

## **Heidelberg Catechism 85-Discipline is the 2<sup>nd</sup> key to God's House**

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ, let me ask the kids a question first: Which do you like more - a hug from your Mom or a spanking from your Dad? I think I know your answer! Now another question: Which one is more important, the hug or the spanking? If you are honest, you would realize that both are essential! Yes, even discipline is essential.

Discipline is essential in Christ's kingdom too. It is the other key to it. Discipline opens and closes the doors to Christ's kingdom. Yes, preaching of the Holy Gospel is essential, but this other key - Christian discipline - is necessary as well. Hear about this today.

Our headings are:

**How is the Kingdom Opened by Christian Discipline?**

**How is the Kingdom Closed by Christian Discipline?**

Our goals are: **That you might gain the courage to give discipline to the unruly and be willing to take God's discipline when you stray so that the church of Jesus will be purer, that it will spread, and that Christ will be esteemed.**

**85 Q. HOW IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN CLOSED AND OPENED BY CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE? A.** According to the command of Christ: If anyone, **though called a Christian, profess unchristian teachings or lives an unchristian life,** if after repeated brotherly counsel, he refuses to abandon his errors and wickedness, and, if after being reported to the church, that is, to its officers, he fails to respond also to their admonition— such a one the officers exclude from the Christian fellowship by withholding the sacraments from him, and God himself excludes him from the kingdom of Christ. Such a person, when he promises and demonstrates genuine reform is **received again** as a member of Christ and of his church.

### **How is the Kingdom Open by Christian Discipline?**

**1. Some in the church say they are Christian but are hypocrites—saying one thing but doing another - and they show it in 2 ways.**

**a. Some show hypocrisy through their talk.** They say they believe in Jesus when they are around Christians, but their mouths are filled with **gossip, tearing-down comments, or unkind words** when they are away from other Christians. Some are **ashamed to publicly speak of Christ's goodness.** Others **sing the Psalms on Sundays, but spew vulgarities** and take **God's name in vain** on Monday through Saturday.

**b. Some show hypocrisy in their walk.** They say they believe, but willfully **absent themselves from worship,** they are **not honest in business,** they **ignore disciplining their children,** and they **show a lack of love for their spouses.** But there are other gross sins as well. The Apostle Paul said the sins in Ephesus was so bad, he could not even mention it! God demands your belief, talk, and life match.

**This lip and life of hypocrisy scandalize the church and her King.**

**2. God demands Christian discipline in order to restore the wanderer – the one who has strayed from the true path.**

In this way, **the kingdom is literally reopened by Christian Discipline.** (This fits in quite well with Jeremiah's prophecy.)

The Lord taught that discipline was for restoration to the right path - that the soul might be saved from hell. Force applied changes the person's direction. Discipline may be painful, but it saves!

Matthew 18:8 "If your hand or foot causes you to sin, **cut it off and cast it from you**. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire.

God loves you too much to let you stray. **It is a sign of hate, the wise man said, not to discipline a child.**

Hebrews 12:6 For **whom the LORD loves He chastens**, And scourges every son whom He receives."

**Similarly, you save your children's lives when you discipline them!**

### **3. Elders in the church have possession of the keys of the kingdom to enforce discipline on the wandering Christian.**

**In the hierarchical system**, discipline is carried out by bishops, archbishops, and popes. **In the congregational system** discipline is carried out primarily by the congregation (this is why they like "shunning of those under discipline"—they have nothing else). **In Reformed churches, like ours**, discipline is carried out by the elders – a plurality. And even when things get too difficult, elders seek the advice of other elders from other congregations.

### **4. What kind of discipline are elders instructed to use?**

**Elders discipline by admonishing, restraining, and excluding** (excommunicating those who act as if they were non-Christians. The church does not have, neither should it be seeking to acquire, corporal discipline.

**Elders must watch their motive in disciplining to make sure they don't deviate from the proper reasons to discipline.**

Martin Luther was a victim of Roman Catholic's misuse of discipline. If someone owes you money and refuses to pay, you should go to him, first, not to get your money back, **but you go to him so that he would repent and be restored to Jesus.**

Motive is key! Force is not an option. The church's power is magisterial, not coercive.

## 5. If elders do not discipline, they show their lack of care for the brethren and lack of love for the Lord.

1Corinthians 5:1It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality **as is not even named among the Gentiles**—that a man has his father's wife! 2 And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.

Can you imagine **what the young people in Corinth were thinking** when they saw elders condoning sin? Imagine how harmful that was to them! **What were women thinking**, seeing elders ignoring disciplining an adulterer? **What were outsiders saying about them?** Would non-believers want to enter into a kingdom that did not appear to be different from the Devil's kingdom?

