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**A1042 – October 17, 2010 – Hebrews 12:4-13**  
**Church Discipline - Part 1**

This morning we are going to go back to a passage Jeremy covered in Galatians and look at it from another perspective. Turn to **Gal. 6:1**:

**Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.**

If you recall, this passage follows Gal. 5:16-26 – the command to walk by the Spirit – and is one of the practical expressions of such a walk. In this case, a fellow believer is caught in a sin and those who are spiritually mature are commanded to restore him. It is an opportunity for service for the spiritually mature – to restore a fallen brother – but, since Gal. 6:1 is a command, it is also a sin to ignore the opportunity.

Now, when you think about this passage, what is it talking about? There is a doctrine that comes to mind that is rarely taught in our day and age, and is even more rarely followed the way it should be. A fellow believer is caught up in a sin and mature believers are commanded to restore him. What does that sound like? What is this talking about? Church discipline. This is a tough doctrine for us today in our culture. What pictures immediately come to your mind when you hear the term “church discipline” – Pharisees, the Inquisition, the Scarlet Letter, legalism. Our culture demands tolerance, privacy, independence, and a general “live and let live” attitude. We have a knee jerk reaction against anything that is contrary to these ideas – particularly if it involves conviction of sin, personal responsibility and accountability. We don’t want to deal with these things. We certainly don’t want others to inject themselves into our condition. We want to be left alone. And on the flip side, the church doesn’t practice it because it wants to avoid confrontation and anything that can damage “unity”, reduce attendance and appear “intolerant” and “unloving” in our culture.

However, at one time, church discipline was considered one of the marks of the true church. In 1561, the Belgic Confession, “the oldest of the doctrinal standards of the Christian Reformed Church” and “one of the best symbolical statements of Reformed Doctrine”, identified church discipline as one of the marks of the “true church”.<sup>i</sup> John Calvin, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, considered church discipline the “sinews” of the Church, so important that anyone wanting to abolish it “would certainly aim at the complete devastation of the Church.”<sup>ii</sup> Why is it so important? How are we supposed to do it? That is what we are going to study.

Let’s look at a couple of examples of how some modern churches have handled things. The first is a 1989 Oklahoma Supreme Court Case **Guinn v. Church of Christ of Collinsville (Oklahoma Sup. Court 1989)**.

Marian Guinn and her children moved to Collinsville, Oklahoma in 1974. While staying with her sister, she became acquainted with three of the Elders of the Collinsville Church of Christ. A few weeks later, she became a member of the Church of Christ.

Six years later, the Elders confronted Marian with a rumor that she was having sexual relations with a male Collinsville resident, who was not a member of the Church of Christ. When confronted with the allegation, she admitted the rumors were true. She apparently was not repentant. The Elders then approached Marian and her children in a laundromat and requested that she appear before the church and repent of her sin. They also suggested that she refrain from seeing her boyfriend. Marian did not comply with the Elders’ request and her attendance at the church dropped considerably.

Later, the Elders called Marian and told her that if she did not come to church to discuss her continuing relationship with her companion they would come to her house. She met with the Elders at the church and they instructed her again to stop seeing her boyfriend. Marian agreed this was the best solution because her relationship with him was deteriorating.

After this, the Elders got wind that Marian was still seeing her boyfriend and confronted her and her boyfriend in the driveway of her home. The Elders told Marian that if she did not appear before the congregation and repent of her sin, the members would "withdraw fellowship" from her.

A few days after the confrontation in Marian’s driveway, the Elders sent Marian a letter warning her that if she did not repent, the withdrawal of fellowship process would be commenced. At this point Marian realized the Elders intended to inform the congregation of her sexual involvement with her boyfriend. She got a lawyer, who sent the Elders a letter and advised them not to expose her private life to the congregation (which, incidentally,

comprised approximately five percent of the town's population). The Elders did not heed her lawyer's advice.

