

Fundamentals of Our Faith from the Beginning
Understanding the Church: The Purpose, Practice, and Product of Discipline
Matthew 18:12-20; Galatians 6:1-2

1. A proposition.

- a. Church discipline has largely been neglected.
 - i. By a failure to develop cultures of discipleship¹...
 - ii. By neglecting the practice of both formal and visible discipline.
- b. This neglect has led to an incorrigible and uncorrectable church culture (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:6).
 - i. Divorce rates and cohabitation.
 - ii. General immorality.
 - iii. Doctrinal impurity.
- c. This neglect has contributed to impotency both in terms of evangelism and broader cultural influence.
- d. This neglect is due to misunderstandings of both the purpose, practice, and produce of discipline (e.g. “shunning,” “unloving,” “punitive,” “harsh,” etc.).

2. Purposes of formal and visible church discipline.

- a. For loving restoration: Matthew 18:1-15f; Galatians 6:1
 - i. Not a “necessary negative”.
 - ii. An act of sacrificial love.

What about those “sheep” who won’t be restored?
- b. For the good of the church: Hebrews 12:4-11
 - i. The Lord disciplines us for our good.
 - ii. That we might share in His holiness.
 - iii. That we might yield the fruit of righteousness.
- c. For the fear of the church: Acts 5:1-11
 - i. Great fear came over the whole church.
 - ii. We are made holy by fear of God (2 Corinthians 7:1; cf. 1 Peter 1:17).
- d. For purification: Matthew 5:13; 1 Corinthians 5.
 - i. The purposes of salt (preservation and flavoring).
 - ii. How does salt become useless?
 - iii. A little leaven...(1 Corinthians 5:6).
- e. For gospel witness: Philippians 1:27; Matthew 5:16.
 - i. Declaration of the gospel without a display of the gospel is a distortion of the gospel (cf. Romans 6:4).
 - ii. Leading to regeneration, not fabrication that leads to inoculation.
 - iii. Our “defense” of the gospel (1 Peter 3:15).

¹ By culture of discipleship, I am referring to church communities in which the expectation of discipleship has become so prevalent that it would be odd not to be in relationships in which members care for one another and encourage, instruct, and reprove each other and where there is an expectation that sin will be corrected and formally disciplined when there is a refusal to listen.

3. Practices of formal and visible church discipline.

- a. Misunderstandings:
 - i. Concerning what “sins” should be disciplined.
 - ii. Concerning who should be told.
 - iii. Concerning the role of the church.
 - iv. Concerning the covenant commitment.
- b. Right practices:
 - i. For sin that is sin and hearts that are hard: Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1; 1 Corinthians 5:11.
 - ii. Tell the church: Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:2, 4-5; 1 Timothy 5:20.
 - iii. Commission the church: Matthew 18:17.
 - iv. Keep covenant: Matthew 18:12-14; 1 Corinthians 5:11-13.

4. Products of discipline.

- a. Greater purity.
- b. Greater clarity.
- c. Greater power.
- d. Greater courage.