

ASSEMBLIES OF GOD THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

RESTORING A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE: EQUIPPING LEADERS
IN THE WEST FLORIDA DISTRICT OF THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD
TO EFFECTIVELY IMPLEMENT CHURCH DISCIPLINE

A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY COMMITTEE
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BY

RICHARD DAVID LONG

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ABSTRACT

This project determined that many ministers and laity within the West Florida District of the Assemblies of God give insufficient attention to the practice of church discipline. Several reasons lead to this inattention, including the prioritization of cultural sensibilities above Scripture's commands, the exacting nature of discipline, and ignorance.

As a proposed remedy, the project laid out a thorough biblical-theological analysis and general review of contemporary literature in order to create a guide for implementing church discipline. Moreover, the project conducted surveys to illuminate the problem and gauge perspective changes, and then used a conference and seminar venue to educate ministers and laity.

As a result of the research and the intervention efforts, participating ministers and laity experienced a dramatic shift in perspective concerning church discipline. This shift brought with it a renewed commitment to practice discipline.

The implications of this project include 1) the establishment of a strong biblical foundation for church discipline, 2) the formation of a step-by-step guide for implementing discipline, and 3) the building of a strong apologetic against the many excuses the church uses against discipline. Churches that teach on the subject of discipline, prepare for it, and implement it, will result in churches that reflect the love and holiness of Christ.

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Before anyone else, I would like to thank God for helping me to complete this project. I spent much time petitioning Him for sound research, organized thoughts, and the ability to communicate effectively through the written word. I could not have accomplished this task without the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit!

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Thanks to those who provided various measures of support to make this project a reality. The West Florida District of the Assemblies of God, especially Reverend Mark Jakelsky, allowed me the opportunity to fulfill the project requirements by teaching at the annual Christian Education Conference. Mark also served as an accountability partner

during the years of this D.Min. program, providing feedback and encouragement when needed. Stephen and Betsy Randolph graciously invited me into their home in Nixa, MO while I attended classes at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary (AGTS). Words cannot express how much my family appreciates this act of kindness and generosity. Their home provided me with serenity and comfort during this exciting phase of my life. Guy and Gayle Tatum made the seminar portion of the project an amazing success. Their beautiful facilities and superb catering enabled me to host an unforgettable event.

Sincere thanks go to the Doctor of Ministry team at AGTS. You all are amazing! Program Director Dr. Cheryl Taylor, Program Coordinator Dr. Ava Oleson, Project Coordinator Dr. Lois Olena, as well as other AGTS faculty and staff encouraged me every step of the way. The atmosphere at AGTS overflows with life, love, and acceptance, and those things do not occur accidentally.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This project endeavors to restore church discipline to its place at the forefront of biblical discipleship. For too long the American church has chosen the path of least resistance when it comes to developing its people. Instead, it surrenders to cultural pressures arising from human-centered philosophies. This project's biblical-theological foundation will provide strength and courage to face the challenges that church discipline creates. The general literature review will open the reader's eyes to some of the perspectives that have existed throughout Christian history and reinforce the systematic method of church discipline set forth in the New Testament. Although challenging, church discipline wields incredible power to transform fallen humanity into the likeness of Christ.

The Context

Currently, I serve as the associate pastor at First Assembly of God in Marianna, Florida. My responsibilities include Christian education, youth ministries, children's ministries, and assisting the lead pastor with administrative and ministry activities.

Our church resides in a semi-rural, agricultural community in the Panhandle of Florida. Marianna proper has an estimated population of 9,300 people, with the greater Marianna area adding significantly to that number. Growth in the community remains steady but slow, with an overall attitude of resistance toward outside influence and change.

First Assembly of God has approximately 150 regular attendees on any given Sunday morning. Our style leans more toward the traditional with a mix of both contemporary choruses and hymns. The mean age of the congregation resides somewhere between thirty-five and thirty-eight.

The lead pastor has served the church for twenty-four years. Another associate pastor recently celebrated her twenty-fifth anniversary at First Assembly. I have the least amount of seniority, with eleven-and-a-half years. Thus, stability and unity thrive. The church, however, like many, finds itself at a place where it must reassess its vision and purpose in order to remain strong and effective in the future.

First Assembly is located within the West Florida District of the Assemblies of God. The district has roughly 170 churches beginning East at the Suwannee River and ending at the western tip of the Panhandle. As with any district, West Florida reflects a wide variety of styles and personalities among its churches. Yet, if one had to describe the average West Florida church, it would be traditional with a significant emphasis on old-time Pentecost. Exuberant, red-faced, and hollering preachers still find a healthy following in this part of the country.

Due to the small-town environment of much of the area, the leadership and congregants find themselves more insulated from progressive (i.e., liberal) ideas that sterilize the gospel and result in “worldly” Christians. Nonetheless, West Florida still represents the culture at large, struggling to maintain its Christian identity in the midst of a society bombarded with pop psychology and anti-Christian messages.

The Problem

The problem in the West Florida District is that some leaders and laity rely more on cultural sensibilities or trends than on the Word of God when it comes to church discipline. In other words, people either agree with the popular cultural mindset that teaches, “live and let live,” or fear the judgment of that mindset and thus refrain from action. Still some, however, may not want to exert the effort necessary to implement discipline. Hence, instead of loving people enough to guide them when they go astray, they ignore the problem and hope it will disappear. Ultimately, this hurts the offender, the church, and the community at large. The offender suffers because he or she continues to walk in unrepentant sin thinking the church does not care, thus jeopardizing his or her soul. The church suffers because other members become discouraged when leadership refuses to act. Moreover, this inaction is interpreted by some as a license to remain in rebellious sin themselves. Under these circumstances, wickedness spreads, unchecked, throughout the rest of the body. Finally, the community suffers because churches that fail to discipline no longer testify to the holiness of Christ and, in essence, become just another club.

The neglect of church discipline happens for several reasons, some of which include 1) the church’s growing embrace of moral relativism and a desire to accommodate cultural trends, 2) the corresponding disbelief in the authority of Scripture, and 3) a lack of courage to enforce biblical teachings. Thus, in abandoning biblical precedent in the area of discipline, many churches have turned away from God’s wisdom preferring, instead, a path founded on the ever-shifting knowledge of humankind. This latter path, however, always results in a weaker, less effective church.

The Purpose

The purpose of this project is to equip ministers and lay leaders to implement biblical discipline more effectively. This will occur through teaching sessions, a seminar, and an accompanying handbook.

Definition of Terms

Church Discipline. Church discipline takes two forms: formational, or teaching biblical standards, and corrective, which involves challenging the sinful behavior of professing Christians. It can also be defined as the act of confronting and correcting, in love, members of the body of Christ who knowingly or unknowingly walk in open, unrepentant sin. Additionally, church discipline functions as a key element within the broader concept of discipleship.

Discipline. This project utilizes the word “discipline” to mean, “Training that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character.”¹ Within the present context, “discipline” has a purposeful, spiritual objective involving the protection and betterment of a Christ follower and those Christians within his or her sphere of influence.

Excommunication. The word “excommunication” refers to the last phase of church discipline as found in Matthew 18:17. It involves the removal of an unrepentant Christian from the body of Christ as a final, desperate attempt to bring them to repentance. Although severe, this action flows out of a deep love and concern, risking the loss of temporal relationships in exchange for the possible restoration of the rebellious Christian.

¹ *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. “discipline,” accessed July 30, 2013, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/discipline>.

Judgment. The use of the term “judgment” in this project means “an effort to correctly discern wrong from right,”² leading to a decision based upon the precedent of law and the law itself, in this case Scripture. In other words, “judgment” measures a person by a specific standard and administers correction when that standard is breeched.

Biblical judgment can come directly from God, through His prophets, or through a spiritual community. Moreover, biblical “judgment” usually connotes God acting against or disciplining those who displease Him, yet always within the context of love.

Offender/s. This project uses the term “offender/s” to describe a Christian, or Christians, openly and unrepentantly transgressing scriptural standards. This word refers to the relational disunity that an unrepentant Christian causes, offending fellow believers through their rebellion.

Offended. Throughout this project the term “offended” refers to a Christian/s responding to another Christian’s unrepentant sinfulness. An offended party may be an individual, several individuals, or an entire church body.

Punishment. Within the context of this project, “punishment” refers to the corrective measures implemented by discipline. Punishment seeks to reform the delinquent and to warn others not to copy bad behavior. In some instances, however, punishment is not intended to change behavior, as with Satan falling from heaven, but simply metes out a particular consequence for justice’s sake.

² Leland Ryken et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), Logos Bible Software.

Description of the Proposed Project

Scope of the Project

This project will involve the development of two surveys on church discipline for leaders in the West Florida District of the Assemblies of God. One of these surveys will cater to ministers and the other to lay leaders. I will administer the first survey to a sample group of West Florida ministers via email. After conducting this initial ministers' survey, the information will be studied and organized—along with the content of the biblical-theological and general literature reviews. The compiled data will then be used to teach four sessions at the 2014 West Florida Christian Education Conference and later at a four-hour, one-day seminar.

I will also administer surveys before and after the conference sessions and the seminar. This will help to gauge both initial and post-event perspectives. Additionally, seminar participants will complete a post-event questionnaire rating the quality and effectiveness of the seminar.

To narrow the scope of this assessment, the project will focus on church discipline attitudes, issues, and practices within the United States only. For, although the concept is timeless, its specific nuances or methods of implementation may vary from culture to culture. This project will also consider the multi-cultural atmosphere of the American church.

This project does not assume that all American churches neglect church discipline, but that cultural forces surrounding the American church work against its implementation. Some pastors and lay leaders also neglect discipline out of ignorance and fear. Thus, this project lays out a clear course of action based upon scriptural commands and precedent.

Phases of the Project

Research

The research phase of this project encompasses two primary areas: 1) it establishes the biblical-theological precedent for church discipline, and 2) it explores contemporary literature to gain an understanding of how other Christians think and act in the arena of church discipline. This research will provide a solid foundation for educating church leaders concerning the critical need for biblical discipline.

Biblical-Theological Literature Review

The first phase of this research involves the biblical-theological literature review (chapter 2). This will commence on June 17, 2013 and end on October 1, 2013. All data will be compiled, organized, and made ready for the writing of this chapter.

The research for chapter 2 will explore the scriptural precedent for church discipline, including a detailed study of the biblical word “discipline.” It will also trace the instances of divine discipline throughout the Old and New Testaments. For example, in the Old Testament, it will examine how God corrects His chosen people through prophets, through the community of God-fearers, and through His own direct judgments.

In the New Testament, the research will examine Jesus’ Matthew 18 template for church discipline. It will also investigate the primary instrument for implementing discipline—the church. Chapter 2’s research will also consider the recipients of church discipline. In doing so, it will take a closer look at 1 Corinthians 5:12-13, where Paul states that scriptural standards apply only to those within the body of Christ. Additionally, the research for chapter 2 will provide a biblical response to the American culture’s growing distaste for discipline. It will seek to show that discipline

communicates love, that its goal is healing and restoration, that it instills a healthy fear of the Lord, and that it prevents sin from spreading.

The biblical-theological research will also delve into the issue of the church's responsibility to discipline. It will discuss the fact that both leadership and laity have an obligation to care for such matters as they arise. Moreover, the study will give attention to the short-sighted fear of discipline (i.e. the fear of losing relationships) versus the long-term view of love, or being willing to sacrifice the temporal for the eternal.

General Literature Review

Research for the general literature review (chapter 3) will begin on or around December 2, 2013, with a goal to finish the research by March 15, 2014. The study will investigate the broader meaning of discipline, namely that it encompasses both formative and corrective action. It will also look at the present state of discipline in the United States, examining some of the reasons Americans struggle to grasp the concept of corrective discipline.

Furthermore, this phase of the research considers the correlation between church membership and discipline. In doing so, it covers topics such as the church's nature and authority. The research for chapter 3 will also investigate the steps of discipline. Some of these steps will include preparing a pre-confrontation checklist, implementing one-on-one confrontations, bringing the offender before the church, and enacting restoration. I will study each of these steps in detail, seeking godly wisdom from both current and time-tested literature.

The last phase of chapter 3's research will explore other miscellaneous considerations concerning church discipline. Some of these topics include, when minors are caught in sin, multi-cultural applications, and dealing with legal concerns.

Planning

The planning phase of the project will involve several steps. The first step will require creating surveys for both ministers and lay leaders. The second will entail scheduling teaching opportunities for disseminating the church discipline material. The last step of planning will involve outlining the coursework and the handbook for the intervention.

Creating the Surveys

The initial phase of planning will entail creating surveys for ministers and lay leaders. I will develop the ministers' survey in the July to August 2013 time period so I can email it to participants by late September 2013. I will then work on the lay leader's survey to prepare it for use at the Christian Education Conference and the seminar in 2014. I will use Survey Monkey to build the surveys. The lay leaders' survey will be a simpler version of the ministers' survey due to the greater level of authority and responsibility that ministers have within the local church.

Scheduling the Teaching Opportunities

The district's annual Christian Education Conference will serve as a great venue for the intervention. Mark Jakelsky, the West Florida District Secretary-Treasurer, will teach at this event. This opportunity will fulfill half of the instruction requirement for the intervention phase of the project. The conference will take place on February 22, 2014.

To fulfill the last part of the teaching requirement, I will plan a half-day seminar at a neutral, non-church location. I will contact Gayle Tatum at Elegant Happenings in Marianna, FL and reserve a small meeting room for the event. The scheduling for the Christian Education Conference and the seminar will occur in October 2013.

Outlining the Coursework

Developing the outlines for the teaching sessions at the Christian Education Conference and the seminar will also require planning. Because each venue allows for only four hours of teaching, I will have to decide what parts of the information to share. I will also create PowerPoint presentations and fill-in-the-blank class notes for each of these sessions.

Implementation

The implementation phase of this project will involve administering surveys to ministers and lay leaders and instructing at two different events. The first event is the West Florida Christian Education Conference to be held on Saturday, February 22, 2014. The conference will take place at the West Florida District Assemblies of God campgrounds. I will teach four, one-hour sessions, one for ministers and three for lay leaders. The lay leaders' sessions will be open to all participants. The ministers' session, however, will be open to pastors only. I will also conduct a four-hour seminar on Saturday, April 12, 2014 at Elegant Happenings in Marianna, FL. This venue will include a Tuscan-themed conference room, a catered continental breakfast, and a smoked steak lunch following the seminar. I will conduct the sessions lecture-style but with plenty of opportunity for class interaction. A PowerPoint presentation and fill-in-the-blank notes will accompany the lecture.

Both the conference sessions and the seminar will include pre- and post-event surveys. These surveys will determine baseline and post-participation perspectives on church discipline. The data will then get organized and evaluated in May and June of 2014 in preparation for chapter 4's project results.

Evaluation

The evaluation phase of the project will involve analyzing survey data via Survey Monkey and looking for variances between pre- and post-event perspectives. Survey results will provide hard data on the state of church discipline viewpoints in West Florida and serve as a sample of the larger American church culture. This information will also help to determine the receptiveness of Christians to scriptural teachings on church discipline. Again, the survey results will undergo analysis in May and June 2014.

Moreover, the evaluation phase will include considerations concerning project effectiveness, project improvement, and the project's contribution to ministry in chapter 4. Chapter 5 will also serve as a thorough evaluation of the project from beginning to end. The evaluation for these two components of the work will take place in September and October of 2014.

Writing

The writing of the biblical-theological literature review will begin in early October 2013 with the goal to submit a draft to my editor by December 1, 2013. This information will provide a sweeping overview of biblical discipline from Genesis to Revelation. It will attempt to lay a scriptural foundation for the practice of church discipline.

Writing for the general literature review will commence sometime in March 2014 with the goal to submit a draft to my editor by June 15, 2014. This chapter will focus more on the steps of discipline and how to implement them effectively. It will also touch upon the current cultural mentality on discipline and how that mentality arose.

I will write chapter 4 in July and August of 2014 and submit a draft for editing by early September 2014. This chapter will reflect upon the intervention phase of the project and explain, in detail, the results of the data from the surveys. During this time I will also write the handbook. This will serve as a reference guide taken from the most pertinent parts of the overall project.

Chapter 5 will be written in late September through the first part of October 2014. I will submit the draft for this chapter around October 15. This section of the project will evaluate the entire work, including proposed improvements and recommendations to the West Florida District in light of the completed research, writing, and intervention.

Finally, I will write chapter 1 and complete all front matter, including the acknowledgments page and the list of tables, submitting a draft for editing by the third week in October of 2014.

CHAPTER 2: BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

When one hears the word “discipline,” his or her mind naturally gravitates toward the idea of punishment or correction for some fault or act of rebellion. Roger Karban, in his article “Everything is Sacred,” accurately conveys the modern attitude toward discipline when he says, “For many of us, discipline isn’t something to be desired. Not only is it usually a painful experience, it also limits what we are able and want to do.”¹ *The Bible Sense Lexicon* defines “discipline” as “the imposition of painful consequences or other disadvantages upon someone for disobedience; especially with the intention of correction and instruction.”² Although this definition represents a fairly accurate expression of biblical discipline, it falls short of capturing all the unique nuances and connotations found in Scripture. For example, in the Law and the historical books, “discipline” refers more to God’s dealings with His covenant people Israel. In the book of Proverbs, however, “discipline” focuses on the importance of a father teaching his child and how that instruction imparts life, saving the child from both physical and spiritual

¹ Roger Vermalen Karban, “Everything Is Sacred,” *National Catholic Reporter* 49, no. 22 (2013): 25.

² *Bible Sense Lexicon* (Logos Bible Software, n.d.).

death.³ This “father disciplining his child” motif runs throughout all of Scripture, emphasizing the reality that discipline flows out of a love and concern for the one receiving it.

A continuity exists between Old Testament and New Testament discipline. The same expectations for purity and obedience that applied to ancient Israel also apply to the body of Christ, albeit under a different covenant. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 5:6-8 Paul uses an Old Testament, Law-based command to instruct the Corinthians on the importance of ridding themselves of the old leaven, or the sinful ways of their former lives. Thus, the need for communal purity persists. In the New Testament, discipline functions only within the Church. God has the sole responsibility to deal with unbelievers. Therefore, one will notice the absence of conquest terminology in the New Testament. Instead, Christians struggle against dark forces and principalities in the spiritual realm, not against fellow human beings outside the grace of God.

As a point of clarification, the biblical concept of discipline does not always involve punishment, as Hebrews 12 makes clear. Hence, sometimes God arranges situations that require struggle in order to teach and purify His children. The struggle itself becomes the chastisement. Most Old Testament discipline and church discipline, however, do involve punishment. The Hebrew and Greek terms for “discipline” include within their range of meaning the concept of chastisement or punishment. One must remember that biblical discipline, and the punishments that result, bare the mark of a loving heart that desires only the best for the one experiencing it.

³ T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, Graeme Goldsworthy, and D. A. Carson, eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Leicester, England: Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 449.

Furthermore, the use of the term “judgment” in this project generally refers to God’s corrective action in the face of disobedience. For instance, God brought judgment upon the Southern Kingdom of Judah by sending the Babylonians to attack it. The term “judgment,” however, can have different meanings within different biblical contexts, sometimes even having a positive connotation. “Judgment,” in some Old Testament passages, conveys hope, a hope for future justice by way of judgment. Yet, again, this project primarily uses the word “judgment” to describe the discernment brought to bear on a particular situation and the punishment that follows. It does not attempt to explore the full range of meanings for this term or to compare them in any way.

This chapter sets out to create a strong biblical foundation for the understanding and practice of church discipline. The concept itself seems rather simple and straightforward. However, in today’s “tolerance”-based, relative truth-oriented environment, many Christians seem confused and reluctant to put these principles into practice. Hopefully, the following examples of God’s discipline throughout biblical history will restore faith and confidence in the need for loving, restoration-focused church discipline.

The Biblical Precedent for Church Discipline

A Study of the Biblical Word “Discipline”

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew verb *yasar* and the related noun *musar* make up the bulk of the usages of the word “discipline.”⁴ *Yasar* means “[to] discipline, chasten, admonish . . . instruct, or correct.”⁵ It often speaks of God’s corrective judgment upon His

⁴ Ibid., 448.

⁵ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000), 415–16.

people for their sin, particularly within a covenant relationship.⁶ In the Pentateuch, only Leviticus and Deuteronomy see the use of *yasar*, with its emphasis on covenant renewal before entering the Promised Land.⁷

The noun *musar* carries much of the same meaning as *yasar*; it means “instruction, correction, chastisement, discipline, punishment.”⁸ It normally refers to God warning or punishing His people in order to shake them from sinful habits and to instruct them in holiness.⁹ *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* explains, “Key to an understanding of *musar* is Deut. 11:2ff,¹⁰ ‘Consider the discipline of the Lord your God ... his signs and his deeds which he did in Egypt to Pharaoh ... to the army of Egypt ... and what he did for you in the wilderness.’”¹¹ Hence, God’s *musar*, His discipline, takes the form of mighty acts upon those set against Him, and upon those in covenant with Him, for the purpose of displaying His omnipotence over all creation.

Both words, *yasar* and *musar*, deal with instruction, correction, and guidance from the standpoint of a parent correcting a child. Even when God chastises Israel for her idolatry, His judgment takes place within the context of a familial relationship, or a father loving his child enough to bring correction. Although the Hebrew Old Testament uses

⁶ Willem VanGemeren, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 480.

⁷ R. Laird Harris and Bruce K Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 387.

⁸ Robert L Thomas, *New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: [including] Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries* (Nashville: Holman, 1981).

⁹ VanGemeren, 481.

¹⁰ Harris and Waltke, 387.

¹¹ All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from *English Standard Version*.

many words to connote teaching and correction, only *yasar* and *musar* are specifically used to mean “to educate,” or “education.”¹² In other words, these two Hebrew words indicate that God wants His people to learn and experience restoration through and by His discipline. Although wrath may come, it always serves a greater purpose—the teaching of His covenant people to fear and obey God.

Yakach, another Hebrew word, sometimes translates as “discipline.” It means “to decide, to contend, to adjudge ... give reproof, reprove.”¹³ For instance, in 2 Samuel 7:14, speaking of Solomon, God declares, “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men.” In this passage “discipline” comes from the verb *yakach*; yet, it appears to be one of the few instances where this verb refers to instruction within the parent/child relationship.

As for the LXX, VanGemeren points out that “almost without exception ... the vb. *ysr* is translated ... in some form of *paideuo*. Similarly, the nom. *musar* is rendered by *paideia*.”¹⁴ Thus, *paideuo*, “to bring up, instruct, train, educate,” and *paideia*, “upbringing, training, instruction, discipline,” replace the Hebrew words *yasar* (verb) and *musar* (noun) in the LXX. Again, these words communicate the idea of a father disciplining his child for the purpose of instruction or education.

Paideuo and *paideia* also carry on the meaning of *yasar* and *musar* in the New Testament. *Paideuo* occurs thirteen times in the New Testament while *paideia* occurs six

¹² Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 604.

¹³ Robert L. Thomas, *New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: [including] Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries* (Nashville: A. J. Holman, 1981), Logos Bible Software.

¹⁴ VanGemeren, 481.

times. As for *paideuo*, “the underlying root of this word group is *pais*, child, boy ... thus *Paideuo* lit. means to be together with a child, hence, to bring up, educate, instruct, teach.”¹⁵ Furthermore, just as *musar* finds its origin in *yasar*, so does *paideia* find its source in the verb *paideuo*.

The word “discipline,” as used in modern English, comes from the Latin *disciplina*, meaning “‘instruction,’ ‘training,’ ‘discipline.’”¹⁶ *Disciplina*, however, comes from both the Latin word *discipulus*, meaning “‘learner,’” and *discere*, meaning “‘to learn.’”¹⁷ The word “discipline,” although sometimes evoking negative feelings due to its perceived harshness, actually finds its English roots in the Latin word “disciple,” meaning “‘learner.’” In other words, discipline, although at times painful, functions as a necessary and critical component of the learning process.

God’s Discipline in the Old Testament

Deuteronomy 8:5 pronounces, “Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you.” These inspired words, more than any other, summarize the biblical concept of discipline. They speak not of a tyrant king lording it over a subjugated people, but of a loving, attentive father seeking the best for his child. The discipline may feel unpleasant at the time, or even severe, yet its goal is

¹⁵ Verlyn D. Verbrugge, *The NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words: An Abridgment of New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 947.

¹⁶ Merrill C. Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 131.

¹⁷ Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 131.

always corrective and educative, motivated by loving concern.¹⁸ Israel need not despise God's discipline, but understand that it serves as an instrument to test their hearts, such as in the wilderness wanderings, where God taught them the ways of YHWH.¹⁹

In the Old Testament, the discipline of the LORD comes by way of His "decrees and commands," which guide and protect His people and provide consequences for disobedience.²⁰ In Deuteronomy 4:39 Moses says to the Israelites, "know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the LORD is God in heaven. . . . Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you." To obey means blessing, but to disobey means God's judgment in various forms. But, again, "God's punishment of sin is no contradiction of his love; it was precisely because he loved so much that he took Israel's sin so seriously."²¹

Just because God adopted more of a group approach to discipline with the nation of Israel does not mean He cared less about individuals. The book of Job illustrates this fact: "Behold, blessed is the one whom God reprove; therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty" (Job 5:17). Job experiences God's discipline for reasons only known to God, proving that God does take an interest in the individual character growth of Old

¹⁸ Alexander et al., 448.

¹⁹ Everett Falconer Harrison and Carl F. H. Henry, *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), 387.

²⁰ Alexander et al., 448.

²¹ VanGemeren, 281.

Testament saints.²² This individualistic approach becomes more obvious throughout the book of Proverbs as the author focuses his attention on personal choices and the consequences that follow. Proverbs 22:15 teaches that “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.” The focus of this verse rests on individual children receiving the correction they need to become healthy people.²³

God, hoping for repentance, warns His people through the prophets. These men become the mouthpiece of God, providing a physical presence with supernatural words. However, if God’s people ignore the prophets, He sometimes gathers foreign nations to inflict corrective discipline. For example, in Hosea 10:10 God says, “When I please, I will discipline them, and the nations shall be gathered against them when they are bound up for the double iniquity.” God uses a variety of methods to discipline His people, including ungodly nations and, at times, even the demonic realm as with Job.

Through the Prophets

Prophets serve as an integral part of God’s discipline process for the nation of Israel and for individuals. Although YHWH administers judgment directly, as with Uzzah when He touches the ark of God in 2 Samuel 6, He usually warns His people about the consequences of their rebellion beforehand through prophets.

David’s adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah, exemplify God’s discipline through the prophets. Nathan, the successor of Samuel, served as a prophet to the king’s court, with “the authority and courage to act as critic and judge of

²² Sakenfeld, 132.

²³ Verbrugge, *The NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words*, 948.

the king.”²⁴ He comes before David with a parable about a rich man with many sheep who steals the one, beloved sheep of a poor man. God uses Nathan to confront David with this heart-wrenching story that, in reality, describes David’s own evil act. David’s actions, however, reflect more than just adultery and murder, they also expose an egregious abuse of power.²⁵ David Janzen insists, “What has led to this act, says God, is a rebellious attitude on David’s part (David feels that he can take God’s role in their relationship) and a false belief that he can act in this way without God’s knowledge.”²⁶ Yet, after David condemns himself and admits his sin, Nathan proclaims, “The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die” (2 Sam. 12:13). Judgment, however, is still pronounced. Nathan boldly says that the sword will never “depart from David’s house” (vv. 10-11) and that evil will cloud his family until the day he dies. Moreover, the child in Bathsheba’s womb will die. God uses His prophet to challenge and pass judgment on David, and although David repents, the consequences remain. As a result, both David and the covenant community learn that no one, not even a king, operates as a law unto himself. God also reminds David and Israel that He is compassionate and forgives sin, wanting nothing more than a restored relationship with His creation.

Another example of God disciplining through His prophets occurs in 1 Samuel 15, when God rejects Saul as king. Leading up to this punishment, not only does Saul

²⁴ Gordon J. Wenham et al., eds., *The New Bible Commentary*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), Logos Bible Software.

²⁵ John H Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), LOGOS Bible Software.

²⁶ David Janzen, “The Condemnation of David’s ‘Taking’ in 2 Samuel 12:1-14,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 131, no. 2 (2012): 216.

make an unlawful sacrifice to the Lord in 1 Samuel 13:9, but he also disobeys God's command through Samuel to annihilate the Amalekites in chapter fifteen. In this later passage, Saul spares the life of King Agag and takes some of the Amalekite livestock, disobeying God for selfish gain.²⁷ God sends Samuel to tell Saul, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is much better than you" (1 Sam. 15:28). The prophet provides a visible, tangible expression of God's warnings and forthcoming discipline to those in rebellion.

Through the Community

Occasionally the covenant community executes God's discipline. In Joshua 7 the Israelites, after decimating Jericho, find themselves fleeing from the men of Ai. This incident causes Joshua to fall before the ark of the LORD and question YHWH's rationale for leading them across the Jordan. God reveals to Joshua that Israel has sinned and, therefore, cannot subdue her enemies. A man named Achan bares the responsibility for this judgment for stealing plunder during the destruction of Jericho. This story serves as an example of collective culpability for the sin of the individual.²⁸ Achan's rebellion pollutes the entire community and brings judgment on Israel.

God's discipline also flows through that same collective group, resulting in the stoning of Achan and his family. Hence, God, by disciplining through the community, allows His people to experience a powerful object lesson. Israel cannot take her position "as the people of God or her possession of the land ... for granted. She is constantly

²⁷ Wenham et al., Logos Bible Software.

²⁸ Leander E. Keck, ed., *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, vol. II (Nashville: Abingdon Press, n.d.), 176.

under obligation to God,” and subject to His corrective measures, in whatever form they might take.²⁹

In Judges 19 and 20, certain men of Gibeah, of the tribe of Benjamin, rape and abuse a Levite traveler’s concubine during the night, causing her death. After which, the traveler returns home, cuts his concubine’s body into twelve pieces, and sends them to all Israel as evidence of the crimes committed. When the people of Israel convene and hear the testimony of the Levite, they decide on a holy war against Gibeah.³⁰ Ironically, only after this decision does the assembly seek to hear the Benjamite’s side of the story. Yet, when the Benjamites refuse to repent, a battle ensues. In summary, God uses the tribes of Israel to destroy all the towns and most of the warriors of Benjamin. He uses the covenant community to enact His judgment. This, as with the other examples listed, harken back to the passage in Deuteronomy 8:5: “Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you.” God’s justice and His love motivate Him to discipline His people in hopes of restoring them into a right relationship with Him.

Through Direct Judgments

God also directly disciplines His people, and the heathen nations, in the Old Testament. Sometimes neither a prophet nor the covenant community plays a part in God’s corrective measures. Numbers 20:12 provides an example of such a case. Moses and Aaron have brought the people of Israel into the wilderness of Zin. Numbers 20:2

²⁹ Trent C. Butler, *Joshua*, Word Biblical Commentary 7 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 83.

³⁰ Wenham et al., Logos Bible Software.

recounts, “Now there was no water for the congregation.” As usual, the people grumble against Moses and Aaron. God then instructs Moses to gather the people and “tell the rock before their eyes to yield up water” (Num. 20:8). Moses strikes the rock twice instead of speaking to it, as the LORD commanded. Therefore, God punishes Moses and Aaron by refusing them entrance into the Promised Land. This narrative, which differs in perspective from the account in Deuteronomy 3, emphasizes the individual responsibility for sin. God directly punishes Aaron and Moses, not for the grumbling unfaithfulness of the Israelite people, but because they disobey God themselves.³¹

Later, Moses pleads with the LORD to relent and allow him to enter the Promised Land (Deut. 3:23-27). God, exhibiting divine tough love, refuses. In fact, “the Hebrew sentence implies that Moses had kept on asking God for permission, and that God became furious with him.”³² God tells Moses to go to the top of Mount Pisgah and there look upon the land across the Jordan, for that would be the closest he would get to entering. Therefore, not only does God judge directly, but He also, as in this instance, remains firm in His discipline to the servants He loves.

The story of Miriam and Aaron conspiring against Moses serves as another example of God’s direct discipline. God calls Moses, Miriam, and Aaron to the tent of meeting, reminding the latter two that He chose Moses as the leader over Israel (Num. 12). When the LORD departs from their presence, Miriam finds herself infected with

³¹ Keck, 159–60.

³² John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 268.

leprosy as a result of arrogantly seeking Moses' authority.³³ YHWH judges directly, reminding both the individual and the community that they serve a just and holy God and that sin has consequences.

God's Discipline in the New Testament

Although the grace of God explodes onto the scene in the New Testament through Jesus Christ, discipline continues as a crucial aspect of God's relationship with humanity. Merrill Tenney states, "Significantly and appropriately Jesus' specially selected twelve men were called 'disciples.' They were learners under the great Teacher, having accepted His invitation to 'Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me' (Matt. 11:29)."³⁴ The disciples submitted themselves to the discipline, or education, of Jesus. Moreover, even the most casual reader of the New Testament understands that following Jesus involves relinquishing sinful tendencies and patterns of the carnal nature. His calling is a high calling—a disciplined calling.

In the New Testament, discipline largely flows through the body of Christ. Each person makes up a part of this body, and each stands accountable to the rest.³⁵ The standards for holiness, relationships, and proper worship come through the Word of God. Scripture informs and directs the major brush strokes of a Christian's life, providing timeless, absolute principles by which to gauge individual and community behavior. Ephesians 4:25 teaches, "Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you

³³ Wenham et al., Logos Bible Software.

³⁴ Tenney, 131.

³⁵ Alexander et al., 450.

speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.” Individuals comprise the church; however, these individuals, gifted and placed within the church by the Holy Spirit, form a united, spiritual community. Consequently, “when believers refuse to be reconciled they deny the unity of the church and thus become subject to discipline by the assembly ... When the truth of the gospel is denied church discipline is to be exercised...”³⁶

The New Testament reveals various methods of discipline, including everything from persuasion, to shunning, to trials, and even putting someone out of the church, or turning them over to Satan.³⁷ Yet, like the Old Testament, all of these find their motivation in love, both for the congregation, by reminding them of the standards and removing the evil, and for the one walking in unrepentant sin. As Tenney observes, “Ultimately discipline is in the hands of God, though it is delegated in part to institutions: government, school, church, and home. And everyone is disciplined, either by self, or society or God.”³⁸ In other words, as with gospel proclamation, God works through natural means, a divine-human cooperation, to accomplish His purposes in the Church and in the world.

Matthew 18—The Timeless Template

Jesus begins this section of Matthew 18 with, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault ...” (v. 15). D. A. Carson suggests, “The words *against you* (15)

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), Logos Bible Software.

³⁸ Tenney, 131.

were probably not part of the original text and unhelpfully restrict the scope.”³⁹ Jesus instructs his disciples to hold each other accountable, not only when personally offended, but whenever a fellow Christian walks in unrepentant sin. Notice, however, that Jesus’ command pertains to challenging rebellious sin and not to confrontations due to differences of opinion.⁴⁰

Jesus’ first step involves two people only: the unrepentant sinner and the offended or concerned brother or sister. He instructs, “...go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone” (Matt. 18:15). A private meeting works to resolve the situation on the simplest level—two people discussing the problem. If the offending party accepts the loving rebuke and repents, then, again, the problem reaches resolution at the lowest level, and the good name of the individual and the church remain strong.⁴¹ If, however, the guilty party refuses the correction, then Jesus instructs his disciples to elevate the matter to the next level.

In Matthew 18:16 Jesus continues, “But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.” In other words, if the accused offender dismisses the initial challenge of the plaintiff, the plaintiff, out of concern, must bring one or two others along to strengthen his or her case and to provide witnesses. These witnesses, as Kenneth Newberger states, if possible, should serve as eye witnesses to the original offense so that

³⁹ Wenham et al., Logos Bible Software.

⁴⁰ Kenneth C. Newberger, *Hope in the Face of Conflict: Making Peace with Others the Way God Makes Peace with Us* (LaVergne, TN: Three Sons, 2011), 310.

⁴¹ R. Albert Mohler et al., *The Compromised Church: The Present Evangelical Crisis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 51.

the accusation has solid support by more than just one person.⁴² Considering the context, however, it seems unlikely that witnesses would always be present during disagreements between two parties and that Jesus simply intends for the witnesses to serve as an “important presence in the event of the confrontation.”⁴³

Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 18:16 draws from the Old Testament command concerning bringing charges against a fellow Israelite.⁴⁴ Deuteronomy 19:15 declares, “A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.”

Jesus also seeks to protect the rights of the accused, particularly when church discipline may ensue. The one or two other witnesses, therefore, carry the responsibility to either confirm or deny the confronting brother’s accusation. For example, if the accused offender continues in his or her rebellion, then the additional witnesses confirm the original report and also add greater force to the confrontation. If the accused person repents, however, the witnesses confirm the original report, yet share in the joy and reward of turning a brother or sister from sin. If the additional witnesses discover that the accuser’s report proves inaccurate, they can then clear the accused person’s name.

To raise the stakes even higher, Jesus instructs, “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church” (Matt. 18:17). If the wayward believer will not repent after one or two other witnesses join the confrontation, then the discipline must go to the highest level, the

⁴² Newberger, 301–02.

⁴³ Mohler, 51.

⁴⁴ Newberger, 302.

church body. R. Albert Mohler aptly states that this level of action “is extremely serious.”⁴⁵ By this time, all involved become aware that the offender chooses his or her sin over God’s Word. However, faced with the united voice and prayer of the church family, repentance remains a possibility.

Some, however, question whether bringing the issue before the church includes only the leadership or the entire body of congregants. Since this serves as the last step before implementing severe discipline, the full weight and chastisement of the body of Christ would be better than just a few leaders. If anything could turn an erring saint from his or her cherished sin, this could.

At this point, the congregation, under the leadership of the pastor, must hear the facts related to the case. Jesus describes this step as if the conclusion has already come. Presumably, the witnesses who confronted the offender in steps one and two walk with integrity and represent the values of the church. By the time the situation reaches this level, the church must only support the verdict already made. If there remains any question up to this point, “the church must render its judgment based upon the principles of God’s Word and the facts of the case. Again, the goal is the restoration of a sinning brother or sister—not a public spectacle.”⁴⁶ As a point of clarification, however, when discipline reaches this level, the body of Christ does not vote, as in an election, to determine the offender’s guilt. Instead, the church must simply confirm the facts of the

⁴⁵ Mohler et al., 51.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

case already gathered, and if a brother or sister will not repent, then the church stands with the witnesses and elders against him or her.

Finally, if all these other attempts fail and the rebellious brother or sister will not turn from sin, Jesus instructs, “let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (Matt. 18:17). In other words, Jesus commands his disciples to excommunicate the unrepentant sinner. Moreover, one should not minimize the terms “Gentile” and “tax collector.” From Matthew’s Jewish-Christian perspective, they communicate the idea of “heathen” or “pagan,” people clearly outside of, and spiritually unacceptable to, the covenant community.⁴⁷ Bridget Illian, in her article, “Church Discipline and Forgiveness in Matthew 18:15-35,” concurs by pointing out,

Gentiles, like tax collectors, may be in need of what Jesus and his followers have to offer, but they are not yet part of the community and are certainly not initiated into the correct way to live. In short, ‘tax collectors and Gentiles’ are outsiders in Matthew’s Gospel and to treat someone as such is to regard them as outsiders too.⁴⁸

This last step represents a dramatic, life-altering attempt to shake the hardened Christian awake, excluding them from all fellowship in hopes to win their soul.

Some argue that Jesus befriended the Gentiles and tax collectors and did not shun them. Yet, the Lord’s intention here involves drawing a stark contrast between those within the believing community and those outside of it. Traditionally, within first-century Jewish circles, these characters represented the worst, most sinful type of people. To

⁴⁷ Donald Alfred Hagner, *Matthew*, Word Biblical Commentary 33B (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1993), Logos Bible Software.

⁴⁸ Bridget Illian, “Church Discipline and Forgiveness in Matthew 18:15-35,” *Currents in Theology Mission* 37, no. 6 (December 2010): 449.

Matthew's audience, the terms "Gentiles" and "tax collector" also connote ostracism.⁴⁹ Jesus' verdict upon the wayward Christian hits hard, decisively executing strong discipline. This act of punishment, although dramatic, serves three purposes: (1) to allow the erring brother or sister to feel the pain of excommunication in hopes for future restoration, (2) to prevent the spread of further evil within the church by setting a precedent for other believers, and (3) to demonstrate to the world that moral standards matter and that the church maintains discipline and order within its ranks.

Jesus' solution for an unrepentant believer, unwilling to receive correction from the church, is removal from the body of Christ. That person forfeits all the relationships and benefits that come with the church. Furthermore, the power and authority to make such a grave decision comes from Christ when He declares to His disciples, "I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19).⁵⁰ Jesus repeats His binding and loosing statement in Matthew 18:18, confirming that the Church has the power to act upon heaven's authority in cases of church discipline. As 1 Corinthians 5 explains, however, this painful action does not intend to sever relationships permanently, but to inflict a painful consequence upon the erring Christian in hopes that he or she will repent.

First-century rabbis understood the terms "binding" and "loosing" to mean that they had the authority to judge fellow believers according to the standards of Scripture.

⁴⁹ Wenham et al., Logos Bible Software.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 928.