The next day, Marian withdrew from the fellowship of the Church and wrote the Elders a letter imploring them not to mention her name in church except to tell the congregation that she had withdrawn from membership. The Elders ignored her requests. Two days later, they read the letter they had sent to Marian in front of the congregation and advised the congregation to contact Marian and to encourage her to repent and return to the Church. The Elders also told the congregation that should their attempts fail, the scriptures Marian had violated would be read aloud at the next service and the proceeding to withdraw Marian from fellowship would begin.

Marian met with one of the Elders personally and again attempted to persuade him not to divulge her private life to the congregation, emphasizing the fact that she had withdrawn from the fellowship of the Church. She was unsuccessful and the scriptures she had violated were read to the Church at the next service. As part of the process the same information about Marian's sin was sent to four other area Church of Christ congregations to be read aloud during services. Marian sued the Church and the Elders - and won.

The second example is a 2007 Texas Supreme Court Case - **Westbrook v. Penly (Tex. Sup. Court. 2007)**:

Peggy Penley and her husband, Ben Stone were having marital problems. They had a few counseling sessions with Buddy Westbrook, a licensed professional marriage counselor and a fellow member at McKinney Memorial Bible Church.

A year later, Buddy Westbrook and others, including Peggy and Ben, broke from their church and formed CrossLand Community Bible Church. Buddy became CrossLand's pastor and also served as a church elder. Peggy (and possibly Ben) became a member. A year after that, Peggy and Ben separated. While they were separated, Peggy and Ben participated in a series of weekly counseling sessions at Buddy's home where couples from the church discussed how to improve their marriages. These counseling sessions did not help and Peggy decided that she would divorce Ben. Peggy and Ben went to Buddy's home for what they thought would be another group session, but Buddy and his wife were the only ones there. During a break, Peggy spoke separately with Buddy and informed him that she had decided to divorce Ben. Peggy also told Buddy that she had engaged in an extramarital affair. When Buddy mentioned that her affair would require church discipline, Peggy told him that she was resigning from CrossLand. Buddy and the church elders composed a letter to the CrossLand congregation concerning Peggy's actions, which they published to the membership. The letter

explained to the congregation that Peggy intended to divorce her husband, there was no biblical basis for the divorce, she had engaged in a “biblically inappropriate” relationship with another man, and she had rejected efforts to bring her to repentance and reconciliation. Describing the disciplinary process as one of “tough love,” the letter encouraged the congregation to “break fellowship” with Peggy in order to obtain her repentance and restoration to the church body. The letter admonished the congregation to treat the matter as a “members-only issue, not to be shared with those outside [the congregation]”. Peggy sued the church and lost.

These two examples illustrate just how sensitive and difficult church discipline can be. Whether or not they were legally correct, were these churches scripturally correct in the way they handled each of these situations? What is the point, what are they trying to accomplish? When a believer does not respond to discipline and leaves the church, what happens then?

This morning and next week, we are going to study the doctrine of church discipline. We are going to begin by putting church discipline in its proper context, which will help us understand its purpose. Once we know the purpose, we will be able to understand why it is so important. After that we will study the procedures for church discipline outlined in Scripture. At the end, it is my hope that you will at least understand that church discipline is not punishment, it is a ministry - a ministry of the church and essential to the spiritual growth of the church body – and that it is not an option – it is a command – and failure to act in obedience to this command is itself sin and can destroy a local church. However, as we will see, it is not to be harsh or legalistic, but gentle and loving – as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Let’s begin by putting church discipline in its proper context. To do that, turn to Hebrews 12, and we are going to focus on verses 4 – 13.

As a brief background, the book of Hebrews was written to a church of Jewish believers in approximately 68AD. It is not known who wrote the book, and it is not known where this church was located. However, Hebrews indicates that this church was characterized by sluggish, immature believers who were not growing and were in danger of returning to Judaism due to the persecution they were experiencing. In the preceding passages, they were exhorted not to throw away their confidence in the gospel, but have faith and endure. Chapter 11 is the great Faith Hall of Fame; examples of the great men and women who, through faith, were able to endure great trials and suffering. With such a great “cloud of witnesses” as a testimony to faith, the Hebrew believers were encouraged to “lay aside the sin that so easily entangles and run with endurance the race” set before them, keeping their

eyes on Christ as the supreme example, so they will not grow weary and lose heart. Note that Christ's life is the ultimate example of how to live by faith in the midst of trials and suffering.

