

THE DIFFICULT TASK OF DISCIPLINE

By Keith Greer

Sadly, one of the most difficult subjects for churches to deal with has to do with church discipline. Nobody looks forward to such tasks, yet, they must be carried out. Who among us like to be rebuked or corrected concerning our behavior?

Still, whenever this subject comes up many will give age old arguments why it should not be done. Let me give you a few I've heard from brethren over the years:

"We cannot judge them." "You're driving them away from God." "All it will do is strengthen their resolve not to return to the Lord." "How is love being shown to them by throwing them out?"

What are brethren thinking about? Do they understand the need and duty for the church to "discipline" unruly and disobedient members? What does God's word instruct us to do in this area?

"And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" {1 Corinthians 5:2-6}.

"But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good. And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." {2 Thessalonians 3:13-15}

Why does God not allow us to "keep company" with the one who is withdrawn from? What does "keep company" mean?

First, we are trying to make the one who has left the Lord to feel ashamed. We do not want them to remain comfortable in their sin! How can this be accomplished if we continue our relationship with them as if nothing has happened? Can I make them feel the need to repent and change if I continue to eat, hunt, fish, go to the movies, have them over for a cookout or socialize with my fallen brother?

Second, and many times not followed by brethren, our relationship must change. If I was a close friend to the one who has walked away from the Lord and has been disciplined, how must our friendship change?

Can I continue to do all the "fun things" together as we have done in the past? Could we go to a sporting event? Enjoy a picnic together with our families? Take in a movie? Go on vacation

together? Certainly not! By so doing we allow the one who has fallen away to feel secure in their present condition. If not, why not?

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives. "{Hebrews 12:5,6}

"Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." {Hebrews 12:11}

What higher form of love can one show than the love we have for their soul's condition? Never forget what is at stake here-where my brother will spend eternity! How much effort will you expend in order to snatch a brother away from the snare of the devil? How much do really I love them and care about what is most needed in their lives?

In the following article we'll look at this situation when it's in the physical family as well.