They would “determine how (or whether) the Scriptures applied in a specific situation and would render judgment by either binding, which means to restrict, or loosing, which means to liberate.”⁵¹ Similarly, Calvin believes that “binding” means excommunication and that “loosing” means to welcome into communion.⁵² Jesus intends for His Church to use the spiritual tools of “binding” and “loosing” to discipline, protect, and restore members of the body of Christ. The church has both the power and responsibility to guide and correct its membership. To avoid doing so equals abuse by neglect.

Correcting Those Inside the Church Only

As a father does not have the responsibility to discipline his neighbor’s child, so the church has no responsibility to discipline unbelievers, or those outside of it. In 1 Corinthians 5:12-13 Paul writes, “For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside.” In other words, because those outside the church do not submit to Christ or His Word, the church has no authority over them. The body of Christ does, however, have authority over its own members, with each of these members accountable to the rest. This ensures individual and corporate purity as Christians embrace the fact that they must uphold standards of conduct to continue as part of the congregation. Paul Achtemeier explains, “The Christians exhibited many of the qualities of a ‘sect.’ They attempted to preserve the purity of church life and disciplined those whom they thought transgressed too far in

⁵¹ Mohler, 52.

⁵² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Library of Christian Classics, vol. 20, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1214.

behavior or rejected orthodox views.”⁵³ The modern church must do likewise, setting moral standards and then teaching and upholding them. Failing to do so discredits its witness to the world and brings confusion to its members.

Correction Comes Through the Church

The Case of the Immoral Brother

First Corinthians 5 provides an example of the church correcting its members. In verse four Paul insists that the church at Corinth come together “in the name of the Lord Jesus” and judge the man sleeping with his father’s wife” (1 Cor. 5:4). He expects the church to maintain order and purity within its ranks. Paul says nothing about the potential politics of the action, nor does he maneuver as not to offend important people. He considers discipline an essential part of preserving the power and character of the body of Christ, an act an individual needs to accept with courage and strength.

Before Paul’s letter, the church at Corinth does nothing to correct this errant brother. Paul discerns pride behind their lack of action and rebukes them.⁵⁴ He says, “for a man has his father’s wife. And you are arrogant!” (1 Cor. 5: 1-2). In Paul’s mind their inaction equals neglect, or corporate sin, both to the impenitent brother and to the larger church body.⁵⁵ Evidently, the Corinthians interpret their passivism as noble rather than

⁵³ Paul J Achtemeier, *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 169.

⁵⁴ Walvoord and Zuck, 514.

⁵⁵ Mohler, 50.

callous and uncaring. In Paul's view, however, love deals quickly with sin, protecting the individual and the community.⁵⁶

In 1 Corinthians 5:4-5 Paul issues the verdict upon the man sleeping with his father's wife. He instructs, "When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present ... you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord." In other words, building upon verse 2 where Paul tells the Corinthians to remove this man from the body, he explains what this means. Not only will this action deprive the brother of the spiritual benefits and relationships of the church, but it also removes his protective covering and fully exposes him to Satan's realm. As the *Bible Knowledge Commentary* explains, "It thus became a painful example of the price of self-centered indifference and a powerful reminder of the demand for holiness in God's temple."⁵⁷

Although speaking within the context of the New Covenant, Paul undoubtedly bases some of his arguments on Old Testament teachings. For example, Israel had strict laws pertaining to the treatment of those refusing to obey God's commands. In Deuteronomy 17, for instance, God instructs the community of believers to put to death any person who "does what is evil in the sight of the Lord," such as worshipping other gods (v. 3). This type of discipline prevented God's wrath from falling upon the entire community, as well as kept sin from spreading throughout the camp.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Walvoord and Zuck, 513-14.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 514.

⁵⁸ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Logos Bible Software.

In like manner, the offending brother in 1 Corinthians 5:5 suffers banishment from the community. As Craig Keener notes, “banishment was a common punishment in the Roman period. In Judaism, exclusion from the community was a spiritual equivalent of execution, applied in the New Testament period to capital crimes of the Old Testament.”⁵⁹ In 1 Corinthians 5:6-8, Paul addresses the issue of corporate purity by removing the wayward brother from the church. He does this using the metaphor of leaven spreading through a lump of dough. Paul borrows this metaphor from the Old Testament feast of Unleavened Bread. The leaven, which represents sin, has to be purged from the community. Therefore, Paul uses this imagery to warn the Corinthians of the dangers of inaction.

Yet, this banishment, from Paul’s perspective, also carries with it the possibility of restoration. Again, as Deuteronomy 8:5 teaches, God disciplines those He loves. Although the brother in 1 Corinthians 5 is now considered an apostate, Paul hopes that the excommunication will result in the destruction of his flesh, creating such discomfort that he will eventually turn back to God. Verlyn Verbrugge explains Paul’s intent well when he writes,

As Satan exercises free play over that person, perhaps by physical suffering but even more likely by encouragement to wallow in the filth of a life of sin, he or she will finally hit the bottom. At this point, like the prodigal son, the sinner will compare the present situation to the joy and peace once experienced in the fellowship of believers.⁶⁰

From Paul’s standpoint, a firm treatment of this man’s sin, in this case excommunication, proves to be the kindest action he could receive. Anything less might result in eternal

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Verlyn D. Verbrugge, “Delivered Over to Satan,” *Reformed Journal* 30, no. 6 (1980): 17–19.

damnation. The loss of relationships may appear severe; however, compared with the potential consequences of failing to act, even this punishment pales in comparison.

For the sake of clarity, excommunication and “delivering over to Satan” mean one and the same thing. Jesus instructs His disciples in Matthew 18:17 to treat the unrepentant sinner like a “Gentile” or “tax collector,” meaning ostracism from the body of Christ. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 5:5, commands the church to “deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh,” which entails removing him from the protective cover of the church. Thus, exclusion from the church places a person under the authority of Satan’s kingdom, exposed and unprotected like the rest of unregenerate humanity.

In 1 Corinthians 5:11, Paul continues with his instruction on how to treat those who refuse to turn from evil. He says, “But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.” In other words, Paul tells the Corinthians that, once expelled from the church, all friendly, casual interaction with the unrepentant brother or sister must cease. This does not constitute another level of discipline, but gives clearer instruction as to what expulsion entails relationally. In verse 12, Paul concludes this section saying, “For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. Purge the evil person from among you” (1 Cor. 5). Therefore, Paul’s command not to eat with brothers or sisters who actively pursue evil falls under the guidelines for how to treat excommunicated believers.

In many non-Western, Mediterranean cultures, eating with someone communicates approval and camaraderie.⁶¹ Paul does not want the church to risk even the appearance of evil, nor does he want the wayward brother to feel accepted in his rebellion. Furthermore, for an excommunication to work effectively, it must be decisive and strong, keeping in mind that restoration, not vengeance, constitutes the ultimate goal of such action.⁶²

In the Case of False Teaching

Discipline within the first-century Church also addressed issues such as false teachings. Paul instructs Timothy, his spiritual son, in 1 Timothy 1:3-4, “remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine ... which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.” Hymenaeus and Alexander serve as an example of this type of spiritual misdirection. Paul declares that they have “shipwrecked” their faith through blasphemy (1 Tim. 1:19-20). However, their punishment for this offense, although serious, remains focused upon rehabilitation. Paul explains to Timothy that he has “handed over to Satan” Hymenaeus and Alexander so that they will “learn not to blaspheme” (v. 20). Thus, once more, the phrase “handed over to Satan” refers to expulsion from the church. The body of Christ must protect itself from those who would stir up confusion and division.⁶³

⁶¹ Jonathan Schwiebert, “Table Fellowship and the Translation of 1 Corinthians 5:11,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* (January 1, 2008): 162–63.

⁶² Martin and Davids, Logos Bible Software.

⁶³ Wayne Grudem, ed., *ESV Study Bible: English Standard Version.*, ESV text ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), Logos Bible Software.

Titus 3:9-11 also deals with false teachings, or “foolish controversies,” and the division that accompanies it. Paul tells Titus to warn the offender “once and then twice,” and if he does not respond to the discipline, “have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.” Thus, Paul refers back to Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 18, instructing Titus to use this systematic approach to church discipline.⁶⁴ Restoration remains a possibility, yet Paul forthrightly admits that, like Judas Iscariot, some people are warped.

Love does not avoid the tough challenges of church ministry. It strives for truth, seeking to intercept and correct those things that might otherwise lead to eternal destruction. Hence, Paul challenges Timothy to discipline his opponents, yet to do so with gentleness and long suffering.⁶⁵ He also states in 1 Timothy 1:5, “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart.” In other words, church discipline flows out of a love and desire to bring health to God’s people.

The Case of The Idle

The New Testament uses discipline to correct the lazy and those who meddle in the affairs of others. Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12, “If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.” Paul commands the Thessalonian Christians to avoid fellowship with believers who will not work (3:6). Like

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 68.

other sinful practices, the offender should receive a warning and loving rebuke, but if he or she refuses to change, fellowship must cease.⁶⁶ As always, this stern action seeks to change bad behavior and return the Christian to a biblical lifestyle. The result of such care, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, leads to a “clean church, wholesome, [and] wholehearted.”⁶⁷ Thus, Paul, as the chief shepherd of various churches, corrects and brings discipline to bear upon a host of inappropriate behaviors. His concern focuses not on leadership popularity or likability, but upon the responsibility to maintain the overall health of the church.

God’s Direct Discipline Upon New Testament Saints

The Case of the Church in Laodicea

Another instance of church discipline occurs in Revelation 3:19, where Christ sternly admonishes the church of Laodicea. He references Proverbs 3:12 by saying, “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.” This particular rebuke, however, distinguishes itself in that it comes directly from Jesus rather than through the mediating body of the church. Jesus’ words leave no room for misunderstanding; He challenges the Laodiceans because He loves them and expects them to repent.⁶⁸

In this confrontation Christ says some things that may seem harsh. In reality, however, only the untainted truth can set a person free. In verse 17 He declares, “For you

⁶⁶ Harrison and Henry, 167.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Walvoord and Zuck, 942.

say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:17). Like a surgeon’s scalpel, Christ cuts and exposes in order to cleanse and heal. Gerhard Kittel explains, “The goal is twofold, renunciation of ungodliness and the confident hope and expectation of the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”⁶⁹ In other words, Jesus directly rebukes the Laodiceans in order to shake them from their complacency and to prepare them, through judgment, to stand confidently before their Savior when He returns.

The Case of Ananias and Sapphira

God’s direct discipline also takes place in Acts 5 with the account of Ananias and Sapphira. Ananias falls dead after lying to Peter about the price of his property. God chooses the punishment and enforces it immediately. When Sapphira repeats her husband’s offense, Peter foretells her death, but God carries it out. God disciplines directly, often for the purpose of instilling fear upon those inside and outside the Church. Acts 5:11 recounts, “And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.” In other words, the implementation of this supernatural punishment brought about “both a reverent awe and a healthy fear of God’s displeasure and discipline,” thereby dissuading others from following in Ananias and Sapphira’s footsteps.⁷⁰ These dramatic, direct interventions of discipline reveal God’s willingness to use creative, even unnerving, methods to protect and preserve His chosen people.

⁶⁹ Kittel and Friedrich, 5:623.

⁷⁰ Grudem, Logos Bible Software.

A Biblical Understanding of Church Discipline

Discipline Equals Love

Unlike the perception so many in the twenty-first century have of suffering and pain, the Bible explains these experiences as necessary components of human development and spiritual growth. Throughout human history suffering has served, and continues to serve as, a powerful disciplinary tool in the hand of God.

The problem of pain in a world sovereignly orchestrated by an all-loving, all-powerful God remains one of the most complicated questions of all time. In Proverbs, however, one uncovers the purpose and necessity behind suffering, discovering the depth and forethought of the love of God.⁷¹ Proverbs 3:11-12 instructs, “My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.” In other words, God’s discipline flows out of a heart of love and concern, not only for His covenant people, but also for all creation. As Murphy explains, “In [Proverbs] 13:24 physical beating is seen as a sign of a father’s love for his son—a paradox.”⁷² A paradox in that God uses something that hurts to produce something good.

Moreover, Proverbs 3:11 pleads with the son not to “despise the Lord’s discipline.”⁷³ Hence, he must humbly submit himself to the pain, embracing the reality that this temporary discomfort will create in him greater strength and nobility of

⁷¹ Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs*, Word Biblical Commentary 22 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 21.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Alexander et al., 449.

character. This happened to Joseph as God prepared him to lead in Egypt. Although God does not always reveal the purpose for the discipline, He nonetheless wants His children to understand that it functions as an indispensable part of His loving care. For God to neglect discipline would signal both a lack of concern on His part, and even worse, illegitimacy. From a biblical perspective, discipline springs from a familial relationship, one in which a father painstakingly guides his son in order to keep him from destruction.⁷⁴

In Hebrews 12, the idea of discipline flowing from love continues with great force. The author of Hebrews reminds the reader, “And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord. . . . For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives” (12:5-6). In the case of the Hebrews, God’s discipline comes in the form of persecution “from the enemies of Christ.”⁷⁵ As perplexing as this may seem, the outcome remains the same—God purges His covenant people by way of outside pressure. William Lane comments concerning the writer of Hebrews:

He fully recognized that suffering has the ability to disturb faith or to provoke uncertainty and despair. The consideration of these harsh experiences as exposure to the παιδεία, “instructive discipline,” “correction,” of God, which attests a filial relationship with the Father, brings a fresh perspective on these aspects of Christian experience. The sufferings of the community were actually disciplinary in character and expressed the love that God has for his children.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Harris and Waltke, 387.

⁷⁵ Sakenfeld, 133.

⁷⁶ William L. Lane and Glenn W Barker, *Hebrews 9-13*, Word Biblical Commentary 47B (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 419.

In other words, God’s discipline, like the discipline of a parent, attests to His unfailing love and commitment to His people. Likewise, the discipline upon erring church members testifies to the love and concern of God, the leadership, and fellow believers. To do nothing reveals a careless and dangerous ambivalence. Jonathan Leeman, in his book *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus*, explains, “Discipleship in the local church involves church members helping one another follow Jesus . . . They teach the good and correct the bad. They encourage one another toward the right path, and help keep one another off the wrong path.”⁷⁷ This mutual accountability, ultimately reflecting God’s care, represents a deep concern and a willingness to assume responsibility for the spiritual success of one’s Christian brothers and sisters. It gives a different, fuller perspective to the concept of love, one more interested in long-term health than immediate and shallow relational pleasure.

Restoration and Healing

Church discipline, although painful at the moment, seeks restoration. In fact, as mentioned earlier, the Greek words *paideuo* (verb) and *paideia* (noun) mean “the rearing of a child, training, to educate, discipline, etc.”⁷⁸ In other words, it is discipline with an objective—to improve and protect those under its care. For example, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:32 regarding the misuse of the Lord’s Supper, “But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.” Therefore, Paul wants the Corinthians to understand that God’s discipline, far from being

⁷⁷ Jonathan Leeman, *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), , 47, Kindle.

⁷⁸ Kittel and Friedrich, 5:621.

arbitrary or capricious like that of the pagan gods, serves a specific purpose—growth and restoration.⁷⁹

Paul makes this point in 1 Corinthians 5:5 when he commands, “you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” In this case the punishment seeks to prevent a catastrophe—destruction in hell. As Mounce comments, “Paul seems to be suggesting that physical punishment is remedial. Satan can punish the body but not the spirit, and all for the purpose of the person’s redemption.”⁸⁰ In other words, few things have the instructive value of painful consequences. Advice and warnings only accomplish so much, yet consequences engage every aspect of a person’s being, leaving behind a deep channel of emotional memories that possess the power to alter behavior. Thus, to rob the recalcitrant sinner of necessary and appropriate church discipline is like withholding the antidote from a poison victim. Furthermore, in this case, where Paul removes the man from the believing community, he hopes that the pain and deprivation of such an action will persuade him to come to his senses and repent.⁸¹

Again, the premise behind God’s discipline, and thus church discipline, rests on the truth that God desires to transform His followers into His likeness. Doing so requires the working off of rough edges, which involves friction. For instance, Hebrews 12:10 explains, “For they [human fathers] disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.” Ched Spellman

⁷⁹ Wenham et al., Logos Bible Software.

⁸⁰ Mounce, 70.

⁸¹ Martin and Davids, Logos Bible Software.

asserts, “The guidance and correction of our spiritual Father has a distinct purpose. When He disciplines, the process is far from meaningless or unnecessary. He works for the ultimate advantage and benefit of His true children, and discipline is one of His chosen methods.”⁸² In other words, God purposefully shapes His children, like a lump of clay, bringing pressure to bear on attitudes and behaviors that need improvement. Therefore, one could accurately say that God cares less about a believer’s everyday happiness than about his or her overall development.

Discipline Instills the Fear of the Lord

Church discipline also sets an example for others in the body of Christ as well as for unbelievers. For instance, in Acts 5, when the Holy Spirit strikes Ananias and Sapphira dead, verse 11 emphasizes, “And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.” God’s disciplinary action serves as both a warning and standard for other believers and for those considering faith in Christ. God is a holy God and expects holiness from His followers.

Paul also commands Timothy to publicly expose persistent sin. He says, “As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear” (1 Tim. 5:10). Therefore, “Discipline is not only for the benefit of the individual but to provide a warning for others.”⁸³ When the church neglects its God-given duty to administer correction to an erring brother or sister, it communicates to the rest of the body that the behavior in question is acceptable.

⁸² Ched E. Spellman, “When Hope Screams: Learning How to Suffer as Sons from the Book of Hebrews,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 53, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 128.

⁸³ Wenham et al., Logos Bible Software.

Discipline Keeps Sin from Spreading

Discipline, by instilling a healthy fear of painful consequences, works to prevent the spread of sin. Paul champions this argument when he says to the Corinthian church, “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump.” (1 Cor. 5:6-7). Paul teaches that unrepentant sin, left unchecked, spreads rapidly and effects the entire congregation, creating a much more difficult problem to solve.⁸⁴

Paul also instructs Timothy “to avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will spread like gangrene” (2 Tim. 2:16-17, NIV). As Keener notes, gangrene’s essential characteristic involves spreading quickly and poisoning everything it touches, eventually killing the body if not eradicated.⁸⁵ Hence, evil behavior left unchecked will spread like an infection, resulting in spiritual death.

The Church’s Responsibility to Discipline

The Responsibility of the Laity and the Leadership

The task of church discipline falls to every member of the body of Christ. Many believers today, however, assume that church leaders, especially pastors, carry the burden of this responsibility. In fact, most church members fear any type of conflict within the body of Christ, choosing to whisper their concerns in dark corners rather than confronting evil directly. Jesus addresses this issue in Matthew 18:15 when He teaches, “If your

⁸⁴ Grudem, Logos Bible Software.

⁸⁵ Keener, Logos Bible Software.

brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained a brother.” The offense has not yet escalated to the place of congregational attention, which functions as the highest level of correction. Therefore, if the two parties can reach a resolution, then nothing further needs attention.⁸⁶ In other words, corrective discipline should always occur at the lowest level, among congregational friends and family, intensifying only if that fails. Hence, every believer has a part to play in church discipline.

In Jesus’ description of the church discipline process in Matthew 18, the pastor or elder, as an individual, has no special function. His or her place includes presiding over the third step, the congregational rebuke, and it may even involve acting as one of the witnesses in step two. This does not preclude, however, the offended brother or sister from seeking counsel from the pastor concerning the best way to approach the confrontation. The most critical function a pastor assumes during any church discipline situation entails acting as a mentor and teaching and encouraging his or her people in God’s wisdom and love.

The lay person also plays a part in the discipline process if the issue goes before the congregation. Paul tells the Corinthians, “When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present ... you are to deliver this man to Satan” (1 Cor. 5:4-5). The assembled congregation, therefore, represents the judgment of God as it seeks wisdom from His Word and enforces the penalty.⁸⁷ One commentary observes, “Paul

⁸⁶ Walvoord and Zuck, Logos Bible Software.

⁸⁷ Keener, Logos Bible Software.

expects the congregation to make an important decision in relation to the offending Christian. The apostle gives his advice in no uncertain terms. . . . But the congregation is to make the decision.”⁸⁸ In other words, the body, led by its pastor, must act as a unified assembly, upholding biblical standards and renouncing the unrepentant sin.

Short-sighted Fear Versus a Long-term View of Love

One of the troubling trends within the modern Church involves Christians refusing to challenge other Christians involved in unrepentant sin. Many assume they have no right to do so, and some refuse to confront for fear of losing the relationship. Still others believe that love should avoid judgment and, in turn, unconditionally accept people. Hidden within each of these assumptions, however, lies a distorted and self-centered view of love. In fact, these hesitant Christians worry more about their own acceptance than they do about the perilous condition of their brother or sister in Christ. They fail to realize that godly love speaks the truth even at the risk of losing the relationship. In other words, correction often proves necessary to move people away from destruction and toward the truth. It functions as an “act of kindness and love.”⁸⁹

The Bible maintains a positive view of corrections, rebukes, and trials in that they work to purge undesirable attitudes and actions. Moreover, the Scriptures consistently compare the responsibility of church discipline to that of loving parents

⁸⁸ Daniel G. Reid, *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament: A One Volume Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 202.

⁸⁹ Ted Cabal et al., *The Apologetics Study Bible: Understand Why You Believe* (Nashville: Holman, 2007), 937–38.

disciplining their children.⁹⁰ Hebrews 12:11 teaches, “For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” Hence, the willingness to confront a fellow believer entangled in sin represents the highest form of love. Confrontation unselfishly risks personal rejection and loss of relationship in hopes of turning an erring believer back to God.⁹¹ Both Jesus and Paul effectively modeled this mindset. Each delivered scathing rebukes in order to provoke deep spiritual reflection in their listeners. They possessed a long-term view of relationships rather than a short-term, selfish view, and they sought to bring about positive change through momentary discomfort.

A Clarification of the Biblical Concept of “Judging”

“Judge Not” Does Not Mean “Live and Let Live”

Perhaps one of the most misunderstood and misapplied passages of Scripture in the twenty-first century resides in Matthew 7. During His famous sermon on the mount, Jesus teaches his disciples,

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye (Matt. 7:1-5).

This passage has become a popular cultural phenomenon that many interpret to mean that no one has the right to judge anyone else, ever, even in the church. Yet, like other tabloid

⁹⁰ Wenham et al., Logos Bible Software.

⁹¹ Ibid.

news disguising itself as truth, the street application of this passage is only half correct. If one only reads verses 1-2 and stops there, he or she can possibly make an argument for not judging. Yet, Jesus continues by explaining the necessary actions for equitable judgment. He says, “You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye” (v. 5). In other words, the disciples would have to make judgments, yet, before doing so, they must first scrutinize themselves.⁹² By metaphorically removing the log from their own eyes, the disciples will judge with greater compassion,⁹³ understanding that they too struggle with sin. Therefore, “What Jesus does rule out is pride that views oneself as better than others.”⁹⁴ Again, a Christian must ensure that he or she has a proper handle on his or her own life before admonishing another brother or sister in Christ.

As a point of clarification, “judging,” in this context, means nothing more than discerning between right and wrong and then confronting a fellow believer. This passage, using the term “brother” several times, indicates that Jesus speaks of correction within the church body.⁹⁵ Therefore, it further supports the idea of church discipline, yet it must take place without hypocrisy and with both tenderness and humility.

⁹² Donald Alfred Hagner, *Matthew*, Word Biblical Commentary 33A (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), Logos Bible Software.

⁹³ Grudem, Logos Bible Software.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Hagner, Logos Bible Software.

Judging Protects the Church Body

Church discipline affects more than just the offended believer and the persistent sinner; it also has far-reaching implications for the body of Christ. In other words, church discipline, or the lack thereof, determines the faithfulness and purity of a congregation. Paul teaches in 1 Timothy 5:20, “As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.” The public rebuke of sin, as in this case, or any form of correction, tends to have a cleansing effect upon those witnessing it. Although intimidating, discipline protects the church by reminding it of the penalties for waywardness. This premise works exactly the same within families as one sibling sees another receive correction for disobedience. As one commentary puts it, “Fear of the discipline of God, in this case administered through the congregation, is a healthy thing in a Christian. . . . Modern congregations that ignore church discipline do so at the peril of both the offender and themselves.”⁹⁶

Church discipline also protects the unity and fellowship of the church body. William Bradly aptly observes, “Fellowship (koinonia) is that special bond, union, and communion believers have with each other and the Godhead.”⁹⁷ This union extends beyond corporate worship, which only partially reflects Christian unity and extends to the spiritual connection that believers share with one another. This connection becomes strained and even damaged when Christians break trust by pursuing rebellious sin.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Walvoord and Zuck, Logos Bible Software.

⁹⁷ William Bradly, *Church Discipline - A Neglected Necessity: A Brief Synopsis of Church Discipline and Its Need in the Contemporary Church* (Westbow Press, 2012), Kindle e-book, 14.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

Paul also instructs Timothy, “Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers” (2 Tim. 2:14). Timothy must teach and correct the church not to argue about words, for this brings discord and disunity to the body of Christ. Church discipline, therefore, seeks to protect and restore the individual while also safeguarding the health of the congregation.

Conclusion

The biblical concept of discipline weaves its way throughout all of Scripture. From Adam and Eve, to the patriarchs, to God’s chosen people Israel, and finally, to the New Testament Church, God corrects, directs, and restores using discipline. In Deuteronomy 8:5 God tells Israel, “Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you.” The Old Testament compares God’s discipline to a loving father guiding his son. The two Hebrew words used for corrective discipline, *yasar* and *musar*, denote chastisement for the purpose of education and improvement.

Most of God’s discipline in the Old Testament centers on His covenant people. He shapes them and directs them with a firm, loving hand. At times, God pours out His judgment, but even then it serves the ultimate purpose of instruction as Israel sees the power of their God and learn from their mistakes. Far from being capricious, God’s discipline serves a purpose. He uses it to educate and admonish, to develop His people into a holy community reflecting His nature.

Moreover, YHWH’s discipline comes through various channels. For instance, He uses prophets to warn, proclaim, and sometimes exact judgment. God also disciplines through the community as He charges Israel to act against evil in her midst, as with

Achan in Joshua 7. At times, God disciplines directly, using neither prophet nor the community of God-fearers, but inflicting punishment Himself. Miriam experiences this type of discipline in Numbers 12.

Discipline continues in the New Testament via the Church. There exists an unbroken continuity between discipline in the Old Testament and discipline in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul refers to Exodus 12 when using the Passover metaphor of leaven spreading throughout the body of Christ. The church, although an institution informed by grace, is expected to maintain scriptural standards of holiness among its adherents. Doing so protects its membership from inward decay and preserves its witness in a dark world.

In Matthew 18, Jesus provides the Church with the simplest, most profound example of how to conduct church discipline. His method seeks to resolve the problem at the lowest level, elevating the issue only if the offender refuses correction. Even amidst an accusation, however, Jesus provides protection for the accused with the presence and testimony of one or two other witnesses: the objective—to restore a wayward brother or sister to a healthy relationship with Christ. Nevertheless, if during the disciplinary process the offender refuses all correction and suffers excommunication, even this painful consequence strives for restoration.

Church discipline, however, does not apply to the world at large. As its name implies, it focuses on those within the Church only. God will judge those outside the church. Moreover, refusing to discipline, for any reason, reflects selfishness and a lack of concern for the kingdom of God. Paul unhesitatingly instructs the Corinthians, as well as Timothy and Titus, to deal quickly and firmly with those who persist in sin. Even the

resurrected Jesus, in Revelation 3, rebukes the Laodicean church, telling them, “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent” (v. 19). Again, discipline serves as an act of love, caring enough to risk earthly relationships in exchange for the possibility that a person might live eternally with God.

Church discipline also instills a healthy fear of the Lord in the body of Christ, resulting in holy living. Furthermore, the responsibility to discipline belongs to the entire body of believers and not just to leadership. Every Christian has an obligation to look out for his or her brother or sister, approaching them in love if they walk in unrepentant sin. By doing so, the church remains strong and protected and its testimony unblemished.

Finally, the Church must push back against the false notion that “judge not, that you be not judged” means that judging or correcting within the body of Christ is wrong (Matt. 7:1). This cultural myth prevents accountability and misunderstands Jesus’ point that before one proceeds to judge another, he or she must first judge his or herself. In other words, it is impossible for a Christian to help a fellow believer deal with a particular sin if that Christian has unresolved issues in the same area. When undertaking church discipline, Jesus wants His followers to exhibit a kind, compassionate heart, one that has the best interest of the offender in mind, and one that exhibits holiness in his or her own life. In essence, love operates as the nucleus of church discipline, informing and directing every aspect of its care.

CHAPTER 3: GENERAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Understanding the precedent for church discipline and implementing it involves two different challenges. The first requires the intellectual integrity to acknowledge the truth and pursue it, while the second requires the love and courage necessary to carry it out. As chronicled in the previous chapter, Scripture presents a clear case for divine discipline. In these last days God accomplishes this task through the church. He calls and equips members of the body of Christ to strengthen one another in the faith, which sometimes includes correction.

This chapter comprehensively lays out the steps and other details concerning the application of church discipline. It does not attempt to touch upon every situation that may arise within a church. Rather, it deals with the proper steps and the functioning of a local church body as it navigates the choppy waters of church discipline.

In order to accomplish this task, a broader understanding of the concept of “church discipline” must come to light. Typically, the average Christian equates the words “church discipline” with punishment or being judgmental. This perception reflects the shallow and short-sighted view that American culture, and the contemporary church, hold concerning the subject. Despite these misperceptions, however, church discipline remains a vital component of any healthy church and fits neatly within the broader category of “discipleship.”

This chapter will also consider the American church's attitude toward church discipline, including some of the corresponding factors that created it. Its scope, therefore, is limited to one country. The biblical principles herein cross all cultural barriers and times. This project does not presume to understand the attitudes and practices of non-U.S. churches toward church discipline.

Church membership is another important factor when discussing the concept of church discipline. In order to appreciate properly the membership within the local church, a person must understand the "nature" and "authority" of the church. This chapter will outline the major points of these topics as they pertain to the subject at hand.

Finally, other miscellaneous church discipline issues will receive attention. Some of these include 1) how to correct minors, 2) how to implement discipline in multi-cultural or ethnically diverse situations, and 3) how to protect the church from lawsuits. Grappling with these topics will help leaders make better decisions when implementing church discipline.

The following general literature review contains some of the strongest voices on the subject of church discipline. It acts as a practical guide for administering discipline within the local church. Although every discipline situation has its own unique set of circumstances, Jesus' model in Matthew 18 serves as God's ideal for building and maintaining a healthy church.

Church Discipline—A Broader Understanding

Two Sides of Church Discipline

In a general sense, church discipline consists of every aspect of ministry that a church employs to help its members mature in Christ. For example, prayer, Bible reading,

accountability groups, and preaching all involve what theologians call “formative” discipline, or discipline that forms the Christian life.¹ “Corrective” discipline, however, involves what most people think of when they hear the words “church discipline.” Corrective discipline takes place when a fellow member of the church must be confronted about a sinful action or attitude.²

Bobby Jamieson, in his book *Guarding One Another: Church Discipline*, explains, “In a broad sense, discipline is teaching. In a more narrow sense, some discipline is corrective. In the narrowest sense, it is the act of excluding someone who professes to be a Christian from membership in the church ... for serious unrepentant sin—sin they refuse to let go of.”³ In other words, church discipline functions on different levels. Formatively, it includes training and equipping people for righteousness. Correctively, it rebukes an erring brother or sister in Christ, sometimes even putting them out of the church for refusing to repent.

The Meaning of Discipleship

Robert Cheong, in his book *God Redeeming His Bride*, states, “We have to see church discipline, not merely as a doctrine of the church to be understood and obeyed, but as an outflow of God’s story of redemption working in the lives of real people in a real world.”⁴ This view broadens the understanding of church discipline by teaching that

¹ Bobby Jamieson, *Guarding One Another: Church Discipline*, ed. Mark Dever (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 215, Kindle.

² Mark Galli, “Shaping Holy Disciples,” *Christianity Today*, August 2005, 32.

³ Jamieson, 133.

⁴ Robert K. Cheong, *God Redeeming His Bride: A Handbook for Church Discipline* (Scotland, UK: Christian Focus, 2013), 449, Kindle.

it functions as a normal component of Christian living. In the overarching story of redemption, God uses discipline to change His people for their own good and for the glory of His Kingdom. Simply put, church discipline falls neatly within the purview of “discipleship.”

Again, discipleship creates the foundation for church discipline, and discipline, as a tool of discipleship, concerns itself with transformation. Mutual accountability, or holding one another accountable for daily decisions, is a form of discipline that works toward this goal. In fact, it embodies a key element in Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 18:15-17. Christians, understanding the reality of a fallen nature, should willingly submit to one another, acknowledging the fact that they may stumble in following Jesus.⁵ Thus, the honesty and vulnerability of mutual accountability serve as the most effective means toward spiritual growth and stability.

John Wesley’s early Methodist movement considered mutual accountability a vital component of fruitful Christian living.⁶ They used groups of varying sizes known as societies, classes, and bands to “watch over one another in love.”⁷ Experience taught Wesley that accountability and encouragement brought the greatest success among his new converts as they transitioned to committed lives in Christ.⁸ In other words, mutual

⁵ Jonathan Leeman, *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 47–48, Kindle.

⁶ Kevin Watson, “The Form and Power of Godliness: Wesleyan Communal Discipline as Voluntary Suffering,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (March 2008): 165.

⁷ Rupert E. Davies, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 9 of *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 125.

⁸ Watson, 165.

accountability acts as the foundation stone for corrective discipline. Members confront each other, when necessary, to ensure that each believer remains on the straight and narrow path to heaven.

The Present State of Discipline in the United States

The practice of church discipline in North American churches has continued to decline throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Some believe that part of the problem stems from the “church-growth thinking” of the last fifty or so years.⁹ Jonathan Leeman claims, “the pragmatism that has reigned in American churches at least since the twentieth century ... has left our understanding of the church itself fairly doctrine-less, principle-less, structure-less.”¹⁰ In other words, everything not immediately relevant to winning converts gets discarded.¹¹ Growth becomes the main focus, and anything causing uncomfortable feelings threatens this growth—including discipline.

Still, others believe that churches focus too much on what they invest in people and not enough on whether these people actually change.¹² Jamieson asserts that the decline in church discipline over the last few generations serves as proof of this reality.¹³ Shockingly, open sin goes unchallenged in most churches, with unrepentant sinners

⁹ Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010), 448, Kindle.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Jamieson, 174.

¹³ Ibid.

enjoying the same benefits and status as other members in good standing.¹⁴ The average church does little to curb the un-scriptural, destructive behavior of its members.

The idea of correcting sin in the body of Christ “runs completely contrary to the American culture in which we live.”¹⁵ Instead, ideals such as tolerance, unconditional acceptance, and libertinism dominate the national ethos.¹⁶ This distinctive mix of American values has declared war on the biblical concept of church discipline, redefining words such as love, freedom, and tolerance. Even worse, however, is the church’s obsession with maintaining peace at all costs,¹⁷ as if relational friction or confrontation represented the epitome of evil.

Struggling to Grasp the Concept of Corrective Discipline

Due to the famine of teaching on the subject of church discipline, Christians have a difficult time accepting its practice.¹⁸ In fact, ignorance on the subject runs so deep that many Christians respond to it as if experiencing some strange phenomena.¹⁹ Albert Mohler, Jr., referring to this type of Christian response, laments, “At first hearing, the issue [of church discipline] seems as antiquarian and foreign as the Spanish Inquisition

¹⁴ Terry Ivy, *Restorative Church Discipline: Rescuing and Healing the Wounded* (n.p.: 2T2, 2013), 249, Kindle.

¹⁵ John S. Hammett and Benjamin L. Merkle, *Those Who Must Give An Account: A Study of Church Membership and Church Discipline* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012), 3260, Kindle.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3049.

¹⁸ W. H. Burnette, *Church Discipline: Talking Points* (n.p.: ESC Ministries, 2005), 6, Kindle.

¹⁹ John H. Armstrong, ed., *The Compromised Church: The Present Evangelical Crisis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 43.

and the Salem witch trials. Their only acquaintance with disciplinary ministry of the church is often a literary invention such as the *Scarlet Letter*.²⁰ Thus, the Christian mindset toward church discipline arises from a culture that rejects the notion of moral boundaries.

Some leaders contend that the neglect of church discipline equals rebellion.²¹ Ivy asserts, “This road of rebellion is so prominent today that most believers have never participated in or even seen the beauty of restorative church discipline performed.”²² Instead, Christians consider it normal to allow open sin to go unchallenged²³ and cringe at the thought of engaging in loving confrontation.

Once more, the average twenty-first-century Christian acquires his or her sense of appropriateness from the mainstream culture. Faithfulness to Scripture has succumbed to a desire for social acceptance, with biblical truth taking a backseat to the shifting morays of the present age. Therefore, since culture embraces almost every form of aberrant behavior, the church often follows suit.

False Sense of Autonomy

The same freedom that has allowed America to become an economic superpower also infuses the average American with a false sense of autonomy. Yet, freedom to govern oneself does not mean freedom to live without restraints. Jonathan Leeman, in his

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ivy, 353.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

book *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus*, observes, “advertisers appeal explicitly to our narcissism: ‘Have it your way’ and ‘You’re in the driver’s seat.’ With all this in the air, it’s easy to want the benefits but not the responsibilities of belonging—to friendships, to marriages, to the workplace, and certainly to the church.”²⁴ Hence, because of America’s liberties and a cultural narcissism, biblical boundaries for behavior often prove difficult to accept.

Accepting responsibility for one’s sin has also taken a backseat to the “therapeutic.”²⁵ Hence, people may fail to meet societal standards or disappoint family and friends, “but they no longer sin.”²⁶ In fact, the concept of “sin” has become a relic of the past, a tool to control the masses. The “therapeutic” mindset places the individual at the center of all things, eliminating all challengers—even biblical accountability.

Much of the narcissism in American culture developed from ideas that grew out of the Enlightenment era. The Enlightenment encouraged “such values as personal freedom, self-improvement, privacy, achievement, independence, detachment, and self-interest.”²⁷ Although most of these qualities are not evil, when combined with humanity’s fallen nature, they coalesce into a self-centered, pleasure-oriented society. A society built upon these things will inevitably struggle with the concept of church discipline.

²⁴ Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 13-14, Kindle.

²⁵ Armstrong, 45.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 314.

Inaction

The fact that few churches use corrective discipline reveals the philosophical struggle that the modern church has with this issue. Some scholars fear that the loss of this form of discipleship will eventually lead to the collapse of biblical Christianity.²⁸ Currently, however, one finds a powerless, sin-tolerant community where few boundaries exist. Moreover, rather than feeling embarrassment or shame, many churches view themselves as on the cutting-edge of Christianity. They interpret their inaction as tolerance but, in reality, reveal their indifference for the truth.

A Narrow View of the Gospel

A narrow view of the gospel also contributes to the weak state of church discipline in America. Many Christians embrace the blessings of the new birth, but they reject the painful, life-surrendering submission and persecution that sometimes follows it.²⁹ Leeman comments, “[Jesus’] gospel and the church simultaneously attract and repel. Within the space of a few verses, the Gospel of Matthew attests that the world will both persecute God’s sons for their righteousness as well as give God praise for the son’s righteous deeds (Matt. 5:10, 16).”³⁰ A truer representation of the gospel, however, includes the blessings and the pain that conjoin in a Christian’s life. One feels the joy, peace, and presence of God, while also experiencing the sting of the crucified flesh.

²⁸ Armstrong, 47.

²⁹ Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love*, 1587.

³⁰ Ibid.

A narrow view of the gospel also leads to a skewed conception of love. The world defines love as “universal, undiscriminating, and unconditional.”³¹ This only partly describes the essence of love. Humanity defines love in a way that demands nothing from the persons involved. In other words, it is self-centered.³² Biblical love centers on God, and carries with it the expectation to decide and change. “In Scripture we actually find that God’s love is utterly God-centered, which means it’s more complicated than human conception would have it.”³³ Therefore, God’s love combines seemingly contrary elements. It mixes salvation and judgment, acceptance and the expectation of change, joy and godly sorrow.³⁴ In God’s economy, all these various facets of love, some thrilling and others painful, create the whole of the discipleship process.

True love does not overlook sin but seeks to protect, or liberate, others from its destructive nature.³⁵ Many Christians interpret such action as intolerant and condemning, preferring, instead, a love that never confronts and rarely says “no.” Biblical love, however, cares less about popularity and more about the eternal well-being of a soul.

Church Membership and Discipline

The Nature of the Church

In order to appreciate the concept of membership and its crucial role in church discipline, one must first understand the nature of the church. Scholars point out that the

³¹ Ibid., 1600.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ivy, 2603.

New Testament word *ekklēsia*, or church, speaks not of a society into which one is born, but of a community to which one makes a personal commitment.³⁶ This community becomes a vital part of a new believer's life and continues as such during his or her journey on earth.