Our passage, vss. 4-13, places discipline in the context of endurance and training:

<sup>4</sup> You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; <sup>5</sup> and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; <sup>6</sup> FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." <sup>7</sup> It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline? <sup>8</sup> But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. <sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? <sup>10</sup> For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines us* for *our* good, so that we may share His holiness. <sup>11</sup> All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. <sup>12</sup> Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, <sup>13</sup> and make straight paths for your feet, so that *the limb* which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

What is immediately obvious about discipline from this passage? You can't miss it. **Discipline occurs because of a relationship – a family relationship – a Father/Son Relationship.** This is the first point to remember. Does this sound familiar? Have we heard something like this before? Turn to 2 Samuel 7:14-15. This a portion of the Davidic Covenant and God is talking about Solomon. <sup>14</sup> **"I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men."** God is telling David that He will treat Solomon as He would a son – when Solomon sins, God will correct him. However, note verse 15 - <sup>15</sup> **but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you."** – God is also saying that His discipline is in love, not vengeance or judgment, but love intended to correct Solomon.

Note something else – where does the Old Testament quote in Hebrews 12 Verses 5 and 6 come from? **"MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; <sup>6</sup>**

**FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.”** Proverbs 3:11. Who wrote Proverbs 3:11? Solomon. Do you think Solomon knew something about God’s discipline? Based on 2 Samuel 7:14 - he sure did. Discipline is based on a Father/Son relationship.

The term “discipline” itself lends to the idea that it is based on a father/son relationship. The Greek noun translated “discipline” in this passage is “**παιδεία**” and means “upbringing, training, instruction”, “guidance in responsible living”. The Greek verb is “**παιδεύω**” and it means “to educate, to provide instruction for informed and responsible living”. The term includes the idea of correction and reproof, but it is more than that. It is the whole package of training – particularly, the training up of a child to maturity. For our purposes, we are primarily dealing with the term as it pertains to correction and reproof when a child goes astray, but it means more than that. For example, the same term is used in Eph. 6:4, also in the context of a father/child relationship - **<sup>4</sup> Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.** The word “discipline” as used in Eph. 6:4 is the same word used in our passage. This is important because it helps us understand what is happening when we are disciplined. God is “bringing us up” as a father raises his children.

All believers are disciplined. But note something else – who is not disciplined? Vs. 8 “Illegitimate Children”. What does this mean? In New Testament times, fathers were responsible for training their sons. Mothers would train the children until they were 4 or 5 years old, then the fathers would take the sons and begin to teach them their trade and the Torah and prepare them for their future. However, illegitimate sons were not treated this way – fathers didn’t invest any time training them.

There are two basic views about this passage – one view is that the term means unbelievers (or those who profess to be Christians but are not “true” Christians). The other view is that the term is referring to true believers who have turned away and gone apostate. In the context, since Hebrews and this passage is addressed to believers, my opinion right now is that the second view is correct – that the term refers to apostate believers, those believers who have fallen away and have rejected the gospel and God’s training. As a result, God ceases to train them. [However, I am not convinced my view is correct and more study needs to be done in order to come to a better conclusion.] Whether or not the passage is referring to believers, it is very clear that unbelievers – those who are not even children in any sense, legitimate or illegitimate – are not disciplined. They are judged and condemned.

Notice something else - Look at vs 6 – **FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.** God’s discipline proceeds out of His love for us. We must always keep this in mind. Sometimes, when we experience discipline, we tend to think that God is being too harsh, or that He is arbitrary, or

that He has rejected us. We must always remember that whatever God does, it is out of His perfect love for us, His perfect knowledge of us (better than we know ourselves), and is most certainly for our good. Remember **Romans 8:28** - **“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose”**.

