

# Church Discipline and Excommunication

By Nick Bibile

Protestant Reformers named three marks of a true Christian church.

1. Pure preaching of the word of God without it the church cannot exist.
2. Administration of the sacraments.
3. Exercise of discipline in the church to maintain purity in the body.

Today we see the church has fallen away from the pure preaching of the word of God and there is no purity in the church as church discipline is not exercised. Who killed the church disciplined? Mega churches are to be blamed as many of them have no church membership. The mega churches boast of their size but have no interest of personal lives and accountability of the members. There are many free floaters who have no accountability. They can be excommunicated in a good church but can easily find a comfortable place in a mega church.

## **The Importance of Church Discipline.**

What will happen if each one of the church was allowed to do as he pleased? Discipline is the foundation and the bond of unity. The goal of the pastor is to promote holiness in the church.

Rebellious children come out of homes that have no discipline. Even at your work, there is discipline, without good discipline the businesses will not last long. Then how much there should be discipline in the church. The saving doctrine of Christ is the soul of the church so discipline is like the nerves which the members of the body unites together.

Christianity separates from unbelievers as the church is called to be holy. It is very important to maintain the purity (holiness) of the church. The church is the bride of Christ, the pure virgin, a glorious church.

Mt 5:48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Eph 5:27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

1Pe 1:14 As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance:

15 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;

16 Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

The most often quoted scripture next to John 3:16 is "Judge not, lest ye be judge." (Mat. 7:1) Moral relativism has crept into the church, and they ask "who are you to judge me, God knows my heart." But they take these scriptures out of context and twist into their opinion. Jesus also said, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgement. (Mat 7:1) Apostle Paul asked the Corinthian church. " Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside God judges." Also went on to say, "Remove the wicked man among yourselves." (1 Cor 5:12-13)

But today when you exercise church discipline it is mark as a false church, like a cult. Many would say it is important to love the church members and church discipline will contradict with the great commandment of God's love. My answer is beloved love and truth cannot be separated.

2Jo 1:6 And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.

We need to understand the revelation of God's truth, obedience to that truth.

There are two kinds of church discipline.

Formative Discipline and Corrective Discipline. Formative discipline has to do with the preaching and teaching you hear and read. Corrective discipline is when someone is talking something out of line or wrong, we need to say they are wrong and correct them right away. If not it will grow into a cancer in the body and will result injury to the body.

Many will hear a good sermon but soon after the sermon they will talk about the basket ball game, the movies but if you practice corrective discipline the local body of the church will change to a well disciplined which is centered on discipleship.

Today we lack corrective discipline, people are shy to confront others when they are wrong, people think they might hurt the other person's feelings so they stay silent and pray.

Pr 27:5 Open rebuke is better than secret love.

The body of church cannot be defiled, because a little leaven can spoil the whole lump. Paul told the Corinthian church, "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat." (1Co 5:11) Railer – one who use bad language. Extortioner is one who will cheat another person.

We need to exercise discipline in the spirit of kindness and love, not in a fighting attitude. Our goal is to bring the sinner to repentance. We should not use the spiritual sword to attack the sinner.

Christ gave authority to exercise church discipline.

Mt 16:19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Here we see the two fold key of shutting and binding, opening and loosing. Puritan Theologian Francis Turretin (1623-1687), comments on this by saying, "By the former, obstinate heretics, disturbers of the peace of the church, scandalous and incorrigible sinners after one and another admonition are suspended from the use of the sacraments and if they persevere in the contumacy and rebellion, they are ejected from the church, so that it is not lawful for them to join with believers in the exercise of piety."

Excommunication

Excommunication is the rod the parents upon a rebellious child, they punish him so they will change his rebellious ways not to destroy but to heal. Not to cast him away but to bring back to purity.

Excommunication proved from our societies.

Even in our work, if there is a person who is disobedient to the authorities, not obeying the laws of work and unfit for work, bring injury to other employees they are expelled from their work. They get fired. We see policemen, judges who are ministers of God who exercise corrective discipline.. Without corrective discipline business will not last, societies will not last. If this is done in the world how much more the church that is holy should practice discipline. Christ Jesus has given the church the power to exercise discipline.

Why is it that we have policemen, Judges and other authorities? There will be order and discipline. How much more there should be order and discipline in the church as the church is the body of Christ.

In the same way a person who is excommunicated from the church is not removed from the mystical body of Christ as the true believers are never cast away. If he is a true believer he will have godly repentance and there will be reconciliation but if he is not a true believer he will never repent.

Excommunication in the Old Testament.

The first person who was excommunicated was Cain. Cain had an envious and angry of his brother. But God warned Cain of his anger. But Cain did not listen as he went and killed his brother. Then Cain was driven out from the face of the Lord. Here we can learn a lesson.

Jesus said, "But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment." (Mt 5:22)

God commanded that the leprous and the unclean were prohibited from the temple and the ceremonies. Also the Lord commanded the priest that they should teach and discern what is holy and unholy.

Le 10:10 And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean;

11 And that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses.

God's standard of holiness is very high and we take it so lightly.

Eze 44:6 And thou shalt say to the rebellious, even to the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; O ye house of Israel, let it suffice you of all your abominations,

7 In that ye have brought into my sanctuary strangers, uncircumcised in heart, and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in my sanctuary, to pollute it, even my house, when ye offer my bread, the fat and the blood, and they have broken my covenant because of all your abominations.

Eze 44:8 And ye have not kept the charge of mine holy things: but ye have set keepers of my charge in my sanctuary for yourselves.

9 Thus saith the Lord GOD; No stranger, uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into my sanctuary, of any stranger that is among the children of Israel.

God rebuked the priests who did not distinguish between holy and profane.

Eze 22:26 Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them.

John Calvin and many other reform theologians believe when a man is cut off from the assembly is excommunication.

(Exodus Gen 17:14; Exo 12:15, 19; 30:33, Lev 7:20, 21 17:4; Num 9:13; 15:27-31)

### Restoration/Reconciliation

Lev 6:1 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “If anyone sins and commits a breach of faith against the Lord by deceiving his neighbor in a matter of deposit or security, or through robbery, or if he has oppressed his neighbor 3 or has found something lost and lied about it, swearing falsely—in any of all the things that people do and sin thereby— 4 if he has sinned and has realized his guilt and will restore what he took by robbery or what he got by oppression or the deposit that was committed to him or the lost thing that he found 5 or anything about which he has sworn falsely, he shall restore it in full and shall add a fifth to it, and give it to him to whom it belongs on the day he realizes his guilt. 6 And he shall bring to the priest as his compensation to the Lord a ram without blemish out of the flock, or its equivalent for a guilt offering. 7 And the priest shall make atonement for him before the Lord, and he shall be forgiven for any of the things that one may do and thereby become guilty.”

## Authority of the elders in excommunication

Ezra 10:6 Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God and went to the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib, where he spent the night, neither eating bread nor drinking water, for he was mourning over the faithlessness of the exiles. 7 And a proclamation was made throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the returned exiles that they should assemble at Jerusalem, 8 and that if anyone did not come within three days, by order of the officials and the elders all his property should be forfeited, and he himself banned from the congregation of the exiles.

## Excommunication in the New Testament.

Jesus confirmed law and order and authority of the priests now is given to the New Testament Church by delivering the keys of the kingdom of heaven to Peter and to the whole church.

Mat 16:19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

The power of binding and loosing not only refers to preaching but authority to exercise discipline. The pastors in the church has the authority to exercise discipline and excommunicate the rebellious man and to pardon the sinner.