Paul describes the Church as the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12). He uses the metaphor of a physical body, with interconnected parts, to illustrate the symbiotic nature of its members. Hammett and Merkle explain:

No member of a physical body is casually related to other members of that body; no member is distant from the other members ... The church as the body of Christ underscores the necessity of church membership (because members of the body cannot survive apart from the body) and highlights the mutuality of love and care involved in church membership.³⁷

Thus, a Christian's flippant attitude toward the church exposes an ignorance of Scripture. The Bible never presents membership or commitment to the church as being optional. In fact, spiritual life can only flourish within the context of the believing community.

Moreover, fellowship among the saints means more than just coming together for worship and camaraderie; it also involves "the believer's way of life that begins at conversion."³⁸ True fellowship happens when Christians uphold the standards of Scripture. When they fail to do so and walk in unrepentant sin, however, the unity and communion of the body of Christ fractures.

³⁶ Hammett and Merkle, 308.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 391.

³⁸ William Bradley, *Church Discipline - A Neglected Necessity: A Brief Synopsis of Church of Church Discipline and Its Need in the Contemporary Church* (Bloomington, IN: Westbow Press, 2012), 14, Kindle.

The Authority of the Church

The authority of the Church also holds an important place in the discussion of membership and church discipline. Leeman asserts, “Just as the Bible establishes the government of your nation as your highest authority on earth when it comes to your citizenship in that nation, so the Bible establishes the local church as your highest authority on earth when it comes to your discipleship to Christ.”³⁹ This truth should impact every Christian’s perspective on the Church. It indicates the compulsory nature of membership and participation in the body of Christ. To choose Jesus means choosing His people as well. You cannot have one without the other.⁴⁰ Christ expects His disciples to grow, and growth occurs through interdependence and mutual accountability. Although this concept alarms some Christians, an understanding of the authority of the Church lays the groundwork for healthy church discipline.

The authority of the Church, however, reaches even further. Apart from submitting one’s time, talent and resources to the local church, a Christian must also submit to its correction. Jesus gives His Church the authority to “guard his gospel ... and his people ... by putting out those who are mere pretenders ... so as not to harm others through their corruption.”⁴¹ This authority involves judging behavior based upon the standards in Scripture, and, when necessary, gives the right to confront or expel.

³⁹ Leeman, *Church Membership*, 24.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 30–31.

⁴¹ Jeremy Pierre, “An Overlooked Help: Church Discipline and the Protection of Women,” *Journal for Biblical Manhood & Womanhood* 18, no. 1 (2013): 14.

The Nature of Membership

Church discipline and membership go hand in hand. Membership distinguishes between the committed and the uncommitted. It also establishes a relationship between the local church and the believer, and provides “oversight of a Christian’s discipleship.”⁴² In essence, membership functions as a type of covenant. It involves the church and the individual Christian pledging their commitment to one another as they serve Christ.

Membership creates boundaries for the church, differentiating between those who belong and those who do not.⁴³ Drawing this line is essential in light of 1 Corinthians 5:12 where Paul asks, “For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?”⁴⁴ Consequently, before implementing discipline, the church must provide a litmus test for determining its members. Failing to do so, or having a blurred line between members and non-members, may result in resistance to corrective discipline. Thus, the church must teach its beliefs and expectations, allowing its membership candidates to make an informed decision, and enabling the church to know its own.

Sometimes Christians shy away from membership but faithfully attend a church and adhere to its beliefs and expectations. These people should be treated as members in light of the importance of church discipline. As mentioned earlier, every believer submits to the church at conversion. Thus, neglecting discipline because a person hesitates to formally commit, endangers his or her soul and the health of the church.

⁴² Leeman, *Church Membership*, 64.

⁴³ Jamieson, 130.

⁴⁴ All Scripture references, unless otherwise notes, are from the English Standard Version.

Boundary Lines

The boundary line that membership creates also helps those inside the church to “stay true to the very things that are cause for drawing the line in the first place. It gives meaning to being a member and is another important mark of a healthy church.”⁴⁵ Well-defined membership standards provide congregants with limits, showing them how to live and protecting them from the dangers of sin. Members draw comfort from these boundaries, especially when leaders consistently teach and lovingly enforce them.

The Mega-Church

Discipline can be a daunting task in any church, yet in larger congregations it can seem impossible. Marlin Jeschke, in his article, “How Discipline Died” observes:

In such settings, it is hard to keep track of the membership rolls, let alone member’s personal lives. Congregants from the 9:30 service rarely meet those who attend the 11:00 service, even if they may be committed to biblical mandates to help a fellow church member in spiritual or moral trouble.⁴⁶

In short, larger congregations have a natural disadvantage when it comes to accountability. The cure for this, however, lies in the organization of small groups. These groups act as churches within the church, providing close, personal contact among members. Thus, the teaching in Matthew 18:15-18 still applies, with implementation occurring within the small groups in the larger church context. The upper echelons of leadership, however, must maintain regular, close contact with the leaders specifically responsible for these small groups.

⁴⁵ Jamieson, 130–133.

⁴⁶ Marlin Jeschke, “How Discipline Died,” *Christianity Today*, August 2005, 31.

Before You Discipline—Teach

Leeman tells the story of a pastor who suddenly realizes the importance of church discipline after years of neglect. With renewed fervor, he sets out to correct this problem by immediately putting it into practice.⁴⁷ In such situations, “misunderstanding and hurt feelings result. . . . The symphony of the local congregation transposes into a cacophony of arguments and accusations.”⁴⁸ Unfortunately, this scenario occurs more often than one might think. Leaders decide to make church discipline a normal part of congregational life, but they do so without preparatory measures. Disaster usually follows.

Not only does American culture resist the idea of accountability and behavioral boundaries, but “church leaders and members alike tend to struggle with the practical implications of removing those who are unrepentant from the covenant community of the church.”⁴⁹ Therefore, clear instruction on church discipline must occur before correction commences. Without appropriate instruction, people resist discipline, causing the church to descend into an even healthier state.

Church leaders should take advantage of every opportunity to teach about church discipline. They should preach about it, “discuss it in groups,” and ensure that every member has a copy of the church’s policies and procedures for implementing corrective discipline.⁵⁰ Hence, executing church discipline begins long before any correction occurs.

⁴⁷ Leeman, *Church Discipline*, 126.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Cheong, 2542–2545.

⁵⁰ Jay Edward Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, Jay Adams Library (Grand Rapids: Ministry Resources Library, 1986), 115.

It starts with educating the body of Christ concerning the biblical principles for such discipline and preparing them to give and receive this care.

Before You Discipline—Organize

As parents expecting a newborn prepare a nursery in advance, so must the church organize itself before using corrective discipline. This requires foresight, making sure that certain aspects of the church's organizational structure reflect its plan to administer biblical discipline when that time arrives.

Cleaning up the church's membership rolls should be the first of these preparations.⁵¹ Not to belabor this point, but “practicing church discipline requires churches to know who the church is.”⁵² This step requires honesty, as leaders often embrace the fantasy of bloated membership rolls. Knowing who belongs to the church simplifies the care and accountability process.

Next, leaders must review the church's documents to ensure that they clearly state its moral boundaries and its process for implementing correction.⁵³ Some churches have a constitution and bylaws, whereas others use statements of faith or some other formal document. Whatever the medium, it must be clear and forthright about expectations, as well as what happens when a person fails to meet these expectations.⁵⁴ This helps to

⁵¹ Leeman, *Church Discipline*, 135.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 135–136.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

protect the church from lawsuits arising from a misguided understanding of biblical love and discipleship.

Educating the church's leadership team also helps to create a strong foundation for correction.⁵⁵ If division exists in this area, and the pastoral staff does not agree on principles and practice, "disunity in the church will result."⁵⁶ In other words, the leadership team must agree on the biblical mandate for, and the implementation of church discipline. Without this unity, division, and ultimately chaos, may occur.

The Steps of Discipline

Before exploring the mechanics, or steps of church discipline, a few important observations need to be made. The first observation reiterates the restorative nature of church discipline. Correction should never stem from a spirit of "condemnation, anger, or with a harsh attitude."⁵⁷ James 1:20 teaches, "the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God." The offended person may not like what happened, but his or her motive for confrontation must always come from a desire to restore the sinning brother or sister.

In 1 Corinthians 13:7, Paul teaches, "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." Love assumes the best about a person. It also takes into consideration that the offender may not realize that he or she is committing a sin.⁵⁸ In essence, love forms the foundation of healthy church discipline. It may appear naïve or

⁵⁵ Ibid., 136.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Bradly, 80.

⁵⁸ Thomas Bear, *Church Discipline: Bring My Sheep Back* (n.p., 2012), 930, Kindle.

overly trusting, but it searches for the best in a person. When it does have to correct, it does so out of a legitimate concern for his or her well-being.

Another important observation points out that God often uncovers sin through “circumstances and other acts of providence” rather than by direct revelation to His leaders.⁵⁹ Although members may walk in unrepentant sin for extended periods of time without anyone knowing it, leaders and other members bear no responsibility until a sin comes to light. Congregants, however, should not pry or snoop without cause, searching for sin in the lives of other members. This violates Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 13:7 that encourages Christians to believe the best about one another.

Self-Discipline

One of the more discreet aspects of church discipline is self-discipline. Self-discipline acts as the starting place for the discipline process. Adams asserts, “Self-discipline is the beginning and end of church discipline because it is the most basic element in all discipline.”⁶⁰ Galatians 5:23 includes self-control as one of the nine fruits of the Spirit.⁶¹ It involves policing oneself and responding to the nudges of the Holy Spirit. However, when an individual remains ignorant of his or her sin, or refuses to use self-discipline, corrective discipline must ensue.

⁵⁹ Bradley, 47-48.

⁶⁰ Adams, 107.

⁶¹ Ibid., 29.

Pre-Confronting Checklist

In addition to having the right attitude and a proper understanding of church discipline, a person must also remember the purpose for corrective discipline. For instance, the offended party must ensure that the offense results from a violation of Scripture and not from a difference of opinion.⁶² To prevent this from happening, the offended person should write down the Scriptures that deal with the sin, ensuring that they have a biblical case for confrontation.⁶³ Failure to do this may lead to correcting a person for the wrong reasons, including one's "own self-righteous agenda and worldly wisdom."⁶⁴ Disagreements and personality conflicts exist as a normal part of church life; yet, as long as members uphold biblical standards, church discipline proves unnecessary. Instead, as Paul exhorts in Colossians 3:13, "Put on then ... compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another." Godly love overlooks many things, recognizing that all Christians have shortcomings.

The offended Christian must also examine his or her own heart for unrepentant sin. Neglecting this step may result in a confrontation marred by twisted motives, such as diverting attention to another person in the name of self-preservation.⁶⁵ Inspecting one's own heart enables a Christian to help someone else more effectively.

⁶² Cheong, 1619.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 1623.

Seeking God’s wisdom directly, versus conferring with others, is also a crucial element in the pre-confrontation process.⁶⁶ Typically, Christians discuss sensitive issues with uninvolved persons, leading to “gossip and/or slander.”⁶⁷ In steps one and two, church discipline seeks to restore a believer using as few people as possible.

Cheong also recommends that a Christian assess his or her hesitation.⁶⁸ By hesitation, he means the things that may cause a Christian to reconsider confrontation. For example, the risk of losing a relationship leads some Christians to reassess the need for confrontation, although this does not constitute a good excuse to avoid it. On the other hand, a hesitancy may result from the Spirit encouraging the offended party to slow the process down, making sure that one has ample grounds for such action.⁶⁹ In short, church discipline requires careful self-examination, including checking one’s motives while seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

One-on-One

Once the believer works through the pre-confrontation checklist, he or she must go to the person who has committed the offense. Again, the sin may not have been personally directed against the offended person. Matthew 18:15 declares, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault.” Whereas, Luke 17:3 says, “If your brother sins, rebuke him.”⁷⁰ Scholars believe that Matthew’s passage does not limit confrontation

⁶⁶ Ibid., 1638.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 1640.

⁷⁰ Hammett and Merkle, 2187.

to direct offenses only or where one Christian sins directly against another.⁷¹ If so, confrontation would rarely occur. Sins such as alcoholism, greed, and pornography do not always take aim at anyone personally, but they offend and impact everyone connected to the sinning individual. Thus, “offense” in this context means any unrepentant sin that grieves another Christian.

The first course of action, when confrontation becomes necessary, entails establishing a time and place to meet.⁷² This should take place “soon after arranging the meeting. Long delays cause undue tension and anxiety.”⁷³ Furthermore, address this issue face-to-face. Confronting people on the phone or by email may feel like a less-threatening way to handle things, but eye contact and non-verbal language are crucial for effective communication.⁷⁴ One must also give careful thought to the meeting place. A neutral location should be chosen, one conducive to open conversation. Attention to these details will improve the chances of a successful encounter.

Some scholars point out that Jesus’ command in Matthew 18:15 to “go and tell him his fault” actually connotes persuasion.⁷⁵ Daniel Cawdry observes, “He does not say, accuse him, chide him, revile or reproach him ... but to convince him ...”⁷⁶ In other

⁷¹ Gordon J. Wenham et al., eds., *The New Bible Commentary*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), Logos Bible Software.

⁷² Cheong, location 1638.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Daniel Cawdry, *A Discourse on Church Discipline and Reformation*, ed. Therese B. McMahon and C. Matthew McMahon (Coconut Creek, FL: Puritan, 2012), 597, Kindle.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

words, the offended Christian should work to persuade the sinning brother or sister of their wrong doing, hoping to bring them to repentance.

Richard Baxter, a seventeenth-century English pastor, comments in regards to one-on-one confrontations, “I have found by experience, that some ignorant persons, who have been so long unprofitable hearers, have got more knowledge and remorse in half an hour’s close discourse, than they did from ten year’s public preaching.”⁷⁷ In other words, sometimes formative discipline fails. In such cases, Baxter believes that a one-on-one challenge has greater power to change a person and lead to repentance.

Jesus designed church discipline to increase in pressure, or consequences, when a person resists repentance. From a discipleship standpoint, remaining in sin is not an option. Thus, believers must accept the responsibility to move discipline to the next level if the need arises. Bear asserts, “But if he remains caught in a sinful behavior or attitude, with no sign of repentance, we must take further action.”⁷⁸ Refusing to escalate discipline equals negligence, which hurts the unrepentant Christian and the body of Christ.

Although Jesus provides clear guidelines for church discipline in Matthew 18, His silence on some of the finer details on the topic infers some flexibility in its practice. For instance, Jesus never sets time frames between the different steps of correction. The church can proceed at variable speeds depending upon the individual situation. Sometimes the process may move more slowly, as when a believer takes some level of responsibility for his or her sin. Then, again, it may move more quickly as it does in 1

⁷⁷ Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth, n.d.), 18.

⁷⁸ Bear, 368.

Corinthians 5, where the man sleeping with his father's wife shows no remorse.⁷⁹ Every situation has a unique set of factors and should receive individualized attention.

In summary, moving to the next level of discipline remains the responsibility of the offended party. Church leadership, however, should support this action and provide guidance. Neglecting to continue to the next level shows a reckless disregard for God's restoration plan.

Witnesses

Should the one-on-one confrontation fail, Jesus instructs His disciples to involve one or two other witnesses. He commands, "But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses" (Matt. 18:16). In doing this, Jesus borrows from an Old Testament practice that required multiple witnesses of a crime before a conviction could take place.⁸⁰ In this context, scholars believe that Jesus intends for the witnesses to serve as more than just first-hand reporters. Mohler suggests, "Jesus seems to intend for the witnesses to be an important presence in the event of the confrontation, thus adding corroborating testimony concerning the confrontation of a sinning brother."⁸¹ In other words, the witnesses observe the spirit of the accuser, the quality of his or her confrontation, and the response of the offending Christian. The information gathered either confirms or denies the original accusation.

⁷⁹ Leeman, *Church Membership*, 114.

⁸⁰ Armstrong, 51.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Others believe that the witnesses add a level of “gravity” and “authority” to the occasion, resulting in a more thoughtful response.⁸² This fits neatly with the idea of progressive pressure and consequences should a Christian refuse correction.

One’s choice of witnesses is another important consideration. Witnesses should exhibit spiritual insight and “possess credibility” among fellow members.⁸³ They must represent the body of Christ well, making it more likely that the church will support their findings.⁸⁴ The offended Christian should also choose witnesses with the offender in mind. Love should propel him or her to select believers that the accused person respects.⁸⁵ In Philippians 2:4, Paul exhorts his readers, “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” Christians should remember this verse when selecting witnesses.⁸⁶ Again, restoration remains the ultimate goal of church discipline. Therefore, the church should choose witnesses that improve the likelihood of success.

The witnesses, on the other hand, must position themselves for maximum effectiveness. Limiting the amount of information the accuser gives to the witnesses will protect objectivity. Only the pertinent facts of the case are needed. Like a jury, witnesses must strive to maintain impartiality, limiting themselves to the essential details of the

⁸² Cawdrey, 738.

⁸³ Bear, 1524.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 1406.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

case.⁸⁷ Witnesses must also think through other considerations as they move forward with the discipline process. Some of these factors include, maintaining confidentiality, selecting the most qualified witness to lead the proceedings, and when to include elders, if necessary, in the process.

Keeping Things Confidential

Jesus teaches in Matthew 18:15, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone.” The last part of this verse, “between you and him alone,” does not encourage but commands confidentiality. Biblical reconciliation seeks to restore broken relationships at the lowest possible level with the least amount of information changing hands.⁸⁸ The discipline process, however, cannot guarantee continued confidentiality.⁸⁹ Non-disclosure remains contingent upon the response of the offending brother or sister. If repentance follows the one-on-one confrontation, then the issue is dead, and all discussion ceases. If repentance does not result, however, the Bible instructs the offended party to elevate the problem to the next level.

Christians err when they guarantee absolute confidentiality in a church discipline situation. Promising to do so goes beyond biblical teaching.⁹⁰ Yet, even when other believers join the process, a form of confidentiality still applies. Pertinent information stays within the expanded circle of accountability. Moving it beyond this circle breaks

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 32.

⁸⁹ Cory D. Shipley, “Increasing the Knowledge of Pastors and Church Leaders about Biblical Church Discipline,” (D.Min. project, Oral Roberts University, 2009), 100.

⁹⁰ Adams, 30.

confidence and may lead to gossip.⁹¹ Hence, although Christians cannot guarantee confidentiality, neither can they share private information with those outside of the discipline process.

Leading The Discipline Process

If the offending person does not repent after a one-on-one encounter and witnesses become a part of the process, one of the witnesses should take the lead.⁹² This brings greater objectivity to the confrontation by allowing someone other than the offended party to move the process forward.⁹³ Because restoration remains the goal of church discipline, it matters not who leads the proceedings but that they succeed.

The leading witness should also establish time limits for the meetings. Some suggest that an hour and a half to two hours allows plenty of time for the first meeting with the witnesses.⁹⁴ “Even if full resolution is not achieved during this time, you can make good headway into understanding the issues and the hearts of those involved.”⁹⁵ Without time limits, meetings can last longer than necessary, further straining the broken relationship. If the problem persists after the first meeting, the lead witness can schedule another meeting for the near future.

Although one of the two witnesses should lead, both will confer with each another and work toward restoration. After listening to both parties and gaining a strong grasp of

⁹¹ Ivy, 901.

⁹² Adams, 62.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Cheong, 1875.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

the situation, the witnesses may “offer their perspective on the matter in light of the gospel.”⁹⁶ If the offending Christian has sinned and admits to wrongdoing, the discipline process should end.

Including Elders

Jesus never teaches that elders must assume a leading role in discipline. This does not negate, however, the importance of their presence and wisdom. Pastors lay the groundwork for healthy discipline in their congregations. Moreover, some believe that a pastor’s presence adds influence and increases the effectiveness of the confrontation. Cheong comments, “It is a sobering reality when one or more elders solemnly issue a strong admonishment and statement of intent to those who continue to resist and reject their Redeemer.”⁹⁷ Although not always necessary, involving elders can add weight to a confrontation and remind the offender that church leadership shares concern.

Tell It to the Church

When a Christian ignores the warnings of an offended brother or sister, as well as those of the witnesses, the church body gets involved. In Matthew 18:17 Jesus instructs, “If he refuses to listen to them [witnesses], tell it to the church.” In other words, the seriousness of the confrontation increases, resulting in greater public visibility.

Churches interpret “tell it to the church” differently. For example, some understand “tell it to the church” to mean notifying church elders only “since they are

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 2088.

God's appointed leaders of the church."⁹⁸ Others insist that "tell it to the church" means including only the "most relevant group of people" involved in the confrontation. No one else needs to participate.⁹⁹ Still others, however, hold to the position that "tell it to the church" means exactly what it says—bring it before the entire body of believers. In view of what Jesus seeks to accomplish, the latter viewpoint seems more likely. By this time, the offending person has had ample opportunity to repent and maintain a fair level of privacy. If steps one and two fail to bring restoration, then the offender must come before the membership body.

The Entire Church Body

Many pastors struggle with the idea of bringing a rebellious Christian before the entire church body because they want to protect the church from "unnecessary grief."¹⁰⁰ Yet, Jesus did not instruct His disciples to "tell it to the leaders of the church," but to "tell it to the church" (Matt. 18:17).¹⁰¹ This allows the congregation to speak with one voice, using its corporate influence to persuade the wayward brother or sister to change.¹⁰² Bringing the unrepentant sinner before the membership body is meant to have an extreme effect. In doing so, the church stands together to pray for, and encourage, the unrepentant person to turn from his or her wickedness.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Ibid., 2171.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 2172.

¹⁰⁰ Bear, 1480.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Furthermore, since the entire membership body participates in the last step of removing a believer from the church, it stands to reason that “tell it to the church,” in step three, refers to the whole body of believers.¹⁰⁴ If not, removing an unrepentant Christian would be impossible, for only a few people would know about the problem.

Before bringing the impenitent person before the church body, however, pastors need to coordinate with the leadership team, the offender’s family, and any other pertinent individuals.¹⁰⁵ If pastors do not appropriately inform these people so they can support the action, division and disruption may take place.

Gathering the Saints

In today’s culture, the idea of bringing an unrepentant sinner before the church evokes the image of a Sunday morning crowd, complete with visitors and guest speakers. This, however, does not accurately construe the meaning of “tell it to the church.” Bradley states, “Under no circumstances should the process be conducted in a regular worship service for fear of strangers and unbelievers in attendance. The appropriate method is to call a special meeting of official church membership.”¹⁰⁶ Only a gathering of the members serves as an appropriate environment for this step. Including non-members in this process, people not initiated into the beliefs and expectations of the church, will result in confusion due to the absence of a unified spirit.

¹⁰⁴ Cheong, 2187.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 2207.

¹⁰⁶ Bradley, 75–76.

Baptist churches in the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, for example, “usually met monthly on a Saturday for business meetings, at which they would receive and dismiss members” and deal with other church discipline issues.¹⁰⁷ Thus, church discipline can become a normal, healthy part of church life. Christians, however, must have the courage to act, understanding that true love demands accountability.

Excommunication

The final step of corrective discipline involves removing the unrepentant sinner from the church. This takes place when an individual refuses the preceding steps of biblical correction. The body of Christ must intensify their efforts when a Christian seems content in his or her sin and “there’s no evidence that the Spirit is making him or her uncomfortable.”¹⁰⁸ Jesus tells His disciples, “And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (Matt. 18:17). In other words, treat the unrepentant individual as an outsider, as someone who no longer belongs. Paul contextualizes Jesus’ words when instructing the Corinthians, “...not even to eat with such a one” (1 Cor. 5:11). In Paul’s mind, the expected consequence for persistent unrepentance is exclusion from the privileges of the body of Christ, or excommunication, which includes daily fellowship.¹⁰⁹ Spiritually speaking, a believer in this position has

¹⁰⁷ Jessica Lee Flinchum, “In Subjection: Church Discipline in the Early American South, 1760-1820,” (PhD diss., University of Kentucky, 2007), 18.

¹⁰⁸ Leeman, *Church Discipline*, 711.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 707.

already severed communion with God and other Christians by relentlessly pursuing sin.¹¹⁰ Excommunication simply provides an outward symbol of an inward reality.

In 1 Corinthians 5:5 Paul tells the Corinthians, “You are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” Although using different language, Paul refers to Jesus’ command in Matthew 18:17 which instructs the church to expel persistently unrepentant believers. In other words, delivering a person to Satan and excommunication are one and the same thing.

Excommunication also stands as the final attempt at restoration. It seeks to change the mind of the wayward Christian and bring him or her back into the fold. Moreover, it recognizes the perilous, eternal consequences of allowing a rebellious believer to continue in deception and seeks this last-ditch effort to rescue the lost soul.

Yet, even when faced with such a dramatic action, love and godliness should still steer the process. Ivy aptly elucidates, “The removal of the unrepentant brother does not mean we are unloving and unwilling to help this man with emergency or even neighborly needs. However, we do nothing which makes him feel he is in right standing with God or the local church.”¹¹¹ The ostracism, therefore, should include relational distance as it pertains to friendship and spiritual camaraderie. The rebellious individual must feel the sting of the exclusion, understanding that normal, close relations cannot be reestablished until repentance takes place.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ivy, 971.

As for the treatment of excommunicated family members, Christians have a fundamental obligation to meet the primary needs of their loved ones. That means married couples continue to honor the covenant with their spouse, and relatives maintain a respectful, caring relationship with excommunicated loved ones.¹¹² Although family members do not pretend that the excommunicated relative still serves Christ, they cannot neglect the care and responsibilities that come with their family position.

Members Who Refuse to Disassociate

Once excommunication takes place, the body of Christ should cooperate to ensure that restoration remains tenable. Excluding a member does not mean the church forgets an individual, but that it continues to pray for, while withholding fellowship from the Christian, in hopes that he or she will repent. If some enforce the discipline while others do not, its effectiveness diminishes. In reality, when members refuse to cooperate with the excommunication of a rebellious Christian, they become guilty themselves of rebellion and must face disciplinary action. Obedience to Christ means supporting His judgments, and Christ has entrusted His judgments to the church.

Unwelcomed Return

Occasionally, an excommunicated member will return to the church unwelcomed. Ivy suggests, “Do not allow any church members to try and physically remove him from the facilities or you could face a law suit. The elders should declare that the meeting is

¹¹² Joel L. Coker, “Cast Out from among the Saints: Church Discipline among Anabaptists and English Separatists in Holland, 1590-1620,” *Reformation II* (2006): 11.

closed, and then inform the man that he is trespassing in a private meeting”¹¹³ If the excommunicated individual still refuses to leave, however, leadership should warn the person that police involvement will come next.¹¹⁴ This action should not stem from anger or vindictiveness but from the desire to maintain order and discipline within the church.

Restoration

Restoration occurs when an offending brother or sister repents of his or her sin. This can take place anywhere in the discipline process. Depending on the nature of the sin, however, restoration may require a process to help the offender settle back into a faithful walk with Christ. In some situations this journey may not take long. In other instances, particularly when an individual persists in sin, it may involve a more extensive restoration period.

Restoration not only focuses on readmitting someone into the body of Christ, but it also ensures the dissipation of “the disorienting haze of sin” and the spiritual blindness that accompanies it.¹¹⁵ Although God’s forgiveness comes immediately, the consequences of sin linger. The body of Christ must assist struggling Christians to regain their spiritual equilibrium and resettle into a life of discipleship.

Again, the gravity of the sin and the length of the rebellion determine the intensity of the accountability process. For example, if a brother repents immediately after another Christian confronts him, the restoration process ends there. If excommunication occurs, a

¹¹³ Ibid., 2990.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Cheong, 2751.

person could need counseling and an assigned accountability partner as a part of his or her restoration. Cheong comments: “There are few situations in pastoral ministry that require more intentional shepherding and wisdom than restoring a wayward brother or sister who has been removed from the church.”¹¹⁶ Restoration requires planning. The leaders of the church must purposefully work out a specific action plan for each restored person.

Different elements within a restoration plan may include required reading, scriptural and other, counseling, seminars, and small group involvement.¹¹⁷ Each element reinitiates formative discipline, reinforcing biblical standards and helping an individual through times of temptation. The development of an accountability team also serves as a crucial component for restoring people to health.¹¹⁸ This could entail assigning two or three mature Christians to provide regular contact for the restored individual. Too often, this type of intentional process does not happen in churches.¹¹⁹ For this reason, repentant Christians sometimes struggle to re-acclimate to spiritual life.

Forgiving

Lest one overlook the obvious, the subject of forgiveness deserves some attention in the discussion of church discipline. Two types of forgiveness exist in this context. The first involves personal forgiveness. Every Christian has the responsibility to obey Jesus’

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 2863.

¹¹⁷ Shipley, 118.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Adams, 95.

words in Matthew 6:14-15: “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” Christians must forgive each other, and they will find it difficult to restore others until they do.¹²⁰

The second type of forgiveness deals with the church’s responsibility to discern true repentance. For example, if an offending person apologizes yet refuses to turn from sin, the church does not have to offer forgiveness or restoration. In Matthew 18:18 Jesus declares, “whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” In essence, Jesus gives the church the authority to determine innocence and guilt in discipline cases. If a wayward believer does not take full responsibility for his or her sin, the church does not have to offer forgiveness in the form of restoration.

Discerning True Repentance

Only repentance leads to restoration. A believer cannot experience true healing and return as a healthy member of the body without a contrite heart. Therefore, the church must look for signs of true repentance. Burnett defines repentance as “a change of mind which leads to a change of life.”¹²¹ If doubt remains concerning a person’s heart, that person should receive the benefit of the doubt and continue under the watchful care of other believers.

¹²⁰ Bear, 890.

¹²¹ Burnette, 9.

David Edling, a certified Christian counselor for Peacemakers Ministry suggests, “The burden is on the one who has received discipline to demonstrate that repentance is real ... The evidence of genuine repentance is a softer spirit demonstrated by a consistent life over a period of time.”¹²² In other words, verbal apologies do not necessarily constitute remorse. An acknowledgment of wrongdoing must accompany repentance, followed by a determined effort to change. For this reason, discernment plays a critical role when determining a person’s readiness for restoration. Extending forgiveness too quickly may seem merciful, but it could lead the offender into a false sense of hope.

Restoring the Leader

The discipline process applies to all Christians equally, including pastors and other leaders within the church. In fact, the consequences tend to be more severe when leaders fail. James 3:1 declares, “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.” Whether this judgment comes at the hands of the church, from God, or from both, the reality remains the same—with more power comes more responsibility. Thus, when leaders lapse morally, it may prove difficult to return to a position of authority.

Edling supports this conclusion when he states, full restoration to roles of leadership may not be possible because of the level of broken trust, but if that trust is restored and demonstrated over an appropriate period of time then the possibility may

¹²² David V. Edling, interview by Cory Shipley, Colorado Springs, January 6, 2009.

present itself again.”¹²³ Every situation should be examined individually, yet leaders will need to submit to the process of restoration if they hope to continue in ministry.

Unfortunately, however, the opposite scenario often occurs, with churches expecting little or no accountability from their leaders.¹²⁴ Due to the time involved, “many leaders prefer to sidestep the rebuilding process.”¹²⁵ Avoiding this element of restoration weakens the church and sets the leader up for future failure. It also reinforces the idea that leaders live above the reach of normal church discipline and accountability.

Restoring the Excommunicated Person

No matter how long and intense the rebellion, restoration must begin when true repentance occurs. As mentioned earlier, sometimes the process advances quickly. Those involved, however, must ensure that the offender takes full responsibility for his or her sin.¹²⁶ Leeman, agreeing with this restoration oversight, asserts, “Restoration occurs when the church is willing to once more stand before the nations and vouch for the individual’s profession of faith.”¹²⁷ The church must determine whether the expelled brother or sister has legitimately changed. Restoring someone without genuine repentance perpetuates spiritual sickness and ultimately harms the person the church desires to help.

¹²³ David V. Edling, “Church Discipline: God’s Search and Rescue Plan,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Spring 2002): 56.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Shipley, 116.

¹²⁶ Leeman, *Church Discipline*, 81.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

In 2 Corinthians 2:6-8, Paul implores the Corinthians to restore a disciplined brother who suffered some sort of public rebuke or excommunication.¹²⁸ Paul's request reveals his deep concern for this person's spiritual well-being. Now that he has repented, Paul encourages the body of Christ to renew their love for this man. Failing to do so could result in the brother becoming "overwhelmed by excessive sorrow" (2 Cor. 2:7).

Finally, when restoring an excommunicated believer, the repentant individual should be presented to the body at a specially scheduled meeting.¹²⁹ He or she should stand before the gathered body and repent, "asking the church to forgive him or her their sin."¹³⁰ This settles the matter once and for all, giving each member the opportunity to embrace the person into the fellowship again. It also stymies gossip and rumors by allowing the membership body to witness the brokenness and sorrow of the repentant person.

Other Considerations

When Minors Are Caught in Sin

Church discipline for minors seeks the same outcome—restoration. The church, however, cannot discipline minors without parental involvement.¹³¹ In God's economy, parents serve as the authority figures in their child's life, and, as such, function as the

¹²⁸ Stacy R. Obenhaus, "Sanctified Entirely: The Theological Focus of Paul's Instructions for Church Discipline," *Restoration Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (2001): 6–7.

¹²⁹ Ivy, 1248.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1250.

¹³¹ Bear, 1650.

primary disciplinarians.¹³² Thus, the church should work in cooperation with parents when disciplining minors.

The discipline of young children remains the sole responsibility of the family. Formal church discipline does not apply in such cases. For teens nearer to adulthood, however, steps one, two, and sometimes three, may serve as appropriate measures of correction as long as they are coordinated with the minor's parents or guardians.

When Government Authorities are Involved

At times a brother or sister in Christ may encounter legal problems with local, state, or federal governments. In such cases, the church has no obligation to accept outside charges without first conducting its own investigation. In fact, as far as the church is concerned, a believer remains innocent until proven guilty.¹³³ Bear suggests that, "At least two witnesses from the church should investigate the matter fully in order to report factual information back to the church."¹³⁴ The church must proceed with caution, remembering that history contains many instances where governments have falsely accused godly people.¹³⁵ Furthermore, the standards of the state and the standards of the church do not always coincide. The state exists to maintain social order, an order not always aligned with biblical morality, while the church exists to disciple its members and to proclaim the gospel.

¹³² Ibid., 1645.

¹³³ Ibid., 1668.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 1673.

When Other Churches are Involved

At some point, the question may arise as to whether other congregations are bound by another church's excommunication. Near the turn of the twentieth century, Baptist denominations believed that anyone excommunicated under their authority remained so until loosed, by them, from such judgment.¹³⁶ In other words, an offender would remain excluded until he or she could prove to the original disciplining body that he or she had changed. Leeman disagrees with this conclusion. He believes that each church possesses the authority to receive whomever they desire, even someone expelled from another congregation.¹³⁷ He admits, on the other hand, that this may not be the wisest choice and recommends that each church "investigate the action of the first church."¹³⁸ From a restoration standpoint, however, maintaining disciplinary continuity between churches seems like the most loving thing to do. If one church has a valid, biblical reason for excommunication, the same reason will apply to any other church.

Nevertheless, due to the highly mobile nature of American culture, a church may never discover a new member's jaded past. For this reason, contacting a Christian's previous church can prove helpful in determining suitability for membership. Should an individual's reputation precede him or her, or overtake him or her, however, the church has the responsibility to face the truth and continue toward restoration through discipline.

¹³⁶ Leeman, *Church Discipline*, 83–84.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

Multi-Cultural Applications

The issue of multi-cultural congregations may also surface as a perceived challenge to biblical church discipline. In other words, some believe that cultural differences require an added awareness of how to use discipline most effectively. Yet, Jesus' instruction in Matthew 18:15-18 possesses a timeless and culturally-neutral nature. The truths therein apply to all peoples of all times, regardless of cultural differences. John Ortberg comments, "I think everyone is pretty much just like Adam and Eve, whether you are black, rich, or from Thailand."¹³⁹ Hence, human nature remains the same throughout the world, whether cloaked in different colored skin, spoken in different languages, or operating within different customs and worldviews. In a multi-cultural congregation, the application may vary slightly depending upon the persons involved, but the model remains completely intact.

Moreover, in the United States, one may encounter various culturally unique congregations in the same city. Again, Jesus' template applies to each of these churches. The confrontation may differ in technique or timetable, but nothing else changes. Each pastor, and congregant, should factor in cultural differences when working through corrective discipline. Because the biblical goal of discipline is always restoration, an individual's approach to using Jesus' template, or Paul's examples in the New Testament, requires careful thought.

In essence, the principles of church discipline deal with the most basic components of human relationships. Human nature does not change from one culture to

¹³⁹ John Ortberg, "Spheres of Accountability: The Dynamics of Discipline in the Mega-Church," *Christianity Today*, August 2005, 34.

another. American churches, therefore, should implement these steps exactly the way Jesus presents them in Matthew 18.

Legal Concerns

Legal action against the church is another potential hazard when practicing church discipline. Burnett contends, “Every time elders enforce discipline, they become susceptible to lawsuits brought by people unfamiliar with church discipline or people unwilling to submit to the discipline.”¹⁴⁰ For this reason, the sections of this paper dealing with formative instruction and pre-discipline organization are crucial to protecting the church. Although lawsuits may come, the vast majority of them remain preventable.

The fear of litigation, however, persuades many churches to avoid church discipline. Moreover, because mainstream culture rejects traditional, biblical morality, pastors and congregants often feel as if they fight a two-front war—against those both inside and outside the church. Yet, these legal risks do not remove the church’s responsibility to carry out God’s discipline.¹⁴¹ The church must never waver in the face of worldly disapproval but choose whom it will fear the most, God or the world.

“Scriptural wisdom and balance”¹⁴² are the keys to navigating the dangerous waters of the litigious American culture. Church leaders should not neglect discipline for fear of a lawsuit; however, neither should they move forward without taking

¹⁴⁰ Burnette, 23.

¹⁴¹ Shipley, 88.

¹⁴² Hammett and Merkle, 3622.

precautions.¹⁴³ Some pastors think the current cultural landscape presents too many hazards to risk church discipline. To do nothing, however, or to choose a human-centered, less abrasive model, results in more damage.

Conclusion

Church discipline encompasses more than just corrective, or confrontational measures. It also involves formational teaching, instructing God's people in the right way to live. In essence, discipline falls under, and finds its meaning within, the broader category of discipleship. This discipleship process includes every scriptural method the church can offer to move God's people toward maturity.

The current cultural context of American society, however, does not lend itself to vigorous, restoration-minded church discipline. Instead, with a false conception of autonomy and an inflated view of "self" and individualism, most American Christians struggle to reconcile freedom with the biblical command to use corrective discipline. For this reason, many church leaders neglect church discipline. Even worse, they mistake their ambivalence toward it as grace and tolerance.

A skewed conception of Biblical love remains the most prominent reason why churches neglect corrective discipline. American culture defines love as embracing everything about a person without question or moral expectation. Thus, confronting someone about a perceived moral failure is viewed as judgmental. The biblical understanding of love, on the other hand, offers the unconditional love that people desire, while establishing boundaries for holy living.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

Before one can appreciate the concept of restorative church discipline, it helps to understand the nature and authority of the church. As Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 12, the church functions as a body. Every person that submits to the lordship of Jesus Christ also submits to His preferred method of discipleship—the local church. Hence, the church must not be viewed as an optional part of a Christian’s life, but as an essential component of faith. According to the body metaphor that Paul uses, every Christian plays an important part of the larger whole. Refusing to participate and submit to the body of Christ hurts the individual and the congregation. God designed the local church to work interdependently, each member helping other members achieve Christ-likeness.

The church, therefore, operating as Christ’s chosen instrument of sanctification, possesses significant authority over a Christian’s life. This authority includes the responsibility to convey God’s Word, to protect the flock from dangerous teachings, and, when necessary, to bring loving correction. This correction seeks to realign a faltering brother or sister with the precepts of Scripture. Christians must submit to this discipline, recognizing that the church watches over their souls.

The process of church discipline begins with self-discipline, the act of correcting inappropriate thoughts and actions in response to the conscience and the Holy Spirit. When this fails, however, Jesus instructs the church in Matthew 18:15-18 to initiate corrective discipline. Jesus walks His disciples through a structured plan of how to deal with erring brothers and sisters. The initial confrontation involves a one-on-one encounter, seeking to clarify facts, and, if necessary, to persuade the offender to repent. If this proves unsuccessful, Jesus intends for the process to increase in pressure and consequences.

The next step consists of the confronter bringing one or two additional witnesses. These witnesses protect both the accused and the accuser. Their word confirms or denies the offended person's charge. Moreover, if the original report proves true, the witnesses help to persuade the wayward person to repent. If this step fails, the rebellious person comes before the membership body where the sin and the witness's testimony are presented. If the brother or sister refuses to repent at this point, the body removes him or her from the church. This action may seem harsh, but it stands as the last hope to turn the unrepentant person from destruction. An excommunicated person must feel the pain of ostracism, with the entire body committed to the endeavor. Anything less may short-circuit the desired result.

Restoration occurs when the offending brother or sister repents. This may happen anytime during the steps laid out in Matthew 18:15-18. The sooner it takes place, the easier the transition back into the body of Christ. If repentance occurs after excommunication, the brother or sister should receive forgiveness but may require more extensive counseling and accountability. Leaders need to ensure that the restored person's testimony matches his or her renunciation of sin.

