



2. Why would the following responses to a fellow Christian who is neglecting public worship be considered improper?
  - **Silence—“I don’t want to get involved or come off like I think I’m better than he is.”**
  
  - **Sharing the matter with the pastor—“Pastor, you should probably know what Tyler is doing on Sundays and why he’s not in church. He’s . . .”**
  
3. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus shares guidelines for church discipline—how we should minister to a straying brother or sister who is caught up in a sin. Read **Matthew 18:15-18**. Put into your own words the four steps of church discipline outlined by Jesus. These steps serve as guidelines for us as we deal with straying people who are caught up in specific sins.
  - 1.
  
  - 2.
  
  - 3.
  
  - 4.
  
4. What do you hope to achieve in each of the four steps of church discipline (verse 15)?
  
5. What two things may happen that will bring the process of church discipline to an end?
  
6. What authority and confidence do we receive from Matthew 18:18?

As the steps of church discipline are followed, questions may arise: What about the brother or sister who expresses sorrow over his or her despising of the means of grace but does not change his or her behavior? Can we say with certainty that such a person is not sincere? After all, who can see into a person’s heart but God alone? In such a case, then, wouldn’t it be improper to continue with the steps of church discipline to their end (excommunication)?

These are good questions. But so are these: Can a person repent of a sin but continue to live in it? Didn't John the Baptist mention *specific* fruits of repentance when asked, "What should we do then?" (John 3:7-14). Didn't Jesus, after absolving the woman who was caught in the act of adultery, tell the woman to *leave her life of sin* as a fruit of her repentance (John 8:11)?

Yes, all good questions, and perhaps troubling. So let's have the Good Shepherd speak to us a while longer. Each of the following parables is found in the context of Jesus' teaching about repentance.

7. Read **Matthew 21:28-32**. One of the lessons of Jesus' parable might be that Christians will not only talk the talk, but they will also walk the walk. How does this apply to the straying member of the church who is sorry for his or her sin of despising the means of grace?
  
8. Read **Luke 13:6-9**. In the parable of the barren fig tree, the vineyard owner represents God, who looks for and expects the fruit of repentance in the hearts and lives of all people. What is significant about the phrases "For three years now" and "Leave it alone for one more year"?

How do these phrases apply to our ministering to the straying in the church?

9. What is meant by "cut it down"?

How does this apply to our ministering to the straying in the church?

10. When ministering to the straying, what comfort and encouragement do we receive from the Lord's promise "My word . . . will not return to me empty" (Isaiah 55:11)?

## Summary

We ought to remember that non-active members are blood-bought souls who need to hear the law and the gospel just as we do. A display of our genuine love for their salvation will defuse any wrong ideas they may have of our motives. The Lord wants his people to seek those who are lost, calling them to faith. If there is sin involved on the part of the inactive member, Jesus' words in Matthew chapter 18 will provide us with direction. In any case, whenever we use God's Word, we can be sure it is working on the hearts of those who hear it.