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Section: Doctrine of the Church (Ecclesiology)

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**HANDOUT NOTES**

**Q106. What is Christian accountability and discipline?**

It is loving correction to someone who professes to be a Christian when he/she is out of step of core sound doctrine or practicing other sin. If he/she does not repent after biblical efforts are made, then God’s instruction is dis-fellowship until he/she does. All Christians are to joyfully submit to biblically-based accountability.

**Q107. Why do we do Christian accountability and discipline?**

We practice Christian accountability and discipline because of our love for God and our love for one another.

It glorifies God when we trust and obey His commanded will, and it is loving to others to treat them the way God has ordained.

* **Introduction**

Tonight’s lesson will be very biblical, very practical, and various degrees of challenging.

**Luke 9:23-25** ... **“**If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?”

As culture has become more and more indifferent to various sinful practices, many in the church have followed suit. And this is an incredibly sad reality. Scripture calls Christians to "not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (**Romans 12:2**).

God’s word is clear about how to handle a professing believer who is pursing sin.

* **Two temptations**

With topics and lessons like this one, people often find themselves in one of two groups.

* **Hasty**

Some folks will read the commands for accountability in their Bible and/or hear a lesson like this taught, and they will overreact. They’ll become over-zealous and seek to put these things into practice in an unbiblical way

* **Inaction**

The temptation on this other side would be to read the commands for accountability in their Bible and/or hear a lesson like this taught *and recoil*. In this recoiling, people will not want to obey God’s word on these things. They don’t want to have tough conversations or possibly lose relationships dear to them.

Often times, this is founded in a desire to be loving and peaceable, but “loving and peaceable” need to be understood as God defines and commands them.

Other times **inaction** in accountability occurs because of fear: not a godly fear, but rather a self-seeking fear. A fear of adding possible tension to relationship, or a fear of not wanting to lose a relationship, or a fear of others that seeks their approval over obeying God.

* **The solution to the temptations: follow Scripture**

Therefore, the answer to both these tendencies (hasty or inaction) is trusting God’s word and seeking godly counsel based on the word of God.

God has ordained that we don’t do life alone, as we see fit in our own eyes. Instead, we are desperate for His Scripture, and He has called us to also seek and heed the biblical counsel Christians around us.

* **Our study scope: relationships with those who proclaim faith in Christ**

What God requires of us in regard to interactions with *non-believers* is also something we need to know, but that is a topic for another study another time.

* **What Is Christian Accountability and Discipline?**

It is loving correction to someone who professes to be a Christian when he/she is out of step of core sound doctrine or practicing other sin. If he/she does not repent after biblical efforts are made, then God’s instruction is dis-fellowship until he/she does. All Christians are to joyfully submit to biblically-based accountability.

* **Why Do We Do Christian Accountability and Discipline?**

We practice Christian accountability and discipline because of our love for God and our love for one another.

It glorifies God when we trust and obey His commanded will, and it is loving to others to treat them the way God has ordained.

**Proverbs 27:6** Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

**Proverbs 15:32** Whoever ignores instruction despises himself, but he who listens to reproof gains intelligence.

**Ecclesiastes 7:5** It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools.

Hear God’s word tell us directly that accountability is a blessing.

**Hebrews 12:11** For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

What if we ignore or despise this Christian accountability and discipline? Look at:

**Proverbs 26:12** Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

**Proverbs 5:22-23** The iniquities of the wicked ensnare [a person], and he is held fast in the cords of his sin. **23**He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly he is led astray.

**Revelation 2:4-5** “But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. **5**Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.”

Christian accountability and discipline are often significant means that God uses to grow His saved. If not for loving insight and rebuke from others, many times we would not see or fight sin that we are each guilty of.

**Romans 12:9** Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.

We must understand that accountability and dis-fellowship is loving and gracious to all parties: First, God uses it as the means to draw back a true believer who is in sin, for glorious reconciliation and sanctification. That’s loving. Second, in some cases, God uses it to show a deceived person—a falsely testifying person—they are not actually united to Christ, and, if God wills, the Holy Spirit will convict that person and bring about true salvation—true unity to Christ. That is loving. And, third, God uses it to help protect His people from approving, tolerating, and/or falling into sin. That is loving.

Know God’s word and trust it as the best way to live. On this matter and all other matters.

**John 14:15** “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

* **The Loving Commands of Christian Accountability and Discipline**

The Christian accountability pursuit includes loving, gentle dialog with a person practicing sin to call him/her to repent.

