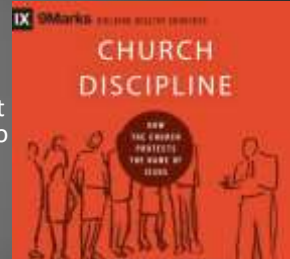


Church Discipline

- Definition: church discipline may be defined as a proleptic and declarative sign of the divine eschatological judgment meted out by Jesus Christ through the church against its sinful members and sinful situations.
 - As a proleptic sign, church discipline expresses in part and in the present age the eschatological judgment to take place in full and in the age to come.
 - As a declarative sign, such discipline is the church's pronouncement of judgment against its sinful members and sinful situations that is intended to reflect the divine judgment.
 - When the church in accordance with the Word of God exercises discipline, it comes with divine sanction; but the church, still a sinful assembly in the midst of sinful reality, may not get its discipline right.
 - In anticipation of that verdict, the church exercises discipline against its sinful members and sinful situations



Church Discipline

- Thus, church discipline is the future judgment of Christ meted out to the church in the present in sinful situations.
 - The Lord is the one exercising this judgment through us (Matt 18:15-20).
- Biblical warrant for this notion of church discipline.
 - Church discipline is carried out in relationship to the eschatological judgment of Christ
 - Proof is found in Paul's demand that the Corinthian church take action against one of its sinful members (1 Cor 5:1-13).
 - The excommunication for which the apostle calls is to be carried out by the church with this purpose or goal: "so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord" (v. 5).
 - This member's situation was so dire that, should he persist in his sin, a dreadful future awaited him on the day of judgment; should church discipline succeed, however, and he repent of his sin, the eschatological verdict would be favorable for him.
 - Thus, church discipline is exercised in the present yet is done in relationship to the divine eschatological judgment.



Church Discipline

- 1 Cor 5:1-13: It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and the kind of sexual immorality that is not even tolerated among the Gentiles—a man is sleeping with his father's wife. ² And you are arrogant! Shouldn't you be filled with grief and remove from your congregation the one who did this? ³ Even though I am absent in the body, I am present in spirit. As one who is present with you in this way, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who has been doing such a thing. ⁴ When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus, and I am with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ hand that one over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. ⁶ Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little leaven^{of} leavens the whole batch of dough? ⁷ Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new unleavened batch, as indeed you are. For Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. ⁸ Therefore, let us observe the feast, not with old leaven or with the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. ⁹ I wrote to you in a letter not to associate with sexually immoral people. ¹⁰ I did not mean the immoral people of this world or the greedy and swindlers or idolaters; otherwise you would have to leave the world. ¹¹ But actually, I wrote you not to associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister and is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or verbally abusive, a drunkard or a swindler. Do not even eat with such a person. ¹² For what business is it of mine to judge outsiders? Don't you judge those who are inside? ¹³ God judges outsiders. **Remove the evil person from among you.**

Church Discipline

- Further proof of church discipline being carried out in relationship to the eschatological judgment of Christ is found in Jesus' instructions in Matt 18:15-20.
 - "If your brother sins against you, go and rebuke him in private. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶ But if he won't listen, take one or two others with you, so that by the testimony of two or three witnesses every fact may be established. ¹⁷ If he doesn't pay attention to them, tell the church. If he doesn't pay attention even to the church, let him be like a Gentile and a tax collector to you. ¹⁸ Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again, truly I tell you, if two of you on earth agree about any matter that you pray for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them."



Church Discipline

- Matt 18:15-20:
 - At the last stage of the disciplinary process, when the church excommunicates an unrepentant member, that action of “binding” the member in sin and under discipline has already occurred in heaven; thus, the church’s verdict confirms a preceding divine denunciation.
 - In the opposite case, when the sinful member repents, the church’s action of “loosing” or forgiving that member has already occurred in heaven; again, the church’s verdict confirms a preceding divine absolution
 - The implication of Jesus’ instructions is that, in the case of unrepentance, divine disapproval, as reflected in the church’s excommunication of the unrepentant member, awaits that member in the eschatological judgment.
 - In the case of repentance, however, divine censure has been removed and divine favor, as reflected in the church’s pronouncement of forgiveness of the repentant member, awaits that member in the eschatological judgment.