So, He disciplines us because of our relationship with Him. Now, this leads us to the second main point - Just as fathers discipline their children so that they grow into mature and productive adults – Here is the next point – **Discipline occurs so that we will grow in spiritual maturity.** God is working on us to conform us to the image of Christ.

Look at vs. 7 – **It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline?** Note that “it is for discipline that you endure”. This does not mean that we endure suffering in order to be disciplined. This means that endurance “trains” us - it is part of our upbringing, it helps us grow and mature. It is like **James 1:2-4** – **“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, <sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. <sup>4</sup> And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”** Our training requires the testing of our faith, which requires endurance, which produces spiritual growth and maturity. So, we endure to grow and we grow when we endure. Good fathers do not let their children raise themselves. They make their children do things the children don’t want to do so that their children will grow. They correct their children when they are disobedient. Children don’t like that. I know that I didn’t like it. But if the child will endure the discipline, he learns something and becomes a little more mature. Parents do this minute by minute, hour by hour, day after day, year after year, until their children are grown. Children never like the discipline, but they grow into responsible adults because of it. That is what vs. 7 is talking about. That is what God is doing with us – His children

Notice verses 9-10 - **Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? <sup>10</sup> For they disciplined us for a short**

time as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness*. This is a comparison between earthly fathers and our heavenly Father – the Father of our spirits. We respect our earthly fathers for disciplining us, even though they are finite humans, with human motives and frailties. They disciplined as it “seemed best” to them – not necessarily what was best for us – they are human, they might be wrong, they may have selfish motives. Their discipline is flawed and imperfect. On the other hand, God’s discipline is perfect and is perfectly for our good. His discipline matures us, and as we mature, we are able to share more and more in His holiness.

Now, look at verse 11 – **All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.**” Think about this and the times you have been disciplined. None of us like it. It is painful. It causes sorrow. It is hard. It is certainly not peaceful.

However, after the discipline was over, what happened? That is – what happened if you accepted the discipline? You learned to submit, to obey, and things calmed down for you, they became peaceful because you weren’t fighting authority. What else happened? You grew a little more – you matured. That is what this is talking about. God’s discipline is hard, it is scary, and it can be chaotic. But if we submit to it, obey and endure, we grow, we mature and we become a little more Christ like. And we are able to rest in our faith and that produces peace.

Remember what Hebrews 2:10 said about Christ - **For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings**, and Hebrews 5:8 - **Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered**. Christ was sinless; He was not disciplined by God in the sense of correction or reproof for disobedience. Christ was perfectly obedient. He was tested and He passed every test (By the way, this is what is meant by Christ being perfected – He was tested and approved). So if Christ, being perfect and perfectly obedient, needed to be perfected and to learn obedience, how much more do we need to be tested, to be disciplined, to endure, in order for us to be “perfect and complete” as James 1:4 says.

Now, Hebrews 12:4-11 is dealing with discipline in the broad sense of the word – the sense of training or upbringing. In order to train us, our parents could train us positively by teaching us and putting us in situations where we had to apply what we learned – to trust in what they taught us. They taught us to do a job and then gave us the job to do.



However, they also trained us by reproof and correction. If we disobeyed them, we were punished. We were punished not because they wanted retribution for our disobedience. They punished us to teach us to obey. God is the same way. He teaches us through His Word and puts us in situations that require us to trust Him and respond in faith. But He also corrects us when we are disobedient so that we learn to be obedient. This passage covers both senses of the term “discipline” – positive training - and reproof and correction. Both types are hard and sometimes seem sorrowful; both types require faith – faith that God is in control, He knows what He is doing, He loves us, and is doing what is good for us – both types require endurance, and both types help us grow in holiness and righteousness. Church discipline fits in under the “reproof and correction” aspect of discipline.

