

you agree on earth about anything (context is disciplinary matters) that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven . . . for where two or three have gathered in My name, there I am in their midst.” (Matt.18:19-20)

A related text is 1 Corinthians 5:3-5. Paul took authority to deal with the unrepentant brother at Corinth in the severest of measures prescribed in the New Testament... “deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”

It appears that Paul was willing to subject the sinning believer’s physical life to attack or even destruction by Satan, because he was confident of the eternal salvation of the spirit. (John 3,10:27-29; 1 Cor. 12:13; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 8:9)

As in all Church discipline, even such drastic action by the Church has restoration as its goal. The eternal salvation of the believer is always preeminent over the temporal effects of discipline. (Matt. 16:24-27; 2 Cor. 3:1, 11:1-3)

II. REPENTANCE

The immediate goal of the necessary steps of confrontation listed above is to bring the errant brother to repentance. Repentance is the turning point in the disciplinary process. It is the bridge between confrontation and restoration. Repentance is:

- to agree with God about sin and act in accordance with His Word.
- the change of mind to begin to abhor their errors and misdeeds, and enter upon a better course of life, both (1) a recognition of sin and sorrow, for it, and (2) a hearty amendment, the effects of which are good deeds.
- the improved spiritual state resulting from deep sorrow for sin.
- a result of those who, conscious of their sins demonstrate sorrow and are intent on obtaining God’s pardon.

Evidences of True Repentance:

- Acknowledge sin. (1 John 1:5-2:2; James 4:7-10)
- Exhibit genuine sorrow as contrasted from being “sorry for getting caught.” (2 Cor. 7:8-11)
- Seek to make restitution. (Luke 19:1-10; Philem. 18,19)
- Manifest fruit of repentance. (Matt. 3:7,8; Luke 3:8-14)

III. RESTORATION

The process of Church discipline is not fully achieved until a period and process of restoration has been completed. Restoration is the final step of bringing back the fallen one through correction into a right relationship with the Body of Christ.

It is a mending of broken trust and a restoration of harmony and order in the Body. It involves a re-qualifying, and a re-commissioning of the restored believer back into active ministry.

The restoration process may involve a period of special guidance and limitations appropriate to the offense and the position of the offender. These are not punitive measures, but necessary restorative steps. They will vary in each situation. The mending process must be carefully navigated in order to ensure total healing and fitness of the believer for return to active life in the Church. Restoration includes:

- Involvement of the entire Church body. (Gal. 6:1,2)
- Forgiveness by God and Church. (Luke 17:1-4; Matt. 18:21-35)
- Comfort and help by fellow believers, (2 Cor. 2:5-7)
- Reaffirmation of Christian love. (2 Cor. 2:8-11)

Final Remarks

God is serious about sin in the Church and among the saints. He has given us in Scripture His loving plan for restoring sinning believers to fellowship with Himself and with the Church.

The true Church today cannot ignore the responsibility of Church discipline nor avoid confrontation with Christians who are living in sin. We are commanded to “judge ourselves” personally (1 Cor. 11:28-32) and corporately (1 Cor. 5:9-13).

Church discipline is a tangible, visible way that committed Christians care for and show true love for each other.

With the coming of the Lord at hand, let us consider the blessings and benefits afforded us by a loving, caring Heavenly Father (Heb. 12:1-17) in giving us a guide to discipline in the Church. Let us prepare for the soon coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Pet. 3:10-18; 1 John 3:1-3)

PROCESS FOR CHURCH DISCIPLINE & RESTORATION



Process for Church Discipline & Restoration

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Process for Church Discipline and

Restoration

The Belgic Confession (1561), which developed out of Reformation teaching, identifies three characteristics “by which the true Church is known. These marks are: (1) the preaching of pure doctrine, (2) the administering of the sacraments (water baptism and communion), and (3) the exercising of Church discipline.”

The Church today often replaces counseling for biblical discipline of an erring believer. Both are necessary in the process of restoration. Christians today are rightly concerned about discipleship, but often fail to confront and correct an erring brother. The results are evident in the Church. Because of our reluctance to rightly apply the principles of Church discipline, the work of the Kingdom of Christ is hindered in our world. The world sees the Church as impotent and ineffective to deal with its problems of sin within the Body of Christ.

The Church without discipline is a Church characterized by a lack of purity as there is more of the world in the Church than the Church in the world. The Church neglecting discipline faces a serious lack of power to serve God in the world. The Church, by not assuming its responsibility to discipline sinning members, limits the progress and potential impact upon both the saved and the unsaved.

We see how Joshua 7 illustrates clearly how the sin of one man can bring defeat to the entire congregation. There was no victory in Ai while Achan's sin went unchecked, when the Church is without purity; power, progress, and God's reputation is damaged. Only by following the principles of disciplines, as given in God's Word, can the full blessing be restored to both the weakened Church and the sinning saint (1 Tim. 6:1b; Rom. 2:23-25; Ezek. 38:21-23).

In preparing this teaching, it is our objective to share these principles of discipline in a form that can be applied in the Church today. As we go through the definitions of key words and the steps outlined in Scripture, it is our hope that we will have clear guidelines with which to lovingly and faithfully apply Church discipline in the household of God, of which we have been given the oversight and care (2 Tim. 2:14-26). Only by the application of biblical Church discipline can true Christian love be demonstrated to each other (Heb. 12:1-17).

The Disciplinary Process:

Church discipline is a process consisting of three key

elements: confrontation, repentance, and restoration.