Church Discipline

- Church discipline is a judicial matter.
 - Proof can be seen in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; Paul describes a somber courtroom scene in which the church’s discipline of its erring member is to take place.
 - Paul, as the apostolic authority who has properly rendered judgment against the sinful member, promises to be present in spirit (vv. 3, 4).
 - The Corinthians are to be “assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus” (v. 4); that this convocation is to meet in the name of the Lord underscores the seriousness of what is to transpire in the meeting
 - The proviso “with the power of the Lord Jesus” (v. 4) adds further weightiness to the proceeding: the church’s exercise of discipline is a serious judicial matter.



Church Discipline

- Proof of it being a serious judicial matter could also be seen in Jesus' teaching in Matthew 18:15-20, specifically in two areas.
 - First, the requirement in the second stage of the process for witnesses to provide evidence for the charge against an unrepentant member (v. 16).
 - Second, Jesus' promise of the divine approbation of the disciplinary action "if two of you agree on earth about anything" (v. 19)—literally, "about any judicial matter."
 - In both passages, the judicial atmosphere in which church discipline is carried out can be readily seen as anticipating the somberness of the eschatological judgment.



Church Discipline

- Church discipline as a proleptic and declarative sign and not an infallible judgment.
- While the church possesses authority to exercise discipline, its authority is nonetheless and always a delegated authority: it comes from Christ to his church.
 - Only Christ's judgment is perfect and true; only his eschatological judgment will be definitive.
 - Because the church in this present age is still a sinful assembly in the midst of sinful reality, it may not get its discipline right: as it exercises discipline, the church makes a declaration, not a definitive pronouncement.



Church Discipline (Matt 18)

- Let's look a little closer at the two key texts.
- Matt 18:15-20.
 - The event that sets the process of church discipline into motion is the sin of a Christian against another Christian
 - First step in the disciplinary process: a personal, private conversation between the two parties, the offended person expressing verbally the offending person's fault (v. 15)
 - The ideal scenario is that the person repents and asks for forgiveness. That ends the process.
 - The other possible outcome is that the offending party does not give heed to the exposé of the offended person.
 - This event (non-repentance) prompts the second step in the disciplinary process (practical to involve 1 or 2 elders at this point as witnesses).
 - The primary purpose of the other witnesses: to establish the charge of the offended party against the offending party (v. 16)
 - At this point a second purpose for the other participants is introduced (v. 17). The group ensures and bears witness that the guilty person repented, or they bear witness that the person has not repented.

Church Discipline (Matt 18)

- Matt 18:15-20 continued.
 - The refusal of the offending Christian to listen to the two or three Christians prompts the third step in the disciplinary process
 - the members are made aware of the initial sin that provoked the desperate situation as well as the failure of the first two stages in the disciplinary process to produce the desired outcome
 - The ideal outcome is as the members admonish the offender to repent, and he repents. Then the process ends. But if there is refusal, then see below.
 - The refusal of the offending Christian to pay heed to the church prompts the fourth and final step in the disciplinary process (v. 17)
 - You are putting them outside of the church. You don't engage in business as usual, but you refuse to engage in normal lifestyle conversation with the excommunicated one.
- What this last part looks like is on next slide.



Church Discipline (Matt 18)

- Matt 18:15-20 continued.
- Practically speaking, this action entails removing the offending party from church membership (this includes removal from any and all involvement in church leadership and ministry), forbidding participation in the Lord's Supper, and cutting off all normal conversation and involvement with that person.
 - Historic Baptists demoted person from brother to mister.
- Binding and loosing: excommunication on the part of the church signals that the offending party is still bound in sin and under church discipline; but when confession and repentance prevail and the situation is righted, the church affirms forgiveness for the entrenched sin and release from church discipline; the matter is concluded.