This leads us to another point about discipline - **Discipline is necessary to purify the Church.** By “Church” I mean the universal church of believers. As individual believers, we are to be pure, we are to be holy. As Hebrews 12:10 said, we are being disciplined to share in God’s holiness. Turn to **1 Peter 1:14–16** <sup>14</sup> **Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance.** <sup>15</sup> **Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct;** <sup>16</sup> **for it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”** Notice the Father/child analogy here – like obedient children, we are to be holy like our Father. Because of our position as children of God, as members of God’s family, we are supposed to be holy.

Collectively, individual believers make up the “church” – the body of Christ. And just as each of us is supposed to be holy, the church, as the body of Christ is to be holy. Look at **Ephesians 5:25–27** <sup>25</sup> **Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,** <sup>26</sup> **so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,** <sup>27</sup> **that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.** This instruction to husbands tells us what the church is supposed to be – sanctified, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, holy and blameless. Notice also a passage in 1 Corinthians - **1 Corinthians 5:6–8** <sup>6</sup> **Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?** <sup>7</sup> **Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are *in fact* unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.** <sup>8</sup> **Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.** In this passage Paul is jumping the Corinthian church for putting up with a very egregious sin by one of their

members. Rather than dealing with the member, they were “tolerant” of his sin (and even arrogant about their tolerant attitude), and allowed him to remain in the church. Leaven is yeast and Paul is using yeast as an analogy for sin. When a very little yeast is added a lump of dough, it spreads quickly and soon permeates the whole thing. It doesn’t take much – just a little. Paul is telling them that, if they tolerate sin in their church, it will soon spread through the whole body. It may not necessarily be the same sin, but the toleration of sin allows sin to grow and permeate the church. His reference to “Christ our Passover” and “celebrating the feast” is an allusion to the Feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread which were celebrated one right after the other by the Jews. Both required the use of unleavened bread and, before they were celebrated all leaven was removed from the house. Paul’s point is this – as a result of Christ’s sacrifice – the once for all sacrifice as the perfect Lamb of God – the Corinthian church was a new unleavened lump of dough and they should not tolerate sin in their midst or it would spread. The Church – whether it is the Church universal, the whole body of believers, or the local church, the local assembly of believers – like Fredericksburg Bible Church – should be holy and should not tolerate sin in its midst. Sin needs to be dealt with by the church. How the church is to deal with it will be discussed next week. For now, just know that it should be dealt with in love and with the goal of lovingly restoring the brother or sister.

To summarize the context of church discipline so far, let’s review the 3 Phases of Sanctification that Jeremy covered several times when he was teaching through Galatians. Remember what they are – Positional Sanctification, Experiential Sanctification and Ultimate Sanctification. Remember our first point – **Discipline occurs because of our relationship with God** – this relates to Positional Sanctification - this is our position – we are believers, we are members of God’s family. We never lose this position.

But, because of our position, because of who we are - we are expected to continually become sanctified – to grow and mature – to become more Christ like - as we live out our lives as Christians. This is Experiential Sanctification. Because we are positionally members of God’s family, we are expected to behave like it and submit to Him in obedience. This is the Aim of Sanctification – to learn loyalty to God. In other words, we are to grow and mature spiritually. Remember our second point about discipline - **Discipline occurs so that we will grow in spiritual maturity.**

Now, the Phases of Sanctification do not just apply to individual believers. They apply to the Church. The Church as a whole is also sanctified in a positional and experiential sense. The Church is made up of the children of God and collectively is the body and bride of Christ (as Ephesians 5 tells us),

a “kingdom of priests, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession” (as 1 Peter 2:9 tells us). This is its position. As an organism, the Church is being purified and prepared by Christ progressively to present the Church to Himself holy and blameless. Just as the position of individual believers imposes an obligation of holiness on them, the position of the church imposes an obligation of holiness on it.

