

## **When To Leave and When To Let Go Discretion and Discipline in the Local Church**

- I. The Difficulty of the Subject
  - A. Ideas about compassion and judgment
  - B. A loss of “church-connectivity”
  - C. A loss of a genuine call to holiness
- II. The “Easy” Issue – When To Leave a Local Church
  - A. Technically, this was a “non-issue” in the New Testament
    - 1. No one “left” their local church to go to another, unless they physically moved from one place to another.
    - 2. Those who did “leave” a local church were thought to have left the “Church” (1 John 2:19)
    - 3. Whole congregations that appeared to full of “false professors” were identified as “synagogues of Satan” – Revelation 2:9 & 3:9
  - B. Yet, we live in a world radically different from that of the newly born 1<sup>st</sup> century church
    - 1. A “church on every corner”
    - 2. Membership by baptism, statement, letter, etc.
    - 3. Membership in multiple local communities, often across denominational lines
  - C. So, in Biblical wisdom, when should a person leave? – Keeping in mind “kingdom language”
    - 1. Definite - Unchecked false teaching/heresy, that is supported by the

- actions/actions of the congregation and leadership
  - 2. Definite - Unchecked immorality, that is supported by the actions/inactions of the congregation and leadership
  - 3. A maybe: an significant issue of conscience in which your continued presence in a congregation would only continue to lead to dissension and factions, rather than unity and peace
  - 4. Otherwise – stay and work it out (kingdom)
- III. The “Hard” Issue – Church Discipline
    - A. Definitions
      - 1. “Learning that molds character and enforces correct behavior” Tyndale Bible Dictionary
      - 2. Church discipline – Efforts to promote right Christian thinking and practice, including, but not limited to, the calling into account those who habitually and unrepentantly fall short of biblical standards.
    - B. Key passages
      - 1. Matthew 18:15-20 & 1 Corinthians 5:1-11
      - 2. Others: Hebrews 12:1-14; Galatians 6:1-8; Romans 16:17-18; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-16; 1 Timothy 1:18-20; 1 Timothy 5:19-20; Titus 3:9-11; 2 John 10-11
    - C. Kinds of sin specifically disciplined in the New Testament
      - 1. Divisiveness (Rom. 16:17 & Titus 3:20)

2. Incest, Sexual Immorality, Covetousness, Idolatry, Reviling, Drunkenness, Swindling (1 Corinthians 5)
3. Laziness and refusing to work (2 Thess. 3:6-10)
4. Disobeying Paul's writings (2 Thess. 3:14-15)
5. Blasphemy (1 Timothy 1:20)
6. Teaching heresy (2 John 10-11)

“Nonetheless, a definite principle appears to be at work: all sins that were explicitly disciplined in the NT were publicly known or outwardly evident sins, and many of them had continued over a period of time. The fact that the sins were publicly known meant that reproach was being brought on the church, Christ was being dishonored, and there was a real possibility that others would be encouraged to follow the wrongful patterns of life that were being publicly tolerated.”

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#### D. Principles of Discipline

1. Redemptive, not vengeful
2. For the good of the one disciplined
3. For the good of other Christians, as they see the danger of sin
4. For the health of the church as a whole
5. For the corporate witness of the church
6. For the glory of God as we reflect His holiness

#### IV. What Do Learn From This?

##### A. Five key principles

1. Barring extreme circumstances, we should try to make the most and best of the church we are presently a member of

2. Leaving should be a last resort, and only for excesses of heresy and immorality
3. Discipline is not an “unkind, uncompassionate” action-rather it shows real love and concern for the life and well-being of those who bear Jesus’ name
4. As such, discipline should be done thoughtfully, in prayer, with great care and love, for the good of the unrepentant, the congregation, and the name of Christ