

Bible Basics Conference 2015: The church

Part 12

Speaker	Bible Basics Conference; Hans Ruedi Graf; Robert Wall; Simon Attwood; Graham Warnes; Michael Hardt; Nick Fleet; Geoff Hawes; Paul Dronsfield; Mark Grasso
Place	Catford, Bible Basics Conference
Date	14.11.2015
Duration	00:24:05
Online version	https://www.audioteaching.org/en/sermons/cbb006/bible-basics-conference-2015-the-church

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[00:00:01] Discipline in the Assembly When Mark Grasso began to speak in the last session, he said that authority was not very popular these days. Well, if authority is not popular, what about discipline? But sadly, it is a reality.

It is an expression we use, although if you search for the word discipline in the New Testament, you won't find it.

We find words like convict, convince, keep away from, put out, restore, repentance.

And for all these matters, these situations that we are going to look at in the New Testament, [00:01:08] we have used the collective name of discipline, but it's not a scriptural name. So it's as well that we understand that to begin. I say not a scriptural name, it's not a New Testament name, it is an Old Testament word. And although where it is used in the Old Testament has nothing to do with the Assembly, I am going to read the verse to you because it gives the idea of what we are actually trying to say when we use the word discipline. If you want to turn it up, it's Job chapter 36 and verse 10.

It's a man called Elihu who is speaking to Job. And in that chapter, he has started a bit of a discourse and in verse 5, he starts to speak about God. [00:02:02] And he is speaking about God and he says in verse 10, He openeth also their ear to discipline and commandeth that they return from iniquity.

Now there are two thoughts there which I think are helpful if we want to understand what discipline is about. Open their ear to understanding. It's instruction.

Instruction in words that the hearer can understand. That's one side of things.

And the other thing is return from iniquity, avoidance of iniquity. Now if we keep those two concepts in mind as we go through these slides, I think it will help us to understand what we are really trying to talk about in this session. Now, in the last session, we looked at the authority of the local meeting and its limits.

[00:03:13] And we saw that the local assembly does have authority to maintain discipline within itself and its members.

And I'll say that again without elaborating, within itself and its members. Of course, ultimately, everybody is accountable to the Lord because he loves us. Now this brings in the thought of God's discipline. Because he loves us, he chastens us and sometimes he disciplines us. Hebrews chapter 12 verses 6 to 11 was mentioned yesterday, I think, but that is God's discipline. That's not our subject this afternoon or we shall be here till quite late in the evening. [00:04:08] What we're looking at in this section is not the whole subject of the Lord's chastening or discipline, but the particular responsibility that the local company has to exercise discipline within itself. And we're going to ask three questions. Why? How? And what happens when discipline has been exercised?

Well, let's look at three reasons for local discipline.

One is God's holiness.

I haven't put these verses up on the slide, so I'm going to have them by me and read them to you. Revelation 3 verse 7.

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, [00:05:03] These things saith he that is holy, he that is true. An Old Testament verse, Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity. And the overriding one is Psalm 93, the second part of verse 5.

Holiness becometh thy house, O Lord, for ever.

What is fitting for God's house? This is really the subject that we're talking about. What is fitting?

OK, I'm redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. Does that mean that I can do whatever I like and my brethren have to accept it? Or is there a certain way to behave?

The verse was quoted yesterday, wasn't it? 1 Timothy 3.15.

That thou mayest know how to behave thyself in the house of God. [00:06:04] And the house of God, I think, is not only when we're gathered together in the house of God. We're always in that house.

How thou mightest know how to behave thyself. What conduct is fitting to the presence of God, that the Lord Jesus comes among his own, as we have considered at some length during this conference. Matthew 18, verse 20.

The second reason is that if sin is allowed to run its course unchecked, it acts like leaven, or to use the modern word, yeast.

You know what yeast does? It actually changes the nature of what you add it to. If you have a piece of dough and you add yeast to it, what you get when you cook it is nothing like you would have got if you had left the leaven out and cooked it without. [00:07:02] It's completely different. And the meeting that allows evil, is that really a representation of the house of the Lord upon earth? Is that really a fitting testimony to him?

