

## **Purpose of the Church: Membership Discipline**

### **02-19-17 AM**

One of the important works that the church that Jesus built is charged with accomplishing is the work of the discipline of the members. In Matthew 18:15-18, Jesus introduced the idea of the work of the church in discipline. In that passage Jesus revealed a plan that is placed in effect when a brother sins against another brother. It is a brilliant plan, as it offers opportunity to repair miscommunications, it offers opportunity for a lack of vision to be corrected, and it identifies one whose heart is not right. To be clear, this is not a pattern for every act of discipline in the church (consider 1 Timothy 5:20, Galatians 2:14, 1 Corinthians 5:4-5 and their relationship to public sin and the sins of church workers). However, it leads into our understand of the principles of church discipline.

What is “church discipline”? Too often the thoughts that come to us revolve around ideas of putting out members who are unfaithful. This is a small part of it, but misses the largest part of the work. To understand the discipline of members of a local congregation we need to understand how we are all working together for a common purpose. Let us consider Paul’s description in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 of the Christian race.

Christianity is a race with rules. It is a team sport, and we run together as a team. When one of our team members lags behind, it is the work of the church to encourage that member (Galatians 6:2, 2 Corinthians 2:5-8). It is the work of the entire team to encourage and admonish each other (1 Corinthians 5:1-5, Philippians 4:2). Fundamentally, our goal is to ensure other racers are not disqualified, (even if that means expelling them from the team) (2 Corinthians 2:5-8, Galatians 6:1-2, 1 Timothy 1:20, Jude 23). But we also understand that undisciplined and disqualified racers pose a danger to the team (Acts 20:29-31, 1 Corinthians 5:6, 2 Peter 2, Jude). We are told that those racers who refuse to be disciplined must be expelled from the team (Romans 16:16, 1 Corinthians 5:4, 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 1 Timothy 6:4-5, Titus 3:9-10, 2 John 9) and that we cannot keep company with them once expelled.

But above all, it is our personal discipline that matters the most. Paul’s race language was to tell the Corinthians that each one of us is ultimately responsible for ourselves (Galatians 6:4). It is our duty to make sure we practice self-control (2 Peter 1:5-6). We must ensure (meaning it is an absolute necessity) that we have prepared ourselves both to give (to admonish one another) and to receive (to have the right heart to receive) the admonitions of our brethren. If we are prepared to admonish, then we have examined ourselves for flaws (Matthew 7:1-5). If we are prepared to receive, then we have humbled ourselves and are prepared to be corrected (Matthew 19:20-22).

Discipline is the glue of the church. It is our most valuable gift in the church, as it ensure we will all cross the finish line. Discipline begins with ourselves.