

Covenant Life Together #11 and #12  
“The Guardrails of Church Discipline, Part 1 and 2” (paragraph 4)  
GCC, 2/10/19 and 2/17/19 Vesper services

## Introduction

- A. Two Reasons for Talking about Church Discipline
  - B. Is any church which professes to be a church a true Church?
  - C. Do we have enough biblical revelation to discern a true church from a false church? (Rev 2:9; 3:9)
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- I. Three marks of a true church
    - A. The true church is the church that practices a:
      - 1. Pure Preaching of the Gospel
      - 2. Pure Administration of the Sacraments
      - 3. Exercise of Church Discipline
    - B. Church Discipline is Impossible without Church Membership
      - 1. Church membership and church discipline are two sides of the same coin
        - a. Working definition of church membership  
*Church membership is the believer’s commitment to walk faithfully with God, to identify with a local body of believers where s/he will lovingly fulfill the one another commandments of scripture, submit to the judgments of the leadership and congregation, financially support the ministries of the church willingly, cheerfully and lovingly, and be a faithful witness to the world according to the scriptures.*
        - b. Working definition of church discipline  
*Church discipline is the public act of exercising the keys of the kingdom by putting out of the assembly and the kingdom of God, a person who claims to be a Christian but destroys his/her testimony by their ongoing, unrepentant lifestyle of sin. This judgment is by the whole church, assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, with the power of Christ’s keys (2 Cor 5:4; Matt 18:15–20; Matt 16:19; Jn 20:23).*
      - 2. You can’t put somebody *out* of the church unless they are first *in* the church
        - 1. Paul recognized that there are *insiders* and *outsiders* (1 Cor 5:11–13)
- II. Why do so many churches have an aversion to church discipline?
  - A. Understanding the times
    - 1. Antiquity: What has God said?
    - 2. Enlightenment/Modernism: Has God said?
    - 3. Postmodernism: Who cares?
  - B. The Perfect Storm
    - Three factors in our modern era have converged to cause the perfect storm which wreaks havoc on the church’s acceptance of Church discipline
    - 1. Postmodernism
    - 2. Pragmatism--Church-growth/seeker sensitive/Evangelical ‘essentialism’

3. Cultural Baggage Regarding Love
  - A. Individualism
  - B. Consumerism
  - C. Commitment Phobia
  - D. Skepticism
  - E. Is God's love for humanity conditional?

### III. The Foundation of Church Discipline

- A. The Keys of the Kingdom
  1. Given to Peter (Matt 16:19)
  2. For all the apostles (Jn 20:23)
- B. Opening the Kingdom of God (church membership)  
*How do we exercise the keys in opening the kingdom of God?*
  1. By preaching the gospel
  2. By receiving someone into the membership of the church
- C. Closing the Kingdom of God (church discipline)
  1. Excommunication is the judgment of the church, with the authority of Jesus, that a person is an unbeliever
  2. May a person who is excommunicated still attend our worship services?
  3. Excommunication Vs. Church Censure
    1. Excommunication—They can't partake because they have been judged by the church to be an unbeliever.
    2. Censure—They need to abstain for a time until they repent (2 Thess 3:14–15; WCF 30.3, 4)
- D. The Keys of the Kingdom are the penultimate word
  1. Avoid Two Extremes
    - a. The Church can't know if someone is truly elect, so church discipline means nothing and someone can easily disregard any judgments the church makes
    - b. The Church's judgment is infallible

### IV. The Process of Church Discipline

- A. Matt 18:15–20
- B. Fleshing out the Details from the Discipline Rubric
  1. What is an offense?
  2. The Goal is Restoration, Not Excommunication (Gal 6:1)
  3. Four steps
    - a. One-on-one (v. 15)
    - b. Two to three witnesses (v. 16)
    - c. Tell it to the church (v. 17a)
    - d. If he refuses, excommunicate him (v. 17b; cf. 1 Cor 5; 2 Cor 2:6–8)
  4. These instructions are a general rubric and not to be taken so woodenly that you tick off all four steps in one day.
  5. We are looking for fruit in keeping with repentance in the offender and in some cases, that takes time (Rev 2:21)
  6. The Focus is Upon the Heart (Jas 1:21–25)

- V. An Example of Church Discipline (1 Cor 5)
  - A. I Cor 5
  - B. A Real-Time Application of the foundation, process, and power of the keys of the kingdom (Matt 18:15–20; Matt 16:19; Jn 20:23)
    - 1. The assumption here is that either this man was unrepentant, or that he claimed to repent but did not bear fruit in keeping with repentance.
    - 2. Paul couldn't *unilaterally* excommunicate this man himself, even as an apostle. Rather, the church, as an assembled body, had to do it.
    - 3. Notice the things that are present in excommunicating this man:
      - a. When you are assembled (v. 4a; cf. Matt 18:17)
      - b. In the name of the Lord Jesus (v. 4b; cf. Matt 18:19–20)
      - c. With the power of our Lord Jesus (v. 4c; cf. Matt 16:19)
  - C. A Biblical Definition of Love Drives Church Discipline
    - 1. God's love is conditional on repentance and faith (Jn 3:16)
    - 2. Excommunication is the most loving thing you can do for the unbeliever (1 Cor 5:5)
    - 3. A love for the reputation of the church and of Christ will excommunicate one who gives the impression to the world that devotion to Christ and his church is not important.
    - 4. A love for the health of the church will excommunicate anyone whose sin will promote and extend ungodliness throughout the church (2 Tim 2:16–19)

Conclusion (Heb 12:1–3)