

PERSPECTIVE

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*Why
Great Commission
Churches Should*

**PRACTICE
CHURCH
DISCIPLINE**

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Why Great Commission Churches Should Practice Church Discipline

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Healthy churches are careful with their membership. They strive to ensure members don't just know the gospel but have a proven track-record of living according to the gospel (James 2:19). Furthermore, sound churches lovingly but firmly confront members caught in open sin. When a member refuses to respond in repentance and faith, a congregation will eventually have no alternative but to remove this person from membership as a matter of what is typically called church discipline, or excommunication (see Matthew 18:15–20; 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Corinthians 2:5–11; 13:1–4; 2 Thessalonians 3:13–15; Titus 3:10).

A few years ago, a member of our church was caught stealing money. He said he was sorry, but his actions proved otherwise. He displayed no godly grief (2 Corinthians 7:10), he refused to heed wise counsel (Proverbs 11:14), and he ceased communication with anyone who would challenge him. This eventually left the church with no other option but to remove him from membership as a matter of church discipline. Sadly, after months of pleading and not a few tears (he'd been a beloved member of the body), we could no longer affirm that he was a Christian. We excommunicated him. This doesn't happen often at our church, but it does happen.

Such practice is all too rare in churches today. Naysayers argue it's not very loving. They suggest all conflict should be handled privately, avoiding the possibility of any public embarrassment. Moreover, they insist churches should be about the business of preaching the gospel instead of worrying about the details of an individual Christian's life.

But church discipline and the Great Commission can't be separated, and here are several reasons why:

Churches that practice church discipline obey the Great Commission.

Consider the actual words of the Great Commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (emphasis added). Because Jesus

commanded his disciples to practice church discipline (Matthew 18:15–20), our obedience to this instruction is essential to Great Commission faithfulness.

Admittedly, practicing church discipline to the point of excommunication is hard. Churches can certainly make mistakes in how they obey this command, but obey we must. Thankfully, Jesus is our wise and loving Lord. We can trust He knows what is best for the church.

Exercising church discipline may cut against the grain of our anti-authoritarian, live-and-let-live culture. But remember, we can't be Great Commission churches without teaching God's people to obey everything Jesus commanded.

Churches that practice church discipline evangelize their own people.

It's amazing how many passages in the New Testament urge people who profess faith in Christ to be sure their profession is genuine (Matthew 7:21; 16:24–28; 25:31–36; 2 Corinthians 6:1; 13:5; Hebrews 3:12–14; 6:1–8; James 2:14–26). Because sin is mischievous, we are always to be on guard. Such self-inspection doesn't demonstrate a lack of faith; it simply proves the reality that sin is powerful and dangerous. The Christian, as Paul said, is to "take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Sometimes sin gets the upper hand. A believer may fall into a sin pattern that calls into question the authenticity of his or her conversion. It could be a husband leaving his marriage with no biblical grounds. It may be a sister sowing seeds of discord throughout the church. Whatever the ongoing sin may be, when it becomes public it should be addressed. This person needs a fresh encounter with the life-giving gospel of Jesus Christ.

What hope does such a person have? How does God call the church to react when this person is no longer living as a Christian? God's answer is church discipline. He calls upon the church to evangelize its own members by removing them from the membership of the body if they refuse to repent (Mark 1:15).

But removal from membership is not the end goal. Not at all! God calls the church to discipline "so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 5:5, emphasis added). Church discipline is evangelistic!

The purpose of church discipline is restorative. The goal is to see a person recommit himself to Christ in word and in deed. Church discipline may be painful, but it's done with the hope of redemption and reconciliation. In that sense, church discipline is a Good News ministry. Church discipline is the most loving and the most evangelistic action a church can take when a member persists in public, unrepentant sin.

Churches that practice church discipline are modeling the gospel.

By and large, families with well-disciplined children are attractive. But if the kids are unruly and disagreeable, it can be hard to find a babysitter. I remember an old Dennis the Menace episode where Dennis's parents couldn't find anyone who actually knew the family to watch their son. His reputation was that bad.

The same is true for a church family. Congregations filled with unruly members are not attractive to an unbelieving world. They have a bad reputation in their community. How often have you heard someone say, "I don't want to attend a church—they're full of hypocrites"?

Before I was a Christian, I attended a bacculaureate service at my high school—a religious program to honor graduates. Several students gave speeches testifying to their relationship with Christ. I knew a couple of these boys from the bus and the cafeteria. Suffice it to say, their lives did not commend the gospel. Their witness made me wonder if Christians were any different than the world. Thankfully, God kept working on my own heart; he revealed my own self-righteousness and my need for a Savior. A few months later I came to saving faith. But the example of my "Christian" classmates did not help.