Also, individuals and the Church are representative of Christ on earth and their behavior directly reflects on His name. The sinful behavior of an individual believer damages the reputation of the Church and whatever damages the reputation of the Church damages Christ’s reputation. Neither the Church, nor a local church, nor an individual believer, can be complacent about sin. Similarly, the Church (and each local church) must commit to its corporate holiness. A church cannot be like the Corinthian church – tolerating sin and boasting in its tolerance. These days, our emphasis tends to be on God’s grace and not so much on our responsibility to obey and grow. And God is gracious – but He does not tolerate sin and neither should we. He gives grace in that He sent Christ to die for our sins. He provides the Holy Spirit to help us live in obedience to Him, and when we don’t, He forgives us when we confess. He doesn’t ignore sin, by His grace He has given us a means to deal with it, at an incomprehensible cost to Him. What does Romans 6:1 ask - **“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?”** What’s the answer? Verse 2 - **“May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?”** (Romans 6:1-2)

The best way I can think of to sum up all of this is this. Before you are saved, you are not a child of God, you are spiritually dead. The moment you believe, you are “born again” as a child of God. You immediately become an infant in God’s family. God’s family is supposed to be holy, like Him. As baby believers, we don’t start off holy. However, God, as our loving Father, raises us in His family, to become holy – to mature spiritually by learning loyalty to Him. When we are disobedient, we break fellowship with God, the head of the family, and God disciplines us to teach us to be obedient and to bring us back into fellowship with Him and the rest of the family. As members of the family, our behavior reflects on the reputation of God and His family. If we obey, it reflects well. If we disobey, the reputation is damaged. This is the context in which discipline occurs.

So, to summarize the context of discipline, we made 3 points:

1. Discipline occurs because we are children of God.
2. Discipline is necessary for us to grow in spiritual maturity.
3. Discipline is necessary for the purity of the Church.

Now, let's narrow the focus to God's discipline as it pertains to reproof and correction of sin. The kind of training that a child receives when he or she is disobedient. Briefly, God has many tools He uses to correct us when we are disobedient. A few examples are:

1. Circumstances - When Solomon sinned by marrying foreign wives and turning to their gods, God raised up adversaries to Solomon. (See 1 Kings 11:14-40)
2. Physical Sickness and Death – Some of the Corinthians were disciplined this way because of the sinful way in which they celebrated the Lord's Supper (See 1 Cor. 11:23-34).
3. Mental Sickness – God disciplined Nebuchadnezzar's arrogance by taking away his reason and driving him out into the wilderness where he ate grass like cattle, until he repented and acknowledged God's sovereignty (See Daniel 5:13-31).

The local body of believers – the local church – like our church – is also a tool that God uses to discipline us when we sin. In fact, this is one of the purposes of the church – Scripture commands the church to discipline its members and the consequences are very bad when it doesn't. Remember Galatians 6:1 - <sup>1</sup>

**Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.** "Restore" is a command. Look at 1 Cor. 5:11-13 - <sup>11</sup> **But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler— not even to eat with such a one.** <sup>12</sup> **For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within *the church*?** <sup>13</sup> **But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.**

[Note that this says "do you not judge those who are in the church? This is a rhetorical question and means – yes. But doesn't John 7:1 tell us not to judge? Are these passages in conflict? The answer is no – In John 7:1, Christ is telling us not to judge according to our own standards. However, we are to judge ourselves according to Scripture. That is what Christ is telling us to do in Matt. 18 and what Paul is telling us to do in 1 Cor. 5].

Also, 1 Thessalonians 5:14 - <sup>14</sup> **We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.** Look at the end of our passage in Hebrews – Hebrews 12:12-13- <sup>12</sup> **Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, <sup>13</sup> and make straight paths for your feet, so that *the limb* which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed." At times, each of us may be weak hands or feeble knees. We are supposed to**

strengthen each other and make straight paths for our spiritual walk – why? So that, when one of us is having trouble walking, he won't be damaged further, but be healed. This is a command to help each other endure God's training and correction.

Let's turn to the book of Revelation and look at Chapters 2 and 3 very briefly. In these chapters, Christ is evaluating seven churches - Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. That is the first thing we need to notice right off the bat – Christ evaluates the obedience and behavior of the local church. Fredericksburg Bible Church is accountable to Christ. If you really think about that, it is a very sobering thought, especially if you are an Elder. We cannot take our responsibilities lightly.