* **Go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone**

In God’s design, first we are to lovingly talk to a brother or sister when there is legitimate concern of sin. Seek unity, sanctification, and God’s glory.

That’s all it should take if we’re all seeking to live by God’s word: *a brother or sister in Christ approaches another in a loving and honest dialog about a concern or known sin; the offender repents of sin and seeks sanctification because of the dialog*.

**Matthew 18:15** “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.”

**Ephesians 4:3** [Be] eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

It cannot be in self-righteousness. It’s not about *being* right, it’s about *being right with God*. Desire and seek unity in godliness.

* **If he does not listen, take others along with you**

Sadly, sometimes a single interaction, like a one-on-one discussion, doesn’t produce the clarity or repentance it should—there’s hardness of heart or perhaps a disagreement on the facts.

When that’s the case, bring others to join the accountability efforts as Jesus taught in **Matthew 18:16:** “But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.”

In this small group setting, more Christians can seek truth, testify to any sin, and encourage what God’s word requires.

* **If he refuses to listen to the covenant community: dis-fellowship**

But after going through the biblical steps, what if repentance is still not something the person agrees to? One on one and appropriate interactions with the covenant community don’t yield the repentance that God’s word calls for: The professing Christian is insisting on his/her own way, own desires, preferences, view, or beliefs.

If he does not repent after proper exhortations have been made, then

Christians in relationship with that person are to cease relational interaction with him until he repents.

God has had the principle of accountability and dis-fellowship in both the covenant communities He set apart.

God has consistently required that the righteousness of people He set apart from the rest of the world be sought through accountability and discipline by the others in fellowship with them, under the authority of and based on His word.

* **Accountability and dis-fellowship in the Old Testament**

In the economy of the Old Covenant, God gave commands of how the covenant people were to have accountability. And He made clear that grievous sin was not to be tolerated. He said clearly to “purge the evil” from among them.

That meant to no longer have relationship with those committing grievous sins—sin such asbeing a false prophet, sin of idolatry/false worship, not obeying the priest in matters requiring their judgement, being a false witness who has accused his brother falsely, being a stubborn and rebellious child (not honoring parents), having premarital sex, committing adultery, and human trafficking.

God put in place the requirement for peers to hold each other accountable. W*ithin the covenant community, those in proximity or with relationship with someone in sin were the main ones to be involved in the carrying out of these things*.

For certain sins, like the list we looked at, God ordained dis-fellowship *by way of death* in the Old Covenant.

Dis-fellowship by putting the offender to death. *That shows how serious God takes sin, does it not*? It shows how He expected His covenant people to be living in holiness.

Based on Scripture, the standard process was that *the one offended or the ones who witnessed the sin* would initiate the dis-fellowship and then the rest of the covenant community in relationship with them would join. Look at the example in **Deuteronomy 13:9**: “Your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people,” and **Deuteronomy 17:7:** “The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.”

Some of the verses that God commands dis-fellowship by death in the four books of Law in your Old Testament:



* **Christian accountability and dis-fellowship in the New Testament**

General Equity requires us to know the principles to honor in Old Testament law/commands that are **not** binding *in the exact same way* now.

One of the most direct passages in Scripture about Christian accountability is 1 Corinthians chapter 5.

**1 Corinthians 5**It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. **2**And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

**3**For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. **4**When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, **5**you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

**6**Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? **7**Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. **8**Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

**9**I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— **10**not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. **11**But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is

an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. **12**For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? **13**God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”

Paul uses the key General Equity statement: “Purge the evil person from among you.” In this, Paul (who is inspired by God) is taking a command from the Old Covenant and showing there is a related command in the New Covenant.

This is critical; don’t miss this. By doing this, Paul is not saying to purge the evil in the exact same way; rather, he is saying God’s hatred for sin still stands, God’s expectation for holiness in His people still stands, God’s expectation of His people holding those who claim or desire to be His people accountable still stands, and God’s way of using those in proximity to a sinning person for accountably still stands.

This is very important to see. God has not removed the requirement for accountability and dis-fellowship in the New Covenant. He has changed the way dis-fellowship happens, but He has not changed the core principle within it.

In the New Covenant, the command of dis-fellowship means we are not to have relational interaction with the unrepentant professing Christian, to any degree. They are to be isolated from God’s church—God’s people.