For the sake of our witness to an unbelieving world, churches ought to do more than preach the gospel. We must model its implications. At times this means putting out of membership those who refuse to walk in a manner pleasing to the Lord (Colossians 1:10). There is no perfect church, but if we want our gospel words to have any traction with our non-Christian neighbors, let's labor to see our churches filled with gospel fruit (Galatians 5:22–23).

There is something wonderful and appealing—even to unbelievers—about a congregation marked by love and peace and holiness. In fact, Jesus said the love believers share is a visible testimony to the reality of Christ (John 13:35). Faithfulness demands we do all we can to live worthy of the gospel we preach. Church discipline is an

important part of this biblical equation.

Churches indistinct from the world having nothing to offer. Passersby will have no interest in a church full of people whose lives are as carnal as their own. Do you want to tarnish your witness in the community? Then refuse to practice church discipline.

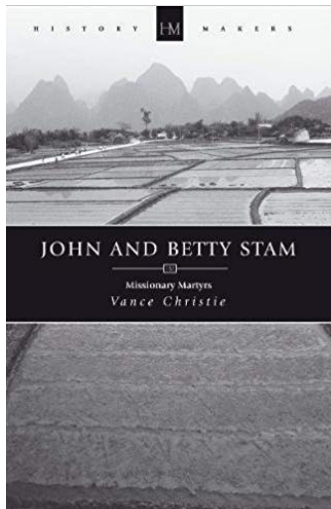
We practice church discipline out of obedience to the Great Commission. Jesus commanded it. Therefore, to be a Great Commission believer, we need to heed His call. We practice church discipline out of love for our own members. There are times when believers fall into a public sin they won't give up. Church discipline is a form of evangelism that points members afresh to the saving power of the cross. Finally, we practice church discipline out of love for our neighbors. We want them to understand that the gospel really does change lives. Jesus doesn't just tell us to believe, He leads us to repent.

– Aaron Menikoff

John & Betty Stam: Missionary Martyrs

Written by Vance Christie

Bookstall Price: \$16



John and Betty Stam: Missionary Martyrs is a wonderfully powerful book about the lives of John and Betty Stam who served as missionaries in China and gave their lives to preach the gospel. The author, Vance Christie, begins the biography not with John or Betty, but with their parents Peter and Amelia Stam and Charles and Clara Scott. John and Betty’s parents were devoted followers of Jesus who gave the example of faithfulness to the local church and zeal for the work of missions. John and Betty pursued the Lord based on the model they saw in their parents. They met at Moody Bible Institute and forged

a friendship on their mutual interest in the China Inland Mission. They both saw a great and urgent need to serve the Lord in China. Their desire to be missionaries grew as did their romantic relationship. Betty was sent first to China to begin her work with John to follow a year later. Soon they married and began serving together in China, traveling to various places to share the gospel. The Lord would use the Stams beyond their time in China—encouraging hundreds more to dedicate their lives to spreading the gospel around the world.

The story of John and Betty Stam will stir your heart to desire undistracted devotion to the Lord and a greater passion for preaching the gospel. Through the difficult training, language school, and the trials of the mission field they continually showed faith in the Lord and remained committed to what He had called them to do. Parents will be inspired to see the example of faithful parenting by John and Betty’s parents. They diligently trained and disciplined their children to know the Lord, showing them the joy of serving both domestically and internationally. John’s parents modeled faithfulness to a local church and serving the community in the home. Betty’s parents instilled a zeal for missions that led every one of their children to become missionaries. Christians ought to read this biography to see two wonderful examples of what devotion to Christ and love for the lost looks like. Who knows how the Lord might use their story to work in your heart for the cause of missions around the world?

– RECOMMENDED BY KYLE GROSS

Excerpts From the Book

1

“It’s as clear as daylight to me that the only worthwhile life is one of unconditional surrender to God’s will, and of living in His way, trusting His love and guidance.” (Betty Stam)

– Fuller Surrender, p.42

2

“Of this we may be sure, that if we have been redeemed by Christ’s blood, and are called into His service, His work done in His way and for His glory will never lack His support.” (John Stam)

– “Going Forward!”, p.72

3

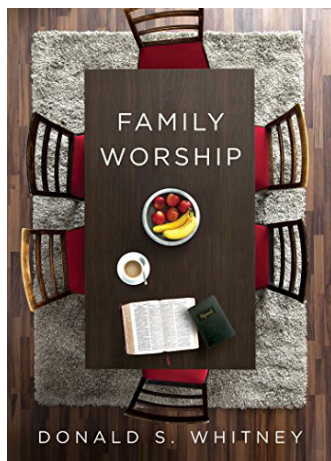
“The sacrifice may seem great now, but no sacrifice is too great to make for Him who gave himself for us.” (Peter Stam)

– A Worldwide Impact, p.200

Family Worship

Written by Donald S. Whitney

Bookstall Price: \$8



Whitney begins *Family Worship* by looking at the past and using examples from the Bible to show how the Lord has instructed family worship from the beginning of redemptive history. He gives biblical examples including Abraham, Moses, Joshua, the apostles, and the early church; and details how family worship has been clearly evident in families and homes throughout Scripture.