**Elders show hate to their congregations when they refuse to discipline or delay discipline!**

## 6. Elders must not exercise discipline with a heavy hand.

**God reminded elders there are some members who are weak and are easily drawn away by sin** and they ought to care for them. **So not every sin puts one under discipline.** Some may sin in ignorance and elders must show love and teach rather than discipline. Remember, the Lord, the Good Shepherd, searches for the 1 lost sheep of 100 and binds their wounds when they are hurt. What wondrous love the Savior has for his children.

## 7. What then is your response?

**a. Do not resist your elders when they ask you about your life.** Be accountable to your elders for what you believe, how you live, how you worship, and how you raise your family. We want to make sure you are walking in God's ways. That is God's charge to us. **God will severely punish us if we fail to oversee** your lives, if we don't care for his sheep. Don't make our lives difficult by rebuffing us.

**b. Play a part in discipline as well.**

**Rebuke an erring brother. Save him from death!**

2Thessalonians 3:14 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. 15 Yet do not count him as an enemy, **but admonish him as a brother.**

**Proverbs 26**...Faithful are the wounds of a friend!

**Galatians 6**...If anyone is overtaken by sins...

**Suppose Eli...and Samuel...and David...had disciplined their children**...wouldn't they have been saved?

How deep is your love for the ones who stay?

**Take corrections!**

**Do you have a friend who would not be afraid to correct you?** Those are good friends to have.

## **8. What joy this restoration brought to the church – to Christ's kingdom!**

What a testimony to the world! Discipline leads to life! Jesus is the Good Shepherd (John 10) who takes good care of his sheep.

### **How is the Kingdom Closed by Christian Discipline?**

#### **1. Suppose someone is living a sinful life and refuses to change his ways, what should the elders do?**

**The Lord gave a clear outline for elders to follow when carrying out discipline.**

**Jesus taught this doctrine of discipline more clearly than most doctrines because he saw the need for it.**

**Matthew 18:15** "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, **you have gained your brother**. 16 "But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' 17 "And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. 18 "Assuredly, I say to you, **whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven**, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

The one who sees his brother doing wrong must **talk to the erring brother**, then **take witnesses** if he would not repent, then **go to all the elders** if he still would not repent.

**2. While Matthew 18 is a sufficient guideline, the Lord gave more details about the method for discipline.**

1 Corinthians 5:4 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**, 5 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. 11 But now I have written to you **not to keep company** with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. 12 For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? **Do you not judge those who are inside?** 13 But those who are outside God judges. **Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person."**

Now look at the follow up situation of that man that the Corinthians had to discipline:

2Corinthians 2:6 **This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man**, 7 so that, on the contrary, **you ought rather to forgive and comfort him**, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. 8 Therefore I urge you to **reaffirm your love to him**. 10 Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, 11 **lest Satan should take advantage** of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.

**3. Elders and the church must always be ready to forgive the repentant lest he be destroyed.**

Jesus told a parable of a man who was forgiven great debts by a king and the forgiven man then threw a man into prison who owed him very little. That man did not understand forgiveness. This is why **elders are called to remember their own great forgiveness through Jesus** as they exercise discipline over others. **The Prodigal Son's father** (Luke 15:20-24) accepted his repentant son and the father's family experienced great joy. **(This principle applies to parents as well!)**

**4. If the person still refuses to repent, he is excommunicated from the church by the elders until he repents.**

The kingdom of God is closed to him until that time. When he repents, he is welcomed back!

## **Conclusion:**

The elders of the church are called to carefully, patiently, and fully **warn of discipline** and **carry out discipline**. Warning of discipline **will keep Christians in**. Carrying out discipline will **reopen the kingdom** for those who have strayed. If the rebellious one does not submit to Christ's discipline, **he must be excommunicated**. This closes the kingdom to him.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

**1. Thank God he cares enough for you to punish you.** He saved you and now he keeps you in his kingdom. Thank God he removes the wicked from his kingdom so they don't do harm to you and dishonor his name.

**2. Pray that your elders will have the wisdom and courage to carry out proper discipline – opening and closing God's kingdom.**

**3. Be a part of the process of discipline.** If you see someone erring, show him his faults and win him back. **By participating in discipline, you are helping to advance the cause of Christ's kingdom throughout the world.** You are Christ's, he paid for your life! Work for him.

Finally, it is true that if you are not a Christian you cannot enjoy the blessings of God's discipline. But more, if you are not a Christian you have to worry about eternity in the fiery pit of hell. Yet, if you call on God and ask him to make you his child, he will hear you!