders of his home congregation: "What took you so long?" Another man in another congregation who had developed sinful relationships with other men and left his family, said, when the elders called him in for a conference: "I thought I would have had a letter by now." Both these members understood their error and understood what the congregation should be doing to discipline them.

Conclusion: To Love Is to Discipline

To love is to discipline. We must make every effort to snatch the erring member from the devil. "Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." 1 Peter 5:8.