He continues to outline how the Church in the first century and beyond viewed family worship. Whitney uses quotes from Tertullian, Martin Luther, John Knox, and even the Westminster and the Second London Baptist Confessions of Faith to support his observations. He also cites examples of similar views of family worship from the Puritans, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, and Martyn Lloyd-Jones among many others. He highlights statements from current pastors Don Carson and John Piper as they provide more insight into the idea of families gathering to worship God.

Whitney then breaks down the elements that comprise family worship. He uses examples of three primary areas: reading scripture, prayer, and singing worship songs. He includes secondary categories that can be a part of family worship as time permits: memorizing catechisms, memorizing scripture, and reading other Christian books and biographies. There are practical questions that each family may face as they arrange their family worship time, such as age appropriate structures and time, if the father is not a believer or not even present in the home, and if there are no children present in the home.

He concludes this short book with the practical motivations for starting family worship and obstacles that can make this difficult. Whitney uses Jacob from the Bible as an example of the resolve needed to begin as soon as possible. He concludes by reminding us of the importance of the Gospel in our worship.

I have been a father for just over 2 years and have been learning on the job. It was very interesting and helpful for me to be able to review *Family Worship* by Donald Whitney. After completing it, I would highly recommend it for any parents looking to deepen their time of family worship as they pour the Word into their kids' lives.

– RECOMMENDED BY DAVID SCOTT

Excerpts From the Book

1

“Having your family in a Christ-exalting, gospel-centered, Bible-teaching local church is crucial to Christian parenting. But it is not enough for conveying to your family all you want to teach them about God and your beliefs. Moreover, it is unlikely that exposure to the church once or twice a week will impress your children enough with the greatness and glory of God that they will want to pursue him once they leave your home”

– Introduction, p.14

2

“If we want to bring up a godly family, who shall be a seed to serve God, when our heads are under the clods of the valley, lets us seek to train them up in the fear of God by meeting together as a family for worship.” (Charles Spurgeon)

– Here the Reformation Must Begin, p.38

3

“Husbands, fathers—if you have been negligent in this duty and great privilege, repent by starting family worship today. Again, you may feel awkward about what to say to your wife or your children about starting, but simply say that God has convicted you of your responsibility to lead in family worship and you want to start at a given time today or tonight. Almost certainly your wife will be thrilled more than you can imagine to hear you say that. Your children may or may not be as enthusiastic, but that does not really matter. The less interest they show, the more your family needs family worship.”

– Isn't This What You Really Want To Do?, p.65

Blessed is the man...

*walks not in the
counsel of the wicked*

*nor stands in the
way of sinners*

*nor sits in the
seat of scoffers*

BUT

his delight is in the

LAW OF THE LORD

and on his law he meditates day and night

Psalm 1:1-2

“¹ Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; ² but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. ³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.”

— Psalm 1:1-3

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Psalms were the prayer book and songbook for Israel, Jesus, and the early church. Each Psalm was central to the life and worship of God’s people for centuries as they have taught people how to worship God in song and prayer with the mingling of the mind and heart.

Psalm 1 opens to us the central theme of wisdom that runs throughout the entire psalter: If we are going to be wise we must understand the fundamental way to have a blessed, happy, life favored by God. It is to choose the life of the righteous who “delights in the law of the Lord.”

Following Jesus means denying a way of life that is opposed to his good and loving will. We are not blessed when we “walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the way of the sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers.” These three phrases encompass everything about us. Followers of Jesus do not have beliefs informed by the “counsel of the wicked.” Their lifestyle is not in line with the “way of sinners.” Their place of belonging is not “in the seat of scoffers.”

Christian, let us remember that we are blessed when we deny sin, its wicked ways, and the company of those who would lead us into it. There is a blessedness in saying no to things contrary to the will of God.

Our joy and blessedness are also found when we say yes to the Lord by saying yes to his Word. Our flesh tells us that we should delight in sin. The Spirit affirms the truth of God’s word—“his delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night.” Delight, joy, and pure pleasure is found in communion with God through his Word. We are to be consumed with a passion for God’s Word in such a way that it is regularly in our thoughts and governing our lives. May we be a people that love the Word of God.

How will we know if we are that kind of people? It will be from the fruit we bear. We will be “like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.” Delighting in and meditating on God’s Word strengthens us for every season of life we must endure. We become deeply rooted in the constant source of nourishment. In turn, we prosper spiritually.

As we think about the simple and wonderful truths of Psalm 1, we can’t help but recall our shortcomings. We often fail to say yes to God and no to wickedness. It’s at that moment, we remember Jesus, who was perfectly righteous for us. In our failure to live the blessed life, we continue to trust him who did live the most perfect blessed life.

— BRAD THAYER



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