

Is Loving Church Discipline Crucial to a Believer's Health?

In *40 Questions about Church Membership and Discipline* (Kregel Academic), Dr. Jeremy M. Kimble recognizes and addresses questions church leaders and members have on the subjects. With succinct chapters, this book is a practical resource for any church leader, elder board, seminary student or new member seeking a foundational understanding of how the church should function.

Church discipline is an often thorny topic, but Kimble describes discipline as a proper demonstration of the biblical concept of love. He writes that God disciplines those whom he loves, and thus a church who claims to love its members without disciplining them contradicts Scripture and offers a different kind of love than God does. Church discipline can potentially be a painful process, but as a spiritual family, we are called to work through such matters faithfully and gently.

Q: How did you come to write a book on church membership and discipline?

There has been a resurgence of discussion about membership and discipline in recent years due to the ministries of people such as Mark Dever, but there is certainly more to be said. Because of this, the topic intrigued me, so I decided to write my doctoral dissertation on the subject.

After completing my degree, teaching in a Christian university setting and serving as an elder in my local church, the ideas of membership and discipline continued to make their mark on my thinking. I realized that if we want to persevere in our faith and progressively grow as disciples, church membership and discipline would be key factors in that growth. I am passionate about educating church leaders, members and

seminary students about this important subject, which is why I wrote *40 Questions About Church Membership and Discipline*.

Q: What is church discipline, and why is it necessary for the church to function properly?

Church discipline is divine authority delegated to the church by Jesus Christ to maintain order through the correction of persistently sinning church members for the good of those caught in sin, the purity of the church and the glory of God. Discipline is a practice that should occur regularly within the church, and it is intended to keep God's people on the path of perseverance and to exhort the one under discipline to repent. This can be thought of in both formative and corrective terms, the former referring to typical church life and practices intended to help all Christians grow in their faith (preaching, teaching, counseling, small groups and so on), the latter referring to specific correction meted out to those involved in ongoing, unrepentant sin. Discipline is necessary and vital for the health of the church because it reminds us what we are doing as members, namely, pursuing growth in love and holiness.

Q: Explain what you mean when you write, "As counterintuitive as it sounds, discipline is a proper demonstration of the biblical concept of love."

Love is not mere tolerance. Love is the overflow of joy in God that gladly meets the needs of others (2 Cor. 8:1-15), the biggest need being conformity to the image of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:28-29). To that end, God disciplines those whom He loves (Heb. 12:6-11), and thus a church who claims to love its members without disciplining them contradicts Scripture and offers a different kind of love than God does. Church discipline can potentially be a painful process, but as a spiritual family, we are called to work through such matters faithfully and gently. As such, not only are we called to go through this process in a loving manner, the very act of discipline should be seen as an act of love.

Q: Many people may argue excommunication, the final step of

church discipline, is harsh, but why it is sometimes necessary? How is excommunication often misunderstood?

When people think of church discipline in general, they often just think of excommunication, which they understand as “kicking people out of the church.” What fails to be understood is typically, churches follow a process from Matthew 18:15-20 before excommunication ever happens. There we are told we should confront the individual multiple times, long before excommunication is considered, with the hope they will repent of their sin. If repentance never happens after this process, with grief and sorrow, the church must obey the teachings of Jesus and remove this person from membership. However, this is to be done in love and with the hope the person under discipline will repent and be restored. Thus, it is not merely “kicking someone out.” If excommunication does occur, people should fervently pray and take opportunities to encourage the person toward repentance, since restoration is the real goal.

Q: How are church membership, discipline and discipleship all interrelated?

Church membership is the front door of church life, and discipline (especially excommunication) is the back door. When people come into the front door of membership, they are ushered into a community that fellowships around the truths of the gospel. They are committed to one another, encouraging each other to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. We seek to imitate God, walking in love (Eph. 5:1-2), and we aim to be holy because God is holy (1 Pet.1:15-16). All that is described here could also be deemed discipleship, as we continue in community to learn from Jesus to live like Jesus. Discipline comes into play because at times we are not in step with what Jesus is calling us to do, pursuing sin instead. When this occurs, sin must be confronted, with the hopes that the rebuke is heard and the pursuit of faithful discipleship is taken up with renewed vigor.

Ask for Part 1 of this interview, where Dr. Kimble discusses

church membership. {eo}

Learn more about *40 Questions about Church Membership and Discipline* and the other books in the 40 Questions series at [40 Questions](#).