

THE CHURCH IN THE WILDERNESS

In chapters 1 through 3, we observe the Church (Israel) and their instructions on how to Worship. The type that God presents with the Levites is fulfilled in the Antitype of the Church and its worship. Now God will move from Worship instructions to instructions in Holiness.

- Isolation of Various Disease Carriers (5:1–4).

The first laws address the issue of restricting persons from the inner circles of holiness who have contracted one of three serious physical infirmities: (1) any infectious skin disease (2) any discharge or (3) any contamination from a corpse.

Such persons were to be sent away by the priests, who were charged with the responsibility of maintaining the purity of the camp and its inhabitants (Lev 10:10–11). Likewise, the priests were assigned the task of assessing the purity of an individual who had become unclean by any such means.

The Principle that God sets here is the principle of Discipline and Correction. The unclean had to be separated for the purpose of cleansing and then brought back into the community.

Does the Christian Church of today have responsibility of Discipline?

The church is called not only to a ministry of reconciliation, but a ministry of nurture to those within her gates. Part of that nurture includes church discipline

The idea of church discipline is totally consistent with the basic purposes of the church—evangelism and edification.

Evangelism ministers to those without the church who are in bondage to sin to bring them to faith in Christ where the transformation process begins. The edification process is designed to build up believers so they can be conformed to the image and character of Christ.

Church discipline as a part of the edification process ministers to those within the body of Christ who are dominated by some area of sin so they can experience liberation from its power through fellowship with Christ.

Church Discipline Defined

Church discipline may be broadly defined as the confrontive and corrective measures taken by an individual, church leaders, or the congregation regarding a matter of sin in the life of a believer.”

Discipline in the church is not punishment. It is discipline and discipline is designed to train and restore.

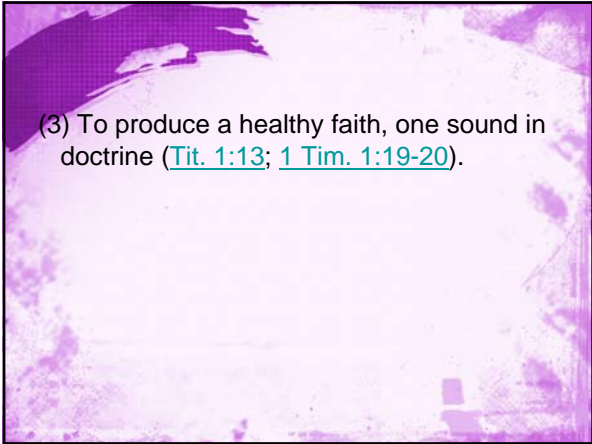
Church discipline is to be patterned after and based on *the divine commands of Scripture* ([1 Cor. 4:6](#); [1 Cor. 5:1-13](#); [Matt. 18:17-18](#); [Titus 3:10](#); [2 Thess. 3:6-15](#); [1 Tim. 5:20](#); [Gal. 6:1](#)).

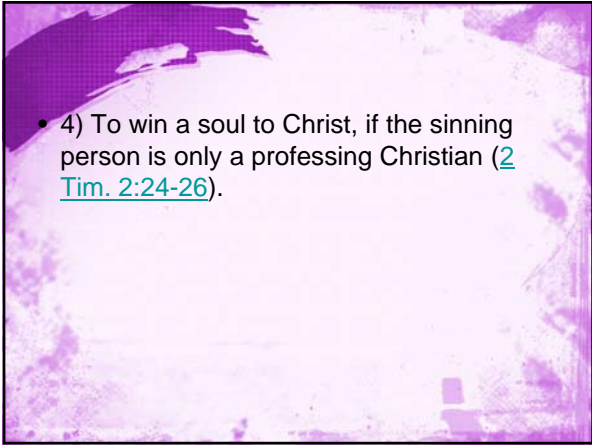
Another basis for the necessity of church discipline is *the testimony of the church in the world* ([1 Pet. 4:13-19](#)). The world observes the behavior and life of the church. When the church acts no differently than the world, it loses its credibility and authenticity ([1 Pet. 2:11-18](#); [3:8-16](#); [4:1-4](#)).