I. THE CONFRONTATION PROCESS

The confrontation phase of discipline aims to bring the sinning member to the point of confession and repentance from sin. It involves six steps taken from our Lord's teaching in Matthew 18:15-20.

Step One: “And if your brother sins...” (Matt. 18:15a)

The first responsibility is to determine when there is a need for discipline. Five categories of sin necessitate discipline in the Body of Christ:

- Violations of Christian LOVE. (Matt. 5:23, 24) These are private offenses to be resolved on a personal level.
- Violations of Christian UNITY. (Rom. 16:17; Titus 3:9-11) These are actions that are divisive and destroy the peace and harmony of the Church body.
- Violations of Christian TRUTH. (1 Tim. 1:3-5; Titus 1:5-13; Eph. 4:15; 2 John 7-11) These are acts that involve heresies and rejection of basic doctrines of the faith.
- Violations of Christian MORALITY. (1 Cor. 5; Heb. 12; Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Cor. 6:9,10) These are practices that relate to moral and ethical standards of the Bible.
- Violations of Christian COMMITMENT and TESTIMONY (James 5:19,20; Heb. 10:24, 25; Phil. 4:1-5) These are situations in which a believer requests help for areas of weakness in his life.

Step Two: “...go and reprove him privately...” (Matt.18:15b)

When a fellow brother or sister becomes aware of a brother's sin, he/she is to go to him privately and deal with the offense on a personal level. Many personal offenses and issues of sin can be dealt with on a one-to-one basis.

Matt. 18:15c “...if he listens to you (and confesses - TLB) you have won your brother.”

If the sinning one confesses and repents, the general principle is that what has been dealt with privately should not be made public. Exceptions are in the case of sins with public consequence. Then it is best to inform the Church before the sin becomes public knowledge (e.g., unwed pregnancy, etc.). By mutual consent, the restoring Christian may go with the erring

Christian to a pastor or leader for counsel.

If no repentance is forthcoming, then the next step is taken.

Step Three: “*but if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.*” (Matt. 18:16)

When private confrontation fails to bring repentance, it is to be followed by a private conference with two or three other witnesses. In the case of Church discipline, Church members are preferable. The choice of witnesses should be influenced by their relationship to the sinning one, since they will witness his response.

The presence of witnesses can better substantiate the charges, especially if they have seen the offense, or have seen the evidence. The presence of witnesses strengthens the rebuke in hope that repentance will follow.

If the erring brother repents, restoration appropriate with the situation and the offense will begin. There are now others involved who are able to help in the process of restoration.

If no repentance comes after the conference, then the next step is taken.

Step Four: “*and if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the Church*” (Matt. 18:17a)

In “telling it to the Church,” the motivation is to restore the sinner. This step will begin by telling the Pastors and Elders of the Church of the failure of Step Three. After the leadership has attempted to consult with all parties and witnesses, they will present it to the membership of the Church. The phrase “tell it to the Church” being interpreted as the Chairman of the Board of Elders or Pastor-Teacher going before the congregation and telling the congregation the negative response to Step Three in the discipline process and the Elders’ response to this negative response and that Step Four of the process has begun.

The place of the Church family in discipline cannot be underestimated. The accountability through the relationships of one Christian to another is a strong theme of the New Testament. (See 1 Cor. 10-14; Rom. 12:5, 10-13; Eph. 4; Gal. 6:1)

The Church will be asked to pray for, and put spiritual and personal pressure on the sinning member with the goal of restoration; the Church is to reach out in love and concern for the one ensnared in sin. Prayer and fasting are also in order when attempting to restore an erring one who is under the control of sin and Satan's dominion. (Is. 58:6)

Great discretion will be used in publicly announcing the

nature of the sin to the membership (Eph.5;11,12). Any public announce-ment will be filled with an expression of grief and concern that the offender acknowledge and repent of his offense.

If repentance is not forthcoming after public announce-ment to the Church, then the next step must be sorrowfully obeyed after some reasonable period of time.

Step Five: “*and if he refuses to listen even to the Church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax gatherer.*” (Matt. 18:17b)

(AB) “...let him be to you as a pagan...”

(TLB) “...then the Church should excommunicate him.”

Although a reasonable period of time should follow public announcement, when it is evident that the sinning one will not even hear the Church’s verdict of his guilt and repent, then separation and public exclusion is forthcoming.

The ecclesiastical word is “*excommunication*,” which refers to “cutting off a person from Church membership, fellowship, and/or communion.” It seems to imply that the unrepentant brother is to be treated as a non-believer because he is acting like one. The Church must keep loving, praying and hoping for repentance so that restoration of the erring believer can begin. However, while the brother remains unrepentant, fellowship is broken. Any member who disobeys this admonishment will be brought before the Board of Elders and be subject to discipline.

Failure to obey this step in discipline will further impair the witness of the Church and the prospect of repentance and restoration of the fallen brother. (1 Cor. 5:11-13; 2 Thess. 3:14-15)

Although it is hoped that such exclusion of the believer from the Body will be followed by genuine repentance and restoration, if restoration is not forthcoming, then a further step is necessary in keeping with Church disciplinary procedure.

Step Six: “*Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.*” (Matt. 18:18)

The spiritual authority and power is given to the Church and its leaders in matters of discipline. When a professing Christian, after being reproved in accordance with Scriptural principles, still refuses to repent, the decision of the Church to exercise biblical discipline reflects the will of God in heaven.

There is a promise to the Church when they agree together in the discipline of a fallen member in faith that he will be restored; “Again I say to you, that if two of