It acts like leaven, it changes the nature of what it affects, changes its character. You see, I suppose the most well-known use of discipline in the New Testament is of the man in 1 Corinthians 5. The point was not so much that all the other Corinthians would be encouraged to be adulterers, although it's possible that some of them would have followed his lead and become adulterers, the point is it changed the whole nature of the meeting if he was allowed to remain. No longer that which was honouring to the name of the Lord. And the final thing, of course, is that the authority of Christ [00:08:01] must be maintained among his own.

Now, there are four aims then of discipline.

One is the maintenance of God's glory. The second one is that the assembly might clear itself, that it might be seen to be separated from what was wrong before.

And Paul wrote the second letter to the Corinthians in which he said, 2 Corinthians 7 verse 11, In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter. And what a happy thing it is when the assembly has dealt with something to the Lord's honour.

And the other thing, of course, is for the correction of the offender. It's not right, is it, to let someone continue in sin.

[00:09:02] The point is to bring him to realize what he has done, realize that that's not acceptable behavior to the Lord, realize that it's not acceptable to his brethren. And perhaps we'll look at that in a little bit more detail later on. And the fourth thing is linked with it. It's for the profit and restoration of souls. Their profit and restoration. This is where the educational bit comes in, the instruction. To all forms of discipline, this comes into it.

A parent may discipline a child.

If the child is not doing what is required in the household, the father or mother, if he or she loves the child, will put it right, will correct it.

[00:10:06] If the child is in danger, they'll snatch it out of danger.

There is a verse, and I don't think it's been quoted yet, it's Revelation 3.19, As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Now that thought goes with Hebrews 12 as well. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. And the Lord would do that for his own. And the assembly has a responsibility to stand in the place of the Lord and to take that action where it's needed.

The Lord would not have written that to Laodicea unless he loved them. But because he loved them, he was going to rebuke and chasten them that they might be recovered from that awful state of indifference to his name [00:11:02] into which they had fallen.

The profit and restoration of souls. We shouldn't overlook that when we speak of discipline.

Now, is discipline always needed? Well, not always. It can be avoided.

If there is proper pastoral care and if there is a response to warning.

Not everything is necessarily an assembly matter.

If there is pastoral care and there is response to that pastoral care, admonishing and correction, then it may be that the assembly doesn't need to take a disciplinary action. And this is where counseling comes in. So you see, we've almost looped back to where we were yesterday afternoon when we were talking about pastoral care and shepherding. [00:12:03] So there is a need to care for one another, to try to prevent one another from slipping into error. We had, just an hour ago, didn't we, the case of Matthew 16 to 18.

If brother B who defended brother A, if he listened to him, there'd be no question of disciplinary action. If he listened to the two or three who went to support brother A, that's the end of the matter. But because he didn't, then there is a need for the matter to be brought before the assembly. But I do, I cannot emphasize this enough. Our first action, if a brother has offended us, is to take it to him.

To take it to him.

[00:13:02] Not to tell everybody else in the assembly. To take it to him and face him with it.

Some examples.

Warning the unruly.

Warning the unruly.

Admonishing as a brother.

Let's take these one by one. I'm having difficulty in seeing this. I hope you can see it from the back there.

Thank you very much. Thank you very much. Right, warn the unruly. 1 Thessalonians 5.14.

Warn them that are unruly.

Admonish as a brother. If any man obey not our word by this epistle, [00:14:02] admonish him as a brother.

For enjoining or charging, charge some that they teach no other doctrine. 1 Timothy 1.3.

Restoring somebody overtaken by a fault. Galatians 6 verse 1 and 2.

A well-known verse. Difficult to do.

Because that verse has a qualification, does it not? Be that are spiritual. We need to be in a spiritual state.

We need to be in a right state to restore someone overtaken by a fault. And the final thing is to withstand or oppose publicly again with a view to avoiding if possible the need for assembly action. Withstand or oppose publicly. We don't often experience that these days.

[00:15:04] But the circumstances will dictate if there is a need for private or public rebuke and public restoration.

Personal issues.

We've covered this already. In the first instance, speak to the offender and gain your brother. If he won't listen, speak one or two more that there may be witnesses and the issues then are clear. Only if he won't hear the witnesses, only then does the disagreement become a matter for the whole assembly.