Every church discipline situation has its own unique set of circumstances. This requires the body of Christ to tailor a plan to deal with each one. When minors need discipline, for example, the church should notify the parents or guardians before proceeding. Parents hold the primary responsibility to discipline their children; the church comes alongside them for support.

When discipline crosses over into the secular realm with local, state, or federal agencies, the church must investigate all facts on their own. A conviction from an outside authority does not presume guilt from the church's perspective.

Multi-cultural congregations and churches with differing ethnic backgrounds fall under the same biblical principles of church discipline. Although people's social interactions may vary from one culture to another, the laws that govern accountability and biblical restoration do not. Sensitivity to these subtle nuances can take place without compromising scriptural standards.

As difficult as church discipline may seem in twenty-first century America, it pays big dividends to those courageous enough to obey. The sacrifice one makes when confronting disciplinary issues pales in comparison to the harvest it brings. Following Jesus' model in Matthew 18 yields healthy, well-adjusted, dedicated Christians who understand biblical accountability and submission. These churches powerfully impact the world around them while enjoying the peace and stability of a well-ordered body with clear boundaries and expectations.

CHAPTER 4: DESCRIPTION OF FIELD PROJECT

Introduction

The problem, as described in Chapter 1, states that pastors and Christian leaders often rely more on cultural sensibilities and trends than on the Word of God when concerning church discipline. Moreover, some avoid discipline because of its exacting nature, preferring, instead, peace at all cost. As a result, church discipline suffers neglect in many American churches. Correcting this problem requires a clearer understanding of the Bible's teachings on this subject and the courage and tenacity to act.

Chapter 4 investigates the results of two teaching sessions, along with accompanying surveys. One of these surveys addresses clergy, while the other focuses on lay leadership. Each seeks to gauge the knowledge and attitudes concerning church discipline in the West Florida District.

This chapter also describes the preparation of the intervention, from the development of the survey and its implementation, to the organization and execution of the teaching components. Moreover, it presents the results of the intervention process and its contribution to ministry, laying out the perspective changes that occurred as a result of the formal instruction.

Although initially uninformed and hesitant to engage in church discipline issues, the leaders involved in this project demonstrated a willingness to accept the biblical model of discipline and a commitment to carry it out. Hopefully, proper training on the subject will lead to proper action.

Preparation of the Project

The preparation process began with designing a survey¹ for participants. This involved using Survey Monkey to create a Likert Scale survey. After creating the questions and deciding upon an effective format, a colleague reviewed the survey and provided feedback.

Next, I compiled a list of qualified credentialed ministers from the West Florida District of the Assemblies of God to take the survey. After completing this list, eligible ministers received a phone call requesting their participation in the survey and the upcoming seminar. An email with web links provided the means of administering the survey to this sample group.

Although initially intended for credentialed ministers, a colleague recommended inviting the students from the District's "inCharacter" School of Ministry to the seminar as well. Upon invitation, the group accepted and added an additional fourteen lay leaders to the seminar.

During this same time period, August through September 2013, I made arrangements to teach at the annual West Florida District Christian Education Conference in February of 2014. This involved teaching four, one-hour classes, or tracks. Three of these classes concentrated on lay leaders and the other on credentialed ministers. After finalizing these arrangements, I developed a second shorter survey for lay leadership.

In December of 2013, I reserved a small banquet room at The Gathering Place in Marianna, Florida. This served as the meeting place for the seminar portion of the

¹ See Appendix A, "Ministers Survey."

intervention. I scheduled the seminar for Saturday, April 12, 2014 from 8 a.m. to noon. It included a free continental breakfast at 7:30 a.m. and a free catered steak lunch at noon. The venue provided a unique, Tuscan-themed, non-church setting for participants.

Execution of the Project

On Saturday, February 22, 2014, the West Florida District held its Christian Education Conference. During this conference, I taught a three-hour church discipline track for lay leaders. The topics for this track included: 1) “Biblical Underpinnings for Church Discipline,” 2) “The Purpose for Church Discipline,” and 3) “Common Misconceptions About Church Discipline.”² The sessions occurred in a classroom setting with lecture-style teaching. I encouraged students to ask questions and interact with the information. Each student received fill-in-the-blank notes,³ and a PowerPoint presentation supplemented the lecture. Approximately forty-five individuals, both men and women, attended one or more of these three sessions. The sessions were offered to lay leaders, specifically deacons, but were open to whoever wanted to attend.

When the participants arrived to class, they received two identical, twelve-question surveys paper-clipped together. Each survey had its own number designator followed by either an “A” or “B” (i.e. 100A and 100B). This differentiated between the pre-conference and post-conference surveys. Students completed the pre-conference survey upon arrival to one of the first two tracks and completed the post-conference

² See Appendices C, D and E, “CE Conference Hour 1,” “CE Conference Hour 2” and “CE Conference Hour 3.”

³ See Appendix G, “CE Conference Lay Leader Fill-In-The-Blank Notes.”

survey after finishing the third track. Participants returned these surveys before exiting the classroom.

During the same conference, I also taught a one-hour ministers track.⁴ It took place in a classroom setting with approximately thirty credentialed ministers present. Lecture served as the primary means of communication, accompanied by fill-in-the-blank notes⁵ to help participants stay engaged while listening for key words and phrases.

Before the class began, these ministers completed the same twenty-seven question survey⁶ administered via email to the first sample group of credentialed ministers. They did not complete a second survey to gauge changes in their understanding and attitude of the material after the track. A one-hour session seemed too short a time to expect significant changes. All ministerial surveys taken up to this point, through email and at the Christian Education Conference, were combined and analyzed to gain a baseline understanding of current church discipline perspectives by West Florida ministers.⁷

In order to complete the presentation requirements for the project intervention, I also conducted a four-hour seminar held on Saturday, April 12, 2014. Nineteen people attended, including five ministers and fourteen lay leaders. Attendees enjoyed a continental breakfast and a catered steak lunch. Upon arrival, participants took a pre-seminar survey⁸ to gauge their understanding of church discipline. Each student also

⁴ See Appendix F, "CE Conference Ministers' Track Curriculum."

⁵ See Appendix H, "CE Conference Ministers' Track Fill-In-The-Blank Notes."

⁶ See Appendix A, "Ministers' Survey."

⁷ See Appendix O, "Ministers' Survey Results."

⁸ See Appendices A and B, "Ministers' Survey" and "Lay Leader Survey."

received fill-in-the-blank notes⁹ to assist them in following the sessions. Lecture served as the primary means for conveying the information, accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation. I made the master lecture notes¹⁰ available, on thumb drive, to any participant desiring them.

At the end of the seminar students received an identical survey. Upon completing this, participants submitted both the pre- and post-seminar surveys before leaving. These were then manually entered into Survey Monkey for analysis.

I also developed a handbook¹¹ for the ministers and lay leaders in the West Florida District. This handbook represents a distilled version of the research done for this project. The District office will help distribute this tool to leaders inside and outside of West Florida.

Results of the Project

Lay Leaders at the Christian Education Conference

The intervention phase for the lay leaders at the West Florida Christian Education Conference provided instruction on the subject of church discipline. Lay leaders possessed a vague understanding of church discipline, yet lacked basic knowledge on the topic. The lay leaders' sessions also heightened awareness of the gross negligence of church discipline in the American church. Lastly, a survey¹² given during these sessions

⁹ See Appendix M, "Seminar Fill-In-The-Blank Notes."

¹⁰ See Appendix N, "Master Lecture Notes."

¹¹ See Appendix V, "Handbook."

¹² See Appendix P, "Pre-CE Conference Lay Leader Survey Results."

revealed that lay leaders are ill-informed about and hesitant to implement church discipline.

In response to the statement, “I sometimes struggle to understand exactly what is meant by ‘church discipline,’” 54 percent of lay leaders either agreed or felt uncertain. This confirms my suspicion that few churches teach on this subject, leaving believers to piece together their own church discipline philosophies and practices. Unfortunately, much of this patchwork understanding comes from a human-centered, worldly perspective that perceives any form of judgment as pharisaical and mean.

Table 1. Pre-conference Lay Leader Survey Responses to Statements 6 and 4

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
I believe that the church bears the responsibility to judge its members according to biblical standards.	54%	30%	8%	8%	
Church discipline should be used with unbelievers.	31%	23%	38%		8%

Despite a less than adequate knowledge of church discipline, however, 84 percent of lay leaders in their pre-conference survey believed that the church bears the responsibility to judge its members according to biblical standards. Thus, as Table 1 indicates, an overwhelming percentage of these leaders recognized the need for correction within the body of Christ yet remained confused as to how to implement it and to whom it applies. For example, 92 percent of pre-conference survey responses either agreed with (84 percent) or felt uncertain about (8 percent) the statement, “Church discipline should be used with unbelievers.” Effective discipline will only happen when leaders understand this type of fundamental information.

In response to the statement, “I believe there are times when an unrepentant Christian must be put out of the church,” 46 percent marked the “uncertain” box, and 16

percent either disagreed or strongly disagreed. This represents a significant number of lay leaders who either do not know what the New Testament teaches concerning excommunication or who know but see this teaching as harsh.

The lay leaders did complete an identical post-conference survey¹³ at the end of the three, one-hour sessions. Not all of these leaders, however, participated in all three sessions. Some joined the class at the second and even the third sessions. Consequently, the post-conference survey reflected less dramatic changes in perspective due to some participants only completing part of the overall instructional time.¹⁴

Table 2. Pre- and Post-conference Lay Leader Survey Responses to Statements 1 and 12

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
I sometimes struggle to understand exactly what is meant by “church discipline.” (Pre-conference)		31%	23%	31%	15%
I sometimes struggle to understand exactly what is meant by “church discipline.” (Post-conference)		33%	8%	33%	26%
I believe there are times when an unrepentant Christian must be put out of the church. (Pre-conference)	15%	23%	46%	8%	8%
I believe there are times when an unrepentant Christian must be put out of the church. (Post-conference)	25%	58%	8%		8%

Yet, changes in perspective did occur. For instance, in the post-conference survey, an additional 13 percent of the respondents claimed they no longer struggled to understand the meaning of church discipline. Moreover, a huge shift occurred in response

¹³ See Appendix Q, “Post-CE Conference Lay Leader Survey Results.”

¹⁴ In the seminar held two months later, all participants completed the entire four-hour instructional time, and all completed the pre- and post-seminar surveys.

to the statement, “I believe there are times when an unrepentant Christian must be put out of the church.” Initially, 62 percent either disagreed or felt uncertain about this statement. After the sessions, however, only 16 percent disagreed or felt uncertain about it. A change of attitude on this issue represents a major shift in perspective. Table 2 illustrates these changes.¹⁵

Ministers at the Christian Education Conference

The intervention phase for the ministers at the West Florida Christian Education Conference resulted in three primary outcomes. First, it provided needed instruction on the subject of church discipline. Second, it heightened awareness of the neglect of church discipline in most American churches. Last, a survey provided hard data showing that ministers struggle to understand and implement church discipline. Due to the abbreviated instruction time, however, the Christian Education Conference ministers’ survey did not include a post-conference survey. Yet, this minister’s survey offered a current perspective of West Florida clergy concerning church discipline.

The results of the survey,¹⁶ which were combined with the responses of the initial group of ministers who took the survey via email, revealed confusion and apathy on the part of West Florida ministers concerning church discipline. For example, in response to the statement, “I sometimes struggle to understand exactly what is meant by ‘church discipline,’” 50 percent of clergy either somewhat agreed or felt uncertain. Although not necessarily indicative of pastoral neglect, this exposes the reality that pastors have little

¹⁵ See Appendices P and Q, “Pre-CE Conference Lay Leader Survey Results” and “Post –CE Conference Lay Leader Survey Results” for responses to all statements.

¹⁶ See Appendix O, “Ministers’ Survey Results.”

training, theological or practical, on the subject. Understanding the biblical concept of discipline serves as the first step to proper implementation.

Table 3. Ministers' Survey Responses to Statements 4, 18 and 21

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
Church discipline should be used with unbelievers.	9%	13%	22%	30%	26%
I believe that church discipline is primarily the responsibility of church leadership.	22%	43%	17%	13%	4%
I sometimes feel reluctant to deal with church discipline issues because of the fallout that might take place.	9%	61%	9%	17%	4%

Moreover, when responding to the statement, "Church discipline should be used with unbelievers," 44 percent of ministers agreed or felt uncertain. In other words, nearly half of the pastors surveyed lacked fundamental knowledge concerning the goal and intended recipients of church discipline. This confusion, in itself, could lead to significant difficulties when implementing church discipline.

A large majority of ministers, 82 percent, either agreed with or felt uncertain about the statement "I believe that church discipline is the primary responsibility of church leadership." Again, these ministers failed to understand the basic premise behind Jesus' teaching in Matthew 18:15-18. Jesus taught that every believer has the responsibility to confront his or her brother or sister when an offense occurs. Clergy should guide and instruct in the area of discipline. Scripture, however, never demands they play a central role in the process.

The ministerial survey also confirmed that West Florida clergy tend to neglect church discipline based on the perceived threat of cultural resistance and relational fallout. For instance, 70 percent of respondents agreed with the statement, "I sometimes

feel reluctant to deal with church discipline issues because of the fallout that might take place.” Table 3 represents the responses to these survey statements.

Thus, West Florida ministers often avoid implementing church discipline because it causes unrest. This reaffirms the importance of pastors helping their people to understand the crucial nature and role of church discipline. This type of training readies a congregation when discipline issues arise.

Interestingly, 92 percent of the surveyed ministers believed that the American church does a poor job with church discipline. This shows that West Florida ministers sense a breakdown in the church’s discipleship process. Ironically, some of these ministers play a role in the neglect of church discipline.

When responding to the statement, “I believe that, regardless of the outcome, church discipline should be applied, when needed, and the results left to God,” 82 percent agreed. On some level, therefore, pastors seem to understand the scriptural precedent for church discipline. Having said that, their reluctance to implement it reflects either an improper grasp of discipline’s theological significance or a lack of courage to carry it out.

Lay Leaders at the Seminar

The seminar provided West Florida’s lay leaders with a needed avenue of education concerning church discipline. It helped to dispel popular misconceptions and encouraged involvement in the discipleship of God’s people. Moreover, the lay leaders participated in a pre-seminar and post-seminar survey. This helped to determine initial perspectives on church discipline and to gauge changes in post-seminar viewpoints.

Table 4. Pre-seminar Lay Leader's Survey and Pre-seminar Ministers' Surveys Compared (Statement 1)

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
I sometimes struggle to understand what is meant by "church discipline." (Lay Leaders)		36%	14%	29%	21%
I sometimes struggle to understand what is meant by "church discipline." (Ministers)		60%		40%	

When asked to respond to the statement, "I sometimes struggle to understand what is meant by 'church discipline,'" 36 percent marked "somewhat agree" and 14 percent marked "uncertain." Surprisingly, as illustrated in Table 4, a notable gap existed between lay leaders and ministers in response to this pre-seminar statement. Accounting for this difference proves difficult. Perhaps this younger group of lay leaders, involved in a Master's Commission-type program, received training on the subject.

The lay leader's post-seminar response to this statement, however, reflected a substantial shift, with 64 percent strongly disagreeing and 29 percent somewhat disagreeing. Thus, the seminar proved effective in clarifying the terms and concept of church discipline.

Table 5. Pre-seminar Lay Leader's Survey Responses to Statement 3 and 21

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
I believe that church discipline is an important part of church health.	79%	7%	7%		7%
I sometimes feel reluctant to deal with church discipline issues because of the fallout that might take place.	14%	36%	43%	7%	

In response to the statement, "I believe that church discipline is an important part of church health," 86 percent of the pre-seminar lay leaders either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed, as seen in Table 5. Yet, 50 percent of these same leaders indicated a reluctance to move forward with church discipline because of potential negative

reactions. This, plus the 43 percent marking “uncertain” to the same statement, totals 93 percent of lay leaders admitting reluctance to implement discipline. As with the ministers at the seminar, the lay leaders’ response to this statement expose a discrepancy between professed knowledge and action. Inadequate knowledge, therefore, may result in inaction.

Table 6. Post-seminar Lay Leader's Survey Responses to Statements 3 and 21

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
I believe that church discipline is an important part of church health.	100%				
I sometimes feel reluctant to deal with church discipline issues because of the fallout that might take place.	7%	29%		50%	14%

The post-seminar survey revealed that 100 percent of the lay leaders strongly agreed that church discipline functions as an important part of church health. Moreover, only 36 percent of these leaders indicated they would feel reluctant to deal with church discipline issues due to negative reactions. None of the lay leaders marked “uncertain” concerning this statement, and 64 percent marked “somewhat disagree” or “strongly disagree.” In other words, after the seminar, the lay leaders felt confident to pursue church discipline issues as a normal, healthy part of church life. Table 6 illustrates the substantial shift in perspective between surveys.

Table 7. Pre-seminar and Post-seminar Lay Leader Survey Responses to Statement 5

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
Church discipline only applies to those within the body of Christ. (Pre-seminar)	14%	36%	29%	14%	7%
Church discipline only applies to those within the body of Christ. (Post-seminar)	100%				

Some lay leaders also seemed confused concerning the intended recipients of church discipline. For example, in response to the statement, “Church discipline only

applies to those within the body of Christ,” 50 percent disagreed or felt uncertain (see Table 7). These leaders either failed to consider, or revealed their unfamiliarity, with Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 5: 12-13. This may account for some of the objections to church discipline in the American church. If Christians wrongly assume that the church has the authority to pursue the sins of non-Christians, especially as they come to investigate the gospel, then they should recoil at the thought. Yet, if Christians understand church discipline applies only to those committed to Christ and His body, then discipline makes sense as a part of sound discipleship.

The lay leader’s post-seminar response to the statement, “Church discipline only applies to those within the body of Christ,” as shown in Table 7, shows a major rethinking of this concept. One hundred percent indicated that they strongly agree that church discipline only applies to those within the body of Christ. Thus, the seminar brought greater clarity to this foundational tenet of church discipline.

Table 8. Pre-seminar and Post-seminar Lay Leader’s Survey Responses to Statement 7

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
I believe it is solely the Holy Spirit’s responsibility to confront unrepentant Christians. (Pre-seminar)	7%	21%	7%	50%	14%
I believe it is solely the Holy Spirit’s responsibility to confront unrepentant Christians. (Post-seminar)				21%	79%

As for the statement, “I believe it is solely the Holy Spirit’s responsibility to confront unrepentant Christians,” 28 percent of pre-seminar lay leaders agreed and 7 percent felt uncertain. Thus, a significant number of lay leaders believed the church has no right or responsibility to challenge a Christian living in sin. Post-seminar results, however, show 100 percent disagreement with this statement. Lay leaders realized

through the seminar teaching that each individual Christian functions as an agent for God, fostering His Kingdom through obedience to His Word. Table 8 shows the dramatic change between the initial and final lay leader surveys.

Table 9. Pre-seminar and Post-seminar Lay Leader Survey Responses to Statement 8

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
I believe that church discipline is primarily the responsibility of church leadership. (Pre-seminar)	7%	71%	14%	7%	
I believe that church discipline is primarily the responsibility of church leadership. (Post-seminar)		7%		50%	43%

One of the more noteworthy changes of perspective among lay leaders centered on the statement, “I believe church discipline is primarily the responsibility of church leadership.” Seventy-eight percent of pre-seminar respondents agreed with this statement, and 14 percent felt uncertain about it. In other words, these lay leaders assumed they had no right to initiate or manage church discipline situations. This may also reveal why churches neglect discipline among their members. Pastors have no way of knowing every offense that occurs within the body of Christ, nor can they effectively manage too many at once.

Ninety-three percent of post-seminar lay leaders, on the other hand, disagreed with this statement. They recognized that Jesus spoke to all believers when He said, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault.” Doing so exemplifies loving one’s neighbor as oneself, taking the time and energy to intervene for the good of another’s soul. Table 9 reflects this pre-seminar to post-seminar change in attitude.

Table 10. Pre-seminar and Post-seminar Lay Leader's Survey Responses to Statement 12

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
I believe there are times when an unrepentant Christian must be put out of the church. (Pre-seminar)	14%	21%	57%	7%	
I believe there are times when an unrepentant Christian must be put out of the church. (Post-seminar)	86%	14%			

The lay leader response to putting a fellow Christian out of the church for unrepentant sin also exposes the church's lack of teaching on discipline. Fifty-seven percent of pre-seminar lay leaders felt uncertain and 7 percent disagreed with the statement that "sometimes a Christian must be put out of the church." Yet, 100 percent of these same leaders, as illustrated in Table 10, either "strongly agreed" or "somewhat agreed" with this statement in the post-seminar survey.¹⁷

Ministers at the Seminar

As with the intervention phase at the West Florida Christian Education Conference, the seminar sought to educate the participants, especially ministers, concerning biblical church discipline. It also set out to create an awareness for the need of church discipline amidst a culture that tends to avoid it. The seminar also included a pre- and post-seminar ministers' survey¹⁸ to gauge knowledge and general sentiment on the subject.

The outcome of the ministerial pre-seminar survey revealed a need for sound teaching in the area of church discipline.¹⁹ For example, 62 percent of the respondents

¹⁷ See Appendices W and X, "Pre-seminar Lay Leader Survey Results" and "Post-seminar Lay Leader Survey Results" for responses to all statements.

¹⁸ See Appendix A, "Ministers' Survey."

¹⁹ See Appendix R, "Pre-seminar Ministers' Survey Results."

admitted they “sometimes struggle to understand what is meant by church discipline.” In other words, these leaders either understood the principles found in Scripture yet did not pair them with the terms “church discipline,” or they insufficiently understood the nature and steps of church discipline. The latter view seems more likely, particularly in light of the famine of teaching on the subject in modern American churches. This ignorance of church discipline exposes the fact that few churches grapple with its implementation. Churches concerned with orderliness and discipline find themselves compelled to search the Scriptures to learn the principles that create these conditions. Encouragingly, however, only 20 percent of the ministers in the post-seminar survey still struggled to understand the meaning of church discipline.

Table 11. Pre-seminar Ministers’ Responses to Statements 3 and 21

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
I believe that church discipline is an important part of church health.	60%	20%	20%		
I sometimes feel reluctant to deal with church discipline issues because of the fallout that might take place.		60%		40%	

As illustrated in Table 11, 80 percent of the ministers in the pre-seminar survey believed that church discipline serves as an important part of church health. Ironically, however, 60 percent of these ministers also indicated they feel reluctant to deal with discipline issues because of the “fallout” that might take place. This discrepancy between knowledge and action reveals the cultural struggle the church faces. Leaders have a general, unrefined understanding of biblical church discipline. Yet, they hesitate, or refuse to act, when challenged by a culture hostile to the accountability required with

discipleship. This further exposes the failure of the church to understand what discipline accomplishes—mainly, greater church health and cohesion.

Table 12. Post-seminar Ministers' Survey Responses to Statements 3 and 21

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
I believe that church discipline is an important part of church health. (Post-seminar)	80%	20%			
I sometimes feel reluctant to deal with church discipline issues because of the fallout that might take place. (Post-seminar)	20%	20%	20%	40%	

Post-seminar survey responses to these same questions, as shown in Table 12, showed some movement in attitude. For example, 100 percent of ministers (up 20 percent) indicated that they believe church discipline to be an important part of church health. Moreover, only 40 percent (down by 20 percent) still felt reluctant to deal with church discipline issues because of the “fallout” that might take place. In other words, the crux of the church discipline problem among West Florida ministers consists of three issues: 1) a lack of knowledge, 2) embracing cultural sensibilities over biblical concepts of love, and 3) a lack of courage to do the right thing.

Twenty percent of ministers in the pre-seminar survey somewhat agreed with the statement, “I believe it is solely the Holy Spirit’s responsibility to confront unrepentant Christians.” In the post-seminar survey, however, this statement elicited a 100 percent strongly disagree response from the same ministers. Astonishingly, some pre-seminar ministers believed that no one, except the Holy Spirit, has the right to confront unrepentant believers. If this proves the case with a handful of conservative, full-gospel ministers, multitudes of other clergy, no doubt, operate under the same assumption. Fortunately, the post-seminar response to this statement reveals a shift from an inactive bystander mentality to a pro-active advocacy for an individual’s spiritual well-being.

Table 13. Pre-seminar and Post-seminar Ministers' Survey Responses to Statement 18

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
I believe that church discipline is primarily the responsibility of church leadership. (Pre-seminar)		60%	20%		20%
I believe that church discipline is primarily the responsibility of church leadership. (Post-seminar)					100%

In response to the statement, "I believe that church discipline is primarily the responsibility of church leadership," 60 percent of pre-seminar respondents agreed and 20 percent felt uncertain. In other words, 80 percent of West Florida ministers misunderstood Jesus' command in Matthew 18:15, "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault."²⁰ This type of ignorance leads to ministerial micro-managing, with clergy attempting to solve problems that would be better resolved on a lower level. It also diminishes effectiveness by removing the offended individual from the early attempts to restore the relationship.

Table 13 also shows the post-seminar response to this statement revealing that 100 percent of the ministers strongly disagreed. Again, the seminar proved effective in dispelling current misunderstandings regarding church discipline. Hopefully, these ministers will begin to teach and encourage their people to participate in the discipline process of the church. Each person's involvement results in a stronger body of believers.

Table 14. Pre-seminar and Post-seminar Ministers' Survey Responses to Statement 26

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
I believe there are times when an unrepentant Christian must be put out of the church. (Pre-seminar)	40%	20%	40%		
I believe there are times when an unrepentant Christian must be put out of the church. (Post-seminar)	100%				

²⁰ All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the *English Standard Version*.

One of the final statements on the survey dealt with the biblical concept of excommunication, or putting someone out of the church. In response to the statement, “I believe there are times when an unrepentant Christian must be put out of the church,” 60 percent either marked “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree,” and a full 40 percent marked “uncertain.” Thus, the pre-seminar ministers further revealed the ignorance that characterizes West Florida clergy concerning church discipline.

In response to this same statement in the post-seminar survey, as shown in Table 14, 100 percent of the ministers strongly agreed. This large shift underscores the reality that the church lacks adequate instruction on church discipline. When provided, however, West Florida leaders adjusted their view to account for the fact that biblical love goes to great lengths to rescue believers caught in sin.²¹

Conclusion

Both the teaching sessions and the surveys indicated that leaders of the AG West Florida District, ministers and laity alike, lacked a sufficient biblical understanding and the courage and commitment to act on issues of church discipline. Some of this stems from a famine of teaching on the subject in American churches, while other aspects of this neglect result from a theology contaminated by worldly views. In other words, ignorance on the subject of church discipline makes it harder to resist the ever-changing cultural morays and trends of a nation. Instead, Christians compromise their convictions in an attempt to placate the emotional cries of “intolerance” or “unfairness” from the world around them.

²¹ See Appendices R and S, “Pre-seminar Ministers’ Survey Results” and “Post-seminar Ministers’ Survey Results” for responses to all statements.

This project systematically re-established a biblical precedent for church discipline, with examples spanning from Genesis to Revelation. It also re-asserted the heart behind such discipline—a tenacious love that risks everything for the sake of restoration. Understanding this principle sets church discipline in an entirely different light. Rather than a smug attempt to control or condemn, it becomes a noble effort to rescue a misdirected brother or sister in Christ. The leaders involved in this project walked away understanding this truth and exhibited a renewed determination to bless and strengthen the church through discipline.

The Project's Contribution to Ministry

One of the contributions this project made to ministry involved exposing the current mindsets of West Florida leaders toward church discipline. This exposition happened through the surveys, the conference, and the seminar. Before the intervention, most of the participants viewed this subject through a mixed lens of biblical precedent and cultural sensibilities, with cultural sensibilities holding sway. Once confronted with a thorough examination of Scripture's teaching on discipline and the American church's neglect in practicing it, participants enthusiastically embraced the concept of church discipline. They also recognized that discipline communicates one of the highest forms of love and concern, often venturing into daunting situations to secure the well-being of another believer. Viewing discipline in this light caused a major shift in perspective for the leaders involved in these sessions, recalibrating their definition of biblical love.

The project also provided the opportunity to recount, from Genesis to Revelation, the loving discipline of God toward His saints. Participants were made aware of the

countless examples of God correcting His people. As a result, the participants possess a stronger foundation to support their future church discipline responsibilities.

This intervention took Jesus' Matthew 18 model, Paul's 1 Corinthians 5 example, and other miscellaneous New Testament dealings with discipline and converged them into a holistic guide on church discipline. Again, many church leaders know the New Testament teachings on discipline, yet fail to strategically implement them. This intervention not only discussed these teachings but explained, in detail, the proper protocol for implementing church discipline. Moreover, this project created a handbook for leaders to reference during church discipline situations.

The training provided by this intervention will enable the participating leaders, their future students, and any who utilize the handbook, to confidently and wisely navigate church discipline issues. This will ultimately result in a healthier church and an improved testimony for a watching world.

CHAPTER 5: PROJECT SUMMARY

Introduction

Chapter 5 reflects upon the effectiveness of the project process, as well as its research, data, and final product. Moreover, it distinguishes between project results as described in chapter 4, or the impact of the intervention, versus the evaluation of the overall project in this chapter. Chapter 5 also sets out to discuss keys for improving this work. As much as a person may strive toward excellence, he or she can always make improvements. Finally, this summary focuses on project implications, recommendations for the West Florida District of the Assemblies of God, and recommendations for future study.

Evaluation of the Project

At the outset, I need to make a distinction between the “results” of this project as described in chapter 4 and the “evaluation” of the project in this chapter. Chapter 4 describes the participant’s shifts in attitude as they gained a biblical understanding of church discipline. These changes of perspective happened as a result of teaching sessions at the West Florida Christian Education Conference and, later, at the project’s half-day seminar. The evaluation of this project in chapter 5, however, assesses the effectiveness of the methods, tools, and information that comprise this work. It serves as a reflective device to determine both positive and negative aspects of the project. Thus, the following

sections make an honest attempt to see this project objectively, if such is possible, stating the keys to its effectiveness as well as areas for improvement.

Keys to Project Effectiveness

The first key to effectiveness stems from the biblical-theological literature review's ability to outline Scripture's uncontested precedent for church discipline. This review supplied examples from Genesis to Revelation of God's consistent, loving correction. Research into the Hebrew and Greek words used to convey God's discipline supported the fact that discipline served, and continues to serve, a significant role in God's redeeming pursuits of humankind. Moreover, a key aspect of this project reminds the church that discipline exists within the broader context of discipleship. This revelation often causes Christians to reassess their view of discipline in light of discipleship's more favorable standing.

Another key to effectiveness results from both chapters 2 and 3 successfully combatting the shallow understanding of discipline promoted by secular society and many American churches. These chapters exposed the narrow view of the gospel espoused by some churches in recent decades. A gospel without discipline is a gospel without love. Understanding the principle that love sometimes causes pain in order to bring healing functions as a pivotal idea throughout Scripture. The general literature review in particular laid out a systematic model for implementing church discipline in the twenty-first century. Additionally, it offered advice on navigating the complexities of the modern era when enacting discipline. Chapter 3 also explained the necessity and the various components that go into church discipline, including a clearly demarcated membership roll and updated constitution and bylaws. It also dealt frankly with the

numerous excuses and faulty reasoning that inhibit churches from pursuing effective discipline. Chapter 3 explained how neglecting discipline, rather than having a positive outcome, acts as a greenhouse for dysfunction and allows it to spread.

The surveys¹ also played a major role in project effectiveness. They revealed the ignorance and inaction of many West Florida District ministers and lay leaders toward church discipline.² Moreover, the responses to the surveys were indicative of the American culture as a whole. In other words, the attitude of West Florida ministers and lay leaders concerning discipline grows out of a pervasive cultural mindset that promotes unbridled human freedom.

The surveys also provided the opportunity to see a shift in attitudes after the intervention phase of the project. Most ministers and laity experienced a significant change in perspective once presented with the biblical concept of discipline.³ Without realizing it, many American Christians allow culture, rather than Scripture, to inform the standards of their faith.

The Christian Education Conference and the seminar also proved effective by disseminating crucial information and providing an atmosphere for participant interaction. During this interactive time, students voiced concerns, many of which were rooted in popular objections to church discipline. One such objection centered on the

¹ See Appendix A, “Ministers’ Survey,” and Appendix B, “Lay Leader Survey.”

² See Appendix O, “Ministers’ Survey Results,” Appendix P, “Pre-CE Conf Lay Leader Survey Results,” Appendix R, “Pre-Seminar Ministers’ Survey Results,” and Appendix T, “Pre-Seminar Lay Leader Survey Results.”

³ See Appendix Q, “Post CE Conf Lay Leader Survey Results,” Appendix S, “Post-Seminar Ministers’ Survey Results,” and Appendix U, “Post-Seminar Lay Leader Survey Results.”

often-misquoted passage in Matthew 7:1, “Judge not, that you be not judged.” Each argument received attention, standing or falling in light of Scripture. Furthermore, these venues allowed for the sharing of real-life anecdotes that strengthened the case for biblical discipline. Participants could identify with the fears and mistakes of other Christians in the area of church discipline.

Although not yet distributed, this project also led to the development of a church discipline handbook.⁴ This handbook may prove to be the most helpful resource derived from this work. It distills the totality of this project down to a workable, quick-reference guide. Pastors and laity should find this resource invaluable as they embark on the mission to hold one another accountable to scriptural standards.

Lastly, and on a more practical level, consistency played an important role in the effectiveness of this project. In this case, effectiveness means getting the work done and progressing at a pace that required no cramming, but allowed for quality time to perform the required research, writing and implementation. Hopefully, this project reflects the care and attention to detail that I tried to give it.

Keys to Project Improvement

One of the things I would improve in this project, if I had it to do again, would entail wording the survey statements with more exactness. Although the statements exposed the confusion and reticence of some West Florida leaders concerning church discipline, some of them seemed redundant and, perhaps, not well worded. In other

⁴ See Appendix V, “Handbook.”

words, I would do more research on building an effective survey and seek greater assistance from those experienced in crafting them.

Another improvement I would attempt to make entails gaining more ministerial support for the seminar. Although the April 12, 2014 seminar was well attended, only five ministers participated. This proved the case even after I informed these ministers about the seminar in October 2013 and sent them a postcard reminder two months before the event. It may have helped to administer the initial ministers' survey personally rather than via email. An early one-on-one connection and brief discussion of the subject might have peaked more interest and persuaded ministers of their need to participate.

Complicating things even further, the West Florida District scheduled an important event on the same day as the seminar. This prevented four or five ministers from attending. In retrospect, perhaps I should have submitted a request to the West Florida District asking them not to schedule events on the same day as my seminar.

Implications of the Project

One of the most significant implications of this project is the realization that West Florida District leaders need more instruction concerning the biblical precedent for church discipline. In doing so, leaders will recognize discipline plays a crucial role in discipleship, and discipleship cannot happen without discipline. God's love for the Church compels Him to admonish, to correct, and to educate His people so He can transform them into His image.

This project also exposed the American church's neglect of church discipline. It uncovers the reasons for this neglect—mainly, accommodation to cultural sensibilities and trends, lack of courage, and ignorance. The project then explains why these reasons

must not interfere with the church's duty to discipline. Thus, this work strips away faulty reasoning, empowering church leaders and laity to move forward in the confidence of God's Word. In many cases, the most productive work proves the most difficult. This project reorients believer's minds, teaching them that the difficult task of church discipline exists as a natural part of church life and not something to avoid at all costs.

The practical, step-by-step treatment of church discipline in this work also has important implications for the church. Pastors and laity will possess a blueprint for implementing discipline. This blueprint includes detailed explanations on how to commence, when to move to the next level, and how and when to end the discipline process. Seeing this progression on paper should enable leaders and laity to understand the larger picture, or the crescendo effect of church discipline, and to reap the rewards of such care.

In this project leaders also gain understanding about the complexities of church discipline, including the dangers of litigation and the proper way to discipline minors. This information will prove invaluable to churches of every size and denomination as the culture grows increasingly hostile toward godly accountability. God's people must implement discipline, but they must do it wisely. The temptation persists to avoid actions that may cause controversy in the body of Christ, yet the Church bares the responsibility to uphold God's standard of righteousness among its people. This project reaffirms the church's authority and duty to stand unflinchingly as it lifts God's banner of truth and enforces His decrees.

Recommendations for the West Florida District of the Assemblies of God

I recommend that the West Florida District implement a one-day, six-hour seminar on church discipline for all newly credentialed ministers and for ministers transferring in from other districts. Pursuing this course of action will create a healthier environment among West Florida Assemblies of God churches and lessen the intervention needed by district officials. It will also foster a more well rounded discipleship process in these district churches.

If holding a one-day seminar on church discipline proves untenable, however, the district should, at least, integrate a two- to three-hour block into their new minister's orientation day.⁵ Cultural trends toward neglecting discipline are simply too strong, and the church only too ready to acquiesce to these trends, for district officers to fail in providing leadership in this area. I believe that the newly credentialed ministers, those ministers transferring in from other districts, and the West Florida District leadership would find this extra effort well worth the investment of time.

Another recommendation for the West Florida District entails providing this project's handbook⁶ to every church in the district. The handbook includes the most significant points of this work, offering a quick-reference guide for leaders and laity as they venture into the arena of church discipline. Offering this resource will infuse

⁵ The West Florida District currently holds an annual one-day orientation for newly credentialed ministers. This orientation involves several sessions dealing with leadership principles that the district deems critical for effective ministry.

⁶ See Appendix V, "Handbook."

confidence into local congregations as they deal with discipline issues and realize the standard that the district seeks to uphold.

I also suggest that the West Florida District continue to offer sessions on church discipline at the annual Christian Education Conference, open to ministers and laity alike. Interestingly, at the 2014 Christian Education Conference, many lay persons exhibited a strong interest in this topic. It seemed as if they recognized the neglect of discipleship through discipline and yearned for a return to good order and accountability. Providing these sessions will continue to foster the perception and reality that the West Florida District is serious about holistic biblical discipleship.

The last recommendation for the West Florida District involves the district officers courageously modeling discipline among the ministers and congregations under their care. This discipline extends to those areas traditionally considered too risky to challenge. Unless ministers see their district leadership “step out of the boat” to uphold and enforce General Council and District standards, they may also continue to choose the path of least resistance. The cost of biblical discipleship is high, but those within the body of Christ must continue to encourage each other toward the goal of this discipline, taking on the likeness of Christ.

Recommendations for Future Study

A comparative study of church discipline in other parts of the world would prove interesting as an area for future study. Churches in other nations will have beliefs and traditions about discipline that exist on a continuum between extreme tolerance and extreme control. Perhaps the American church can learn from church cultures of other nations that closely adhere to the biblical principles of discipline.

Although this project acts as a sample of general church discipline beliefs and practices in the United States, it does not look closely at the specific perspective differences between more conservative and liberal churches on this issue. For example, some regions and denominations in America more closely adhere to biblical teachings on this subject, while others completely ignore them. Therefore, it might prove interesting to uncover the varying sub-cultural, philosophical ideas that affect a church's willingness to discipline. In the end, I believe one will find the reasons for neglecting discipline still reflect the motives and skewed logic listed in previous chapters, yet it may prove interesting to uncover and then answer them.

Lastly, the West Florida District may consider charting the perspective changes that occur toward church discipline while implementing educational measures. The district can create surveys for pastors and their congregations. Again, these would measure attitudes toward church discipline before and after participating in teaching sessions, enabling leadership to determine educational success. As with any form of discipline, the fight for right thinking and actions never ends. For that reason, educating the churches on discipline must continue indefinitely.

Conclusion

In the midst of a nation that removes all restraints, a nation that expects compliance with established laws, yet fosters moral anarchy, this project sought to reassert the need for healthy church discipline. Yet, many American churches continue to reject the scriptural mandate to discipline their members. Therefore, this project reminds the Church of its nature, authority, and responsibility to disciple the body of Christ. The American church can remedy this neglect, but doing so will require an honest assessment

of its current condition, as well as the courage to trust God's Word over popular cultural morays.

Having established the reality that God's discipline plays an integral part of His dealings with humankind, this project sought to educate and change perspectives that view discipline as outdated. As such theological shifts occur, churches can push forward with the difficult task of accountability. There are no shortcuts to Christian maturity and a healthy body of believers. In this fallen world, consequences serve as a powerful motivator toward right living, and these consequences flow out of church discipline.

This project also reasserted the biblical understanding of "love." In order for the Church to move forward with the difficult task of discipline, it must understand that such action springs from a deep concern over a person's eternal well-being. Thus, this work attempted to debunk the shallow conception of love that the culture embraces.

Lastly, this project provided a Bible-based, systematic process for churches to follow when implementing discipline. It removed many of the barriers that churches feel hinder such action, presenting a step-by-step road to correction within the body of Christ. Jesus taught these principles in Matthew 18, Paul reaffirmed them throughout his epistles, and the Church must carry the baton to the finish line. Ultimately, this work desires to see a resurgence of the Church carrying out one of its most vital responsibilities—the loving discipline of its people.