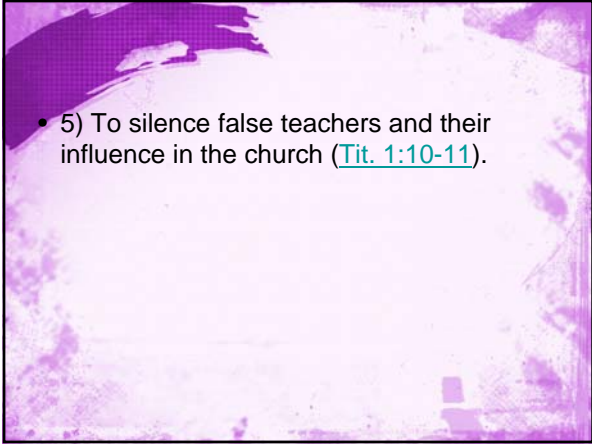
The Purposes of Church Discipline

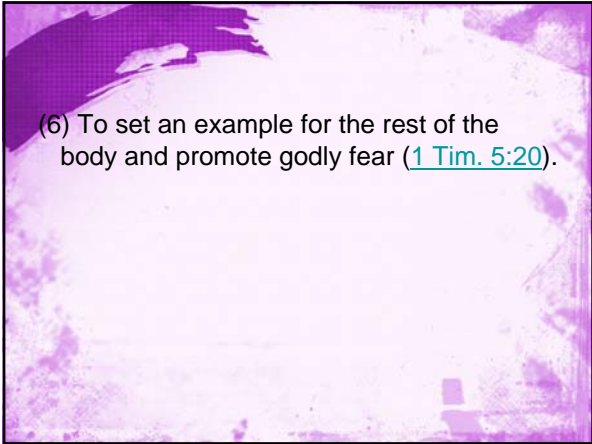
- 1) To bring glory to God and enhance the testimony of the flock.

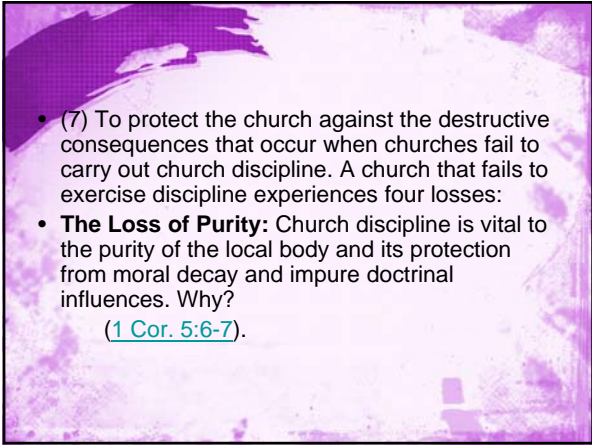
- 2) To restore, heal, and build up sinning believers ([Matt. 18:15](#); [2 Thess. 3:14-15](#); [Heb. 12:10-13](#); [Gal. 6:1-2](#); [Jam. 5:20](#)).

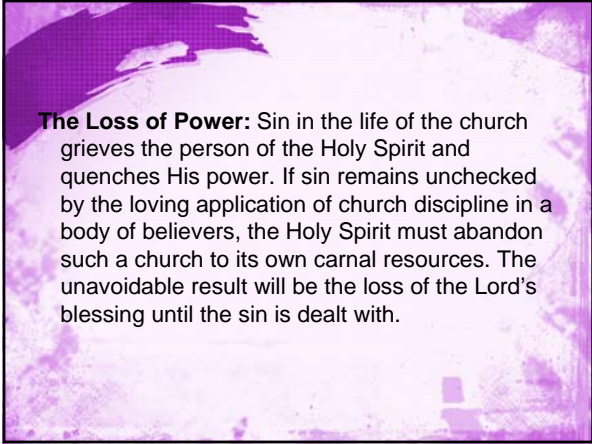












The defeat of Israel because of the sin of Achan in [Joshua 7](#) illustrates the principle. This is just as true for the church today, especially when we know certain things exist but ignore them or simply look the other way because it is difficult to deal with or because it involves one of our friends and we do not want to risk causing problems in the relationship.

- **The Loss of Progress:** A church that refuses to practice church discipline will see its ministry decline. The church may want to grow and reach out and it may try all kinds of stop gap measures, promotional campaigns, and programs in an attempt to turn things around, but if there is sin in the camp, it will all be to no avail. [Revelation 2:5](#), 3:16

The Loss of Purpose: As His ambassadors to a lost and dying world, God has called the church to be a holy people, a people who, standing out as distinct from the world, proclaim the excellencies of the works of God in Christ ([1 Pet. 1:14-16](#); 2:9-15).

If this is to occur, we must be different from the world and church discipline helps us to both remember and maintain that purpose. One of the recurring judgments against the church today as demonstrated in various polls taken across the country is the fact there is little or no difference between the church and the secular world when it comes to attitudes, values, morals, and lifestyle. We have lost our sense of purpose.

As we study the Book of Numbers and see its prophetic correlation with the Church, there are several things that God does with Israel in the wilderness that is worthy of our attention. The things that God does with Israel can be clearly applied to what he does with the Church today.