And if he refuses the assembly, he should be treated as a heathen. The authority of the assembly extends to this. Now we had that in the last session so I'm not going to elaborate on that. The meeting has authority given to it for that purpose.

[00:16:02] Now, thus we can see that personal offences, personal trespasses show the link between what need not concern the meeting and what does.

Actions of discipline. Now we come to discipline by the local assembly because discipline is needed.

We've already made the point in the last session that any action should be observed by other meetings.

If somebody is under discipline in one assembly, then the other assemblies should observe that discipline. Of course, they need to be made aware of it in order to observe it. But it should be observed by all the meetings in the same way. And there are various actions that we can take, the meeting can take, withdraw from, [00:17:01] a disorderly work, walk.

Withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, 2 Thessalonians 3 verse 6.

For one who is disobedient to the truth, note that man and have no company with him that he may be ashamed. 2 Thessalonians 3 verses 14 to 15.

I'm trying to put these in ascending order of seriousness. Avoid, mark or consider those who create divisions.

That's from Romans 16 verse 17. To avoid them, to mark them, to consider them. It's a serious thing to spread division among the people of God.

Proverbs.

One of the things that the Lord hates, [00:18:02] those who cause dissension among brethren.

Reject or refuse a heretic.

That is someone who seeks to lead or to form a party of his own. That's in the epistle to Titus. Refuse a man that is a heretic after the first and second admonitions. Don't keep company with a moral sinner.

Just reject.

Do not keep company with moral sin. 1 Corinthians 5.11. And finally, if all else has failed, put away or expel from fellowship a moral sinner.

It may be also that there is a matter of serious doctrinal evil that a person holds and he may need to be put away. [00:19:03] But this is the final step when all else has failed. When all reasoning, all explanation, all attempted education has failed. Then finally, such a person must be put away.

I keep saying man, in man I include woman because the scripture generally says man, he. But it's any person who refuses correction, in the ultimate they need to be put away from fellowship for moral sin or for doctrinal sin.

And that includes association.

The participation in it or association with it must not be in the house of God.

[00:20:03] Recovery.

After all, discipline should be done with a view to recovery.

I expect you've known cases where somebody is silenced or put out of fellowship.

But that's not the first action to take. And it's not the action to take simply to get rid of somebody who's a problem. All discipline should be with a view to the restoration of the one who is being disciplined. It should have in view the recovery of the individual because we want, if it's the Lord's will and if the conditions are met, we want full fellowship to be resumed.

And what's the first step in recovery? It's repentance. [00:21:04] Repentance on the part of the individual. If you read the second epistle to the Corinthians, I think it's the second chapter, you read how that man who was put out was overcome with repentance to the point where Paul says, Go to him. I'm paraphrasing. Put your arm around him and draw him back. Don't let him be overcome with too much sorrow.

There is room for repentance. For a true believer, no matter what's happened, there is room for repentance. And then that opens the way to restoration. I'm not going to try and say what the meeting ought to do because the steps will vary according to the particular situation. How? [00:22:01] Well, they can censor, they can forgive and they can comfort and show their love.

If repentance is not seen, then this is another situation where we can convert from error with the Lord's help. That's James' word. Convict with contending, save, pulling out of the fire. That, of course, is the epistle to Jude.

Pity with fear, hating the garment spotted by the flesh. These are other ways in which discipline can be exercised.

And what is the reason for this? It's not a popular subject. It's not an attractive subject like the subjects we had before us yesterday when we thought about what the Lord has done and what the

assembly is and what it means to him. But nevertheless, it's a very necessary subject. [00:23:04] And we need to, if cases ever come up, we need to be familiar with the scriptures in the New Testament so that we might deal with it for the glory of the Lord Jesus and for the profit of the individual. That a person might not be discouraged and put away, never to return, but that they might be recovered after true repentance, recovered for the Lord's glory.

The reason, of course, is really summed up in this verse that we've had before us all through. Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I among them. It's the Lord's presence among his own. That is what makes the need for these steps of discipline, these steps of correction, these steps of restoration.