*The primary purpose of this level of accountability is the spiritual restoration of unrepentant professing believers unto the honoring of God’s name and the strengthening of the body of Christ.* When a sinning believer is rebuked and he turns from his sin, *he is won back to relational interaction and normal Christian fellowship with the body of Christ.*

In addition to accountability being to benefit the person in sin by seeking their repentance, God has other wise reasons for these commands. *Other purposes of accountability and dis-fellowship include*

deterring others claiming Christ from sin,

protecting the people of God from false teaching,

and maintaining the testimony of holiness in the people of God to the rest of the world (see Deuteronomy 13:11, Deuteronomy 19:20, Deuteronomy 21:21, 1 Peter 2:12, Titus 2:7-8, Matthew 5:16).

* **Additional New Testament New Covenant passages**

**Galatians 6:1** Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

**Hebrews 3:13** But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

**Titus 3:8-11** The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. **9**But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. **10**As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, **11**knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

**2 Thessalonians 3:14-15** If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. **15**Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

**Romans 16:17-18** I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. **18**For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.

**Galatians 1:8-9** But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. **9**As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

**2 John 9-11** **9**Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. **10**If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, **11**for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.

**Matthew 18:15-17** “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. **16**But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. **17**If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

It’s woven in the whole New Testament. This isn’t a take-it-or-leave-it thing. This isn’t just for some Christians; it’s for all of us to know and seek God’s revealed will in.

* **Patience with those struggling but *not* rejecting accountability**

Christians are called to patience with those who are less mature in the faith. We need to understand that there is a bearing with the less mature that occurs when they are actively receiving your biblically sound influence, counsel, teaching, and admonishment. This is accountability in action, as well. When the relationship bears the real fruit of the less mature moving in a godly direction and not rejecting you or your efforts to look to Scripture with them to bring about repentance, doctrine, and/or godliness, we maintain patience with them. We do not dis-fellowship with those struggling but *truly* heeding correction and growing.

**Ephesians 4:1-3** I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, **2**with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, **3**eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

**1 Thessalonians 5:14** And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.

**Romans 15:1** We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

**Colossians 3:16** Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

*Patience* with those not rejecting counsel and rebuke, and *discipline* for those who are continuing in sin and rejecting counsel and rebuke.

* **Further Personal and Practical Application**
* **Seek counsel**

Seek counsel in these matters. There is a communal aspect to these things, as well as the always important wisdom in not being on an island in how you’re seeing things and doing things.

Factors of each situation and relationship need to be carefully considered.

Do you have a real relationship with a person in question or are they seeking relationship with you? Are they inside or outside of your church, your family, your friends?

* **Judge with right judgment**

Christian liberty matters are not things to quarrel over or judge each other over.

What Jesus taught during His incarnate ministry and what the rest of God's word teaches is that we must discern right from wrong, righteousness from sin, morality from immorality. **John 7:24** "... judge with right judgment." We must make judgments, and we must avoid sinful judging, such as self-righteous judging, hypocritical judging, and superficial/untrue judging.

Be sure Christian accountability and dis-fellowship is a two-way street. Accountability is **not** about being more concerned about others’ sin than ourselves. We must be honest about our own sin and actively be practicing repentance in our own lives at all times; a person should evaluate his own life before looking into the lives of others.

Additionally, we must always receive accountability from others and gladly acknowledge it as an act of love towards us.

God’s word calls us to invite, welcome, and desire the admonition and insight of others.

**Proverbs 8:33** Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it.

**Proverbs 18:2** A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.

We must be people who accept the biblical counsel and rebuke from brothers and sisters in Christ. We do **not** want to be the ones of which God says in **Isaiah 5:21,** “Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes ...”

We are called to judge—with a right heart for the right reasons.

* **What kind of matters would call for accountability?**

Some matters (liberty matters) are not to be questioned in one another.

The type of things that we should hold people accountable to, even unto dis-fellowship if repentance isn’t practiced, are things beyond Christian liberty-type matters. Some things that fall under this treatment are explicit in Scripture, while other things are arrived at by biblical wisdom and good and necessary consequence.

We will not attempt to address every conceivable issue in this overview, but we feel confident in saying that the ones seen in the text and sins related to those are a good starting point for better accountability.

* **Closing Encouragement**

Godly love fights for righteousness and true unity instead of ignoring sin.

**Romans 12:9**, **“**Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.”

**Revelation 3:19** “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.”