



## Ecclesiology: The Study of the Church

### Lesson 20: Church Discipline: Loving and Purposeful

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#### INTRODUCTION

1. What are reasons a church might give for not practicing church discipline? \_\_\_\_\_  
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Since church discipline is a neglected and challenging topic, we will begin with some basic teaching before jumping into the Bible passages specifically regarding church discipline.

#### Defining Discipline

Broadly speaking, discipline is everything the church does to help its members pursue holiness and fight sin. Preaching, teaching, prayer, reading and memorizing the Bible, corporate worship, accountability relationships, and godly oversight by pastors and elders are all forms of discipline that are used to prevent sin in the believer's life. Theologians often call this kind of discipline "formative discipline" because it forms our character to be more like Christ.

In a narrower sense, discipline is when we point out fellow church members' sin and encourage them to repent and pursue holiness by God's grace. Theologians often call this kind of discipline "corrective discipline." It means correcting fellow church members when they begin to veer from the path of following Christ. As we'll see in coming studies, Jesus commands the church not only to correct sin and pursue the sinner's repentance but also to exclude someone from the church if they continue to cling to their sin instead of clinging to Jesus.

#### MAIN IDEA

God disciplines us because He loves us. His purpose is to help His children grow in holiness and humble dependence on Him. In Section I we will see how discipline is loving. In Section II we will see how God calls all the members of a local church to build each other up in love so that the church will grow in holiness. That is, He calls all of us to practice formative discipline with one another: to encourage and instruct one another in living as Christians.

#### I. Church Discipline is Loving

Discipline involves correction, confrontation, and, if necessary, exclusion. When some people hear this, they throw up their hands and say, "I want nothing to do with that! That's the most unloving thing I've ever heard!" This study answers the question: Is discipline loving? In order to do that, we're going to consider a passage of Scripture that teaches us about how God disciplines us and why.

#### Hebrews 12:3–11

1. In verse 3, what does the author of Hebrews exhort us to do? For what purpose? \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. According to verses 5 and 6, whom does God discipline? What does this teach us about God's attitude toward those whom He disciplines? \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. Many people have had human fathers who disciplined them in anger, in selfishness, and in excess. What can we be certain about when it comes to God's discipline? \_\_\_\_\_  
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4. In verses 5 and 6, what does the "exhortation which is addressed to you as sons" (Prov. 3:11-12) tell us to do? Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
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5. What comparison do verses 7 through 11 draw? How does this help us to understand God's discipline? \_\_\_\_\_  
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6. What does verse 8 say about those who have not received God's discipline? How should this comfort us when we do receive God's discipline? \_\_\_\_\_  
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7. What is the proper response to parental discipline (v. 9)? \_\_\_\_\_  
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8. According to verse 10, our earthly fathers disciplined us for a \_\_\_\_\_ time as seemed \_\_\_\_\_ to them. But God disciplines us for our \_\_\_\_\_ so that we may share in His \_\_\_\_\_.
9. What does this comparison teach us about how we should respond to God's discipline? \_\_\_\_\_  
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10. According to verse 11, what does discipline feel like now? What does it bring about later? \_\_\_\_\_  
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11. As we considered at the outset of this study, some people consider the very idea of church discipline—drawing attention to others’ sin, calling for repentance, and so on—to be mean spirited and hateful. How would you respond to someone who held this view in light of what we’ve seen in this passage? \_\_\_\_\_  
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Looking back over the whole passage, we see that it teaches us several things about God’s discipline:

- The objects of God’s discipline are His children (vv. 5–8).
- The motive of God’s discipline is love (v. 6).
- The goal of God’s discipline is our holiness (v. 10).
- The present experience of God’s discipline is painful (v. 11).
- The long-term fruit of God’s discipline is a harvest of righteousness in our lives (v. 11).

## II. Church Discipline is Purposeful

There is a purpose in discipline. Discipline is necessary to help build one another up and form our character to be more like Christ. As we saw above, theologians call the corporate building up “formative discipline,” because it is the means by which church members help each other grow to maturity in Christ. In Colossians 3, the apostle Paul instructs us about how we are to do this.

### Colossians 3:12–17

1. What does Paul tell us to “put on” in verses 12 through 14? \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. What does it mean to “put on” a compassionate heart, or humility, or love? (Hint: For context, look back at what Paul has said to “put to death” and “put away” in verses 5 through 11.) \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. What are our motivations to “put on” all these things? How do these help us to do each of them (vv. 12–14)? \_\_\_\_\_  
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4. Why does Paul say that we are to put on love “beyond all these things”? What’s unique about love (v. 14)? \_\_\_\_\_  
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5. What do all of the specific actions Paul exhorts us to do in verses 12 through 16 have in common? What does this teach us about how we are to grow spiritually? \_\_\_\_\_  
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6. What are we to let rule in our hearts (v. 15)? Why? What effect will this have on our relationships in the local church? \_\_\_\_\_  
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7. What does Paul say we are to do with the word of Christ? What specific examples does he give of how we are to do this (v. 16)? \_\_\_\_\_  
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8. How does singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs help us grow to maturity in Christ? \_\_\_\_\_  
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9. How is it that singing is part of how we teach and admonish one another? In view of this, how should we approach our church’s times of corporate praise?<sup>1</sup> \_\_\_\_\_  
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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Bobby Jamieson, *Guarding One Another: Church Discipline*, ed. Mark Dever, 9Marks Healthy Church Study Guides (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 17–23.