

Healthy Churches Detox

1 Corinthians 5:8, *“Therefore purge out the old leaven...”*

Introduction: Physically speaking, we can really make a mess out of our bodies. So, sometimes, we just need to detox. Sometimes the doctor tells us: “if you keep eating like that it’s going to kill you.” There comes a time, as much as we like certain foods, that we need to realize they are doing nothing but harming us and we need to set them aside and start trying to take care of this body God gave us.

There’s certainly a spiritual parallel we can make to the church. We are to love and strive to win all people to take part in this wonderful family of God. Yet, there comes a time where we sometimes need to realize some do not want to live a holy and righteous life. In so doing, they drag down the church body as a whole by their refusal to surrender to Christ. So, there are times, the church body needs to detox. The vineyard needs pruning. The field needs weeding. The house needs cleaning. The sheep and the goats need separating. The old leaven needs purged from the cupboards. There’s a right way and a wrong way to go about this important work. Because many brothers and sisters have seen discipline enacted the wrong way we often have a knee-jerk reaction to any type of discipline at all. So, let’s take a look, Biblically, at how and why healthy churches detox so we might continue to be the glorious, unspotted church God calls us to be.

I. God Calls Us To Discipline For the Greater Good

- A. God does not call us to discipline for evil, but for good.
 - 1. In fact, the church’s first form of discipline is in its instructive and precautionary teaching (Hebrews 12:5-11; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Timothy 4:2).
 - 2. The goal of such chastening, as Hebrews mentions, is for long-term good (12:10-11).

- B. So, when the church must show tough love, our goal is to help the erring individual.
 - 1. They must be moved to godly sorrow for their sin (2 Corinthians 7:9-11).
 - 2. Ultimately, we want to win their soul (James 5:19-20; 1 Corinthians 5:5).

- C. Secondly, the goal is to protect the rest of the body from the backslider’s influence (1 Corinthians 5:6; 15:33; Titus 1:11).

II. Discipline’s Trigger—Obstinacy in Sin

- A. The Bible calls for church discipline in a variety of situations and it is always triggered by one common reason—obstinacy in sin.
 - 1. If a private offense goes uncorrected—it calls for church discipline (Matthew 18:15-17).
 - 2. If the immoral person does not repent—it calls for church discipline (1 Corinthians 15:1-13).
 - 3. If a false teacher does not retract—it calls for church discipline (Romans 16:17-18; 1 Timothy 6:3-5; Titus 3:10-11).
 - 4. If an individual disobeys an apostolic teaching—it calls for church discipline (2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15).

B. While it is our hope instructive teaching can help prevent others from sin, it is a reality that some still continue in their sin and may need more than just instruction.

1. To use an Old Testament illustration: God sent round after round of Old Testament prophets to Israel, but they responded in rebellion (2 Chronicles 36:15-16).
2. Therefore, God took stronger measures as He allowed His people to be taken into captivity by their enemies (2 Chronicles 36:17; cp. 1 Kings 9:4-9).

III. Varying Situations Call For Varying Responses

A. Not every situation calls for the exact same response—so we must be careful to think there is a cookie cutter process followed for each sin.

1. There are private offenses which may be privately corrected (Matthew 18:15-17).
2. There are sins which are publicly committed (1 Corinthians 1:10-11; Galatians 2:11-14).
3. There may even be sins where elders are involved (1 Timothy 5:19-20; Deuteronomy 19:15).

B. Each sin may call for a different response and tone.

1. Some require compassionate correction (Jude 22; 2 Timothy 2:24-26).
2. Some require sharp rebuke (Jude 23; Titus 1:12-14).
3. Some need gentle encouragement (Galatians 6:1; Hebrews 12:12-13).

C. It takes discernment and experience to know how to respond to each unique situation—which is why it may not be for everyone (Proverbs 15:28; cp. Galatians 6:1).

IV. Actions Which Hamper Effectively Winning Back Erring Brethren

A. Treating Brothers Like Enemies (2 Thessalonians 3:15).

B. Lack of Urgency In Response to Sin (Luke 15:1-9; 1 Timothy 4:2).

C. Assuming a “Letter” is the Discipline (1 Corinthians 5:11; Romans 16:17; Luke 15:11-17).

D. Mixed Messages Via a Disjointed Response (1 Timothy 5:22; Romans 1:32; 1 Cor 1:10).

E. Inconsistent discipline/partiality (James 2:1-4).

E. Failure to reaccept the penitent brother (2 Corinthians 2:8).

Conclusion: Many have been hurt by preaching that does not help sinners turn from sin. Others have been hurt by congregations who have responded too slowly, with love, to those who are wayward. Yet, many have also been hurt by the manmade traditions we have created and called “church discipline” that find no place in Scripture. All we can do today is repent...repent if we have been negligent, too tolerant or too cold in how we have responded to sin. Repent if we have been living in sin and need to return to the loving fellowship of Christians who love God and love one another more than anything else in this world. We will not be a healthy church if each of us does not rid ourselves of unhealthy attitudes, beliefs and practices and, perhaps, toxic, impenitent brethren.