

Equipping Thoughts for Leaders



Scandia Bible Church

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Dealing with Sin in the Local Church?

We have seen several high-profile leadership scandals in this past season which have rocked the church world again and again (The continuing Catholic priest scandals, Bill Hybels, Gordon McDonald, Jerry Falwell Jr, and Carl Lentz, just to name a few). The recent uncovering of Ravi Zacharias' sins has been specifically painful for myself and others as he has been such a champion in apologetics.

Sin among leadership has devastating consequences, both among the people who are let down by those who should be providing an encouraging example as well as our testimony to the world.

What about other sins that go on in the church? With the continual deterioration in our culture in which people, including many "Christians", embrace lifestyles and behaviors that swing further and further away from God's design how do we approach them. These are not just irrelevant things, but things God clearly has identified as wrong and make Him angry. It leaves many people wondering, does the local church have any responsibility in dealing with these kinds of things?

Is dealing with sin in the church important?

We know Church should be a place of love, forgiveness, acceptance, and grace. Is noticing or bringing up the idea of sin opposed to this? Isn't that kind of stuff for those weird fundamentalists or "evangelical wackos."

God's people take part in a variety of organizations in their everyday life such as family, work, civic organizations, schools, and charitable organizations. In every one of them, there are membership standards that ensure that the organization carries out the purpose for which it was created. Those standards are important for the organization's direction and continued purpose. They have to oppose things that would derail it. The same is true for God's house, the church.

God says that His people are often "destroyed because of a lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6). This is true individually and corporately. One area that hinders churches is a lack of knowledge about Biblical membership standards and discipline.

The Protestant Reformers named "Three marks by which the true church is known: the preaching of the pure doctrine of the gospel, the pure administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of church discipline to correct faults." Unfortunately, in many Protestant churches today discipline is a lost subject.

I once read a great perspective on church discipline by John Ortberg,

"Maybe the most fundamental dynamic in church discipline is also the simplest: Sin happens. It happens in big churches; it happens in little churches. It probably happens at roughly the same per capita rate, no matter what the congregation's size. It should sadden everyone, but it shouldn't shock anyone. So, the question is not how to respond IF it happens. The question is how to respond WHEN it happens." The Bible is very clear, continual or serious sin is not to be ignored but addressed. While "love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8) it doesn't ignore them or cover them up. Sometimes it seems larger churches are worse about it than smaller ones, probably to protect their greater influence. Either way, it is wrong.

Over the years, I have been shocked at how God's people become surprised by any sort of discipline in the church as if it is a foreign concept. Some mistakenly think that because it is a voluntary society where God's grace abounds then there are no

standards of membership. Somehow there is a subtle thought that the church is a standard free zone.

The same people usually belong to organizations in the community that have standards and requirements of membership, and they have no problem with that. Why would one think such things should not exist in the church? After all, God's house is "the body of Christ, light of the world, a holy temple, and the pillar and support of the truth." There are many Scriptures that speak of active steps in discipline.

Without standards and discipline, the wonderful "city of God" will become a ghetto of sin. I faced an example of this with one of my relatives who had begun to follow Jesus. He had a neighbor who was married with three children. They were good friends, and he had influence in my relative beginning to follow Jesus. Unfortunately, the wife caught the husband in an ongoing affair. My relative appealed to the neighbor, but he refused to break off the affair. They were churchgoers, who had influenced him towards Jesus, so my relative ended up going to some board members of the church.

How do you spell "Bad Leadership?"

To his shock, the board members replied when he brought it up, "We can't deal with him because if we did, we would have to deal with a bunch of other people in the church over their sins as well." They did nothing!

The man left his wife, ended up marrying the lady he had the affair with, and they continued to go to the same church while his previous wife and her three kids had to watch it every Sunday. Out of anguish, they left the church because they couldn't take the pain of it all.

I remember reading a quote from the Museum of the Diaspora in Tel Aviv. On a wall section devoted to the Jewish community's government and its affairs a word of wisdom attributed to Rabbi Israel Salanter, **"A rabbi whose community does not disagree with him is not really a rabbi, and a rabbi who fears his community is not really a man."**

Leaders can't fear the people to the point they avoid dealing with continual or serious sin.

- *Proverbs 29:25, TEV "It is dangerous to be concerned with what others think of you. The fear of man brings a snare, But he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted."*

All levels of leadership will end up dealing with sin issues that require action.

What is Church Discipline and the Consequences of Ignoring it

In Matthew 5 and 18, Jesus shows us the importance of addressing sin. Church discipline is a broad category that entails a variety of steps such as challenging, restriction, avoiding of the unrepentant, or the last step, removal (removed outside of God's people Mt 18:15-17). The goal is to see the one in sin repent and healing of the effects of that sin.

If leaders don't follow through with discipline, there can be severe damage among God's people. I remember a time when a gender confused pedophile who had served time in prison started coming around our church and reaching out to God. We began the process of discipleship.

He continued to have sexual conflicts. We drew him close and didn't allow him around any children. At one point we found a place that specializes in helping people with sexual dysfunctions. At first, he was open to going but backed out at the last minute and then left the church.

We lost track of him and later found, after an explosion of sin, that he became part of a church in another town. It was a fairly new church that was trying to make a big splash, so it launched a variety of programs to attract people quickly. In those situations, there is a great demand for people to help serve in the programs. Without checking, they put this man in children's work, and you can guess what happened. He molested children and with the scandal that church no longer exists.

Dealing with sin is not some harsh expression designed to marginalize or punish people. We need church discipline both for protecting the saints and the glory of God.

Because discipline is an often unknown or neglected subject, we put together a systematic study based on the thirty New Testament Passages that address the issue.



Don't forget to check out this book: [Click here](#)

You can download a copy at: <https://c2cfamily.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Systematic-Study-Church-Discipline-Challenge-Restrict-Avoid-Remove-or-Restore.pdf>

Doug Kreighbaum
www.dougreighbaum.com
dkreighbaum@gmail.com
www.c2cfamily.org