APPENDIX A: MINISTERS' SURVEY

CHURCH DISCIPLINE SURVEY (SEMINAR)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Uncertain	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I sometimes struggle to understand exactly what is meant by "church discipline."					
I believe that the New Testament age of grace rules out the need for church discipline.					
Overall, I believe that church discipline is an important part of church health.					
Church discipline should be used with unbelievers.					
Church discipline only applies to those within the body of Christ.					
I believe that the church bears the responsibility to judge its members according to biblical standards.					
I have some in my church that disagree with me on the subject of church discipline.					
I believe it is solely the Holy Spirit's responsibility to confront unrepentant Christians.					
I have had to use church discipline in the last three years.					
I have never been involved in a situation where church discipline proved necessary.					
I follow the example of Matthew 18 when confronting a brother or sister in Christ.					
Overall, my church accepts the biblical model of confronting a brother or sister in Christ as found in Matthew 18.					
I have taught, or referenced, the importance of church discipline to my congregation in the last three years.					
In the past, when I followed the biblical principles of church					

discipline, things did not turn out as positively as I had hoped.					
My key leaders agree with me on the subject of church discipline.					
There have been times when key leaders believed I was acting too harshly when following the biblical model of church discipline.					
Some in my church criticize me for not being tough enough with church discipline issues.					
I believe that church discipline is primarily the responsibility of church leadership.					
Laity should not get involved in church discipline issues.					
I have had members leave the church because they felt that church discipline was too harsh.					
I sometimes feel reluctant to deal with church discipline issues because of the fallout that might take place.					
I feel the American church does a good job with church discipline.					
I believe that Jesus' teaching of "judge not, that you be not judged" is misunderstood and misapplied among many Christians today.					
Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I believe that Jesus' instructions in Matthew 18, regarding confronting a fellow Christian who has offended us, should be literally applied.					
Church discipline is an act of love seeking the restoration of an erring brother or sister in Christ.					
I believe there are times when an unrepentant Christian must be put out of the church.					
I believe that, regardless of the outcome, church discipline should be applied, when needed, and the results left to God.					
Additional Comments:					

APPENDIX B: LAY LEADERS' SURVEY

CHURCH DISCIPLINE SURVEY (SEMINAR-LAY LEADER)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Uncertain	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I sometimes struggle to understand exactly what is meant by "church discipline."					
I believe that the New Testament age of grace rules out the need for church discipline.					
Overall, I believe that church discipline is an important part of church health.					
Church discipline should be used with unbelievers.					
Church discipline only applies to those within the body of Christ.					
I believe that the church bears the responsibility to judge its members according to biblical standards.					
I believe it is solely the Holy Spirit's responsibility to confront unrepentant Christians.					
I believe that church discipline is primarily the responsibility of church leadership.					
Laity should not get involved in church discipline issues.					
Church discipline is an act of love seeking the restoration of an erring brother or sister in Christ.					
I sometimes feel reluctant to deal with church discipline issues because of the fallout that might take place.					
I believe there are times when an unrepentant Christian must be put out of the church.					
Additional Comments:					

APPENDIX C: CE CONFERENCE HOUR 1 CURRICULUM

CE Conference

R. David Long

2/22/14

Session One

Title of Series: *Tough Love in a Wimpy World: Loving People Enough to Do the Hard Stuff*

Session One: Biblical Underpinnings for Church Discipline

I. **Intro**—I want you to imagine raising two children, or remember back to when you actually did it. Your kids are young and energetic. Your son likes to stick things in electrical sockets, and your daughter is learning words at school from other classmates that are less than desirable. How do you respond? You probably slap your son’s hand as a warning and then insert safety plugs in the sockets. You would probably tell your daughter that those words are not good and warn her not to say them anymore. But, if they continue, disregarding your corrections, the penalties get worse in order to get their attention. Why? Because you’re molding them to be what you think they ought to be. This is discipline, and most of us would agree that it’s necessary and ultimately good for our children.

Yet, for some reason, when it comes to discipline in the church we freak out. We throw tantrums and scream for tolerance and invoke the ever famous “judge not that you be not judged” of Matthew 7. **We automatically envision church leaders going on a rampage hunting down the evil in their flock (like the Salem Witch Trials).**

My case to you in these sessions is that church discipline is not only normal but healthy and a necessary component of church life. Besides that, you’ll find it from cover to cover in the Bible. But before looking at the biblical underpinnings of church discipline, let’s talk briefly about its meaning.

II. **Church Discipline Defined**

A. **Formative**—teaching & ***preaching***; Instruction in God’s Word and how to apply it. Helps to ***“form”*** the Christian life.

- B. **Corrective**—takes place when a fellow member of the church must ***be confronted*** about a sinful action or attitude. This is what most of us think of when we hear the words “church discipline.”
- C. **Discipleship**—the process of ***growth*** and learning through discipline. When Jesus’ disciples accepted His call, they, in essence, submitted to His ***school of discipline***.

III. A brief look at the Hebrew, Greek and English words for “discipline.”

- A. ***Yasar and Musar***—these two Hebrew words account for the majority of the uses of the word “discipline” in the OT. ***Yasar (verb)*** means “[to] discipline, chasten, admonish ... instruct, or correct.”¹ **It often speaks of God’s corrective judgment upon His people for their sin, particularly within a covenant relationship.**² ***Musar (noun)***—derived from *yasar*; means “instruction, correction, chastisement, discipline, punishment.”³ It normally refers to ***God warning or punishing*** His people in order to ***shake*** them from sinful habits and to instruct them in holiness.⁴

These are the only two words for “discipline” in the OT used to mean “to educate,” or “education.”

- B. ***Paideuo and Paideia***—these two Greek words carry forward the meanings of *yasar* and *musar* into the NT. The root word for ***paideuo (verb)*** is *pais*, child, boy ... *paideuo*, “thus lit. means to be ***together with a child***, hence, to bring up, educate, instruct, teach.”⁵ ***Paideia (noun)*** derived from *paideuo* means “education, instruction.”

¹ Francis Brown, S. R Driver, and Charles A Briggs, *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, Logos (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2000), 415–16.

² Willem VanGemeren, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 480.

³ Robert L. Thomas, *New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : [including] Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries* (Nashville: A.J. Holman, 1981).

⁴ VanGemeren, 481.

⁵ Verlyn D Verbrugge, *The NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words: An Abridgment of New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 947.

- C. **The English word “Discipline”**—from the Latin *disciplina*, means “instruction,” “training.”⁶ *Disciplina, however, comes from both the Latin words discipulus, meaning “learner,” and discere, meaning “to learn.”*⁷

Do you see where we’re going with this? The word “discipline” has a positive meaning. It’s intended to accomplish all the things we love to talk about, growth, development and learning to be better. Yet, the words “church discipline” have developed such a negative connotation in our culture, even in the church. No doubt this has occurred due to our culture’s obsession with individualism, consumerism, and the false ideas about tolerance and love.

IV. **We find God’s discipline from the beginning of Genesis through to Revelation.**

- A. The Old Testament—**Deut. 8:5** “**Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you**” (Summarizes the biblical concept of discipline).
1. Through the prophets—one method God used to discipline was through his prophets. He usually warns His people about the consequences of their rebellion beforehand through the prophets.
 - a. **David (2 Sam. 12)**—Bathsheba and Uriah—Nathan is sent with a parable about a rich man with many sheep who steals the one, beloved sheep of a poor man.

Nathan boldly says that the sword will never “depart from David’s house” (vv. 10-11) and that evil will cloud his family until the day he dies. The child in Bathsheba’s womb will die. **David repents and Nathan declares, “The Lord has forgiven your sins ...” but the consequences/discipline still comes.**
 - b. **Saul (1 Sam. 15)**—**God rejects Saul as king.** The unlawful sacrifice (1 Sam. 13:9); Saul neglects to annihilate the Amalekites in 1 Sam. 15. Samuel is sent to Saul and says, “**The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is much better than you**” (1 Sam. 15:28).

⁶ Merrill C. Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 131.

⁷ Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 131.

- c. **God's discipline is not capricious, fickle, or unpredictable, but is purposeful and restorative in nature.**
2. Through the Community—sometimes the covenant community executes God's discipline.
 - a. **Achan (Joshua 7)**—he steals plunder during the destruction of Jericho. God's judgment falls upon the entire community because of Achan's sin until he is singled and disciplined. **Achan and his family are stoned to death by the community.**
 3. Through Direct Judgments
 - a. **Moses (Numbers 20:12 and Deut. 3:23-27)** Moses & Aaron have brought the people of Israel into the wilderness of Zin. There was no water for the people. **God tells Moses to speak to the rock, but Moses strikes it instead.** God punishes Moses & Aaron by refusing them entrance into the Promised Land.

Later, Moses pleads with God to relent and allow him to enter the PL (Deut. 3:23-27), but God, exhibiting divine tough love, refuses. He only allows Moses to go to the top of Mt. Pisgah to look at it from there. This is God's tough love.
 - b. **Deut. 28—The Blessings and Curses**—God blesses for obedience and curses, or disciplines for disobedience. Both show His love. The latter is meant to turn His people back.
- B. The New Testament—Discipline largely flows through the body of Christ. Each person makes up a part of this body, and each stands accountable to the rest.⁸**
1. **Matthew 18—The Timeless Template**—“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault ...” (v. 15). This could also read, “If your brother sins, go and tell

⁸ T. Desmond Alexander et al., eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 450.

him his fault ...” This pertains to rebellious sin and not to confrontations due to differences of opinion.⁹

***v. 16** “But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses” (Matt. 18:16).

Discipline continues to progress until restoration occurs.

2. **1 Cor. 5—The Immoral Brother**—In verse 4, *Paul insists that the church at Corinth come together “in the name of the Lord Jesus” and judge the man sleeping with his father’s wife*” (1 Cor. 5:4). He expects the church to maintain order and purity within its ranks.
 - a. **Correcting those inside the church only**—1 Cor. 5:12-13 “For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside.”
3. **Divisiveness—Titus 3:9-11** (2 Tim. 2:17) “But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law Warn a divisive person once, and the warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him.”
4. **The Idle**—Lest you think that it’s none of the church’s business to correct so-called personal issues, consider 2 Thess. 3:10-12 “...*If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.* For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons **we command** and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.”
5. **Ananias & Sapphira** (direct judgment) Acts 5—Ananias and Sapphira struck dead by God for lying to the Holy Spirit. *This judgment struck fear in the hearts of all who heard about it, inside and outside the church (v. 11).*
6. **The Church in Laodicea** (Rev. 3:19)—“I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot ... I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked **Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.**”

⁹ Kenneth C. Newberger, *Hope in the Face of Conflict: Making Peace with Others the Way God Makes Peace with Us* (LaVergne, TN: Three Sons, 2011), 310.

- V. **Conclusion**—Are you beginning to see the picture? The entire Bible is a *manual* for discipline and correction. It's the story of God reaching out to His *estranged creation*, telling them the truth, hoping for their change of heart, and bringing correction or judgment upon them when they stray or continue in their rebellion. All of this is done out of love.

Deut. 8:5 sums it up perfectly, **“Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you.”**

Heb. 12:5 reminds us, **“And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? ‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the ones he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.’”**

If God operates in this fashion, why would we neglect to do so? Why would we not love our brothers and sisters enough to confront them when they're walking, or running down a destructive path.

APPENDIX D: CE CONFERENCE

HOUR 2 CURRICULUM

R. David Long

2/22/14

Session Two

Title of Series: *Tough Love in a Wimpy World: Loving People Enough to Do the Hard Stuff*

Session Two-The Purpose for Church Discipline

Intro—Sometimes I'll be out and about and see something and wonder what it does (like a machine of some sort). For example, I look at the light poles on my street and know what they ultimately accomplish, yet I don't understand some of the pieces and parts that I see. I see those coil-looking things and wonder what exactly they do.

I think one of the questions many Christians ask about church discipline, if they even experience it, is "Why do it?" Our popular mindset today tends to be "live and let live." But there are some good reasons /purposes for church discipline and I want to talk about five of them.

In the last session we talked about the biblical underpinnings, or precedent, for church discipline. We saw that right from the beginning, in Genesis, God firmly but lovingly disciplined His creation for their own benefit.

- **Let's quickly reiterate that church discipline engages people that are either unaware that they've sinned (and thus simply need instruction & guidance), or are sinning but don't want to stop.**
- From a biblical perspective, sin destroys the individual and also damages those around it (collateral damage). Thus, we make an issue of it because we care enough about a person to keep them from hurting themselves and others, and giving the kingdom of God a bad name. ***So the first reason for discipline is ...***

I. Discipline Equals Love

- A. **Proverbs 3:11-12** "My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights."

- B. **Hebrews 12:5-6 picks up on this idea in the NT.** “And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”
1. **In Hebrews, discipline comes in the form of *persecution from enemies*.** As perplexing as this may seem, the outcome remains the same—**God purges His covenant people of unwanted behavior** by way of outside **pressure**. It’s a school of learning.
 2. **William Lane observes concerning the author of Hebrews,** “He fully recognized that suffering has the ability to disturb faith or to provoke uncertainty and despair. The consideration of these harsh experiences as exposure to the παιδεία, ‘instructive discipline,’ ‘correction,’ of God, which attests a filial relationship with the Father, brings a fresh perspective on these aspects of Christian experience. *The sufferings of the community were actually disciplinary in character and expressed the love that God has for his children.*”¹
- C. **We mentioned earlier that the English word “discipline” comes from the word “disciple” (learner).**
1. **Jonathan Leeman explains,** “Discipleship in the local church involves church members helping one another follow Jesus They teach the good and correct the bad. They encourage one another toward the right path, and help keep one another off the wrong path.”²
- Thus, church discipline (rooted in love) keeps us accountable and pushes us forward in spiritual development.**
- D. **Why then do we struggle so much with the concept of church discipline within the church?** Because our concept of love is **“skewed.”**
1. **Analogy**—Parents giving their kids everything they want under the auspices of love.

¹ William L. Lane and Glenn W. Barker, *Hebrews 9-13*, Word Biblical Commentary 47B (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 419.

² Jonathan Leeman, *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 47, Kindle.

2. **Quote** –"God's love is often conceived of these days as something **universal, indiscriminating, and unconditional**. And behind this conception, often, is human-centeredness. Yet in Scripture we actually find that God's love is utterly God-centered, which means it's more complicated than common conception would have it. **It combines salvation and judgment**. It's gracious and discriminating. It moves outward and inward. **Church membership is a picture of all these things**—of salvation and judgment, grace and discrimination, inward and outward care—and therefore defines God's love for the world."³

In other words, the popular cultural definition for "love" is distorted. Our love today tends to be "human-centered" rather than "God-centered." It cares more about *friendship* and "getting along" than it does the *long-term* spiritual welfare of others.

- a. For example, this idea of never **talking about religion in public, or about unconditionally accepting our friends or other people no matter what type of lifestyle they choose, is not love at all—it's selfishness**. God doesn't unconditionally accept us. He expects us to turn from wickedness and to the truth of his Son.
3. Leeman says, "**My main argument ... is that our ideas about love are more idolatrous than we realize Why does it feel unloving to draw clear borders around a church? Is it? What do we take 'love' to be? Are our notions of love in fact biblical?**"⁴

Is it unloving to draw boundaries around our children for their protection?

Our modern definition of love is kind of like witnessing to a Mormon and asking them if they believe in Jesus. They'll tell you "yes," but they define Him differently, and that matters.

4. **God's love does not always say "yes."** God's love has standards, so much so that some will not be allowed to enter heaven as a result of their choices. God is **discriminating** (the ability to recognize the

³ Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010), 1600, Kindle.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 708, Kindle.

difference between good things and bad things), why aren't we? Why do we resist so fiercely **confronting** each other in love?

The church administers discipline, therefore, because, like God, we should love each other enough to fight for each other and keep each other on the straight path to heaven.

II. Restoration and Healing

A. Church discipline, although painful at the moment, seeks **restoration**. It has no greater purpose.

1. Paideuo and paideia, the NT words used for "discipline," mean **training** and educating a child.⁵ **Discipline works to improve the individual.**
2. **1 Cor. 5:5** "you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord."

Discipline (intervention) seeks to prevent a **catastrophe**. *Few things have the instructive value of painful consequences. Advice and warnings only accomplish so much, yet consequences engage every aspect of a person's being, leaving a **deep channel** of emotional memories that possess the power to alter behavior.*

3. **Heb. 12:10** "For they [human fathers] disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness."

- a. **The Church is God's instrument of discipleship. He has entrusted us to assist Him in the discipline.**

III. Discipline Instills the Fear of the Lord

A. **Analogy**—How many of us have seen someone get "pulled over" for speeding or doing a U turn and then changed our behavior because of it? We tend to learn from other people's mistakes...hopefully. Discipline works the same way; it's meant to deter others from repeating/copying bad behavior. America's nuclear arsenal—a **deterrent**.

⁵ Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 621.

- B. In Acts 5 we see Ananias and Sapphira pay the ultimate price for their sin. Verse 11 then emphasizes, *“And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.”*
- C. 1 Tim. 5:10 Paul tells Timothy, “As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.”
- *Church discipline should deter other believers from open and flagrant sin.

IV. Discipline Keeps Sin from Spreading

- A. This point is very similar to the one just mentioned. In 1 Cor. 5:6-7 Paul instructs, *“Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump.”*
- B. What happens when we overlook our children’s bad behavior? It gets worse. Even more, siblings may begin to copy the bad behavior.

Church discipline is particularly important for our young people to see practiced. It doesn’t drive them away; in fact, it makes them respect the church even more.

V. Discipline Helps the Church to Maintain a Positive Testimony to a Watching World.

If the church doesn’t take its own standards seriously enough to uphold and enforce them within, why would the world feel compelled to take us seriously?

Conclusion—*In the American culture we’ve come to equate a lax attitude toward sin as compassion and love.* In reality, however, overlooking sin and refusing to deal with it is cruel and heartless. The Bible says, “God disciplines those He loves.” Why then, would we withhold such a loving tool? We fail to understand that true love intervenes, even if it means the one we want to help becomes angry with us.

Church discipline broadly accomplishes five things: (1) It proves that we love our brothers and sisters in Christ, (2) It brings restoration and healing to the individual caught in sin, (3) It instills the fear of the Lord upon church members and upon the outside world, (4) it keeps sin from spreading in the church, and (5) It maintains the church’s testimony to a watching world.

*In the next hour we’re going to talk about some of the common misconceptions about church discipline (i.e. “judge not” misquoting) and whose responsibility it is to do the judging.

APPENDIX E: CE CONFERENCE

HOUR 3 CURRICULUM

CE Conference

R. David Long

2/22/14

Session 3

Title of Series: *Tough Love in a Wimpy World: Loving People Enough to Do the Hard Stuff*

Common Misconceptions about Church Discipline

Intro—Have you ever thought you had a person figured out, but once you got to know them you discovered you were all wrong? Our church conducts interviews for our Day Care, and sometimes I'm a part of that interview process. At first, I thought I could tell which applicants would be good employees and which ones bad, but I soon realized that my hunches were many times wrong.

There's a lot of Christians that think they know all about church discipline, but most know very little about why it's done and how it's done. In fact, much of what we claim to know is misinformation that we get from the world.

This morning I want to talk about some of **the most common misconceptions** about church discipline. You may find that you've heard one or more of these before, or even that you've believed one.

- I. **Misconception One—Church discipline is the pastor's responsibility.**
 - A. Many church members believe ***pastors***, or other leaders, should do the confronting. In fact, most fear any type of ***conflict*** within the body of Christ, choosing to whisper their concerns in dark corners rather than confronting evil directly.
 - B. **Jesus addresses this issue in Matt. 18:15, "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone."** In other words, the person who recognizes the problem, whether the sin is personally against him or her or just sin in general, must go and ***initiate the process*** of restoration. This keeps

the matter at the lowest level possible. ***Notice, there is nothing said here about telling the church leaders.***

The next step involves one or two additional **witnesses**. “But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses” (v. 16). Again, no leaders have to be involved. The offended person may, at any time, confer or counsel with the pastor or pastors, yet it is not necessary until step two fails. **Everything continues to be led by the offended person.**

Even though the pastor should be involved in step three (“telling it to the church”), laity continue to serve a vital role even in this step.

- II. **Misconception Two — Maintaining a close, personal relationship is more important than confronting my brother or sister, which may, in turn, damage the friendship.**

Short-term vs. long-term view of relationships.

- A. **Behind this misconception, or fear, is again, a selfish understanding of love.** When we refuse to act for fear of losing a relationship, we are basically saying, by our actions, that our **happiness** (friendship status quo) here and now is more important than our brother or sister’s eternal well-being. ***It would be like, as a doctor, knowing someone had cancer but not wanting to tell them because it would upset them. Doctors must be committed to the truth, and so should Christians be.***
- B. **Behind this misconception is also a lack of trust in God. **We think we know how to do things better, so we jettison God’s instructions and choose to free-style discipline.****
- C. **The willingness to confront a fellow believer entangled in sin represents the highest form of love.** It unselfishly risks personal rejection and loss of relationship in hopes of turning an erring believer back to God.¹

Both Jesus and Paul effectively modeled this mindset. Each of them delivered scathing rebukes in order to provoke **deep spiritual reflection** in their listeners.

¹ Gordon J. Wenham et al., eds., *The New Bible Commentary*, 4th ed (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), Logos Bible Software.

They possessed a long-term view of relationships rather than a short-term, selfish view, and they sought to bring about positive change through momentary discomfort.

III. Misconception Three—“Judge not...” means never judging anyone.

- A. Jesus teaches in **Matt. 7**, “**Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measure to you.**”

Unfortunately, Christians and non-Christians alike have taken this passage to mean that we have no right to judge each other—ever! Truly, if you stop reading there, that might be true. But one has to continue to read to get the full context of what Jesus means.

Read Matthew 7:3-6 “Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ... You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.”

Jesus teaches against hypocritical judging, not judging altogether. *He instructs his followers on how to judge equitably, by first scrutinizing their own lives.*

By metaphorically removing the log from their own eyes, the disciples will judge with greater compassion,² understanding that they too struggle with sin.

Ironically, in **Matthew 7:15**, Jesus tells His disciples to judge. He teaches, “**Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits.**” Observing the fruit of a person’s life is a form of judgment. It requires careful observation, making a decision as to the rightness or wrongness of a person’s actions, and then acting upon that information.

IV. Misconception Four—If we discipline our people the church will shrink (The Shrinking Church Syndrome) (Fear of Losing People)

- A. **This attitude or misconception believes that if it practices biblical church discipline then people in the church will leave, or be forced to leave.**

² Wayne Grudem, ed., *ESV Study Bible : English Standard Version*, ESV text ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), Logos Bible Software.

- B. **Terry Ivy**, in his book *Restorative Church Discipline: Rescuing and Healing the Wounded*, observes, “**This barrier finds its strength in the worldly definition of success. The world perceives success as the increase of numbers and finances. However, the Lord’s view of success is obedience to the Word.”³**
- C. **Sometimes our churches do temporarily shrink when we practice discipline, yet they are much more likely to thrive and be a place of true health if we follow the Bible’s prescription.** When a person goes in for surgery and has to go under the knife, pain comes before the healing. If they refuse the surgery, the ailment will remain and true health will not be restored.
- D. **David Purkey**, in his book *Church Discipline*, tells this story of his own experience with a pastor who would not bring formative discipline to his body:

Nearly forty years ago, I worked under the tutelage of a pastor who stated to me that he would not teach any bible doctrine that would offend any of the members of his congregation. He told me it was more important to keep God’s church together than to teach any doctrine that would divide them. He also suggested when I matured I would understand. Well, it’s nearly forty years later, **and what I do understand is that he will give account to God Almighty for his refusal to put the absolute faithful and unbending exposition of Scripture first in his ministry. I would not want to be in his shoes when he stands before Jesus and gives account of himself. Thank God, I knew enough, as a three year old in Christ, to get out of that church. **God’s Elder must never compromise an iota of truth for a ton of unity.**⁴**

V. **Misconception Five—Asking Rebellious Members to Leave the Church May Hurt the Chances of Helping Them (Hospital Mentality)**

- A. **Quote (Terry Ivy): “We have all heard this one. It sounds spiritual, but it can reveal a shallow understanding of what church is. Any hospital which knows a patient has cancer, but ignores dealing with it, is not functioning as a hospital, but as a morgue. **Yes, the local church is to be like a hospital. Therefore, let us get involved with the sin sickness of our patients and heal them.** The only way**

³ Terry Ivy, *Restorative Church Discipline: Rescuing and Healing the Wounded* (2T2 Publishing, 2013), 2220, Kindle.

⁴ David Purkey, *Church Discipline* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), 1436, Kindle.

of spiritually healing them is to point them to repentance in Christ. This is what we are called to do. (Gal. 6:1)”⁵

- B. If you’ve worked with church discipline long enough you’ve probably heard this plea from concerned church members. **In their minds it’s like yanking the life-support cord and saying good-bye. In reality, however, it’s just the opposite.**

Keeping someone in the church while he or she is involved in unrepentant sin is ***damaging*** to a person, not to mention the rest of the body of Christ. It also causes the unrepentant brother or sister ***to settle*** into his or her bad behavior while having a false sense of acceptance and security. Upon death, he or she will face judgment as ***a deceived person*** and likely not go to heaven.

Putting someone out of the church feels ***harsh*** at the moment, but sends a clear message that ultimately has ***great influence*** and power to change a wayward person, and isn’t that the goal anyway—discipleship?

Conclusion—To be perfectly honest, church discipline can seem like a daunting task. We know it’s the right thing to do, but right things aren’t always easy. Yet, we can’t allow ourselves to be deceived by excuses that, in the end, will lead to an unhealthy church and disobedience to God.

We also need to realize that the world’s ideals and the church’s ideals are often irreconcilable. We can’t worry about trying to make the world like the church—it never will.

Just like with our families, do the hard stuff when it has to be done and our kids and everyone else will be healthier for it in the long run.

⁵ Ivy, *Restorative Church Discipline: Rescuing and Healing the Wounded*, 2924, Kindle.

APPENDIX F: CE CONFERENCE MINISTERS'

TRACK CURRICULUM

CE Conference

R. David Long

2/22/14

Session Four

Title: Pandora's Box: A Leader's Guide to Restoring Church Discipline in an Age with Few Restraints

Session Four—A Practical Guide to Implementing Positive, Life-Altering Church Discipline within a Discipline-Resistant Culture.

- **Have Survey Ready at Seats**
- **Explain that my teaching today helps to fulfill the requirements that I have for completing my D.Min.**

- I. **Introduction**—One of the reasons I wanted to focus on this topic for my final project was because I noticed how scattered and weak the American church seemed to be in this area. ***We're scared of our own shadow and don't want to stir up trouble.*** It also appeared to me that our people had notions about discipline but they weren't coming from Scripture, they were coming from popular culture with ideas such as ***"judge not, that you be not judged."*** Yet, even ministers from the same denomination don't always agree on this subject. And we all know that nobody is responsible for anything anymore...

From ***life-time chain smokers suing cigarette companies because they get lung cancer***, to ***murderers claiming insanity in order to dodge complete responsibility for their crimes***, to ***genetics***, it's clear that we live in an age that strongly resists accountability. Increasingly, there seems to be few things that our culture considers "off-limits," that is, unless you're talking about judging someone else. We live in a culture where words like ***"hater"*** or ***"intolerant"*** or ***"homophobe"*** are thrown around loosely, mostly referring to people who have absolute standards for their lives. ***This is the world we live in, that our people live in. Its messages bombard us at every turn, not only questioning our faith, but defiantly promoting values that spit in the face of God.***

And then we attempt to bring order to our congregations through church discipline. What happens next can be anybody's guess. I remember one of my first times I was involved in a church discipline situation. I naively thought that if I did everything by the Book that all would turn out fine. That's when it happened...I realized that people really struggle with the concept of church discipline, and even when it's done right, done carefully, sometimes people still leave and don't come back and other members get mad about the process.

There's no question, church discipline can be a messy business. For that reason, and others, many of our churches don't practice it faithfully, or at all.

But when I read passages of Scripture like **Rev. 2 and 3**, where the risen Christ speaks to each of the seven churches, I reminded of the importance of doing things God's way, even the hard things like church discipline.

To the church at Ephesus—"I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent."

To the church at Smyrna—"I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer...Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life." God will not be pleased with those who shrink back.

What I want to share with you today is not so much the nuts and bolts of church discipline as found in Matthew 18 and 1 Cor. 5, but about a broader understanding of, and foundation for, the concept of church discipline. When we hear the words "church discipline" we normally think of confrontation and turmoil, but it is much more than that.

I also want to talk about what makes church discipline so difficult in the modern church and what we can do to change this.

My hope is that after this hour you'll have a better understanding of the concept of church discipline and how to lay the groundwork for effective implementation.

II. Church Discipline—A Broader Understanding

A. Two Sides of Discipline

1. **Formative**—teaching *biblical standards* and expectations; Instruction in God’s Word and how to apply it. Helps to “form” the Christian life.
2. **Corrective**—Confrontational; Takes place when a *member* of the church must be confronted/challenged about a sinful action or attitude. ***This is what we do when the formative discipline doesn’t take hold.***

***But church discipline is even more than just formative and corrective, it’s also part of the process we call “discipleship.”**

- B. Discipline as Discipleship**—the process of growth and learning through *discipline*. **When Jesus’ disciples accepted his call, they, in essence, were submitting themselves to his school of discipline, or discipleship.**

We often fail to realize that church discipline falls cleanly within the category of discipleship (we tend to see church discipline as completely separate from everything else).

In fact, the English word “discipline” is derived from the Latin *disciplina*, meaning “instruction,” “training”¹ (two very positive words). *Discipulus*—“learner,” and *discere*—“to learn.”

The Hebrew and Greek words predominantly used for “discipline” mean “[to] chasten, admonish...instruct, or correct,” and to educate.²

Furthermore, *these biblical words for “discipline” are almost always used within the family context of a Father disciplining his child because he loves him or her.* In other words, families use *discipline* because they love each other so much.

Deut. 8:5 “Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you.”

Heb. 12:5 “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the ones he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

¹ Merrill C. Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 131.

² Francis Brown, S. R Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, Logos (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000), 415-416.

Robert Cheong, in his book *God Redeeming His Bride*, states, “**We have to see church discipline, not merely as a doctrine of the church to be understood and obeyed, but as an outflow of God’s story of redemption working in the lives of real people in a real world.**”³

- III. **The Present State of Discipline in the US (very brief)**—The practice of church discipline in North American churches has continued to decline throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. *Jonathan Leeman believes that part of the problem revolves around the “church-growth thinking” of the last fifty or so years.*⁴ In other words, everything not immediately relevant to the salvation experience gets discarded.⁵

Growth becomes the main focus, and anything that might cause **uncomfortable feelings**, including godly discipline, is seen as a hindrance to this growth.

Shockingly, in many of our churches today, open sin goes unchallenged, with unrepentant sinners enjoying the same benefits and status as any other member in good standing (especially in the area of relationships and sexuality).

- Live-in boyfriends, divorce and remarriage, homosexuality, etc.

A. This Generation Cannot Grasp the Concept of Corrective Discipline

A strong component of this trend or state of discipline within the American church has to do with a famine of teaching on the subject. In fact, ignorance on the subject runs so deep that, when encountered, many Christians respond to it as if experiencing some **strange phenomena**.⁶

Albert Mohler, Jr., (former Pres. of SBC) laments of Christians today, “At first hearing, the issue seems as antiquarian and foreign as the Spanish Inquisition and the Salem witch trials”⁷

The average Christian today acquires his or her sense of appropriateness or fairness about behavioral discipline from the mainstream culture. Therefore,

³ Robert K. Cheong, *God Redeeming His Bride: A Handbook for Church Discipline* (Christian Focus Publications, 2013), 449, Kindle.

⁴ Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010), 448, Kindle.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ John H. Armstrong, ed., *The Compromised Church: The Present Evangelical Crisis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 43.

⁷ Ibid.

since culture embraces almost every form of aberrant behavior without judgment, so follows the modern church.

- B. **A Narrow View of the Gospel**—by this I mean, *we want the gospel to be all happy and pleasant without the painful aspects of growth and accountability* that is a natural part of any relationship.

Luke 14:26-27 “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sister, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”

Does that sound like it’s always going to be happy and fun? Discipline is a part of transformation.

1. **Skewed Love Vs. Biblical Love**— Jonathan Leeman observes, “God’s love is often conceived these days as something universal, indiscriminating, and unconditional. And behind this conception, often, is man-centeredness. **Yet in Scripture we actually find that God’s love is utterly God-centered, which means it’s more complicated than common conception would have it. It combines salvation and judgment.** It’s gracious and discriminating. It moves outward and inward. Church membership is a picture of all these things—of salvation and judgment, grace and discrimination, inward and outward care—and therefore defines God’s love for the world.”⁸

- C. **Free-Style Church Discipline**—this is what we end up doing when we try to alter church discipline to make it more palatable (easier). *We excuse some things, alter the process so as not to make waves or stir things up*, but ultimately we do the individual and the church a disservice by reinforcing negative behavior and stating, by our actions, that we don’t trust God enough to do things his way.

IV. **Church Membership and Discipline**—Church membership is a critical component of church discipline. But before we talk anymore about that, let’s take a moment to consider what it means to be a part of the church.

- A. **The Nature of the Church**—We are a body (1 Cor. 12). This has important implications for church discipline. If we are a body, **interdependent**, then it matters what each members does.

John Hammett, in his book *Those Who Must Give an Account*, says, “No member of a physical body is casually related to other members of that body;

⁸ Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love*, 1600, Kindle.

no member is distant from the other members...The church as the body of Christ underscores the necessity of church membership (because members of the body cannot survive apart from the body) and highlights the mutuality of love and care involved in church membership..."

But to add to this, **Christians do not have the option of whether or not to be a part of the body of Christ.** To be a Christian is to be a part of the body (a physical presence).

And when Christians become members of a church, they are choosing to submit to the leadership of that church, to be accountable to it. In other words, to submit to Christ is to submit to his chosen institution on earth—the church.

But, in order to bring discipline into the lives of our flock, we must determine who's *committed* and who's not.

- B. **The Nature of Membership**—Membership is important so that we clearly know who is “in” and who is “out.” *We must have a clean, up-to-date membership list.*

Paul tells us in 1 Cor. that church discipline only applies to those **inside the church.**

1. **Adopting Rules of Discipline**—Going a step further now, when people are in the membership process at our churches, it's essential that we lay out our **expectations** for behavior and how the church discipline **process** works in our body. We want them to know up front what they're getting into.

- C. **Before You Discipline—Teach**—Mark Dever, senior pastor of Capital Hill Baptist Church, has been known to tell pastors not to discipline, that is, not until they prepare their congregation through teaching.

Jay Adams, in his book *Handbook on Church Discipline*, suggests, **“Begin to instruct the congregation about church discipline. Preach about it; discuss it in groups, etc. Provide each member with a set of the procedures that the church will follow when implementing the biblical commands.”**⁹

In other words, the worse thing we could do is set off to make everything right in our church without first laying the proper foundation.

⁹ Jay Edward Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, Jay Adams Library (Grand Rapids: Ministry Resources Library, 1986), 115.

"Teach your elders [deacons] what the Scriptures say. Hold special classes for them on the subject... Work with them until they are behind you. **It will be very difficult, if not impossible, to effect proper church discipline if you do not have the support of the officers of your church.**"¹⁰ (Adams)

D. **Before You Discipline—Organize**—during and while you teach make sure certain things are in order.

- Make sure your membership rolls are up-to-date.
- Make sure your church documents (constitution or bylaws, statements of faith, etc.) explain what's expected of members and how church discipline functions in your particular church.¹¹
- Make sure the leaders agree

Conclusion—Again, discipline is a critical aspect of discipleship, growth and transformation.

Our people need it, and the Bible requires it.

- But if we're going to prove effective with it we must prepare our people for it.
- The culture at large teaches them just the opposite of a life of accountability. We must teach them what's right (formative disc.) and we must confront sinful situations when necessary (corrective discipline).
- But before correcting, we have to lay the groundwork for successful discipline. We have to teach and organize.
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¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Jonathan Leeman, *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 133.

APPENDIX G: CE CONFERENCE LAY LEADER

FILL-IN-THE-BLANK NOTES

Tough Love in a Wimpy World: Loving People Enough to Do the Hard Stuff

CE Conference

R. David Long

2/22/14

Session One Notes

Session One—Biblical Underpinnings for Church Discipline

I. Church Discipline Defined

- A. **Formative**— teaching & _____; Instruction in God’s Word and how to apply it. Helps to _____ the Christian life.

- B. **Corrective**—takes place when a fellow member of the church must _____ about a sinful action or attitude. This is what most of us think of when we hear the words “church discipline.”

- C. **Discipleship**— the process of _____ and learning through discipline. When Jesus’ disciples accepted his call, they, in essence, submitted to his _____.

II. A Brief Consideration of the Hebrew, Greek and English Words for “Discipline”

- A. **Yasar and Musar**-- these two Hebrew words account for the majority of the uses of the word “discipline” in the OT.

Yasar (verb) means “[to] discipline, chasten, admonish...instruct, or correct.”¹ It often speaks of _____ judgment upon His people for their sin, particularly within a _____.²

Musar (noun)—derived from *yasar*; means “instruction, correction, chastisement, discipline, punishment.”³ It normally refers to _____ His people in order to _____ them from sinful habits and to instruct them in holiness.⁴

These are the only two words for “discipline” in the OT used to mean “to educate,” or “education.”

- B. **Paideuo and Paideia**—these two Greek words carry forward the meanings of *yasar* and *musar* into the NT. The root word for **paideuo (verb)** is *pais*, child, boy...*paideuo* “thus lit. means to be _____, hence, to bring up, educate, instruct, teach.”⁵
Paideia (noun) derived from *paideuo*. Means “education, instruction.”
- C. **The English word “Discipline”**—from the Latin **disciplina**, meaning “instruction,” “training.”⁶ **Disciplina, however, comes from both the Latin words discipulus, meaning _____ and discere, meaning _____**⁷

III. We find God’s discipline from the very beginning of Genesis through to Rev.

¹ Francis Brown, S. R Driver, and Charles A Briggs, *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, Logos (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000), 415–16.

² Willem VanGemeren, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 480.

³ Robert L. Thomas, *New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : [including] Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries* (Nashville: A.J. Holman, 1981).

⁴ VanGemeren, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, 481.

⁵ Verlyn D Verbrugge, *The NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words: An Abridgment of New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 947.

⁶ Merrill C. Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 131.

⁷ Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 131.

- A. **The Old Testament—Deut. 8:5** “Know then in your heart that, as a man _____ his son, the LORD your God _____ you.” **(Summarizes the biblical concept of discipline)**
1. Through the prophets—one method God used to discipline was through His prophets. He usually warned His people about the _____ of their rebellion beforehand through the prophets.
 - a. **David (2 Sam. 12)**—Adultery & Murder—Nathan sent with a _____. Nathan, God’s spokesman, speaks judgment upon David. “_____ shall never depart from your house...”
 - b. **Saul (1 Sam. 15)**—**God rejects Saul as king.**
 - Unlawful sacrifice (1 Sam. 13:9)
 - Neglects to _____ the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15). Samuel is sent to Saul “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours... (v. 28).
 2. Through the Community —sometimes the covenant community executes God’s discipline.
 - a. Achan (Joshua 7)— God’s judgment falls upon the entire _____ because of Achan’s sin until he is singled and disciplined.
 3. Through Direct Judgments
 - a. **Moses (Nu. 20:12 and Deut. 3:23-27)** God punishes Moses & Aaron for their disobedience by _____ them entrance into the _____.

Later, Moses pleads with God to relent and allow him to enter the PL (Deut. 3:23-27), but God, _____, refuses. He only allows Moses to go to the top of Mt. Pisgah to look at it from there. *This is God’s tough love.*

- b. **Deut. 28—The Blessings and Curses**—God blesses for obedience and curses, or disciplines for disobedience. Both show His love. The latter is meant to turn His people back.

B. **The New Testament—Discipline largely flows through the _____**. Each person makes up a part of this body, and each stands accountable to the rest.⁸

1. **Matthew 18—The Timeless Template**—“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault ...” (v. 15). This could also read, “If your brother sins, go and tell him his fault ...” This pertains to _____ and not to confrontations due to differences of opinion.⁹

***v. 16 “But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses” (Matt. 18:16).** Discipline continues to _____ until restoration occurs.

2. **1 Cor. 5—The Immoral Brother**—In verse four Paul insists that the church at Corinth come together “in the name of the Lord Jesus” and judge the man sleeping with this father’s wife” (1 Cor. 5:4). He expects the church to _____ and purity within its ranks.

- a. **Correcting those inside the church only**—1 Cor. 5:12-13 “For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside.”

3. **Divisiveness—Titus 3:9-11** (2 Tim. 2:17) “But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law ... Warn a divisive person once, and the warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him.”

4. **The Idle**—In case you think that it’s none of the _____ to correct so-called _____ issues,

⁸ T. Desmond Alexander et al., eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 450.

⁹ Kenneth C. Newberger, *Hope in the Face of Conflict: Making Peace with Others the Way God Makes Peace with Us* (LaVergne, TN: Three Sons, 2011), 310.

consider 2 Thes. 3:10-12 “...If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.”

5. **Ananias & Sapphira** (direct judgment) **Acts 5**—Ananias and Sapphira struck dead by God for lying to the Holy Spirit. ***This judgment*** _____ ***in the hearts of all who heard about it, inside and outside the church (v. 11).***

6. **The Church in Laodicea** (Rev. 3:19)—“I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot...I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked... **Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.**”

Conclusion—

The entire Bible is a _____ for discipline and correction. It’s the story of God reaching out to his _____, telling them the truth, hoping for their change of heart, and bringing correction or judgment upon them when they stray or continue in their rebellion. All of this is done out of love.

