

Heidelberg Catechism 85-Discipline is the Key.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: There are 2 keys to the kingdom of Jesus: **Preaching** and **Christian discipline** (管教). Both of these keys open and close Christ's kingdom. You have already seen how preaching opens Christ's kingdom to the believer and closes the Christ's kingdom to the non-believer.

Today you will hear from God concerning the 2nd key: Christian discipline. This key **encourages Christians to stay** in the kingdom and **locks the doors** to those who are not submissive to (顺服于) the Lord of the Kingdom.

Our headings are:

The Motives for Discipline

The Men who Discipline

The Method for Discipline

Our goals are: **That you might gain the courage to give discipline to the unruly (不守规矩的) and to take God's discipline when you stray (走偏) so that the church of Jesus might be stronger, that it would spread, and that Christ would 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 (告诫, 责备) – such a one the officers exclude (驱逐, 赶出) 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 (改变, 改善), is received again as a member of Christ and of his church.

The Motives for Discipline

1. Some in the church say they are Christian but are indeed hypocrites假冒伪善者. They show they are hypocrites in 2 main 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 (流言蜚语), tearing-down (毁坏人的) comments, or unkind words when they are away from other Christians. Some are ashamed to publicly speak of Christ's goodness. They might sing the Psalms, but spew (吐出) vulgarities (粗俗的话) and spurn (唾弃) God's name on Monday through Saturday.

b. Some show hypocrisy in their walk. They say they believe, but willfully absent (不出席) themselves from worship, they are not honest in business, they ignore disciplining their children, and they show a lack of love for their spouses. God demands your belief, talk, and life match.

2. So why bother with those who are delinquent (懈怠的) in doctrine (教义) and life, why not leave them and make them look out for their own self-interest, or why meddle (干涉) in other people's personal lives?

a. God demands Christian discipline in order to restore (重建) the wanderer (迷失的人) – the one who has strayed from the true path. This means that discipline must not be exercised for personal vendettas (长期争斗, 积怨) – to get even with the wicked. In the past, Roman Catholics punished people because they preached truth they did not want to hear. RC's

loved to keep people in spiritual prisons. This was how Luther was pushed out of the church. But the Lord taught that discipline was for restoration (恢复, 挽回) to the right path - that the soul to 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 (残废的), 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 (管教)**, And scourges every son whom He receives."

b. God demands Christian discipline in order to keep the church pure. He wants you to be pure because you are precious to him. He said: "Be holy, for **I am holy**." Children must reflect their parents. So you must reflect God. Discipline keeps you pure.

1Peter 1:18 knowing that you were not redeemed (被赎回) with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish (瑕疵) and without spot.

c. God demands Christian discipline in order to bring honor to himself. Unruly children are a shame – especially grown children. When God disciplines you, you will thank him for your discipline – maybe later, **but you will thank** him. And when others see how God disciplines the son he loves they will praise him as well.

The Men Who Discipline

1. The church, which is properly run by the elders who have possession of the keys of the kingdom, enforces discipline on the wanderer.

In the hierarchial system (等级制度), discipline is carried out by the bishops (主教), archbishops (大主教), and popes (教皇).

In the congregational system (公理会体系) discipline is carried out primarily by the congregation会众 (this is why many who are congregational like "shunning 避开 of those under discipline – they have nothing else). (BTW, shunning 回避 is abnormal cruelty.) (Good ecclesiology is important.)

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.

2. What kind of discipline are elders instructed to use?

Elders discipline by admonishing (警告), restraining (节制), and excluding (excommunication 开除教籍) those who act as if they were non-Christians. The church does not have, neither should it be seeking to acquire, corporal discipline (体罚).

3. Elders must watch their motive in discipline to make sure they don't deviate (偏离) from the proper reasons to discipline.

Illustration: 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 (悔改) and be restored to Jesus**. Motive is key!

4. If elders do not discipline, they show their lack of care for the brethren (弟兄) and lack of love for the Lord.

Look at Apostle Paul's rebuke to the Corinthians.

1Corinthians 5:1It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality (奸淫) among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the

Gentiles (外邦人) —that a man has his father's wife! 2 And you are puffed up (自高自大的) , and have not rather mourned (哀痛) , 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 (容忍) sin? Imagine how harmful that was to them! What were women thinking, seeing them ignoring discipline of an adulterer? What were outsiders saying about this new religion? Would they want to enter into a kingdom that did not appear to be different from theirs? **How elders show hate to their congregations when they refuse to discipline** or delay discipline!

5. What is then your response?

Do not resist (抵抗) your elders when they ask you about your life. Be accountable (负责的) 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** (监督) your lives. Don't make our lives difficult by rebuffing (断然拒绝) us.

The Method of Discipline

1. The Lord gave a clear outline to follow.

He taught this doctrine of discipline more clearly than most doctrines, obviously 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 (见证人) 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 (不信之人) and a tax collector (税吏) . 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.

First, you **talk to the erring (犯错的) brother**...then you **take witnesses** if he would not repent...then you **go to the elders** if he still would not repent and you turn discipline over to them. If the person still refuses to repent, he is excommunicated from the church by the elders until he repents. **You are not to go straight to the elders when you discover someone's sin...and neither are you to ignore sin and say: "I don't want to be involved."** Can you imagine how someone might be upset with you when you talk to him about adultery (奸淫) , for instance? Yet, God puts that obligation on every Christian. **You are part of one family!** Who sees his baby sister trying to put her hand on the hot stove and pretends he doesn't see? That would be cruel.

2. While Mt 18 is a sufficient guideline, the Lord was pleased to give 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 (拜偶像者) , or a reviler (辱骂的) , or a drunkard (醉酒的) , or an extortioner (勒索的) —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."

The elders who exercise discipline **must do so with unity** and **with prayer for guidance** from the Holy Spirit. 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**. 9 For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. 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.

What joy this restoration brought to the church! What a testimony to the world!

3. Elders must not exercise discipline with a heavy hand.

While there are bad sheep there are also bad shepherds. So God reminded elders that there are some members who are weak and are easily drawn away by sin and they ought to care for them. Their sins may not be of mature deliberation 考虑, 深思熟虑. So not every sin puts one under discipline. Some may sin in ignorance and elders must show love and teach rather than discipline. Even elders sin – everyday. So they must show grace. Remember, the Lord searches for the 1 lost sheep of 100. What wondrous love the Savior has for his children. (These principles apply to your home as well.)

2Thessalonians 3:14 And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle (信), 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.**

4. Elders and the church must always be ready to forgive the repentant (悔改者).

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. Elders are called to remember their own great forgiveness through Jesus as they exercise discipline over others. The Prodigal Son's father accepted his repentant son and the father's family experienced great joy. **(This principle applies to all parents as well!)**

Luke 15:20 "And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. 21 "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. 23 'And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; 24 **for this my son was dead and is alive again**; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry.

Conclusion:

The elders of the church are called to carefully, patiently, and fully carry out discipline. They must do this to correct the erring brother, to keep the church pure, and to honor the Lord. The Lord loves his church, died for her, and wants her to be kept pure. If the rebellious one does not submit to Christ's discipline, he must be excommunicated from Christ's church until he repents.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. Thank the Lord that he cares enough for you to punish you. He saved you and now he keeps you.

2. Pray that your elders will have the wisdom and courage to carry out proper discipline.

3. Be a part of the process of discipline. If you see someone erring, show him his faults and win him back.

4. By participating in discipline you are helping to advance the cause of Christ's kingdom throughout the world. You are his, 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!