

# Love Disciplines: Answering Five Objections to Church Discipline

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Last year the elders of our church preached through a [series on the church](#). The penultimate message in that series turned to the important but often misunderstood topic of church discipline. [Expounding on Matthew 18](#), our elder-turned-fulltime-seminary-student, Jamie McBride, articulated a vision of church discipline that is compassionate, convictional, church-building, and Christ-centered.

This Sunday we return to the topic of church discipline, as we summarize and apply 1 Corinthians 5-7. For the last eight weeks, we have walked through Paul's instructions on church discipline (ch. 5), legal proceedings and sexual purity (ch. 6), and singleness, marriage, divorce, and remarriage (ch. 7). Now we will consider how these teachings are meant to shape life together in the church.

In preparation for Sunday's message, let's consider five faulty objections that come against church discipline. Jamie answered these objections in his [sermon](#). And I will answer them here.

## Five Objections to Church Discipline

### 1. "It's none of my business."

In our hyper-individualistic culture, we are accustomed to passing by the plights of others. In the church, however, we cannot simply ignore the needs of others. We are not a restaurant that gives out biblical teaching and communion wafers. We are a family, a household of God, brothers and sisters committed to Christ and one another. We are not like Cain who mocked, "Am I my brothers keeper?" *We are our brothers keeper.*

Therefore, when sin enters the church, we cannot say, "It's none of my business." We are called to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:1-2) and to confront sin when we see it in appearing in the words and actions of our fellow church members. This is the point of Matthew 18:10-14 (the passage preceding Jesus' directives about church discipline): It is God's will that none of his little ones should perish. Each step of church discipline brings this desire into action. And thus loving Christians can never say: "It's none of my business."

### 2. "I don't want to cause a problem."

This objection to church discipline sounds so noble, so humble. But it is anything but. A dentist who always gives a clean bill of health "No cavities. Again." is not good; he's dangerous. A housing inspector who turns a blind eye to termite damage in the rafters is inviting residential

collapse. So too, the church or church member who refuses to address sin is not making peace; they are insuring that the Satan's warfare will succeed.

Addressing sin with gospel truth and loving rebuke is not causing a problem. It is aiming to fix a problem. Sin is the problem and love-driven, Christ-centered, repentance-seeking church discipline is the solution. The church should be a place where weak believers are protected from the lies of Satan and where the poison of sin can be leached from infected lives. In this way, it is patently unloving and untruthful to avoid church discipline (at any stage) because "it causes a problem."

### **3. "I'm not supposed to judge others."**

This is the most biblical objection as it comes with a proof-text: "Judge not, that you be not judged" (Matthew 7:1). If any verse defines our culture today, it's this one. And countless Christians have adopted the mentality which says "Who am I to judge. For I'm a sinner too." But this misses Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7:1-5, which calls for Christians to examine their own hearts ("remove the log from your own eye") so that they can perform spiritual surgery on others ("remove the splinter from another's eye"). In other words, Jesus' command doesn't teach heartless passivity, but humble proactivity.

It is not judgmental to confront those who break God's law. It's loving. It is judgmental to condemn others by the laws and traditions we make. Church discipline aims to rescue others from judgment; it seeks reconciliation and forgiveness. Matthew records Jesus' parable about forgiveness right after Jesus' speaks about church discipline (see 18:21-35), because the goal of discipline is restoration, not condemnation.

### **4. "I can't address the sins of another."**

Matthew 18:15 says, "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault." This translation follows the later MSS. Earlier manuscripts do not include "against you." The wrong implication by including "against you" is that if someone has not sinned directly against me, I can let it go. However, this passivity does not hold up. James 5:19-20 and Jude 22-23 call Christians to "bring back" erring brothers and "save others snatching them out of the fire," respectively. Therefore, the best manuscript evidence for Matthew 18 and the overarching teaching of the New Testament is that we pursue others - especially members of the church (who have entrusted themselves to the care of the church). It is unloving and unbiblical to say, "I can't address the sins of another."

### **5. "I just want to be loving."**

Finally, some object to church discipline because it *feels* so unloving. And yet, it is just the opposite. As Jonathan Leeman explains in his excellent book [The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love](#), church discipline is only perceived as unloving when we have an unbiblical understanding of love. Yet, when we define love by the cross of Christ, the place where God's wrath was poured out in full, we learn that true love judges (sin), hates (evil), and disciplines.

Scripture couldn't be more clear. The father disciplines those who he loves (Proverbs 3:11-12; Hebrews 12:5-11); the children of God obey the one who they love (1 John 5:1-3). In contrast to the world which says love is free to do as it pleases, biblical love obeys the laws of God (John 14:15, 21). Love is never set against law; just the opposite. The law commands love (Leviticus 19:18; Galatians 5:14), and love is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:8-10).

Moreover, love ceases to be love when it ignores justice: "Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth" (1 Corinthians 13:6). In this, the most loving thing we can do is point people to Jesus or help them walk in obedience to him. The objection "I just want to be loving" turns out to be one of the most *unloving* things a Christian can do.

## Love Disciplines

In the end, church discipline is not only biblical, it is loving. Indeed, nothing could be more loving than prayerfully, compassionately correcting an erring brother or sister. God honors such endeavors and has often preserved the souls of his sheep through the vigilant watch-care of a local church. Indeed, this is what the church is for.

We are not a spiritual interest group who enjoys a hearty potluck after a good sermon. We are a people called out of darkness to walk in the light of his love. We have fellowship with God and one another as we abide in him. And when that fellowship is destroyed by sin, love compels us to sacrifice ourselves in order to discipline others. This is what love looks like. And because it is so foreign to us today, we must continue to let Scripture inform our minds and transform our hearts.

*May God help us love . . . and when circumstances necessitate, discipline from hearts compelled by Christ's love to see others love God through repentance and obedient faith.*

For His Glory and his joy, ds