Deut. 8:5 sums it up perfectly, “**Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you.**”

Heb. 12:5 reminds us “**And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? ‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the ones he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.’**”

CE Conference
R. David Long
2/22/14
Session Two Notes

Title of Series: *Tough Love in a Wimpy World: Loving People Enough to Do the Hard Stuff.*

Session Two-The Purpose for Church Discipline

- Church discipline engages people that are either _____ that they've sinned (and thus simply need instruction & guidance), or are sinning but don't _____.

IV. Discipline Equals _____

- A. **Proverbs 3:11-12** "My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights."
- B. **Hebrews 12:5-6 picks up on this idea in the NT.** "And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord...For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."
 1. **In Hebrews, discipline comes in the form of** _____ . As perplexing as this may seem, the outcome remains the same—**God purges His covenant people of unwanted behavior** by way of outside _____.
 2. **William Lane observes concerning the author of Hebrews,** "He fully recognized that suffering has the ability to disturb faith or to provoke uncertainty and despair. The consideration of these harsh experiences as exposure to the παιδεία, "instructive discipline," "correction," of God, which attests a filial relationship with the Father, brings a fresh perspective on these aspects of Christian experience. *The sufferings of the community were actually disciplinary in character and expressed the love that God has for his children.*"¹⁰
- C. **We mentioned earlier that the English word "discipline" comes from the word** _____.

¹⁰ William L. Lane and Glenn W Barker, *Hebrews 9-13*, Word Biblical Commentary 47B (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 419.

1. **Jonathan Leeman explains**, “Discipleship in the local church involves church members helping one another follow Jesus ... They teach the good and correct the bad. They encourage one another toward the right path, and help keep one another off the wrong path.”¹¹

Thus, church discipline (rooted in love) keeps us _____ and pushes us forward in _____.

- D. **Why then do we struggle so much with the concept of church discipline within the church?** Because our concept of love is _____.

1. **Quote** –“**God’s love is often conceived of these days as something universal, indiscriminating, and unconditional.** And behind this conception, often, is **man-centeredness**. Yet in Scripture we actually find that God’s love is utterly God-centered, which means it’s more complicated than common conception would have it. **It combines salvation and judgment.** It’s gracious and discriminating. It moves outward and inward. **Church membership is a picture of all these things**—of salvation and judgment, grace and discrimination, inward and outward care—and therefore defines God’s love for the world.”¹²

In other words, the popular cultural definition for “love” is distorted. Our love today tends to be “man-centered” rather than “God-centered.” It cares much more about _____ and “getting along” than it does the _____ spiritual health of others.

2. **Leeman says**, “My main argument...is that our ideas about love are more idolatrous than we realize...Why does it feel unloving to draw clear borders around a church? Is it? What do we take “love” to be? Are our notions of love in fact biblical?”¹³
3. **God’s love does not always say “yes.”** God’s love has standards, so much so that some will not be allowed to enter heaven as a result of their choices. God is _____ (the ability to recognize

¹¹ Jonathan Leeman, *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 47, Kindle.

¹² Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010), 1600, Kindle.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 708, Kindle.

the difference between good things and bad things), why aren't we? Why do we resist so fiercely _____ each other in love?

The church administers discipline because, like God, we should love each other enough to fight for each other and keep each other _____.

V. Restoration and Healing

A. Church discipline, although painful at the moment, seeks _____ . It has no greater purpose.

1. Paideuo and paideia, the NT words used for "discipline," mean training and educating a child.¹⁴ **Discipline works to improve the _____.**

2. **1 Cor. 5:5** "you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord."

Discipline (intervention) seeks to prevent a _____. *Few things have the instructive value of painful consequences. Advice and warnings only accomplish so much, yet consequences engage every aspect of a person's being, leaving a _____ of emotional memories that possess the power to alter behavior.*

3. **Heb. 12:10** "For they [human fathers] disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness."

a. **The Church is God's instrument of _____.** He has entrusted us to assist Him in the discipline.

VI. Discipline Instills the Fear of the Lord

A. **In Acts 5 we see Ananias and Sapphira pay the ultimate price for their sin.** Verse 11 then emphasizes, "***And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.***"

¹⁴ Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 621.

B. **1 Tim. 5:10** Paul tells Timothy, “As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, *so that the rest may stand in fear.*”

*Church discipline should _____ other believers from open and flagrant sin.

IV. **Discipline Keeps Sin from Spreading**

A. **1 Cor. 5:6-7** “*Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump...*”

B. *Church discipline is particularly important for our _____ to see practiced. It doesn't drive them away; it makes them respect the church even more.*

V. **Discipline Helps the Church to Maintain a Positive Testimony to a Watching World.**
If the church doesn't take its own standards seriously enough to uphold and enforce them within, why would the world feel compelled to take us seriously?

- Church discipline broadly accomplishes five things: (1) It proves that we love our brothers and sisters in Christ, (2) It brings restoration and healing to the individual caught in sin, (3) It instills the fear of the Lord upon church members and upon the outside world, (4) it keeps sin from spreading in the church, and (5) It maintains the church's testimony to a watching world.

CE Conference
 R. David Long
 2/22/14
 Session Three Notes

Title of Series: *Tough Love in a Wimpy World: Loving People Enough to Do the Hard Stuff.*

Common Misconceptions about Church Discipline

VI. Misconception One—Church discipline is the pastor’s responsibility.

- A. Many church members believe _____, or other leaders, should do the confronting. In fact, most fear any type of _____ within the body of Christ, choosing to whisper their concerns in dark corners rather than confronting evil directly.
- B. **Jesus addresses this issue in Matt. 18:15** “**If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone.**” In other words, the person who recognizes the problem, whether the sin is personally against him or her or just sin in general, must go and _____ of restoration. This keeps the matter at the lowest level possible. ***Notice, there is nothing said here about telling the church leaders.***

The next step involves one or two additional _____. “**But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses**” (v. 16). Again, no leaders have to be involved. The offended person may, at any time, confer or counsel with the pastor or pastors, yet it is not necessary until step two fails. **Everything continues to be led by the _____.**
Even though the pastor should be involved in step three (“telling it to the church”), laity continue to serve a vital role even in this step.

VII. Misconception Two —Maintaining a close, personal relationship is more important than confronting my brother or sister, which may, in turn, damage the friendship.

- A. **Behind this misconception, or fear, is again, a _____ understanding of love.** When we refuse to act for fear of losing a relationship, we are basically saying, by our actions, that our _____ here and now is more important than our brother or sister’s eternal well-being.
- B. **Behind this misconception is also a _____ in God.**

- C. **The willingness to confront a fellow believer entangled in sin represents the _____ of love.** It unselfishly risks personal rejection and loss of relationship in hopes of turning an erring believer back to God.¹⁵

Both Jesus and Paul effectively modeled this mindset. Each of them delivered scathing rebukes in order to provoke _____ in their listeners. They possessed a _____ view of relationships rather than a _____, selfish view, and they sought to bring about positive change through momentary discomfort.

VIII. Misconception Three—“Judge not...” does not mean “Live and let live”

- A. Jesus teaches in **Matt. 7**, **“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measure to you.”**

Unfortunately, Christians and non-Christians alike have taken this passage to mean that we have _____ to judge each other—ever!

Jesus teaches against _____ judging, not judging altogether. ***He instructs his followers on how to judge equitably, by first scrutinizing their own lives.***

By metaphorically removing the log from their own eyes, the disciples will judge with greater compassion,¹⁶ understanding that they too struggle with sin.

Ironically, in **Matthew 7:15**, Jesus tells his disciples to judge. He teaches, **“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits.”** Observing the fruit of a person’s life is a form of _____. It requires careful _____, making a decision as to the rightness or wrongness of a person’s actions, and then acting upon that information.

IX. Misconception Four—The Shrinking Church Syndrome (Fear of Losing People)

¹⁵ Gordon J. Wenham et al., eds., *The New Bible Commentary*, 4th ed (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), Logos Bible Software.

¹⁶ Wayne Grudem, ed., *ESV Study Bible : English Standard Version.*, ESV text ed. (Wheaton IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), Logos Bible Software.

- A. This attitude or misconception believes that if biblical church discipline is practiced, then people in the church _____, or be forced to leave.
- B. Terry Ivy, in his book *Restorative Church Discipline: Rescuing and Healing the Wounded*, observes, “This barrier finds its strength in the worldly definition of success. The world perceives success as the increase of numbers and finances. However, the Lord’s view of success is obedience to the Word.”¹⁷
- C. Sometimes our churches do _____ when we practice discipline, yet they are much more likely to thrive and be a place of true health if we follow the Bible’s prescription.
- D. David Purkey, in his book *Church Discipline* tells this story of his own experience with a pastor who would not bring formative discipline to his body...

Nearly forty years ago, I worked under the tutelage of a pastor who stated to me that he would not teach any bible doctrine that would offend any of the members of his congregation. He told me it was more important to keep God’s church together than to teach any doctrine that would divide them. He also suggested when I matured I would understand. Well, it’s nearly forty years later, **and what I do understand is that he will give account to God Almighty for his refusal to put the absolute faithful and unbending exposition of Scripture first in his ministry**. I would not want to be in his shoes when he stands before Jesus and gives account of himself. Thank God, I knew enough, as a three year old in Christ, to get out of that church. **God’s Elder must never compromise an iota of truth for a ton of unity.**¹⁸

X. **Misconception Five—Asking Rebellious Members to Leave the Church May Hurt the Chances of Helping Them (Hospital Mentality)**

- A. Keeping someone in the church while their involved in unrepentant sin is _____ to a person, not to mention the rest of the body. It also causes the unrepentant brother or sister _____ into their bad behavior while having a false sense of acceptance and security. When they die they’ll face judgment as _____ and likely not go to heaven.

¹⁷ Terry Ivy, *Restorative Church Discipline: Rescuing and Healing the Wounded* (2T2 Publishing, 2013), 2220, Kindle.

¹⁸ David Purkey, *Church Discipline* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), 1436, Kindle.

Putting someone out of the church feels _____ at the moment, but sends a clear message that ultimately has _____ and power to change a wayward person.

APPENDIX H: CE CONFERENCE MINISTER'S TRACK

FILL-IN-THE-BLANK NOTES

CE Conference Notes

R. David Long

2/22/14

Ministers' Track Notes

Title: Pandora's Box: A Leader's Guide to Restoring Church Discipline in an Age with Few Restraints

Jesus' Letters to the Churches

To the church at Ephesus—"I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent."

To the church at Smyrna—"I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer...Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life."

I. Church Discipline—A Broader Understanding

A. Two Sides of Discipline

- 1. Formative**—teaching _____ and expectations; Instruction in God's Word and how to apply it. Helps to _____ the Christian life.
- 2. Corrective**—Confrontational; Takes place when a _____ of the church must be confronted/challenged about a sinful action or attitude. ***This is what we do when the _____ discipline doesn't take hold.***

- B. **Discipline as Discipleship**—the process of growth and learning through_____. **When Jesus’ disciples accepted his call, they, in essence, were submitting themselves to his school of discipline, or _____.**

The English word “discipline” is derived from the Latin *disciplina*, meaning “instruction,” “training.”¹

The Hebrew and Greek words predominantly used for “discipline” mean _____²

These biblical words for “discipline’ are almost always used within the family context of a Father disciplining his child because he loves them. In other words, families use _____ because they love each other so much.

Deut. 8:5 “Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you.”

Heb. 12:5 “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the ones he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

Robert Cheong, in his book *God Redeeming His Bride*, states, “**We have to see church discipline, not merely as a doctrine of the church to be understood and obeyed, but as an outflow of God’s story of redemption working in the lives of real people in a real world.**”³

II. The Present State of Discipline in the US (very brief)—

Jonathan Leeman believes that part of the problem revolves around the “church-growth thinking” of the last fifty or so years.⁴

¹ Merrill C. Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1975), 131.

² Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A Briggs, *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2000), 415-416.

³ Robert K. Cheong, *God Redeeming His Bride: A Handbook for Church Discipline* (Christian Focus Publications, 2013), 449, Kindle.

⁴ Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010), 448, Kindle.

- _____ becomes the main focus, and anything that might cause _____, including godly discipline, is seen as a hindrance to this growth.

Shockingly, in many of our churches today, open sin goes _____, with unrepentant sinners enjoying the same _____ as any other member in good standing.

A. This Generation Cannot Grasp the Concept of

_____ on the subject.
A strong component of this trend results from a famine of _____ on the subject.

Albert Mohler, Jr., (former Pres. of SBC) laments of Christians today, “At first hearing, the issue seems as antiquarian and foreign as the Spanish Inquisition and the Salem witch trials”⁵

The average Christian today acquires his or her sense of appropriateness or fairness about behavioral discipline from the _____.

B. A Narrow View of the Gospel

We want the gospel to be _____ without the painful aspects of _____.

Luke 14:26-27 “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sister, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”

2. _____ Vs. Biblical Love

Jonathan Leeman observes, “God’s love is often conceived these days as something universal, indiscriminating, and unconditional. And behind this conception, often, is man-centeredness. **Yet in Scripture we actually find that God’s love is utterly God-centered, which means it’s more complicated than common conception would have it. It combines salvation and judgment.** It’s gracious and discriminating. It moves outward and inward. Church membership is a picture of all these things—of salvation

⁵ Ibid.

and judgment, grace and discrimination, inward and outward care—and therefore defines God’s love for the world.”⁶

C. Free-Style Church Discipline

We excuse some things, _____ the process so as not to make waves or stir things up.

III. Church Membership and Discipline—Church membership is a critical component of church _____.

A. The Nature of the Church—We are a body (1 Cor. 12).

The body of Christ is _____.

John Hammett, in his book *Those Who Must Give an Account*, says, “No member of a physical body is casually related to other members of that body; no member is distant from the other members...The church as the body of Christ underscores the necessity of church membership (because members of the body cannot survive apart from the body) and highlights the mutuality of love and care involved in church membership...”

To submit to Christ is to _____ his chosen institution on earth—the church.

B. The Nature of Membership

Membership is important so that we clearly know who is _____.

Church discipline applies only to those _____.

2. Adopting Rules of Discipline

It’s essential that we lay out our _____ for behavior and how the church discipline _____ works in our body.

C. Before You Discipline—_____

Jay Adams, in his book *Handbook on Church Discipline*, suggests, “*Begin to instruct the congregation about church discipline. Preach about it; discuss it in*

⁶ Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love*, 1600, Kindle.

groups, etc. Provide each member with a set of the procedures that the church will follow when implementing the biblical commands."⁷ In other words, the worse thing we could do is set off to make everything right in our church without first laying the proper foundation.

"Teach your elders [deacons] what the Scriptures say. Hold special classes for them on the subject... Work with them until they are behind you. **It will be very difficult, if not impossible, to effect proper church discipline if you do not have the support of the officers of your church.**"⁸ (Adams)

D. **Before You Discipline**— _____

- Make sure your _____ are up-to-date.
- Make sure your _____ explain what's expected of members.
- Make sure the leaders _____

⁷ Jay Edward Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, Jay Adams Library (Grand Rapids: Ministry Resources Library, 1986), 115.

⁸ Ibid.

APPENDIX I: SEMINAR LESSON 1-INTRODUCTORY
AND PREPARATORY ELEMENTS OF
CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Seminar

4/12/14

Session One

Seminar Title: Tough Love in a Wimpy World: Loving People Enough to Do the Hard Stuff

Session One—Introductory and Preparatory Elements of Church Discipline

- I. **Introduction**—One of the reasons I chose this topic for my final project was because I noticed how scattered and weak the American church seemed to be in this area. *We're scared of our own shadow and don't want to stir up trouble.* It also appeared to me that our people had notions about discipline that weren't coming from Scripture, but from popular culture with ideas such as **"judge not, that you be not judged."** Yet, even ministers from the same denomination don't always agree on this subject. And we all know that nobody is responsible for anything anymore...

From *life-time chain smokers suing cigarette companies because they get lung cancer*, to *murderers claiming insanity in order to dodge complete responsibility for their crimes*, to *genetics*, it's clear that we live in an age that strongly resists accountability. Increasingly, there seems to be few things that our culture considers "off-limits," that is, unless you're talking about judging someone else. We live in a culture where words like "hater" or "intolerant" or "homophobe" are thrown around loosely, mostly referring to people who have absolute standards for their lives. *This is the world we live in, that our people live in. Its messages bombard us at every turn, not only questioning our faith, but defiantly promoting values that spit in the face of God.*

And then we attempt to bring order to our congregations through church discipline. What happens next can be anybody's guess. I remember one of my first times I was involved in a church discipline situation. **I naively thought that if I did everything by the Book that all would turn out fine.** That's when it happened...I realized that people really struggle with the concept of church discipline, and even when it's done right, done carefully, sometimes people still leave and don't come back and other members get mad about the process.

There's no question, church discipline can be a messy business. For that reason, and others, many of our churches don't practice it faithfully, or at all.

But when I read passages of Scripture like **Rev. 2 and 3**, where the risen Christ speaks to each of the seven churches, I reminded of the importance of doing things God's way, even the hard things like church discipline.

To the church at Ephesus—"I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent."

To the church at Smyrna—"I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer...Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life."

God will not be pleased with those who shrink back.

In this first session I want to provide some framework/foundational ideas about church discipline as well as make us aware of some of the hindrances to it in the American church.

II. Church Discipline—A Broader Understanding

In order to comprehensively lay out the steps and details concerning the application of church discipline, however, a broader understanding of the concept of church discipline must come to light. **Presently, when the average person hears the words "church discipline," he or she equates them with punishment, or being judgmental.** This perception reflects the shallow and short-sighted view of discipline that American culture and the contemporary church, specifically, have come to espouse.

Yet, despite these misperceptions, church discipline remains a vital component to any healthy church, and, in fact, *fits neatly within the broader category of "discipleship."*

A. Two Sides of Church Discipline—In a general sense, church discipline consists of every aspect of ministry that a church employs to help its members mature in Christ.

- **Formative**—preaching, teaching, Bible reading, accountability groups, prayer, etc.

- **Corrective**—takes place when a fellow member of the church must be confronted about a sinful action or attitude.

B. Discipline: A Key Component of Discipleship

Church discipline is a crucial part of discipleship!

Robert Cheong, in his book *God Redeeming His Bride*, states, “We have to see church discipline, not merely as a doctrine of the church to be understood and obeyed, but as an outflow of God’s story of redemption working in the lives of real people in a real world.”¹

Discipline is a part of our story, a part of the molding of human character, a part of God’s creative, sanctifying work in us.

In the overarching story of redemption, God uses discipline to change His people for their own good and for the glory of His kingdom.

1. **Mutual Accountability**—Discipline concerns itself with transformation, and one of the most effective tools for transformation in the church is mutual accountability.

In fact, mutual accountability embodies a key element in Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 18:15-17.

2. **A Disciplined Lifestyle**—Before anything else, discipleship involves godly introspection and *self-correction* in response to the Holy Spirit.

All the various levers and levels of church discipline serve as an important function of church life, yet, the most basic component of such activity is self-discipline.

Jay Adams, in his book *Handbook of Church Discipline*, states, “When we are baptized into the church, we thereby matriculate into Christ’s school. Then, for the rest of our earthly life, we are to be taught (not facts alone, but also) to obey the commands of Christ. This is education with force, education backed by discipline and good order ...”²

In other words, the church is Christ’s school of learning/discipline for his followers. Without discipline (self-discipline/self-control) there can be no army of God.

¹ Robert K. Cheong, *God Redeeming His Bride: A Handbook for Church Discipline* (Christian Focus Publications, 2013), 449, Kindle.

² Jay Edward Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, Jay Adams Library (Grand Rapids: Ministry Resources Library, 1986), 16.

- III. **The Present State of Discipline in the US**—The practice of church discipline in North American churches has continued to decline throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

*Jonathan Leeman believes that part of the problem revolves around the “church-growth thinking” of the last fifty or so years.*³

In other words, everything not immediately relevant to the salvation experience gets discarded.⁴ Numerical growth becomes the main focus, and anything that might cause uncomfortable feelings, including godly discipline, is seen as a hindrance to this growth.

Some believe that modern churches invest too much time in what they put into people without enough attention as to whether those people actually internalize the truth.”⁵

John Hammett, in his book *Those Who Must Give an Account: A Study of Church Membership and Church Discipline*, suggests, “The concept of dealing biblically with sin in the lives of its [church] members runs completely contrary to the American culture in which we live. Ours is a culture that delights in tolerance, acceptance, independence, freedom, individualism, and privacy.”⁶

Yet, this distinctive mix of American values has declared war on the biblical concept of church discipline, as well as **redefined** the traditional biblical meanings of words such as love, freedom and tolerance (**love=acceptance without boundaries and never judging; tolerance=to accept someone without question, unplugging any sense of moral right and wrong**).

The average Christian today acquires his or her sense of appropriateness or fairness about behavioral discipline from the *mainstream culture*. Therefore, since culture embraces almost every form of aberrant behavior without judgment, so follows the modern church.

- A. Struggling to Grasp the Concept of Corrective Discipline— Due to the famine of teaching on the subject of church discipline in the American church, modern

³ Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010), 448, Kindle.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Jamieson, *Guarding One Another*, 174, Kindle.

⁶ John S. Hammett and Benjamin L. Merkle, *Those Who Must Give An Account: A Study of Church Membership and Church Discipline* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012), 3260, Kindle.

Christians have a difficult time accepting its practice.⁷ *In fact, ignorance on the subject runs so deep that, when encountered, many Christians respond to it as if experiencing some strange phenomena.*⁸

1. **False Sense of Autonomy**— The same freedom that has allowed Western culture to **break away** from old class systems and thrive as an economic superpower has also infused the average American with a **false sense** of autonomy. Yet, freedom to govern oneself and to pursue happiness does not give Christians biblical grounds to selectively choose what parts of the Bible to obey.

Jonathan Leeman, in his book *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus*, observes, “... advertisers appeal explicitly to our narcissism: ‘Have it your way’ and ‘You’re in the driver’s seat.’ With all this in the air, it’s easy to want the benefits but not the responsibilities of belonging—to friendships, to marriages, to the workplace, and certainly to the church.”⁹

2. **Inaction**— The most obvious indication that this generation struggles with the idea of corrective church discipline is that few American churches appropriately use it, or use it at all.

Mohler laments, “The result of this is the loss of the biblical pattern for the church—and **the impending collapse of authentic Christianity in this generation.**”¹⁰

In its place one often finds a **powerless**, sin-tolerant community where few boundaries exist. ***Rather than embarrassment or shame, these local churches feel as if they are on the evolutionary cutting-edge of Christianity.***

- B. **A Narrow View of the Gospel**— A narrow view of the gospel also contributes to the weak state of church discipline in America. *For instance, many Christians gladly embrace the **blessings** of the new birth, yet reject the painful, life-surrendering **submission** , discipline and persecution that follow such dedication to Christ.*¹¹

⁷ W. H. Burnette, *Church Discipline: Talking Points* (ESC Ministries, 2005), 6, Kindle.

⁸ John H. Armstrong, ed., *The Compromised Church: The Present Evangelical Crisis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 43.

⁹ Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus*, Building Healthy Churches (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 13–14, Kindle.

¹⁰ Armstrong, *The Compromised Church: The Present Evangelical Crisis*, 47.

¹¹ Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love*, 1587, Kindle.

Leeman comments, “[Jesus’] gospel and church simultaneously attract and repel. Within the space of a few verses, the Gospel of Matthew attests that the world will both persecute God’s sons for their righteousness as well as give God praise for the son’s righteous deeds (Matt. 5:10, 16).”¹²

Luke 14:26-27 “**If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sister, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.**”

Does that sound like it’s always going to be happy and fun? Discipline is a part of transformation.

Thus, a truer representation of the gospel includes the blessings and the **pain** that come in a Christian’s life. He or she feels the joy, peace and presence of God like never before, yet also feels the sting of putting to death the flesh and living as a stranger in the world.

1. Skewed Conception of Love—Leeman asserts, “God’s love is often conceived these days as something universal, undiscriminating, and unconditional. **And behind this conception, often, is man-centeredness**. Yet in Scripture we actually find that God’s love is utterly God-centered, which means it’s more complicated than human conception would have it.”¹³

God’s love combines seemingly contrary elements. For instance, it mixes salvation and judgment, acceptance and the expectation of change, joy and godly sorrow, etc.¹⁴ ***In God’s economy, all these various facets of love, some thrilling and others painful, make up the whole of the discipleship process.***

C. Free-Style Church Discipline—this is what we end up doing when we try to **alter** church discipline to make it more palatable (easier). ***We excuse some things, alter the process so as not to make waves or stir things up.*** Ultimately, however, we do the individual and the church a disservice by reinforcing negative behavior and stating, by our actions, that we don’t trust God enough to do things his way.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 1600, Kindle.

¹⁴ Ibid.

APPENDIX J: SEMINAR LESSON 2 COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS
ABOUT CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Seminar

R. David Long

4/12/14

Session 2

Title of Series: *Tough Love in a Wimpy World: Loving People Enough to Do the Hard Stuff.*

Common Misconceptions about Church Discipline

Intro.—Have you ever thought you had a person figured out, but once you got to know them you discovered you were all wrong? Our church conducts interviews for our Day Care, and sometimes I'm a part of that interview process. At first, I thought I could tell which applicants would be good employees and which ones bad, but I soon realized that my hunches were many times wrong.

There's a lot of Christians that think they know all about church discipline, but most know very little about why it's done and how it's done. In fact, much of what we claim to know is misinformation that we get from the world.

This morning I want to talk about some of **the most common misconceptions** about church discipline. You may find that you've heard one or more of these before, or even that you've believed one.

- I. **Misconception One—Church discipline is the pastor's responsibility.**
 - A. Many church members believe ***pastors***, or other leaders, should do the confronting. In fact, most fear any type of ***conflict*** within the body of Christ, choosing to whisper their concerns in dark corners rather than confronting evil directly.
 - B. **Jesus addresses this issue in Matt. 18:15 "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone."** In other words, the person who recognizes the problem, whether the sin is personally against him or her or just sin in general, must go and ***initiate the process*** of restoration. This keeps

the matter at the lowest level possible. ***Notice, there is nothing said here about telling the church leaders.***

The next step involves one or two additional **witnesses**. ***“But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses” (v. 16).*** Again, no leaders have to be involved. The offended person may, at any time, confer or counsel with the pastor or pastors, yet it is not necessary until step two fails. ***Everything continues to be led by the offended person.***

Even though the pastor should be involved in step three (“telling it to the church”), laity continue to serve a vital role even in this step.

- II. **Misconception Two — Maintaining a close, personal relationship is more important than confronting my brother or sister, which may, in turn, damage the friendship.**

Short-term vs. long-term view of relationships.

- A. **Behind this misconception, or fear, is again, a selfish understanding of love.** When we refuse to act for fear of losing a relationship, we are basically saying, by our actions, that our **happiness** (friendship status quo) here and now is more important than our brother or sister’s eternal well-being. ***It would be like, as a doctor, knowing someone had cancer but not wanting to tell them because it would upset them. Doctors must be committed to the truth, and so should Christians be.***
- B. **Behind this misconception is also a lack of trust in God. **We think we know how to do things better, so we jettison God’s instructions and choose to free-style discipline.****
- C. **The willingness to confront a fellow believer entangled in sin represents the highest form of love.** It unselfishly risks personal rejection and loss of relationship in hopes of turning an erring believer back to God.¹

Both Jesus and Paul effectively modeled this mindset. Each of them delivered scathing rebukes in order to provoke **deep spiritual reflection** in their listeners.

¹ Gordon J. Wenham et al., eds., *The New Bible Commentary*, 4th ed (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), Logos Bible Software.

They possessed a ***long-term*** view of relationships rather than a ***short-term***, selfish view, and they sought to bring about positive change through momentary discomfort.

III. Misconception Three—“Judge not...” means never judging anyone.

- A. Jesus teaches in **Matt. 7**, **“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measure to you.”**

Unfortunately, Christians and non-Christians alike have taken this passage to mean that we have ***no right*** to judge each other—ever! Truly, if you stop reading there, that might be true. But one has to continue to read to get the full context of what Jesus means.

Read Matthew 7:3-6 “Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?...You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.”

Jesus teaches against ***hypocritical*** judging, not judging altogether. ***He instructs his followers on how to judge equitably, by first scrutinizing their own lives.***

By metaphorically removing the log from their own eyes, the disciples will judge with greater compassion,² understanding that they too struggle with sin.

Ironically, in **Matthew 7:15**, Jesus tells his disciples to judge. He teaches, **“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits.”** Observing the fruit of a person’s life is a form of ***judgment***. It requires careful ***observation***, making a decision as to the rightness or wrongness of a person’s actions, and then acting upon that information.

IV. Misconception Four—If we discipline our people the church will shrink (The Shrinking Church Syndrome) (Fear of Losing People)

- A. **This attitude or misconception believes that if it practices biblical church discipline then people in the church will leave, or be forced to leave.**

² Wayne Grudem, ed., *ESV Study Bible: English Standard Version*, ESV text ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), Logos Bible Software.

- B. **Terry Ivy**, in his book *Restorative Church Discipline: Rescuing and Healing the Wounded*, observes, “**This barrier finds its strength in the worldly definition of success. The world perceives success as the increase of numbers and finances. However, the Lord’s view of success is obedience to the Word.”³**
- C. **Sometimes our churches do temporarily shrink when we practice discipline, yet they are much more likely to thrive and be a place of true health if we follow the Bible’s prescription.** When a person goes in for surgery and has to go under the knife, pain comes before the healing. If they refuse the surgery, the ailment will remain and true health will not be restored.
- D. **David Purkey**, in his book *Church Discipline* tells this story of his own experience with a pastor who would not bring formative discipline to his body...

Nearly forty years ago, I worked under the tutelage of a pastor who stated to me that he would not teach any bible doctrine that would offend any of the members of his congregation. He told me it was more important to keep God’s church together than to teach any doctrine that would divide them. He also suggested when I matured I would understand. Well, it’s nearly forty years later, **and what I do understand is that he will give account to God Almighty for his refusal to put the absolute faithful and unbending exposition of Scripture first in his ministry. I would not want to be in his shoes when he stands before Jesus and gives account of himself. Thank God, I knew enough, as a three year old in Christ, to get out of that church. **God’s Elder must never compromise an iota of truth for a ton of unity.**⁴**

V. **Misconception Five—Asking Rebellious Members to Leave the Church May Hurt the Chances of Helping Them (Hospital Mentality)**

- A. **Quote (Terry Ivy) “We have all heard this one. It sounds spiritual, but it can reveal a shallow understanding of what church is. Any hospital which knows a patient has cancer, but ignores dealing with it, is not functioning as a hospital, but as a morgue. **Yes, the local church is to be like a hospital. Therefore, let us get involved with the sin sickness of our patients and heal them.** The only way**

³ Terry Ivy, *Restorative Church Discipline: Rescuing and Healing the Wounded* (2T2 Publishing, 2013), 2220, Kindle.

⁴ David Purkey, *Church Discipline* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), 1436, Kindle.

of spiritually healing them is to point them to repentance in Christ. This is what we are called to do. (Gal. 6:1)”⁵

- B. If you’ve worked with church discipline long enough you’ve probably heard this plea from concerned church members. **In their minds it’s like yanking the life-support cord and saying good-bye. In reality, however, it’s just the opposite.**

Keeping someone in the church while their involved in unrepentant sin is ***damaging*** to a person, not to mention the rest of the body of Christ. It also causes the unrepentant brother or sister ***to settle*** into their bad behavior while having a false sense of acceptance and security. When they die they’ll face judgment as ***a deceived person*** and likely not go to heaven.

Putting someone out of the church feels ***harsh*** at the moment, but sends a clear message that ultimately has ***great influence*** and power to change a wayward person, and isn’t that the goal anyway—discipleship?

Conclusion—To be perfectly honest, church discipline can seem like a daunting task. We know it’s the right thing to do, but right things aren’t always easy. Yet, we can’t allow ourselves to be deceived by excuses that, in the end, will lead to an unhealthy church and disobedience to God.

We also need to realize that the world’s ideals and the church’s ideals are often irreconcilable. We can’t worry about trying to make the world like the church—it never will.

Just like with our families, do the hard stuff when it has to be done and our kids and everyone else will be healthier for it in the long run.

⁵ Ivy, *Restorative Church Discipline: Rescuing and Healing the Wounded*, 2924, Kindle.

APPENDIX K: SEMINAR LESSON 3 STEPS TO
CHURCH DISCIPLINE PT1

Seminar
R. David Long
4/12/14
Session Three

Session Three—The Steps of Discipline Part 1

I. Important Considerations about Church Discipline

- A. **Restorative** in Nature (versus condemning or angry)
- B. **Assumes the Best of People**—1 Cor. 13:7 “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”
 - 1. **Thomas Bear**, “If we are to engage in the process of restoration, we are to assume the best about the brother we seek to restore. As an observer or outsider, we frankly do not know everything that is going on in the brother’s heart. He may be blind to his own sin.”¹
- C. **Sometimes members walk in unrepentant sin for extended periods of time without the church knowing it.** In such cases, fellow members and church leaders bear no responsibility until the sin comes to light.
 - 1. Congregants should not **pry or snoop**, without cause, into the lives of other members, searching for sin.

II. Steps of Discipline

- A. **Self-Discipline**—One of the more discreet, less talked about aspects of church discipline is self-discipline.

¹ Thomas Bear, *Church Discipline: Bring My Sheep Back*, 930, Kindle.

1. Adams asserts, “Self-discipline is the beginning and end of church discipline because it is the most basic element in all discipline.”²
2. **Gal. 5:23** The fruit of the Spirit includes “self-control.”

B. Pre-Confronting Checklist

1. Ensure that the offense results from a clear **violation** of Scripture and not a difference of opinion.
2. The offended party should **write down** the Scripture passage(s) that apply to the situation (this helps to prevent #1 from happening).
3. No hypocritical judging—dealing with one’s own **sin** enables a believer to effectively restore someone else.
4. Assess your hesitation—meaning the things that may dissuade you from going to an offending brother or sister. For example, some Christians feel that the possibility of a broken relationship make the effort not worth the risk.

C. One-on-One

Matt. 18:15 “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault ...,” **Luke 17:3** says, “If your brother sins, rebuke him.”

The sin may not have been personally directed against the individual doing the confronting.

In other words, someone’s sin does not have to be personally directed or inflicted upon us in order for us to get involved.

If we are offended by a brother or sister’s behavior, something that violates Scripture, we have the right to lovingly confront them.

1. **Establish a time and place to meet.**

Cheong recommends talking “soon after arranging the meeting. Long delays cause undue tension and anxiety. Avoid addressing the issue via phone or email. Eye contact and non-verbal communication are essential elements to gospel confrontation.”³

Carefully select meeting place.

² Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, 107.

³ Ibid.

2. **Persuasion**—Daniel Cawdrey points out that **Matt. 18:15** “**go and tell him his fault**” actually connotes persuasion. We should attempt to persuade our brother or sister of their fault and woo them to return.

Richard Baxter (17th century English pastor) “I have found by experience, that some ignorant persons, who have been so long unprofitable hearers, have got more knowledge and remorse in half an hour’s close discourse, than they did from ten year’s public preaching.”⁴

3. Moving to the next level—*Jesus designed the mechanism of church discipline to **increase in pressure**, or consequences, if a person does not repent.*

Thomas Bear, “But if he remains caught in a sinful behavior or attitude, with no sign of repentance, we must take further action.”⁵ ***To disregard doing so equals negligence.***

Jesus never gives time frames between the different levels of correction. The church can proceed at variable speeds depending upon the individual situation.

Leeman observes, “Sometimes the process ... should move quite slowly, as when an individual shows interest in fighting the sin. Sometimes the process ... needs to speed up, as in 1 Corinthians 5 where the man’s sin is flagrant and apparently unrepentant.”⁶

Every situation has its own **unique factors** and, thus, should receive individualized treatment.

Moreover, as Leeman points out, a Christian’s willingness to face the truth and make appropriate changes also determines the **speed** of the process.⁷

In such a case, the gears may move slower as the sinning believer works toward acknowledgment of his or her wrongdoing and toward repentance.

⁴ Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth, n.d.), 18.

⁵ Thomas Bear, *Church Discipline: Bring My Sheep Back*, 368, Kindle.

⁶ Leeman, *Church Membership*, 114.

⁷ Ibid.

APPENDIX L: SEMINAR LESSON 4 STEPS
TO CHURCH DISCIPLINE PT2

Seminar
R. David Long
4/12/14
Session Four

Session Four—The Steps of Discipline Part 2

I. Witnesses—without repentance the process must move forward.

Jesus says, “But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses” (Matt. 18:16).

Deuteronomic law—required multiple witnesses in order to convict (more than one person had to witness the sin for it to be accepted as proof).

Yet, in this context, scholars believe that Jesus intends for the witnesses to function as **more than mere first-hand reporters**. In Matt. 18 Jesus is not asking that there be multiple witnesses to the actual offense, for, if so, why would he ask for the privacy/confidentiality of a one-on-one meeting? **The witnesses are to testify to the reaction of the offending person to find out if the offense is legitimate.**

Mohler propounds, “Jesus seems to intend for the witnesses to be an important presence in the event of the confrontation, thus adding corroborating testimony concerning the confrontation of a sinning brother. The brother cannot claim that he was not confronted with his sin in a **brotherly/loving** context.”¹

In other words, **the witnesses observe both the spirit of the accuser and the quality of his or her confrontation, and the response of the offending Christian.** The information either confirms or rejects the original accusation of the offended person.

¹ John H. Armstrong, ed., *The Compromised Church: The Present Evangelical Crisis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 51.

A. Choice of witnesses

1. Should exhibit spiritual insight
2. **Credibility** among fellow members
3. Choose witnesses with the offender in mind (people they respect)

B. The witnesses should be selective about the information they accept.

1. Don't allow the offended party to fill your mind with **negative facts** about the incident. Get only the essential information necessary to operate as a witness.

C. Confidentiality—Matt. 18:15, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone.”

1. Biblical reconciliation seeks to resolve broken relationships at the **lowest** possible level with the least amount of **information** changing hands.²
2. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed—Yet, non-disclosure remains contingent upon the response of the offending brother or sister. ***The widening process of church discipline precludes absolute confidentiality.***

*Christians make a mistake when they **guarantee** an offending brother or sister absolute confidentiality; to do so goes beyond biblical teaching.³*

3. Even when other believers get involved, confidentiality still applies. The information simply stays within the expanded circle of accountability.

D. One Person Should Lead— If the offending brother refuses to repent after a one-on-one discussion, and if he or she agrees to another meeting involving witnesses, one of the witnesses must take the lead in the encounter.⁴

1. The lead witness should establish **time limits** for meetings.

Cheong recommends, “An hour and a half to two hours is a good time frame for the first meeting. Even if full resolution is not achieved during this time, you can make good headway into understanding the issues and the hearts of those involved ...”⁵

² Ibid., 32.

³ Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, 30.

⁴ Ibid., 62.

⁵ Cheong, *God Redeeming His Bride: A Handbook for Church Discipline*, 1875, Kindle.

Without time limits, meetings may last longer than necessary, potentially straining the broken relationship even more. If a resolution does not come during the first meeting, another can be scheduled for the near future.

2. **Although one witness takes the lead, both will work together to gather information and to make a decision in light of the gospel.** ⁶

II. When to Include Elders

Jesus' template for discipline in Matthew 18 nowhere indicates that the elders of the church must assume a primary role in the discipline process. This does not mean, however, that their presence and leading are unimportant. Pastors lay the groundwork for, and set the tone and tenor of healthy discipline in their congregations. Some believe that involving the pastor in certain situations adds influence and increases the effectiveness of the confrontation.

Cheong comments, "It is a sobering reality when one or more elders solemnly issue a strong admonishment and statement of intent to those who continue to resist and reject their Redeemer."⁷

Pastors are critical to church discipline as they prepare their people for such action and guide them when it is taken.

III. Tell It to the Church

When a wayward Christian ignores the loving correction of an offended brother or sister, and the witnesses that follow, the next level of discipline comes from the church body.

In **Matthew 18:17** Jesus instructs, "**If he refuses to listen to them [witnesses], tell it to the church.**" In other words, the seriousness of the confrontation increases resulting in more pressure and greater public visibility.

A. Differing interpretations of "tell it to the church."

1. **Before the church elders/deacons only** ("since they are God's appointed leaders of the church."⁸)
2. **Only the most relevant people involved in the case**

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 2088, Kindle.

⁸ Ibid., 2171, Kindle.

3. **The entire church body**—in view of what Jesus seeks to accomplish, this interpretation seems most likely.

Bear asserts, “Elders must resist the instinct to **‘protect the church’** from what they perceive as unnecessary grief. Jesus did not say ‘tell it to the leaders of the church.’ The church is supposed to speak to the brother caught in sin with one voice.”⁹

Bringing the unrepentant sinner before the entire membership body is intended to have an extreme effect. Sometimes it takes extreme measures to shake people from their apathy.

