

Matt 18:15-17

15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

KJV

One of the most neglected practices in the church today is church discipline. Many would argue that it is neglected because of the low standards of the church.

But one of the main reasons that Pastors neglect this practice is that it is so distasteful. It is distasteful to personally confront someone you love and bring to their attention a fault you believe they may have committed. It is distasteful because you may not be sure they are guilty. It is distasteful because you know you are not perfect and you may be guilty of the same sin. It is distasteful because you fear how they may react.

It is even more distasteful when you know that your brother is guilty and they will not repent. It is distasteful to have to go to them with another witness to their sin. Everything is magnified when you have to discuss your brother's sins with another witness to their sin. There is something terribly wrong with you if you enjoy discussing your brother's sins with others.

It is even more distasteful when leaders have to tell the church about your brother's sins. It is more distasteful because you are even bringing more shame to your brother and your brother's family. It is more distasteful because you have to deal with fear whether or not the members of the church will believe you are doing the right thing. It is more distasteful because you know that you are subjecting yourself and your family to the inspection and the criticism of others. A Pastor's family lives in a fish bowl. The nature of the job is that it causes the members of a church to constantly inspect your life and the lives of those in your family. For a Pastor, church discipline puts you and your family under the microscope. It magnifies an already difficult situation.

The first time I remember personally correcting a church member was over 20 years ago. I was 30 years old. One of our members was creating contention in our church by being critical of me for certain decisions that I had made for our church. The main problem was that they were not having their discussions with me. On another occasion one of our staff members made a series of inappropriate comments to others about our members. On another occasion one of our staff members refused to attend a regular prayer meeting that I required all

of our staff to attend. On another occasion one of our leaders began to neglect their commitment to a responsibility that they had accepted. I can remember four times in 25 years that our church took all three steps of correction in Matthew 18. Each time it has been very difficult and distasteful.

In each one of these situations, because of discipline, there was a measure of confusion, contention, and division. Because of discipline, people have left the church. Our church has suffered. My family has suffered. Discipline causes the church to suffer.

Is it worth it? It is so distasteful. Who wants to cause others to suffer shame and embarrassment? Who wants to cause the church to suffer? I do not enjoy it. It is the one role of a Pastor that I find to be the most difficult, the least appealing, and the most challenging. Before you are hard on Pastors and churches that do not practice church discipline, please identify with how distasteful it is and what it cost those who are leaders. Have you heard it said about leadership, "It is lonely at the top!" This is true.

It is a lot easier to believe that you are doing something right as a Pastor when the church is at peace and is growing than it is when you are causing contention, confusion, and division because of church discipline and people are leaving.

But to be a man of God, you must follow God's ways when there is a need for correction. You cannot judge if you have done the right thing by the fact that discipline causes confusion or contention or division and that people leave the church. As a Pastor who is responsible for correction, you must follow God's Word do what the scripture says to do. You must die to the fear of man or the fear of what will happen to your salary and follow God.

When there is a need for discipline, it is much easier on the church when most of the church agrees there is a need for it.

1 Tim 5:24-25

24 Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after.

Some sins are easily seen. A man has an affair and divorces his wife. A man or a woman openly declares that he or she intends to live an immoral lifestyle. Their sins are very public and go before them. These situations are still very distasteful and difficult on a church but it is easier when most of the church agrees there is a need for correction.

At other times, the need for discipline is not easily seen.

1 Tim 5:24-25

24 Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; **and some men they follow after.**

25 Likewise also the good works of some are manifest beforehand; and they that are otherwise cannot be hid.

KJV

Some sins follow men. They are not open beforehand or easily seen.

Sins are like good works.

1 Tim 5:24-25

24 Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after.

25 Likewise also the good works of some are manifest beforehand; and they that are otherwise cannot be hid.

KJV

A Pastors good works may be more easily seen. The deacon's good works are not as easily seen and can be completely hidden because of the nature of the good work. The same is true with sin.

When men's sins are hidden, discipline is even more distasteful and difficult because many members of the church do not see the need for correction like they do when a man's sins are open beforehand. It magnifies your fear and concern that people will not understand or agree. The confusion, contention, and division are magnified.

It is even more difficult and distasteful to discipline when the man who is guilty is a popular leader in the church whose family is love and admired. Discipline can create even more confusion, contention, and division in the church.

This is one reason why the scriptures says an elder who is charged with a sin by two or more witnesses and found to be guilty should always be rebuked publicly, even if he has repented for what he has done.

1 Tim 5:19-22

19 Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.

20 Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.

21 I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.

22 Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure.

KJV

The elder is judged by a higher standard when there are two or more witnesses making an accusation.

A witness is one who has either been personally injured by your sin or one who has personally witnessed you injuring another. A witness is not someone who had heard rumors or is basing their charge on speculation.

While a member can repent of sin without the church having knowledge of their sin, an elder cannot if there are two more witnesses.

The first reason for this higher standard is self-evident. When an elder is charged with sin by two or more witnesses his reputation has been severely damaged. To be a leader, people in the church and in the community have to have confidence in you. That confidence is dependent upon your reputation in the church and in the community.

1 Tim 3:7

7 Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

KJV

To have a good name when you have been charged with a sin by two or more witnesses, if you are guilty, you have to be rebuked in the publicly and receive that rebuke with a humble heart. When an elder is found to be guilty under these circumstances, his sins should never be covered. His sins should always be made open to the church even if he repents. Following this principle protects his reputation and helps put down confusion, contention, and division in the church.

A second reason for this higher standard is found in this verse. It says that all may fear.

1 Tim 5:19-22

19 Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.

20 Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.

The public rebuke establishes a Holy standard for all in the church to accept and pursue.

The scripture says that we must observe this without preferring one another.

1 Tim 5:19-22

19 Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.

20 Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.

21 I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.

22 Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure.

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To do so is to be a partaker of other men's sins.

1 Tim 5:19-22

19 Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.

20 Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.

21 I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.

22 Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure.

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If an elder is found to be innocent when a charge is made by two or more witnesses, his name needs to be publicly cleared by others who have been appointed to investigate the charge.

But let me say this.

When there are two or more witnesses to the same sin in your life, those who are investigating the charges must have extraordinary evidence to prove your innocence.

An elder must first be blameless.

1 Tim 3:2

2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;

KJV

Blameless does not mean perfect. Who then could be an elder? Blameless means that no one can say that you have sinned against them and you have not done what is required by scripture to make it right.

When there are two or more witnesses charging you with the same sin, it would be extraordinary if you were not guilty to what you have been charged. We are talking about people who have been personally injured by your conduct or who are eyewitnesses to the injury that you have caused.

An elder is one who is humble. He cannot be a novice lest he be lifted up with pride.

1 Tim 3:6

6 Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.

KJV

When a man is a novice and is proud he will find fault with the witnesses rather than humble himself and repent of his evil conduct.

When a command like church discipline is so distasteful and so difficult to follow, isn't it pride that makes the command so difficult to follow?

I wish I could end this message on a high note by telling you how God will bless our church with great growth if we will follow the scripture and be true to the Apostle's doctrine. I cannot make such a promise.

I can tell you that a little leaven leavens the whole lump and that our church will be without that leaven if we will follow the scripture. I can tell you that when the dust settles and we get through the darkness there will be light. The greatest darkness is always just before the dawn. I can tell you that there will be greater love, peace, unity, and joy among us if we will follow the scripture. I can tell you that there will be more answers to prayer when we unite in prayer.

Let's humble ourselves and follow the scripture and trust God for the results.