

Coach's Corner



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“Church Discipline”

This is our fifth issue of the *Coach's Corner* devoted to looking at *The Deliberate Church* by Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, a book which discusses how to build and lead a church deliberately upon the gospel of Jesus Christ. The fifth chapter, “Doing Church Discipline,” addresses a subject that most of us do not like to talk about, yet it is important for a healthy God-honoring, Christ-exalting, gospel-centered church.

In order to deal with this topic, I will begin by defining church discipline as I have in our Discovery Class (membership class) notes and then briefly looking at a few parts of the description afterward. This is a definition in line with the discussion in *The Deliberate Church*.

Church discipline is that action and mentality in a local congregation whereby we understand we are family and thus understand we have a responsibility to care for one another and to restore one another when we see a fellow Christian straying away from close fellowship with Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 3:15). This ranges all the way from soft accountability in regard to things like Bible reading, prayer, church attendance, and ministry (Proverbs 27:17; Hebrews 10:24) all the way to confrontation in regard to sinful actions which are public and harm the name of God as well as other persons (Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5:1-5; Galatians 6:1-2).

We Are Family

Adopted as God's children (Romans 8:15-16; Ephesians 1:5), we are family, a truth shown by the frequent use of “brother” to refer to fellow Christians in the New Testament (e.g. 1 Cor. 1:1; Col. 1:1; James 4:11). As family we are to love one another, care for one another, and pray for one another (John 15:12; 1 Cor. 12:25; Eph. 6:18; James 5:16). We also are to be concerned for each other's well-being and to spur each other on to love and gospel-wrought good works (Hebrews 10:24). What this means is that if we see someone falling away from church attendance or possibly walking away from a strong relationship with Christ, we care enough to intervene and treat them as family (2 Thes. 3:15).

Men, this is the reason that we as elders must take very seriously the call of Paul to make supplication for all the saints (Ephesians 6:18) and the call of Peter to shepherd the flock of God among us (1 Peter 5:2). We must pray for our flock regularly and when we see people falling away in any way, we must seek to come alongside them and restore them (Galatians 6:1-2).

Iron Sharpens Iron

“Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens the face of his friend” (Proverbs 27:17, my translation). We are to help keep each other sharp and focused when it comes to living for the glory of Christ and carrying out His mission. This means helping Christians in our congregation get into relationships within Bible Fellowships by which we can help each other grow. This is part of gospel-centered, Christ-exalting, family-based “discipline”. As the definition above brings out, discipline involves both actions and mentality—a mentality which says we are family and we will “have each other's back” and we will help each other grow.

With that kind of mentality, we will also be willing to take discipline to the next step, if necessary.

We Will Confront, If Need Be

Because we love each other and desire our church to honor Christ and walk worthy of our calling (Ephesians 4:1), we will confront fellow Christians when they sin in ways that dishonor God's name publically and/or hurt others—even to the point of asking them to give up their membership and leave the church, if they are unresponsive (Matthew 18:15-20). This is for the purpose of helping them wake up, repent, and be restored (1 Cor. 5:1-5).

Discipline All The Time

Most discipline will not get to this public point of excommunication. Most family-like Christian discipline will simply be carried out among the body on a weekly and daily basis as we help each other grow and live out the gospel in all we do. It is a mentality which says to each other, "I care enough to walk along side you and to ask you to walk alongside me and Christ cares enough to have us do this with each other. It is my commitment to you (and yours to me) to help you discipline yourself unto godliness (1 Timothy 4:7). This runs counter to how most people, organizations, and even churches function. Nevertheless, it is how the New Testament Church is to operate.

Men, let's pray together that this will be the kind of mentality and the kinds of actions we carry out toward and among each other at the Minden Evangelical Free Church.

Joyfully Following Him With You,

Tom