Moreover, **as Cheong points out**, “... in light of the fuller action taken by the church to not associate with those who refuse to submit to Christ and His people, it would not make sense for only a small group to be informed.”¹⁰

B. **Coordinate**

Before bringing the impenitent brother or sister before the church body, however, pastors need to coordinate with the **leadership team**, the offender’s family, and other pertinent persons involved in the discipline process.¹¹ If these people are not appropriately informed and supportive of the action, chaos may ensue and threaten the restorative process.

C. **Gathering the Saints**

The idea of bringing an unrepentant sinner before the church, in today’s culture, invokes the image of a Sunday morning crowd, complete with visitors and guest speakers, witnessing the discipline process. Yet, this image does not accurately construe what telling the church means.

Bradley states, “Under no circumstances should the process be conducted in a regular **worship service** for fear of strangers and unbelievers in attendance. The appropriate method is to call a special meeting of official church membership.”¹²

Baptist churches in the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, for example, “usually met monthly on a Saturday for business meetings, at which

⁹ Bear, *Church Discipline: Bring My Sheep Back*, 1480, Kindle.

¹⁰ Cheong, *God Redeeming His Bride: A Handbook for Church Discipline*, 2187, Kindle.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2207, Kindle.

¹² Bradley, *Church Discipline: A Neglected Necessity*, 75–76.

they would receive and dismiss members ...,” as well as deal with other church discipline issues.¹³

IV. Excommunication

- A. **The final step of corrective discipline**, if the unrepentant individual refuses all other forms of **confrontation**, involves putting him or her out of the church.

Jesus tells His disciples, “And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (Matt. 18:17).

In other words, treat him or her as an **outsider**, as someone who no longer belongs, and who spurns God’s Word. *Paul contextualizes Jesus’ words when instructing the Corinthians “not even to eat with such a one” (1 Cor. 5:11).*

Leeman emphasizes, “Formal discipline or excommunication is warranted when an individual seems to **happily abide** in known sin. There’s no evidence that the Spirit is making him or her uncomfortable ...”¹⁴

Excommunication not only breaks fellowship with the wayward Christian, but it assumes that the basis for that fellowship has been lost. As far as the church is concerned, the offending brother or sister has rejected the faith.

Ultimately, excommunication hopes to bring about transformation and restoration. It recognizes the perilous, eternal consequences of allowing a rebellious Christian to continue in deception, and seeks this last ditch effort to rescue the lost soul.

- B. **What Excommunication Looks Like**

Ivy points out that “The removal of the unrepentant brother does not mean we are **unloving** and unwilling to help this man with emergency or even neighborly needs. However, we do nothing which makes him feel he is in right standing with God or the local church.”¹⁵

The ostracism, therefore, should include relational distance as it pertains to friendship and spiritual camaraderie. The rebellious individual must feel the sting of the exclusion, understanding that normal, close relations cannot be reestablished until repentance takes place.

¹³ Jessica Lee Flinchum, “In Subjection: Church Discipline in the Early American South, 1760-1820” (PhD dissertation, University of Kentucky, 2007), 18.

¹⁴ Leeman, *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus*, 711, Kindle.

¹⁵ Ivy, *Restorative Church Discipline: Rescuing and Healing the Wounded*, 971, Kindle.

1. **Family Members**— As for the treatment of excommunicated family members, Christians in such situations have a fundamental obligation to meet the **primary needs** of their loved ones.

Joel Coker, in his article “Cast Out from Among the Saints: Church Discipline Among Anabaptists and English Separatists in Holland, 1590-1620,” quotes the Anabaptist 1580 confession as stating, *“the married do not separate themselves nor do they withdraw themselves from marital privileges ...”*¹⁶

Although family members do not pretend that the excommunicated relative still serves Christ, they, nonetheless, must not **neglect** the care that comes with their family position.

- C. **Members Who Refuse to Disassociate**—Once excommunication takes place, the body of Christ must **cooperate** to ensure that the process of restoration continues.

If some members enforce the discipline yet others do not, then its effectiveness diminishes.

Ivy makes a shocking statement about those who refuse to cooperate with the punishment of the excommunicated. He declares, “Anyone refusing to do this places themselves under the same penalty; loss of fellowship privileges.”¹⁷

In other words, Christians within the church who refuse to participate in the ostracism of excommunicated believers will themselves face disciplinary action. ***Obedience to Christ means supporting His judgments, and the judgments of Christ have been entrusted to the church.***

- D. **Unwelcomed Return**—Occasionally an unrepentant, excommunicated member will return unwelcomed to the church.

Ivy suggests, “Do not allow any church members to try and **physically** remove him from the facilities or you could face a law suit. The elders should declare that the meeting is closed, and then inform the man that he is **trespassing** in a private meeting”¹⁸

¹⁶ Joel L. Coker, “Cast Out from Among the Saints: Church Discipline Among Anabaptists and English Separatists in Holland, 1590-1620,” *Reformation II*, 2006, 11.

¹⁷ Ivy, *Restorative Church Discipline: Rescuing and Healing the Wounded*, 1222, Kindle.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2990, Kindle.

If this does not result in the person's departure, then warning them of **police** involvement should come next.¹⁹ Again, none of this stems from anger or unforgiveness, but from the desire to maintain order and discipline within the church.

V. Restoration

Restoration occurs when an offending brother or sister, wherever they may be in the discipline process, repents of his or her sin. Yet, depending on the nature of the sin, restoration may require a process whereby the offending person, through accountability, settles back into a faithful walk with Christ.

Cheong remarks, "In some situations, God can bring about immediate clarity and wisdom but in most cases those who turn back to Christ after a period of running from God will still be partially blinded by the disorienting haze of sin."²⁰

Although God's forgiveness comes immediately, the consequences of sin linger. The body of Christ must assist struggling Christians to regain their spiritual equilibrium and resettle into a life of discipleship.

A. The Gravity of the Sin Determines the Intensity of the Restoration Process

For example, if a brother immediately repents after another brother goes to him personally, the restoration process may end there. **But, if excommunication occurs**, a person may need a **period of counseling** and stringent accountability in order to return as a healthy member of the body.

Cheong comments, "There are few situations in pastoral ministry that require more intentional shepherding and wisdom than restoring a wayward brother or sister who has been removed from the church."²¹

B. Restoration requires a plan. It requires the leadership team to think through and establish a recovery process.

1. Different elements within a restoration plan may include required reading, Scriptural and other, counseling, seminars, small group involvement, etc.²²

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Cheong, *God Redeeming His Bride: A Handbook for Church Discipline*, 2751, Kindle.

²¹ Ibid., 2863, Kindle.

²² Shipley, "Increasing the Knowledge of Pastors and Church Leaders about Biblical Church Discipline," 118.

2. **Organize an accountability team**—this might entail two or three well-grounded Christians to work together to provide regular contact and friendship to those being restored.

C. **Forgiveness**

1. Two types of forgiveness
 - a. Personal—should happen immediately
 - b. Corporate—contingent upon a person's repentance

Concluding Remarks—

APPENDIX M: SEMINAR FILL-IN-THE-BLANK NOTES

Session One Notes

R. David Long

4/12/14

Seminar Title: Tough Love in a Wimpy World: Loving People Enough to Do the Hard Stuff

Session One—Introductory and Preparatory Elements of Church Discipline

I. Introduction—

To the church at Ephesus—“I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.”

To the church at Smyrna—“I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer...Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

God will not be pleased with those who shrink back.

Church discipline can prove challenging and will require strength and courage to carry it through.

II. Church Discipline—A Broader Understanding

Presently, when the average person hears the words “church discipline,” he or she equates them with _____, or being _____. This perception reflects the shallow and short-sighted view of discipline that American culture and the contemporary church, specifically, have come to espouse.

Yet, despite these misperceptions, church discipline remains a vital component to any healthy church, and, in fact, fits neatly within the broader category of “_____.”

A. Two Sides of Church Discipline—In a general sense, church discipline consists of every aspect of _____ that a church employs to help its members mature in Christ.

- **Formative**—preaching, teaching, Bible reading, accountability groups, prayer, etc.
- **Corrective**—takes place when a fellow member of the church must be confronted about a sinful action or attitude.

B. Discipline: A Key Component of Discipleship

Robert Cheong, in his book *God Redeeming His Bride*, states, “We have to see church discipline, not merely as a doctrine of the church to be understood and obeyed, but as an outflow of God’s story of redemption working in the lives of real people in a real world.”¹

Discipline is a part of our _____, a part of the molding of human character, a part of God’s creative, sanctifying work in us.

In the overarching story of redemption, God uses discipline to change His people for their own good and for the glory of His kingdom.

1. **Mutual Accountability**—Discipline concerns itself with _____ and one of the most effective tools for transformation in the church is mutual accountability.

In fact, mutual accountability embodies a key element in Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 18:15-17.

2. **A Disciplined Lifestyle**—Before anything else, discipleship involves godly introspection and _____ in response to the Holy Spirit.

All the various levers and levels of church discipline serve as an important function of church life, yet, the most basic component of such activity is _____.

Jay Adams, in his book *Handbook of Church Discipline*, states, “When we are baptized into the church, we thereby matriculate into Christ’s school. Then, for the rest of our earthly life, we are to be taught (not facts alone,

¹ Robert K. Cheong, *God Redeeming His Bride: A Handbook for Church Discipline* (Christian Focus Publications, 2013), 449, Kindle.

but also) to obey the commands of Christ. This is education with force, education backed by discipline and good order ...”²

In other words, the church is Christ’s school of learning/discipline for his followers. Without discipline (self-discipline/self-control) there can be no army of God.

- III. **The Present State of Discipline in the US**—The practice of church discipline in North American churches has continued _____ throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

*Jonathan Leeman believes that part of the problem revolves around the “church-growth thinking” of the last fifty or so years.*³

In other words, everything not immediately relevant to the salvation experience gets discarded.⁴ _____ becomes the main focus, and anything that might cause uncomfortable feelings, including godly discipline, is seen as a _____ to this growth.

Some believe that modern churches invest too much time in what they put into people without enough attention as to whether those people actually internalize the truth.”⁵

John Hammett, in his book *Those Who Must Give an Account: A Study of Church Membership and Church Discipline*, suggests, “The concept of dealing biblically with sin in the lives of its [church] members runs completely contrary to the American culture in which we live. Ours is a culture that delights in tolerance, acceptance, independence, freedom, individualism, and privacy.”⁶

Yet, this distinctive mix of American values has declared war on the biblical concept of church discipline, as well as _____ the traditional biblical meanings of words such as love, freedom and tolerance.

The average Christian today acquires his or her sense of appropriateness or fairness about behavioral discipline from the _____.

² Jay Edward Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, Jay Adams Library (Grand Rapids: Ministry Resources Library, 1986), 16.

³ Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010), 448, Kindle.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Jamieson, *Guarding One Another*, 174, Kindle.

⁶ John S. Hammett and Benjamin L. Merkle, *Those Who Must Give An Account: A Study of Church Membership and Church Discipline* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012), 3260, Kindle.

Therefore, since culture embraces almost every form of aberrant behavior without judgment, so follows the modern church.

A. Struggling to Grasp the Concept of Corrective Discipline— Due to the famine of _____ on the subject of church discipline in the American church, modern Christians have a difficult time accepting its practice.⁷ *In fact, ignorance on the subject runs so deep that, when encountered, many Christians respond to it as if experiencing some strange phenomena.*⁸

1. **False Sense of Autonomy**— The same freedom that has allowed Western culture to _____ from old class systems and thrive as an economic superpower has also infused the average American with a _____ of autonomy (self-rule).

Yet, freedom to govern oneself and to pursue happiness does not give Christians biblical grounds to selectively choose what parts of the Bible to obey.

Jonathan Leeman, in his book *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus*, observes, “... advertisers appeal explicitly to our narcissism: ‘Have it your way’ and ‘You’re in the driver’s seat.’ With all this in the air, it’s easy to want the benefits but not the responsibilities of belonging—to friendships, to marriages, to the workplace, and certainly to the church.”⁹

2. **Inaction**— The most obvious indication that this generation struggles with the idea of corrective church discipline is that few American churches appropriately use it, or use it at all.

Mohler laments, “The result of this is the loss of the biblical pattern for the church—and **the impending collapse of authentic Christianity in this generation.**”¹⁰

In its place one often finds a _____, sin-tolerant community where few boundaries exist. ***Rather than embarrassment or shame, these local churches feel as if they are on the evolutionary cutting-edge of Christianity.***

⁷ W. H. Burnette, *Church Discipline: Talking Points* (ESC Ministries, 2005), 6, Kindle.

⁸ John H. Armstrong, ed., *The Compromised Church: The Present Evangelical Crisis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 43.

⁹ Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus*, Building Healthy Churches (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 13–14, Kindle.

¹⁰ Armstrong, *The Compromised Church: The Present Evangelical Crisis*, 47.

- B. **A Narrow View of the Gospel**— A narrow view of the gospel also contributes to the weak state of church discipline in America. *For instance, many Christians gladly embrace the _____ of the new birth, yet reject the painful, life-surrendering _____, discipline and persecution that follow such dedication to Christ.*¹¹

Leeman comments, “[Jesus’] gospel and church simultaneously attract and repel. Within the space of a few verses, the Gospel of Matthew attests that the world will both persecute God’s sons for their righteousness as well as give God praise for the son’s righteous deeds (Matt. 5:10, 16).”¹²

Luke 14:26-27 **“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sister, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”**

Thus, a truer representation of the gospel includes the blessings and the _____ that comingle in a Christian’s life. He or she feels the joy, peace and presence of God like never before, yet also feels the sting of putting to death the flesh and living as a stranger in the world.

1. **Skewed Conception of Love**—Leeman asserts, “God’s love is often conceived these days as something universal, undiscriminating, and unconditional. **And behind this conception, often, is man-centeredness**. Yet in Scripture we actually find that God’s love is utterly God-centered, which means it’s more complicated than human conception would have it.”¹³

God’s love combines seemingly _____ elements. For instance, it mixes salvation and judgment, acceptance and the expectation of change, joy and godly sorrow, etc.¹⁴ ***In God’s economy, all these various facets of love, some thrilling and others painful, make up the whole of the discipleship process.***

- C. **Free-Style Church Discipline**—this is what we end up doing when we try to _____ church discipline to make it more palatable (easier). ***We excuse some things, alter the process so as not to make waves or stir things up.*** Ultimately, however, we do the individual and the church a disservice by reinforcing

¹¹ Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love*, 1587, Kindle.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 1600, Kindle.

¹⁴ Ibid.

negative behavior and stating, by our actions, that we don't trust God enough to do things his way.

Session Two Notes
R. David Long
4/12/14

Seminar Title: Tough Love in a Wimpy World: Loving People Enough to Do the Hard Stuff

Common Misconceptions about Church Discipline

- I. **Misconception One—Church discipline is the pastor’s responsibility.**
 - A. Many church members believe _____, or other leaders, should do the confronting. In fact, most fear any type of _____ within the body of Christ, choosing to whisper their concerns in dark corners rather than confronting evil directly.
 - B. **Jesus addresses this issue in Matt. 18:15** “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone.” In other words, the person who recognizes the problem, whether the sin is personally against him or her or just sin in general, must go and _____ of restoration. This keeps the matter at the lowest level possible. ***Notice, there is nothing said here about telling the church leaders.***

The next step involves one or two additional _____. “But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses” (v. 16). Again, no leaders have to be involved. The offended person may, at any time, confer or counsel with the pastor or pastors, yet it is not necessary until step two fails. **Everything continues to be led by the _____.** **Even though the pastor should be involved in step three (“telling it to the church”), laity continue to serve a vital role even in this step.**
- II. **Misconception Two —Maintaining a close, personal relationship is more important than confronting my brother or sister, which may, in turn, damage the friendship.**
 - A. **Behind this misconception, or fear, is again, a _____ understanding of love.** When we refuse to act for fear of losing a relationship, we are basically saying, by our actions, that our _____ here and now is more important than our brother or sister’s eternal well-being.
 - B. **Behind this misconception is also a _____ in God.**

- C. **The willingness to confront a fellow believer entangled in sin represents the _____ of love.** It unselfishly risks personal rejection and loss of relationship in hopes of turning an erring believer back to God.¹⁵

Both Jesus and Paul effectively modeled this mindset. Each of them delivered scathing rebukes in order to provoke _____ in their listeners. They possessed a _____ view of relationships rather than a _____, selfish view, and they sought to bring about positive change through momentary discomfort.

III. **Misconception Three—“Judge not...” does not mean “Live and let live”**

- A. Jesus teaches in **Matt. 7**, **“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measure to you.”**

Unfortunately, Christians and non-Christians alike have taken this passage to mean that we have _____ to judge each other—ever!

Jesus teaches against _____ judging, not judging altogether. ***He instructs his followers on how to judge equitably, by first scrutinizing their own lives.***

By metaphorically removing the log from their own eyes, the disciples will judge with greater compassion,¹⁶ understanding that they too struggle with sin.

Ironically, in **Matthew 7:15**, Jesus tells his disciples to judge. He teaches, **“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits.”** Observing the fruit of a person’s life is a form of _____. It requires careful _____, making a decision as to the rightness or wrongness of a person’s actions, and then acting upon that information.

IV. **Misconception Four—The Shrinking Church Syndrome (Fear of Losing People)**

- A. **This attitude or misconception believes that if biblical church discipline is practiced, then people in the church _____, or be forced to leave.**

¹⁵ Gordon J. Wenham et al., eds., *The New Bible Commentary*, 4th ed (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), Logos Bible Software.

¹⁶ Wayne Grudem, ed., *ESV Study Bible : English Standard Version.*, ESV text ed. (Wheaton IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), Logos Bible Software.

- B. **Terry Ivy**, in his book *Restorative Church Discipline: Rescuing and Healing the Wounded*, observes, “**This barrier finds its strength in the worldly definition of success. The world perceives success as the increase of numbers and finances. However, the Lord’s view of success is obedience to the Word.”¹⁷**
- C. **Sometimes our churches do _____ when we practice discipline, yet they are much more likely to thrive and be a place of true health if we follow the Bible’s prescription.**
- D. **David Purkey**, in his book *Church Discipline* tells this story of his own experience with a pastor who would not bring formative discipline to his body...

Nearly forty years ago, I worked under the tutelage of a pastor who stated to me that he would not teach any bible doctrine that would offend any of the members of his congregation. He told me it was more important to keep God’s church together than to teach any doctrine that would divide them. He also suggested when I matured I would understand. Well, it’s nearly forty years later, **and what I do understand is that he will give account to God Almighty for his refusal to put the absolute faithful and unbending exposition of Scripture first in his ministry. I would not want to be in his shoes when he stands before Jesus and gives account of himself. Thank God, I knew enough, as a three year old in Christ, to get out of that church. **God’s Elder must never compromise an iota of truth for a ton of unity.**¹⁸**

V. **Misconception Five—Asking Rebellious Members to Leave the Church May Hurt the Chances of Helping Them (Hospital Mentality)**

- A. Keeping someone in the church while their involved in unrepentant sin is _____ to a person, not to mention the rest of the body. It also causes the unrepentant brother or sister _____ into their bad behavior while having a false sense of acceptance and security. When they die they’ll face judgment as _____ and likely not go to heaven.

¹⁷ Terry Ivy, *Restorative Church Discipline: Rescuing and Healing the Wounded* (2T2 Publishing, 2013), 2220, Kindle.

¹⁸ David Purkey, *Church Discipline* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), 1436, Kindle.

Putting someone out of the church feels _____ at the
moment, but sends a clear message that ultimately has
_____ and power to change a wayward person.

Session Three Notes

R. David Long

4/12/14

Seminar Title: Tough Love in a Wimpy World: Loving People Enough to Do the Hard Stuff

Session Three—The Steps of Discipline Part 1

I. Important Considerations about Church Discipline

- A. _____ in Nature (versus condemning or angry)
- B. Assumes the Best of People—1 Cor. 13:7 “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”
 - 1. **Thomas Bear**, “If we are to engage in the process of restoration, we are to assume the best about the brother we seek to restore. As an observer or outsider, we frankly do not know everything that is going on in the brother’s heart. He may be blind to his own sin.”¹
- C. Sometimes members walk in unrepentant sin for extended periods of time without the church knowing it. In such cases, fellow members and church leaders bear no responsibility until the sin comes to light.
 - 1. Congregants should not _____, without cause, into the lives of other members, searching for sin.

II. Steps of Discipline

- A. _____—One of the more discreet, less talked about aspects of church discipline is self-discipline.
 - 1. Adams asserts, “Self-discipline is the beginning and end of church discipline because it is the most basic element in all discipline.”²
 - 2. **Gal. 5:23** The fruit of the Spirit includes “self-control.”
- B. Pre-Confronting Checklist

¹ Thomas Bear, *Church Discipline: Bring My Sheep Back*, 930, Kindle.

² Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, 107.

1. Ensure that the offense results from a clear _____ of Scripture and not a difference of opinion.
2. The offended party should _____ the Scripture passage(s) that apply to the situation (this helps to prevent #1 from happening).
3. No hypocritical judging—dealing with one’s own _____ enables a believer to effectively restore someone else.
4. Assess your hesitation—meaning the things that may dissuade you from going to an offending brother or sister. For example, some Christians feel that the possibility of a broken relationship make the effort not worth the risk.

C. One-on-One

Matt. 18:15 “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault ...,” Luke 17:3 says, “If your brother sins, rebuke him.”

The sin may not have been _____ directed against the individual doing the confronting.

In other words, someone’s sin does not have to be personally directed or inflicted upon us in order for us to get involved.

If we are offended by a brother or sister’s behavior, something that violates Scripture, we have the right to lovingly confront them.

1. **Establish a time and place to meet.**

Cheong recommends talking “soon after arranging the meeting. Long delays cause undue tension and anxiety. Avoid addressing the issue via phone or email. Eye contact and non-verbal communication are essential elements to gospel confrontation.”³

Carefully select _____.

2. **Persuasion**—Daniel Cawdrey points out that **Matt. 18:15 “go and tell him his fault”** actually connotes persuasion. We should attempt to persuade our brother or sister of their fault and woo them to return.

Richard Baxter (17th century English pastor) “I have found by experience, that some ignorant persons, who have been so long unprofitable hearers,

³ Ibid.

have got more knowledge and remorse in half an hour's close discourse, than they did from ten year's public preaching."⁴

3. Moving to the next level—*Jesus designed the mechanism of church discipline to _____, or consequences, if a person does not repent.*

Thomas Bear, "But if he remains caught in a sinful behavior or attitude, with no sign of repentance, we must take further action."⁵ **To disregard doing so equals _____.**

Jesus never gives time frames between the different levels of correction.

The church can proceed at variable speeds depending upon the individual situation.

Leeman observes, "Sometimes the process ... should move quite slowly, as when an individual shows interest in fighting the sin. Sometimes the process ... needs to speed up, as in 1 Corinthians 5 where the man's sin is flagrant and apparently unrepentant."⁶

Every situation has its own _____ and, thus, should receive individualized treatment.

Moreover, as Leeman points out, a Christian's willingness to face the truth and make appropriate changes also determines the _____ of the process.⁷

In such a case, the gears may move slower as the sinning believer works toward acknowledgment of his or her wrongdoing and toward repentance.

⁴ Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth, n.d.), 18.

⁵ Thomas Bear, *Church Discipline: Bring My Sheep Back*, 368, Kindle.

⁶ Leeman, *Church Membership*, 114.

⁷ Ibid.

Session Four Notes
R. David Long
4/12/14

Title: Tough Love in a Wimpy World: Loving People Enough to Do the Hard Stuff

Session Four—The Steps of Discipline Part 2

I. **Witnesses—without repentance the process must move forward.**

Jesus says, “But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses” (Matt. 18:16).

Deuteronomic law—required multiple witnesses in order to convict (more than one person had to witness the sin for it to be accepted as proof).

Yet, in this context, scholars believe that Jesus intends for the witnesses to function as *more than mere* _____ *reporters*. In **Matt. 18** Jesus is not asking that there be multiple witnesses to the actual offense, for, if so, why would he ask for the privacy/confidentiality of a one-on-one meeting? *The witnesses are to testify to the reaction of the offending person to find out if the offense is legitimate.*

Mohler propounds, “Jesus seems to intend for the witnesses to be an important presence in the event of the confrontation, thus adding corroborating testimony concerning the confrontation of a sinning brother. The brother cannot claim that he was not confronted with his sin in a _____ context.”⁸

In other words, *the witnesses observe both the _____ of the accuser and the quality of his or her confrontation, and the _____ of the offending Christian.* The information either confirms or rejects the original accusation of the offended person.

A. **Choice of witnesses**

1. Should exhibit spiritual insight
2. _____ among fellow members
3. Choose witnesses with the offender in mind (people they respect)

B. **The witnesses should be selective about the information they accept.**

Don’t allow the offended party to fill your mind with _____ about the incident. Get only the essential information necessary to operate as a witness.

⁸ Ibid.

C. **Confidentiality**—Matt. 18:15, **“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone.”**

1. Biblical reconciliation seeks to resolve broken relationships at the _____ possible level with the least amount of _____ changing hands.⁹
2. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed—Yet, non-disclosure remains contingent upon the response of the offending brother or sister. ***The widening process of church discipline precludes absolute confidentiality.***

*Christians make a mistake when they _____ an offending brother or sister absolute confidentiality; to do so goes beyond biblical teaching.*¹⁰

3. Even when other believers get involved, confidentiality still applies. The information simply stays within the expanded circle of accountability.

D. **One Person Should Lead**— If the offending brother refuses to repent after a one-on-one discussion, and if he or she agrees to another meeting involving witnesses, one of the witnesses must take the lead in the encounter.¹¹

1. The lead witness should establish _____ for meetings.

Cheong recommends, “An hour and a half to two hours is a good time frame for the first meeting. Even if full resolution is not achieved during this time, you can make good headway into understanding the issues and the hearts of those involved ...”¹²

Without time limits, meetings may last longer than necessary, potentially _____ the broken relationship even more. If a resolution does not come during the first meeting, another can be scheduled for the near future.

2. **Although one witness takes the lead, both will work together to gather information and to make a decision in light of the gospel.**¹³

⁹ Ibid., 32.

¹⁰ Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, 30.

¹¹ Ibid., 62.

¹² Cheong, *God Redeeming His Bride: A Handbook for Church Discipline*, 1875, Kindle.

¹³ Ibid.

II. When to Include Elders

Jesus' template for discipline in Matthew 18 nowhere indicates that the elders of the church must assume a _____ role in the discipline process. This does not mean, however, that their presence and leading are unimportant. Pastors lay the groundwork for, and set the tone and tenor of healthy discipline in their congregations. Some believe that involving the pastor in certain situations adds influence and increases the effectiveness of the confrontation.

Cheong comments, "It is a sobering reality when one or more elders solemnly issue a strong admonishment and statement of intent to those who continue to resist and reject their Redeemer."¹⁴

Pastors are critical to church discipline as they _____ their people for such action and guide them when it is taken.

III. Tell It to the Church

When a wayward Christian ignores the _____ of an offended brother or sister, and the witnesses that follow, the next level of discipline comes from the church body.

In **Matthew 18:17 Jesus instructs,** "If he refuses to listen to them [witnesses], tell it to the church." In other words, the seriousness of the confrontation increases resulting in more pressure and greater public visibility.

A. Differing interpretations of "tell it to the church."

1. **Before the church elders/deacons only** ("since they are God's appointed leaders of the church."¹⁵)
2. **Only the most relevant people involved in the case**
3. **The entire church body**—in view of what Jesus seeks to accomplish, this interpretation seems most likely.

Bear asserts, "Elders must resist the instinct to _____ from what they perceive as unnecessary grief. Jesus did not say 'tell it to the leaders of the church.' The church is supposed to speak to the brother caught in sin with one voice."¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid., 2088, Kindle.

¹⁵ Ibid., 2171, Kindle.

¹⁶ Bear, *Church Discipline: Bring My Sheep Back*, 1480, Kindle.

Bringing the unrepentant sinner before the entire membership body is intended to have an extreme effect. Sometimes it takes _____ to shake people from their apathy.

Moreover, **as Cheong points out**, "... in light of the fuller action taken by the church to not associate with those who refuse to submit to Christ and His people, it would not make sense for only a small group to be informed."¹⁷

B. Coordinate

Before bringing the impenitent brother or sister before the church body, however, pastors need to coordinate with the _____, the offender's family, and other pertinent persons involved in the discipline process.¹⁸ If these people are not appropriately informed and supportive of the action, chaos may ensue and threaten the restorative process.

C. Gathering the Saints

The idea of bringing an unrepentant sinner before the church, in today's culture, invokes the image of a Sunday morning crowd, complete with visitors and guest speakers, witnessing the discipline process. Yet, this image does not accurately construe what telling the church means.

Bradley states, "Under no circumstances should the process be conducted in a regular _____ for fear of strangers and unbelievers in attendance. The appropriate method is to call a special meeting of official church membership."¹⁹

Baptist churches in the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, for example, "usually met monthly on a Saturday for business meetings, at which they would receive and dismiss members ...," as well as deal with other church discipline issues.²⁰

IV. Excommunication

A. The final step of corrective discipline, if the unrepentant individual refuses all other forms of _____, involves putting him or her out of the church.

¹⁷ Cheong, *God Redeeming His Bride: A Handbook for Church Discipline*, 2187, Kindle.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2207, Kindle.

¹⁹ Bradly, *Church Discipline: A Neglected Necessity*, 75–76.

²⁰ Jessica Lee Flinchum, "In Subjection: Church Discipline in the Early American South, 1760-1820," (PhD dissertation, University of Kentucky, 2007), 18.

Jesus tells His disciples, “And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (Matt. 18:17).

In other words, treat him or her as an _____, as someone who no longer belongs, and who spurns God’s Word. ***Paul contextualizes Jesus’ words when instructing the Corinthians “not even to eat with such a one” (1 Cor. 5:11).***

Leeman emphasizes, “Formal discipline or excommunication is warranted when an individual seems to _____ in known sin. There’s no evidence that the Spirit is making him or her uncomfortable ...”²¹

Excommunication not only breaks fellowship with the wayward Christian, but it assumes that the basis for that fellowship has been lost. As far as the church is concerned, the offending brother or sister has
_____.

Ultimately, excommunication hopes to bring about transformation and
_____. It recognizes the perilous, eternal consequences of allowing a rebellious Christian to continue in deception, and seeks this last ditch effort to rescue the lost soul.

B. What Excommunication Looks Like

Ivy points out, “The removal of the unrepentant brother does not mean we are _____ and unwilling to help this man with emergency or even neighborly needs. However, we do nothing which makes him feel he is in right standing with God or the local church.”²²

The ostracism, therefore, should include _____ as it pertains to friendship and spiritual camaraderie. The rebellious individual must feel the sting of the exclusion, understanding that normal, close relations cannot be reestablished until repentance takes place.

1. **Family Members**— As for the treatment of excommunicated family members, Christians in such situations have a fundamental obligation to meet the _____ of their loved ones.

Joel Coker, in his article “Cast Out from Among the Saints: Church Discipline Among Anabaptists and English Separatists in Holland, 1590-1620,” quotes

²¹ Leeman, *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus*, 711, Kindle.

²² Ivy, *Restorative Church Discipline: Rescuing and Healing the Wounded*, 971, Kindle.

the Anabaptist 1580 confession as stating, *“the married do not separate themselves nor do they withdraw themselves from marital privileges ...”*²³

Although family members do not pretend that the excommunicated relative still serves Christ, they, nonetheless, must not _____ the care that comes with their family position.

- C. **Members Who Refuse to Disassociate**—Once excommunication takes place, the body of Christ must _____ to ensure that the process of restoration continues.

If some members enforce the discipline yet others do not, then its effectiveness diminishes.

Ivy makes a shocking statement about those who refuse to cooperate with the punishment of the excommunicated. He declares, “Anyone refusing to do this places themselves under the same penalty; loss of fellowship privileges.”²⁴

In other words, Christians within the church who refuse to participate in the ostracism of excommunicated believers will themselves face disciplinary action. ***Obedience to Christ means _____ His judgments, and the judgments of Christ have been entrusted to the church.***

- D. **Unwelcomed Return**—Occasionally an unrepentant, excommunicated member will return unwelcomed to the church.

Ivy suggests, “Do not allow any church members to try and _____ remove him from the facilities or you could face a law suit. The elders should declare that the meeting is closed, and then inform the man that he is _____ in a private meeting”²⁵

If this does not result in the person’s departure, then warning them of _____ involvement should come next.²⁶ Again, none of this stems from anger or unforgiveness, but from the desire to maintain order and discipline within the church.

V. Restoration

²³ Joel L. Coker, “Cast Out from Among the Saints: Church Discipline Among Anabaptists and English Separatists in Holland, 1590-1620,” *Reformation II* (2006), 11.

²⁴ Ivy, *Restorative Church Discipline: Rescuing and Healing the Wounded*, 1222, Kindle.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 2990, Kindle.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Restoration occurs when an offending brother or sister, wherever they may be in the discipline process, repents of his or her sin. Yet, depending on the nature of the sin, restoration may require a process whereby the offending person, through accountability, settles back into a faithful walk with Christ.

Cheong remarks, “In some situations, God can bring about immediate clarity and wisdom but in most cases those who turn back to Christ after a period of running from God will still be partially blinded by the disorienting haze of sin.”²⁷

Although God’s forgiveness comes immediately, the _____ of sin linger. The body of Christ must assist struggling Christians to regain their spiritual equilibrium and resettle into a life of discipleship.

A. **The Gravity of the Sin Determines the Intensity of the Restoration Process**

For example, if a brother immediately repents after another brother goes to him personally, the restoration process may end there. **But, if excommunication occurs**, a person may need a _____ and stringent accountability in order to return as a healthy member of the body.

Cheong comments, “There are few situations in pastoral ministry that require more intentional shepherding and wisdom than restoring a wayward brother or sister who has been removed from the church.”²⁸

- B. **Restoration requires a plan.** It requires the leadership team to think through and establish a recovery process.
1. Different elements within a restoration plan may include required reading, Scriptural and other, counseling, seminars, small group involvement, etc.²⁹
 2. **Organize an accountability team**—this might entail two or three well-grounded Christians to work together to provide regular contact and friendship to those being restored.
- C. **Forgiveness**
1. Two types of forgiveness
 - a. Personal—should happen immediately
 - b. Corporate—contingent upon a person’s repentance

Concluding Remarks

²⁷ Cheong, *God Redeeming His Bride: A Handbook for Church Discipline*, 2751, Kindle.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2863, Kindle.

²⁹ Shipley, “Increasing the Knowledge of Pastors and Church Leaders about Biblical Church Discipline,” 118.

APPENDIX N: MASTER LECTURE NOTES

Seminar

4/12/14

Session One

Seminar Title: Tough Love in a Wimpy World: Loving People Enough to Do the Hard Stuff

Session One—Introductory and Preparatory Elements of Church Discipline

- I. **Introduction**—One of the reasons I chose this topic for my final project was because I noticed how scattered and weak the American church seemed to be in this area. *We're scared of our own shadow and don't want to stir up trouble.* It also appeared to me that our people had notions about discipline but they weren't coming from Scripture, they were coming from popular culture with ideas such as **"judge not, that you be not judged."** Yet, even ministers from the same denomination don't always agree on this subject. And we all know that nobody is responsible for anything anymore...

From *life-time chain smokers suing cigarette companies because they get lung cancer*, to *murderers claiming insanity in order to dodge complete responsibility for their crimes*, to *genetics*, it's clear that we live in an age that strongly resists accountability. **Increasingly, there seems to be few things that our culture considers "off-limits," that is, unless you're talking about judging someone else.** We live in a culture where words like **"hater"** or **"intolerant"** or **"homophobe"** are thrown around loosely, mostly referring to people who have absolute standards for their lives. *This is the world we live in, that our people live in. Its messages bombard us at every turn, not only questioning our faith, but defiantly promoting values that spit in the face of God.*

And then we attempt to bring order to our congregations through church discipline. What happens next can be anybody's guess. I remember one of my first times I was involved in a church discipline situation. **I naively thought that if I did everything by the Book that all would turn out fine.** That's when it happened...I realized that people really struggle with the concept of church discipline, and even when it's done right, done carefully, sometimes people still leave and don't come back and other members get mad about the process.

There's no question, church discipline can be a messy business. For that reason, and others, many of our churches don't practice it faithfully, or at all.

But when I read passages of Scripture like **Revelation 2 and 3**, where the risen Christ speaks to each of the seven churches, I reminded of the importance of doing things God’s way, even the hard things like church discipline.

To the church at Ephesus—“I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.”

To the church at Smyrna—“I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

God will not be pleased with those who shrink back.

In this first session I want to provide some framework/foundational ideas about church discipline as well as make us aware of some of the hindrances to it in the American church.

II. Church Discipline—A Broader Understanding

In order to comprehensively lay out the steps and details concerning the application of church discipline, however, a broader understanding of the concept of church discipline must come to light. **Presently, when the average person hears the words “church discipline,” he or she equates them with punishment, or being judgmental.** This perception reflects the shallow and short-sighted view of discipline that American culture and the contemporary church, specifically, have come to espouse.

Yet, despite these misperceptions, church discipline remains a vital component to any healthy church, and, in fact, *fits neatly within the broader category of “discipleship.”*

- A. Two Sides of Church Discipline—In a general sense, church discipline consists of every aspect of ministry that a church employs to help its members mature in Christ.
 - **Formative**—preaching, teaching, Bible reading, accountability groups, prayer, etc.
 - **Corrective**—takes place when a fellow member of the church must be confronted about a sinful action or attitude.

B. Discipline: A Key Component of Discipleship

Church discipline is a crucial part of discipleship!

Robert Cheong, in his book *God Redeeming His Bride*, states, “We have to see church discipline, not merely as a doctrine of the church to be understood and obeyed, but as an outflow of God’s story of redemption working in the lives of real people in a real world.”¹

Discipline is a part of our story, a part of the molding of human character, a part of God’s creative, sanctifying work in us.

In the overarching story of redemption, God uses discipline to change His people for their own good and for the glory of His Kingdom.

1. **Mutual Accountability**—Discipline concerns itself with transformation, and one of the most effective tools for transformation in the church is mutual accountability.

In fact, mutual accountability embodies a key element in Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 18:15-17.

2. **A Disciplined Lifestyle**—Before anything else, discipleship involves godly introspection and *self-correction* in response to the Holy Spirit.

All the various levers and levels of church discipline serve as an important function of church life, yet, the most basic component of such activity is self-discipline.

Jay Adams, in his book *Handbook of Church Discipline*, states, “When we are baptized into the church, we thereby matriculate into Christ’s school. Then, for the rest of our earthly life, we are to be taught (not facts alone, but also) to obey the commands of Christ. This is education with force, education backed by discipline and good order.”²

In other words, the church is Christ’s school of learning/discipline for his followers. Without discipline (self-discipline/self-control) there can be no army of God.

¹ Robert K. Cheong, *God Redeeming His Bride: A Handbook for Church Discipline* (Christian Focus Publications, 2013), 449, Kindle.

² Jay Edward Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, Jay Adams Library (Grand Rapids: Ministry Resources Library, 1986), 16.

- III. **The Present State of Discipline in the US**—The practice of church discipline in North American churches has continued to decline throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

*Jonathan Leeman believes that part of the problem revolves around the “church-growth thinking” of the last fifty or so years.*³

In other words, everything not immediately relevant to the salvation experience gets discarded.⁴ Numerical growth becomes the main focus, and anything that might cause uncomfortable feelings, including godly discipline, is seen as a hindrance to this growth.

Some believe that modern churches invest too much time in what they put into people without enough attention as to whether those people actually internalize the truth.”⁵

John Hammett, in his book *Those Who Must Give an Account: A Study of Church Membership and Church Discipline*, suggests, “The concept of dealing biblically with sin in the lives of its [church] members runs completely contrary to the American culture in which we live. Ours is a culture that delights in tolerance, acceptance, independence, freedom, individualism, and privacy.”⁶

Yet, this distinctive mix of American values has declared war on the biblical concept of church discipline, as well as **redefined** the traditional biblical meanings of words such as love, freedom and tolerance (**love=acceptance without boundaries and never judging; tolerance=to accept someone without question, unplugging any sense of moral right and wrong**).

The average Christian today acquires his or her sense of appropriateness or fairness about behavioral discipline from the *mainstream culture*. Therefore, since culture embraces almost every form of aberrant behavior without judgment, so follows the modern church.

- A. Struggling to Grasp the Concept of Corrective Discipline— Due to the famine of teaching on the subject of church discipline in the American church, modern Christians have a difficult time accepting its practice.⁷ ***In fact, ignorance on the***

³ Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010), 448, Kindle.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Jamieson, *Guarding One Another*, 174, Kindle.

⁶ John S. Hammett and Benjamin L. Merkle, *Those Who Must Give An Account: A Study of Church Membership and Church Discipline* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012), 3260, Kindle.

⁷ W. H. Burnette, *Church Discipline: Talking Points* (ESC Ministries, 2005), 6, Kindle.

*subject runs so deep that, when encountered, many Christians respond to it as if experiencing some strange phenomena.*⁸

1. **False Sense of Autonomy**— The same freedom that has allowed Western culture to **break away** from old class systems and thrive as an economic superpower has also infused the average American with a **false sense** of autonomy. Yet, freedom to govern oneself and to pursue happiness does not give Christians biblical grounds to selectively choose what parts of the Bible to obey.