Notice how Christ evaluates the church in Thyatira. Look at **Revelation 2:19–25** - <sup>19</sup> **'I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.** <sup>20</sup> **'But I have *this* against you, that you tolerate** (note the word "tolerate" – it is a key word) **the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit *acts of* immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.** <sup>21</sup> **'I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality.** <sup>22</sup> **'Behold, I will throw her on a bed of *sickness*, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds.** <sup>23</sup> **'And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.** <sup>24</sup> **'But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you.** <sup>25</sup> **'Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.** What does Christ have against them? Thyatira was dominated by trade guilds. You basically could not find work unless you were a member of a guild and to be a member of a guild, you had to participate in the guild's festivals, which included feasting and orgies dedicated to the god of the guild. The false teacher (called Jezebel), was apparently allowed to teach in the church, and she taught them that it was okay to participate in these feasts and orgies. The church messed up because it tolerated her false teaching and the participation of its members in the feasting and immorality of the guild festivals. That church had not taken care of business. It had allowed itself to be led away from Christ by false teaching, which led them into gross sin. They should have dealt with this early on, but they didn't, and it basically led most of the church into apostasy. Now, we can look at the church in Thyatira and say "we would never do that". But we don't start out to go apostate. We get there over time – we begin a little at a time, our collective conscience gets seared, we gradually become blind to it and our

hearts become hardened to the point we don't see the problem. A little false teaching here and there, a little immorality. Pretty soon, a church will be in full blown apostasy.

We are immersed in the world system – our culture. We live and breathe it every day. If we are not careful, we will allow some aspect of the world - its thoughts, philosophies, its values, its ideas of right and wrong, its behavior – into our thinking – into the thinking of the church. The world will plant a virus in the church and it will grow and – like the leaven that leavens the whole lump of dough – it will eventually spread and infect the whole church. There are many examples of this – years ago everyone read the Bible literally – the Genesis creation account, the Fall of man, Noah's flood, everything was considered literally and historically true. Not any more – now liberal theologians even question the literal historical death and resurrection of Christ – the very foundation of Christianity. The church didn't just wake up one morning and decide to reject everything. It started with little bits here and there. Evolution catches on in the world – the church buys into it – it has to reconcile the creation account with evolution – it can't do it – so it rejects the literal reading of Genesis. Well, if the creation account is not literally true, what else is not literally true? Step by step God's Word is eroded until nothing is literally true. The world wins. Take another example – unmarried couples living together. Scripturally, this is wrong – it is fornication. From the world's perspective, fornication is no longer a problem. Unfortunately, many churches tolerate this behavior within the church body. What happens? Other members see it, see that nothing is done about it, and think – Hey! That must be alright. The world wins. This is how a church goes apostate.

If the church fails to do its job – to correct disobedient members and false teachers – the consequences are catastrophic and Christ will hold that church accountable. The church must do its job.

So, this week we learned:

1. Discipline occurs because we are children of God.
2. Discipline is necessary for us to grow in spiritual maturity.
3. Discipline is necessary for the purity of the Church.
4. Discipline can be positive instruction through trials and endurance.
5. Discipline can also be corrective – correction and reproof when we are disobedient children.
6. The church is supposed to participate in Discipline.

Next week, we will cover Matthew 18 and how the local church is supposed to handle sin among its members. We will see that church discipline should not be harsh or legalistic, but gentle and loving and forgiving. We will also see

that – any sin can lead to discipline – there is actually only one sin that drives the process – rebellion.

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<sup>i</sup> *The Belgic Confession*, in the Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics digital library, <http://www.reformed.org/documents/?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/documents/BelgicConfession.html> [accessed November 1, 2009]. According to the Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics, the Belgic Confession was initially prepared in 1561 and is “the oldest of the doctrinal standards of the Christian Reformed Church” and “stands as one of the best symbolical statements of Reformed Doctrine”.

<sup>ii</sup> Calvin *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, bk. IV, ch. Xii, sec. 1.