Jonathan Leeman, in his book *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus*, observes, “... advertisers appeal explicitly to our narcissism: ‘Have it your way’ and ‘You’re in the driver’s seat.’ With all this in the air, it’s easy to want the benefits but not the responsibilities of belonging—to friendships, to marriages, to the workplace, and certainly to the church.”⁹

2. **Inaction**— The most obvious indication that this generation struggles with the idea of corrective church discipline is that few American churches appropriately use it, or use it at all.

Mohler laments, “The result of this is the loss of the biblical pattern for the church—and **the impending collapse of authentic Christianity in this generation.**”¹⁰

In its place one often finds a **powerless**, sin-tolerant community where few boundaries exist. ***Rather than embarrassment or shame, these local churches feel as if they are on the evolutionary cutting-edge of Christianity.***

- B. **A Narrow View of the Gospel**— A narrow view of the gospel also contributes to the weak state of church discipline in America. *For instance, many Christians gladly embrace the **blessings** of the new birth, yet reject the painful, life-surrendering **submission**, discipline and persecution that follow such dedication to Christ.*¹¹

⁸ John H. Armstrong, ed., *The Compromised Church: The Present Evangelical Crisis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 43.

⁹ Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 13–14, Kindle.

¹⁰ Armstrong, *The Compromised Church: The Present Evangelical Crisis*, 47.

¹¹ Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love*, 1587, Kindle.

Leeman comments, “[Jesus’] gospel and church simultaneously attract and repel. Within the space of a few verses, the Gospel of Matthew attests that the world will both persecute God’s sons for their righteousness as well as give God praise for the son’s righteous deeds (Matt. 5:10, 16).”¹²

Luke 14:26-27 “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sister, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”

Does that sound like it’s always going to be happy and fun? Discipline is a part of transformation.

Thus, a truer representation of the gospel includes the blessings and the **pain** that come in a Christian’s life. He or she feels the joy, peace and presence of God like never before, yet also feels the sting of putting to death the flesh and living as a stranger in the world.

1. **Skewed Conception of Love**—Leeman asserts, “God’s love is often conceived these days as something universal, undiscriminating, and unconditional. **And behind this conception, often, is man-centeredness**. Yet in Scripture we actually find that God’s love is utterly God-centered, which means it’s more complicated than human conception would have it.”¹³

God’s love combines seemingly **contrary elements**. For instance, it mixes salvation and judgment, acceptance and the expectation of change, joy and godly sorrow, etc.¹⁴ ***In God’s economy, all these various facets of love, some thrilling and others painful, make up the whole of the discipleship process.***

- C. **Free-Style Church Discipline**—this is what we end up doing when we try to **alter** church discipline to make it more palatable (easier). ***We excuse some things, alter the process so as not to make waves or stir things up.*** Ultimately, however, we do the individual and the church a disservice by reinforcing negative behavior and stating, by our actions, that we don’t trust God enough to do things his way.

Seminar

R. David Long
4/12/14

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 1600, Kindle.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Session 2

Title of Series: *Tough Love in a Wimpy World: Loving People Enough to Do the Hard Stuff*

Common Misconceptions about Church Discipline

Intro—Have you ever thought you had a person figured out, but once you got to know them you discovered you were all wrong? Our church conducts interviews for our Day Care, and sometimes I'm a part of that interview process. At first, I thought I could tell which applicants would be good employees and which ones bad, but I soon realized that my hunches were many times wrong.

There's a lot of Christians that think they know all about church discipline, but most know very little about why it's done and how it's done. In fact, much of what we claim to know is misinformation that we get from the world.

This morning I want to talk about some of **the most common misconceptions** about church discipline. You may find that you've heard one or more of these before, or even that you've believed one.

I. Misconception One—Church discipline is the pastor's responsibility.

- A. Many church members believe ***pastors***, or other leaders, should do the confronting. In fact, most fear any type of ***conflict*** within the body of Christ, choosing to whisper their concerns in dark corners rather than confronting evil directly.
- B. **Jesus addresses this issue in Matt. 18:15** "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone." In other words, the person who recognizes the problem, whether the sin is personally against him or her or just sin in general, must go and ***initiate the process*** of restoration. This keeps the matter at the lowest level possible. ***Notice, there is nothing said here about telling the church leaders.***

The next step involves one or two additional witnesses. “But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses” (v. 16). Again, no leaders have to be involved. The offended person may, at any time, confer or counsel with the pastor or pastors, yet it is not necessary until step two fails. **Everything continues to be led by the offended person.**

Even though the pastor should be involved in step three (“telling it to the church”), laity continue to serve a vital role even in this step.

- II. **Misconception Two — Maintaining a close, personal relationship is more important than confronting my brother or sister, which may, in turn, damage the friendship.**

Short-term vs. long-term view of relationships.

- A. **Behind this misconception, or fear, is again, a selfish understanding of love.** When we refuse to act for fear of losing a relationship, we are basically saying, by our actions, that our happiness (friendship status quo) here and now is more important than our brother or sister’s eternal well-being. *It would be like, as a doctor, knowing someone had cancer but not wanting to tell them because it would upset them. Doctors must be committed to the truth, and so should Christians be.*
- B. **Behind this misconception is also a lack of trust in God. We think we know how to do things better, so we jettison God’s instructions and choose to free-style discipline.**
- C. **The willingness to confront a fellow believer entangled in sin represents the highest form of love.** It unselfishly risks personal rejection and loss of relationship in hopes of turning an erring believer back to God.¹⁵

Both Jesus and Paul effectively modeled this mindset. Each of them delivered scathing rebukes in order to provoke deep spiritual reflection in their listeners. They possessed a long-term view of relationships rather than a short-term, selfish view, and they sought to bring about positive change through momentary discomfort.

¹⁵ Gordon J. Wenham et al., eds., *The New Bible Commentary*, 4th ed (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), Logos Bible Software.

III. Misconception Three—“Judge not...” means never judging anyone.

- A. Jesus teaches in **Matthew 7**, “**Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measure to you.**”

Unfortunately, Christians and non-Christians alike have taken this passage to mean that we have no right to judge each other—ever! Truly, if you stop reading there, that might be true. But one has to continue to read to get the full context of what Jesus means.

Read Matthew 7:3-6 “Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?...You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.”

Jesus teaches against hypocritical judging, not judging altogether. *He instructs his followers on how to judge equitably, by first scrutinizing their own lives.*

By metaphorically removing the log from their own eyes, the disciples will judge with greater compassion,¹⁶ understanding that they too struggle with sin.

Ironically, in **Matthew 7:15**, Jesus tells his disciples to judge. He teaches, “**Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits.**” Observing the fruit of a person’s life is a form of judgment. It requires careful observation, making a decision as to the rightness or wrongness of a person’s actions, and then acting upon that information.

IV. Misconception Four—If we discipline our people the church will shrink (The Shrinking Church Syndrome) (Fear of Losing People)

- A. **This attitude or misconception believes that if it practices biblical church discipline then people in the church will leave, or be forced to leave.**
- B. **Terry Ivy**, in his book *Restorative Church Discipline: Rescuing and Healing the Wounded*, observes, “**This barrier finds its strength in the worldly definition of**

¹⁶ Wayne Grudem, ed., *ESV Study Bible : English Standard Version.*, ESV text ed. (Wheaton IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), Logos Bible Software.

success. The world perceives success as the increase of numbers and finances. However, the Lord's view of success is obedience to the Word.¹⁷

- C. **Sometimes our churches do *temporarily shrink* when we practice discipline, yet they are much more likely to thrive and be a place of true health if we follow the Bible's prescription.** When a person goes in for surgery and has to go under the knife, pain comes before the healing. If they refuse the surgery, the ailment will remain and true health will not be restored.
- D. **David Purkey**, in his book *Church Discipline* tells this story of his own experience with a pastor who would not bring formative discipline to his body ...

Nearly forty years ago, I worked under the tutelage of a pastor who stated to me that he would not teach any bible doctrine that would offend any of the members of his congregation. He told me it was more important to keep God's church together than to teach any doctrine that would divide them. He also suggested when I matured I would understand. Well, it's nearly forty years later, **and what I do understand is that he will give account to God Almighty for his refusal to put the absolute faithful and unbending exposition of Scripture first in his ministry.** I would not want to be in his shoes when he stands before Jesus and gives account of himself. Thank God, I knew enough, as a three year old in Christ, to get out of that church. **God's Elder must never compromise an iota of truth for a ton of unity.**¹⁸

V. **Misconception Five—Asking Rebellious Members to Leave the Church May Hurt the Chances of Helping Them (Hospital Mentality)**

- A. **Quote (Terry Ivy) "We have all heard this one. It sounds spiritual, but it can reveal a shallow understanding of what church is. Any hospital which knows a patient has cancer, but ignores dealing with it, is not functioning as a hospital, but as a morgue. Yes, the local church is to be like a hospital. Therefore, let us get involved with the sin sickness of our patients and heal them.** The only way of spiritually healing them is to point them to repentance in Christ. This is what we are called to do (Gal. 6:1)."¹⁹

¹⁷ Terry Ivy, *Restorative Church Discipline: Rescuing and Healing the Wounded* (2T2 Publishing, 2013), 2220, Kindle.

¹⁸ David Purkey, *Church Discipline* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), 1436, Kindle.

¹⁹ Ivy, *Restorative Church Discipline: Rescuing and Healing the Wounded*, 2924, Kindle.

- B. If you've worked with church discipline long enough you've probably heard this plea from concerned church members. **In their minds it's like yanking the life-support cord and saying good-bye. In reality, however, it's just the opposite.**

Keeping someone in the church while their involved in unrepentant sin is ***damaging*** to a person, not to mention the rest of the body of Christ. It also causes the unrepentant brother or sister ***to settle*** into their bad behavior while having a false sense of acceptance and security. When they die they'll face judgment as ***a deceived person*** and likely not go to heaven.

Putting someone out of the church feels ***harsh*** at the moment, but sends a clear message that ultimately has ***great influence*** and power to change a wayward person, and isn't that the goal anyway—discipleship?

Conclusion—To be perfectly honest, church discipline can seem like a daunting task. We know it's the right thing to do, but right things aren't always easy. Yet, we can't allow ourselves to be deceived by excuses that, in the end, will lead to an unhealthy church and disobedience to God.

We also need to realize that the world's ideals and the church's ideals are often irreconcilable. We can't worry about trying to make the world like the church—it never will.

Just like with our families, do the hard stuff when it has to be done and our kids and everyone else will be healthier for it in the long run.

Seminar
R. David Long
4/12/14
Session Three

Session Three—The Steps of Discipline Part 1

I. Important Considerations about Church Discipline

- A. **Restorative in Nature** (versus condemning or angry)
- B. **Assumes the Best of People—1 Cor. 13:7** “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”
 - 1. **Thomas Bear**, “If we are to engage in the process of restoration, we are to assume the best about the brother we seek to restore. As an observer or outsider, we frankly do not know everything that is going on in the brother’s heart. He may be blind to his own sin.”²⁰
- C. **Sometimes members walk in unrepentant sin for extended periods of time without the church knowing it.** In such cases, fellow members and church leaders bear no responsibility until the sin comes to light.
 - 1. Congregants should not **pry or snoop**, without cause, into the lives of other members, searching for sin.

II. Steps of Discipline

- A. **Self-Discipline**—One of the more discreet, less talked about aspects of church discipline is self-discipline.
 - 1. Adams asserts, “Self-discipline is the beginning and end of church discipline because it is the most basic element in all discipline.”²¹
 - 2. **Gal. 5:23** The fruit of the Spirit includes “self-control.”
- B. **Pre-Confronting Checklist**
 - 1. Ensure that the offense results from a clear **violation** of Scripture and not a difference of opinion.

²⁰ Thomas Bear, *Church Discipline: Bring My Sheep Back*, 930, Kindle.

²¹ Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, 107.

2. The offended party should **write down** the Scripture passage(s) that apply to the situation (this helps to prevent #1 from happening).
3. No hypocritical judging—dealing with one’s own **sin** enables a believer to effectively restore someone else.
4. Assess your hesitation—meaning the things that may dissuade you from going to an offending brother or sister. For example, some Christians feel that the possibility of a broken relationship make the effort not worth the risk.

C. One-on-One

Matt. 18:15 “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault ...,” Luke 17:3 says, “If your brother sins, rebuke him.”

The sin may not have been personally directed against the individual doing the confronting.

In other words, someone’s sin does not have to be personally directed or inflicted upon us in order for us to get involved.

If we are offended by a brother or sister’s behavior, something that violates Scripture, we have the right to lovingly confront them.

1. **Establish a time and place to meet.**

Cheong recommends talking “soon after arranging the meeting. Long delays cause undue tension and anxiety. Avoid addressing the issue via phone or email. Eye contact and non-verbal communication are essential elements to gospel confrontation.”²²

Carefully select meeting place.

2. **Persuasion**—Daniel Cawdrey points out that **Matt. 18:15 “go and tell him his fault”** actually connotes persuasion. We should attempt to persuade our brother or sister of their fault and woo them to return.

Richard Baxter (17th century English pastor) “I have found by experience, that some ignorant persons, who have been so long unprofitable hearers, have got more knowledge and remorse in half an hour’s close discourse, than they did from ten year’s public preaching.”²³

²² Ibid.

²³ Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth, n.d.), 18.

3. *Moving to the next level*—Jesus designed the mechanism of church discipline to **increase in pressure**, or consequences, if a person does not repent.

Thomas Bear, “But if he remains caught in a sinful behavior or attitude, with no sign of repentance, we must take further action.”²⁴ **To disregard doing so equals negligence.**

Jesus never gives time frames between the different levels of correction. The church can proceed at variable speeds depending upon the individual situation.

Leeman observes, “Sometimes the process ... should move quite slowly, as when an individual shows interest in fighting the sin. Sometimes the process ... needs to speed up, as in 1 Corinthians 5 where the man’s sin is flagrant and apparently unrepentant.”²⁵

Every situation has its own **unique factors** and, thus, should receive individualized treatment.

Moreover, as Leeman points out, a Christian’s willingness to face the truth and make appropriate changes also determines the **speed** of the process.²⁶

In such a case, the gears may move slower as the sinning believer works toward acknowledgment of his or her wrongdoing and toward repentance.

²⁴ Thomas Bear, *Church Discipline: Bring My Sheep Back*, 368, Kindle.

²⁵ Leeman, *Church Membership*, 114.

²⁶ Ibid.

Seminar
R. David Long
4/12/14
Session Four

Session Four—The Steps of Discipline Part 2

I. **Witnesses—without repentance the process must move forward.**

Jesus says, “But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses” (Matt. 18:16).

Deuteronomic law—required multiple witnesses in order to convict (more than one person had to witness the sin for it to be accepted as proof).

Yet, in this context, scholars believe that Jesus intends for the witnesses to function as ***more than mere first-hand reporters***. In Matt. 18 Jesus is not asking that there be multiple witnesses to the actual offense, for, if so, why would he ask for the privacy/confidentiality of a one-on-one meeting? ***The witnesses are to testify to the reaction of the offending person to find out if the offense is legitimate.***

Mohler propounds, “Jesus seems to intend for the witnesses to be an important presence in the event of the confrontation, thus adding corroborating testimony concerning the confrontation of a sinning brother. The brother cannot claim that he was not confronted with his sin in a **brotherly/loving** context.”²⁷

In other words, ***the witnesses observe both the spirit of the accuser and the quality of his or her confrontation, and the response of the offending Christian.*** The information either confirms or rejects the original accusation of the offended person.

A. **Choice of witnesses**

1. Should exhibit spiritual insight
2. **Credibility** among fellow members
3. Choose witnesses with the offender in mind (people they respect)

B. **The witnesses should be selective about the information they accept.**

- A. Don’t allow the offended party to fill your mind with **negative facts** about the incident. Get only the essential information necessary to operate as a witness.

²⁷ Ibid.

C. **Confidentiality**—Matt. 18:15, “**If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone.**”

1. Biblical reconciliation seeks to resolve broken relationships at the **lowest** possible level with the least amount of **information** changing hands.²⁸
2. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed—Yet, non-disclosure remains contingent upon the response of the offending brother or sister. ***The widening process of church discipline precludes absolute confidentiality.***

*Christians make a mistake when they **guarantee** an offending brother or sister absolute confidentiality; to do so goes beyond biblical teaching.*²⁹

3. Even when other believers get involved, confidentiality still applies. The information simply stays within the expanded circle of accountability.

D. **One Person Should Lead**— If the offending brother refuses to repent after a one-on-one discussion, and if he or she agrees to another meeting involving witnesses, one of the witnesses must take the lead in the encounter.³⁰

1. The lead witness should establish **time limits** for meetings.

Cheong recommends, “An hour and a half to two hours is a good time frame for the first meeting. Even if full resolution is not achieved during this time, you can make good headway into understanding the issues and the hearts of those involved ...”³¹

Without time limits, meetings may last longer than necessary, potentially straining the broken relationship even more. If a resolution does not come during the first meeting, another can be scheduled for the near future.

2. **Although one witness takes the lead, both will work together to gather information and to make a decision in light of the gospel.**³²

II. **When to Include Elders**

²⁸ Ibid., 32.

²⁹ Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, 30.

³⁰ Ibid., 62.

³¹ Cheong, *God Redeeming His Bride: A Handbook for Church Discipline*, 1875, Kindle.

³² Ibid.

Jesus' template for discipline in Matthew 18 nowhere indicates that the elders of the church must assume a primary role in the discipline process. This does not mean, however, that their presence and leading are unimportant. Pastors lay the groundwork for, and set the tone and tenor of healthy discipline in their congregations. Some believe that involving the pastor in certain situations adds influence and increases the effectiveness of the confrontation.

Cheong comments, "It is a sobering reality when one or more elders solemnly issue a strong admonishment and statement of intent to those who continue to resist and reject their Redeemer."³³

Pastors are critical to church discipline as they prepare their people for such action and guide them when it is taken.

III. Tell It to the Church

When a wayward Christian ignores the **loving correction** of an offended brother or sister, and the witnesses that follow, the next level of discipline comes from the church body.

In **Matthew 18:17** Jesus instructs, "If he refuses to listen to them [witnesses], tell it to the church." In other words, the seriousness of the confrontation increases resulting in more pressure and greater public visibility.

A. Differing interpretations of "tell it to the church."

1. **Before the church elders/deacons only** ("since they are God's appointed leaders of the church."³⁴)
2. **Only the most relevant people involved in the case**
3. **The entire church body**—in view of what Jesus seeks to accomplish, this interpretation seems most likely.

Bear asserts, "Elders must resist the instinct to '**protect the church**' from what they perceive as unnecessary grief. Jesus did not say 'tell it to the leaders of the church.' The church is supposed to speak to the brother caught in sin with one voice."³⁵

³³ Ibid., 2088, Kindle.

³⁴ Ibid., 2171, Kindle.

³⁵ Bear, *Church Discipline: Bring My Sheep Back*, 1480, Kindle.

Bringing the unrepentant sinner before the entire membership body is intended to have an extreme effect. Sometimes it takes extreme measures to shake people from their apathy.

Moreover, **as Cheong points out**, "... in light of the fuller action taken by the church to not associate with those who refuse to submit to Christ and His people, it would not make sense for only a small group to be informed."³⁶

B. **Coordinate**

Before bringing the impenitent brother or sister before the church body, however, pastors need to coordinate with the **leadership team**, the offender's family, and other pertinent persons involved in the discipline process.³⁷ If these people are not appropriately informed and supportive of the action, chaos may ensue and threaten the restorative process.

C. **Gathering the Saints**

The idea of bringing an unrepentant sinner before the church, in today's culture, invokes the image of a Sunday morning crowd, complete with visitors and guest speakers, witnessing the discipline process. Yet, this image does not accurately construe what telling the church means.

Bradley states, "Under no circumstances should the process be conducted in a regular **worship service** for fear of strangers and unbelievers in attendance. The appropriate method is to call a special meeting of official church membership."³⁸

Baptist churches in the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, for example, "usually met monthly on a Saturday for business meetings, at which they would receive and dismiss members ...," as well as deal with other church discipline issues.³⁹

IV. **Excommunication**

- A. **The final step of corrective discipline**, if the unrepentant individual refuses all other forms of **confrontation**, involves putting him or her out of the church.

Jesus tells His disciples, "And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector" (Matt. 18:17).

³⁶ Cheong, *God Redeeming His Bride: A Handbook for Church Discipline*, 2187, Kindle.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 2207, Kindle.

³⁸ Bradly, *Church Discipline: A Neglected Necessity*, 75–76.

³⁹ Jessica Lee Flinchum, "In Subjection: Church Discipline in the Early American South, 1760-1820," (PhD dissertation, University of Kentucky, 2007), 18.

In other words, treat him or her as an **outsider**, as someone who no longer belongs, and who spurns God's Word. *Paul contextualizes Jesus' words when instructing the Corinthians "not even to eat with such a one" (1 Cor. 5:11).*

Leeman emphasizes, "Formal discipline or excommunication is warranted when an individual seems to **happily abide** in known sin. There's no evidence that the Spirit is making him or her uncomfortable."⁴⁰

*Excommunication not only breaks fellowship with the wayward Christian, but it assumes that the basis for that fellowship has been lost. As far as the church is concerned, the offending brother or sister has **rejected the faith**.*

Ultimately, excommunication hopes to bring about transformation and restoration. It recognizes the perilous, eternal consequences of allowing a rebellious Christian to continue in deception, and seeks this last ditch effort to rescue the lost soul.

B. What Excommunication Looks Like

Ivy points out, "The removal of the unrepentant brother does not mean we are **unloving** and unwilling to help this man with emergency or even neighborly needs. However, we do nothing which makes him feel he is in right standing with God or the local church."⁴¹

*The ostracism, therefore, should include **relational distance** as it pertains to friendship and spiritual camaraderie.* The rebellious individual must feel the sting of the exclusion, understanding that normal, close relations cannot be reestablished until repentance takes place.

1. **Family Members**— As for the treatment of excommunicated family members, Christians in such situations have a fundamental obligation to meet the **primary needs** of their loved ones.

Joel Coker, in his article "Cast Out from Among the Saints: Church Discipline Among Anabaptists and English Separatists in Holland, 1590-1620," quotes the Anabaptist 1580 confession as stating, "**the married do not separate themselves nor do they withdraw themselves from marital privileges ...**"⁴²

⁴⁰ Leeman, *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus*, 711, Kindle.

⁴¹ Ivy, *Restorative Church Discipline: Rescuing and Healing the Wounded*, 971, Kindle.

⁴² Joel L. Coker, "Cast Out from Among the Saints: Church Discipline Among Anabaptists and English Separatists in Holland, 1590-1620," *Reformation II*, 2006, 11.

Although family members do not pretend that the excommunicated relative still serves Christ, they, nonetheless, must not **neglect** the care that comes with their family position.

- C. **Members Who Refuse to Disassociate**—Once excommunication takes place, the body of Christ must **cooperate** to ensure that the process of restoration continues.

If some members enforce the discipline yet others do not, then its effectiveness diminishes.

Ivy makes a shocking statement about those who refuse to cooperate with the punishment of the excommunicated. He declares, “Anyone refusing to do this places themselves under the same penalty; loss of fellowship privileges.”⁴³

In other words, Christians within the church who refuse to participate in the ostracism of excommunicated believers will themselves face disciplinary action. ***Obedience to Christ means supporting His judgments, and the judgments of Christ have been entrusted to the church.***

- D. **Unwelcomed Return**—Occasionally an unrepentant, excommunicated member will return unwelcomed to the church.

Ivy suggests, “Do not allow any church members to try and **physically** remove him from the facilities or you could face a law suit. The elders should declare that the meeting is closed, and then inform the man that he is **trespassing** in a private meeting”⁴⁴

If this does not result in the person’s departure, then warning them of **police** involvement should come next.⁴⁵ Again, none of this stems from anger or unforgiveness, but from the desire to maintain order and discipline within the church.

V. Restoration

Restoration occurs when an offending brother or sister, wherever they may be in the discipline process, repents of his or her sin. Yet, depending on the nature of the sin, restoration may require a process whereby the offending person, through accountability, settles back into a faithful walk with Christ.

⁴³ Ivy, *Restorative Church Discipline: Rescuing and Healing the Wounded*, 1222, Kindle.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 2990, Kindle.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Cheong remarks, “In some situations, God can bring about immediate clarity and wisdom but in most cases those who turn back to Christ after a period of running from God will still be partially blinded by the disorienting haze of sin.”⁴⁶

*Although God’s forgiveness comes immediately, the **consequences of sin linger**.* The body of Christ must assist struggling Christians to regain their spiritual equilibrium and resettle into a life of discipleship.

A. **The Gravity of the Sin Determines the Intensity of the Restoration Process**

For example, if a brother immediately repents after another brother goes to him personally, the restoration process may end there. ***But, if excommunication occurs***, a person may need a **period of counseling** and stringent accountability in order to return as a healthy member of the body.

Cheong comments, “There are few situations in pastoral ministry that require more intentional shepherding and wisdom than restoring a wayward brother or sister who has been removed from the church.”⁴⁷

B. **Restoration requires a plan.** It requires the leadership team to think through and establish a recovery process.

1. Different elements within a restoration plan may include required reading, Scriptural and other, counseling, seminars, small group involvement, etc.⁴⁸
2. **Organize an accountability team**—this might entail two or three well-grounded Christians to work together to provide regular contact and friendship to those being restored.

C. **Forgiveness**

1. Two types of forgiveness
 - a. Personal—should happen immediately
 - b. Corporate—contingent upon a person’s repentance

Concluding Remarks

⁴⁶ Cheong, *God Redeeming His Bride: A Handbook for Church Discipline*, 2751, Kindle.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 2863, Kindle.

⁴⁸ Shipley, “Increasing the Knowledge of Pastors and Church Leaders about Biblical Church Discipline,” 118.

APPENDIX O: MINISTERS' SURVEY RESULTS

CHURCH DISCIPLINE SURVEY (MINISTERS' SURVEY)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Uncertain	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I sometimes struggle to understand exactly what is meant by "church discipline."		38%	12%	32%	18%
I believe that the New Testament age of grace rules out the need for church discipline.				30%	70%
Overall, I believe that church discipline is an important part of church health.	82%	18%			
Church discipline should be used with unbelievers.	9%	13%	22%	30%	26%
Church discipline only applies to those within the body of Christ.	32%	36%	5%	23%	4%
I believe that the church bears the responsibility to judge its members according to biblical standards.	65%	22%		4%	9%
I have some in my church that disagree with me on the subject of church discipline.	22%	26%	43%	9%	
I believe it is solely the Holy Spirit's responsibility to confront unrepentant Christians.		8%		57%	35%
I have had to use church discipline in the last three years.	57%	26%	4%	4%	9%
I have never been involved in a situation where church discipline proved necessary.	4%		9%	26%	61%
I follow the example of Matthew 18 when confronting a brother or sister in Christ.	77%	23%			
Overall, my church accepts the biblical model of confronting a brother or sister in Christ as found in Matthew 18.	48%	43%	4%	4%	
I have taught, or referenced, the importance of church discipline to my congregation in the last three years.	17%	43%	22%	13%	4%

In the past, when I followed the biblical principles of church discipline, things did not turn out as positively as I had hoped.	13%	43%	13%	26%	4%
My key leaders agree with me on the subject of church discipline.	43%	43%	4%	4%	4%
There have been times when key leaders believed I was acting too harshly when following the biblical model of church discipline.	22%	17%	17%	22%	22%
Some in my church criticize me for not being tough enough with church discipline issues.	9%	17%	22%	26%	26%
I believe that church discipline is primarily the responsibility of church leadership.	22%	43%	17%	13%	4%
Laity should not get involved in church discipline issues.	17%	22%	17%	30%	13%
I have had members leave the church because they felt that church discipline was too harsh.	17%	30%	17%	17%	17%
I sometimes feel reluctant to deal with church discipline issues because of the fallout that might take place.	9%	61%	9%	17%	4%
I feel the American church does a good job with church discipline.		4%	4%	43%	48%
I believe that Jesus' teaching of "judge not, that you be not judged" is misunderstood and misapplied among many Christians today.	39%	52%	4%	4%	
Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I believe that Jesus' instructions in Matthew 18, regarding confronting a fellow Christian who has offended us, should be literally applied.	65%	35%			
Church discipline is an act of love seeking the restoration of an erring brother or sister in Christ.	78%	22%			
I believe there are times when an unrepentant Christian must be put out of the church.	65%	35%			
I believe that, regardless of the outcome, church discipline should be applied, when needed, and the results left to God.	65%	17%	13%	4%	
Additional Comments:					

APPENDIX P: PRE-CE CONFERENCE LAY

LEADER SURVEY RESULTS

CHURCH DISCIPLINE SURVEY (PRE-CE CONF.-LAY LEADER)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Uncertain	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I sometimes struggle to understand exactly what is meant by “church discipline.”		31%	23%	31%	15%
I believe that the New Testament age of grace rules out the need for church discipline.			8%	54%	38%
Overall, I believe that church discipline is an important part of church health.	54%	46%			
Church discipline should be used with unbelievers.	31%	23%	38%		8%
Church discipline only applies to those within the body of Christ.	15%		23%	54%	8%
I believe that the church bears the responsibility to judge its members according to biblical standards.	54%	31%	8%	8%	
I believe it is solely the Holy Spirit’s responsibility to confront unrepentant Christians.		23%		54%	23%
I believe that church discipline is primarily the responsibility of church leadership.	15%	38%	15%	23%	8%
Laity should not get involved in church discipline issues.			77%	8%	15%
Church discipline is an act of love seeking the restoration of an erring brother or sister in Christ.	38%	62%			
I sometimes feel reluctant to deal with church discipline issues because of the fallout that might take place.		38%	15%	31%	15%
I believe there are times when an unrepentant Christian must be put out of the church.	15%	23%	46%	8%	8%
Additional Comments:					

APPENDIX Q: POST-CE CONFERENCE

LAY LEADER SURVEY RESULTS

CHURCH DISCIPLINE SURVEY (POST-CE CONF.-LAY LEADER)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Uncertain	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I sometimes struggle to understand exactly what is meant by “church discipline.”		33%	8%	33%	25%
I believe that the New Testament age of grace rules out the need for church discipline.		17%		42%	42%
Overall, I believe that church discipline is an important part of church health.	75%	25%			
Church discipline should be used with unbelievers.	17%	25%		33%	25%
Church discipline only applies to those within the body of Christ.	36%	36%		27%	
I believe that the church bears the responsibility to judge its members according to biblical standards.	75%	25%			
I believe it is solely the Holy Spirit’s responsibility to confront unrepentant Christians.		8%	17%	25%	50%
I believe that church discipline is primarily the responsibility of church leadership.	9%	9%		45%	36%
Laity should not get involved in church discipline issues.	8%	17%	8%	33%	
Church discipline is an act of love seeking the restoration of an erring brother or sister in Christ.	75%	25%			
I sometimes feel reluctant to deal with church discipline issues because of the fallout that might take place.		25%	8%	42%	25%
I believe there are times when an unrepentant Christian must be put out of the church.	25%	58%	8%		8%

Additional Comments:



APPENDIX R: PRE-SEMINAR MINISTERS’
SURVEY RESULTS

CHURCH DISCIPLINE SURVEY (PRE-SEMINAR MINISTERS)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Uncertain	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I sometimes struggle to understand exactly what is meant by “church discipline.”		60%		40%	
I believe that the New Testament age of grace rules out the need for church discipline.			20%		80%
Overall, I believe that church discipline is an important part of church health.	60%	20%	20%		
Church discipline should be used with unbelievers.				40%	60%
Church discipline only applies to those within the body of Christ.	40%	60%			
I believe that the church bears the responsibility to judge its members according to biblical standards.	60%	40%			
I have some in my church that disagree with me on the subject of church discipline.	20%	60%	20%		
I believe it is solely the Holy Spirit’s responsibility to confront unrepentant Christians.		20%		80%	
I have had to use church discipline in the last three years.	20%	80%			
I have never been involved in a situation where church discipline proved necessary.	20%			40%	40%
I follow the example of Matthew 18 when confronting a brother or sister in Christ.	40%	40%	20%		
Overall, my church accepts the biblical model of confronting a brother or sister	20%	20%	40%		20%

in Christ as found in Matthew 18.					
I have taught, or referenced, the importance of church discipline to my congregation in the last three years.	40%		60%		
In the past, when I followed the biblical principles of church discipline, things did not turn out as positively as I had hoped.	20%	20%	20%	40%	
My key leaders agree with me on the subject of church discipline.	20%	20%	20%	20%	20%
There have been times when key leaders believed I was acting too harshly when following the biblical model of church discipline.	20%		80%		
Some in my church criticize me for not being tough enough with church discipline issues.	20%		40%	20%	20%
I believe that church discipline is primarily the responsibility of church leadership.		60%	20%		20%
Laity should not get involved in church discipline issues.		60%			40%
I have had members leave the church because they felt that church discipline was too harsh.		40%	20%	40%	
I sometimes feel reluctant to deal with church discipline issues because of the fallout that might take place.		60%		40%	
I feel the American church does a good job with church discipline.					100%
I believe that Jesus' teaching of "judge not, that you be not judged" is misunderstood and misapplied among many Christians today.	60%	40%			
Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I believe that Jesus' instructions in Matthew 18, regarding confronting a fellow Christian who has offended us, should be literally applied.	40%	60%			
Church discipline is an act of love seeking the restoration of an erring brother or sister in Christ.	80%	20%			

I believe there are times when an unrepentant Christian must be put out of the church.	40%	20%	40%		
I believe that, regardless of the outcome, church discipline should be applied, when needed, and the results left to God.	60%	20%	20%		
Additional Comments:					

APPENDIX S: POST-SEMINAR MINISTERS’

SURVEY RESULTS

CHURCH DISCIPLINE SURVEY (POST-SEMINAR MINISTERS)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Uncertain	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I sometimes struggle to understand exactly what is meant by “church discipline.”		20%		40%	40%
I believe that the New Testament age of grace rules out the need for church discipline.			20%		100%
Overall, I believe that church discipline is an important part of church health.	80%	20%			
Church discipline should be used with unbelievers.					100%
Church discipline only applies to those within the body of Christ.	100%				
I believe that the church bears the responsibility to judge its members according to biblical standards.	80%	20%			
I have some in my church that disagree with me on the subject of church discipline.	40%	40%	20%		
I believe it is solely the Holy Spirit’s responsibility to confront unrepentant Christians.					100%
I have had to use church discipline in the last three years.	40%	60%			
I have never been involved in a situation where church discipline proved necessary.			20%	20%	60%
I follow the example of Matthew 18 when confronting a brother or sister in Christ.	20%	80%			
Overall, my church accepts the biblical model of confronting a brother or sister in Christ as found in Matthew 18.		40%	40%	20%	

I have taught, or referenced, the importance of church discipline to my congregation in the last three years.	20%	20%	20%	40%	
In the past, when I followed the biblical principles of church discipline, things did not turn out as positively as I had hoped.	20%	20%	40%	20%	
My key leaders agree with me on the subject of church discipline.		40%	20%	40%	
There have been times when key leaders believed I was acting too harshly when following the biblical model of church discipline.	20%	60%	20%		
Some in my church criticize me for not being tough enough with church discipline issues.		40%	20%	20%	20%
I believe that church discipline is primarily the responsibility of church leadership.					100%
Laity should not get involved in church discipline issues.					100%
I have had members leave the church because they felt that church discipline was too harsh.	20%	20%	40%	20%	
I sometimes feel reluctant to deal with church discipline issues because of the fallout that might take place.	20%	20%	20%	40%	
I feel the American church does a good job with church discipline.					100%
I believe that Jesus' teaching of "judge not, that you be not judged" is misunderstood and misapplied among many Christians today.	80%			20%	
Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I believe that Jesus' instructions in Matthew 18, regarding confronting a fellow Christian who has offended us, should be literally applied.	80%	20%			
Church discipline is an act of love seeking the restoration of an erring brother or sister in Christ.	80%	20%			
I believe there are times when an unrepentant Christian must be put out of the church.	100%				
I believe that, regardless of the outcome, church discipline	100%				

should be applied, when needed, and the results left to God.					
Additional Comments:					

APPENDIX T: PRE-SEMINAR LAY LEADER SURVEY

CHURCH DISCIPLINE SURVEY (PRE-SEMINAR-LAY LEADER)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Uncertain	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I sometimes struggle to understand exactly what is meant by “church discipline.”		36%	14%	29%	21%
I believe that the New Testament age of grace rules out the need for church discipline.				36%	64%
Overall, I believe that church discipline is an important part of church health.	79%	7%	7%		7%
Church discipline should be used with unbelievers.	7%	21%	7%	50%	14%
Church discipline only applies to those within the body of Christ.	14%	36%	29%	14%	7%
I believe that the church bears the responsibility to judge its members according to biblical standards.	57%	29%	7%		7%
I believe it is solely the Holy Spirit’s responsibility to confront unrepentant Christians.	7%	21%	7%	50%	14%
I believe that church discipline is primarily the responsibility of church leadership.	7%	71%	14%	7%	
Laity should not get involved in church discipline issues.		21%	57%	21%	
Church discipline is an act of love seeking the restoration of an erring brother or sister in Christ.	57%	21%	14%		7%
I sometimes feel reluctant to deal with church discipline issues because of the fallout that might take place.	14%	36%	43%	7%	

I believe there are times when an unrepentant Christian must be put out of the church.	14%	21%	57%	7%	
Additional Comments:					

APPENDIX U: POST-SEMINAR LAY LEADER SURVEY

CHURCH DISCIPLINE SURVEY (POST-SEMINAR-LAY LEADER)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Uncertain	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I sometimes struggle to understand exactly what is meant by “church discipline.”		7%		29%	64%
I believe that the New Testament age of grace rules out the need for church discipline.			7%	7%	86%
Overall, I believe that church discipline is an important part of church health.	100%				
Church discipline should be used with unbelievers.					100%
Church discipline only applies to those within the body of Christ.	100%				
I believe that the church bears the responsibility to judge its members according to biblical standards.	100%				
I believe it is solely the Holy Spirit’s responsibility to confront unrepentant Christians.				21%	79%
I believe that church discipline is primarily the responsibility of church leadership.		7%		50%	43%
Laity should not get involved in church discipline issues.		15%		7%	77%
Church discipline is an act of love seeking the restoration of an erring brother or sister in Christ.	100%				
I sometimes feel reluctant to deal with church discipline issues because of the fallout that might take place.	7%	29%		50%	14%
I believe there are times when an unrepentant Christian must be put out of the church.	86%	14%			

Additional Comments:

APPENDIX V: HANDBOOK

Restoring a Biblical Perspective

A Church Discipline Handbook

By R. David Long

June 2014

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Introduction

Understanding the precedent for church discipline and implementing it involves two different challenges. The first requires the intellectual integrity to acknowledge the truth about the need for discipline, while the second requires the love and courage necessary to carry it out. Without a doubt, Scripture presents a clear case for divine discipline. In these last days God accomplishes this task through the church. He calls and equips members of the body of Christ to strengthen one another in the faith, which, at times, includes correction.

This handbook lays out the steps and other miscellaneous details concerning the application of church discipline. It does not touch upon every situation that may arise within a church. Rather, it deals with the proper steps and functioning of a local church body as it navigates the choppy waters of church discipline.

This handbook also briefly addresses some of the fundamental principles necessary for understanding church discipline. Two of these include the “nature of the church” and the “authority of the church.” Understanding these foundational realities will help re-orient the modern mind to see church discipline as a normal part of church life.

Adhering to Jesus’ template on church discipline in Matthew 18, as well as other New Testament teachings on the subject, serves as the most effective means of correction. This does not guarantee, however, that every situation ends happily. In fact, sometimes things get worse before they get better. Yet, the pain involved in discipleship should never be used as an excuse not to do it. Godly love ventures where all others fear to tread, and it is never content when members of the body of Christ destroy themselves in sin.

The Biblical Precedent for Church Discipline

A Brief Study of the Biblical Word “Discipline”

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew verb *yasar* and the related noun *musar* make up the bulk of the usages of the word “discipline.”¹ *Yasar* means “[to] discipline, chasten, admonish ... instruct, or correct.”² It often speaks of God’s corrective judgment upon His people for their sin, particularly within a covenant relationship.³

The noun *musar* carries much of the same meaning as *yasar*; it means “instruction, correction, chastisement, discipline, punishment.”⁴ It normally refers to God warning or punishing His people in order to shake them from sinful habits and to instruct them in holiness.⁵

Both words, *yasar* and *musar*, deal with instruction, correction, and guidance from the standpoint of a parent correcting a child. Even when God chastises Israel for her idolatry, His judgment takes place within the context of a familial relationship, or a father loving his child enough to bring correction.

Paideuo and *paideia* also carry on the meaning of *yasar* and *musar* in the New Testament. *Paideuo* occurs thirteen times in the New Testament while *paideia* occurs six times. As for *paideuo*, “the underlying root of this word group is *pais*, child, boy ... *paideuo* thus lit. means to be together with a child, hence, to bring up, educate, instruct, teach.”⁶

The word “discipline,” as used in modern English, comes from the Latin *disciplina*, meaning “‘instruction,’ ‘training,’ ‘discipline.’”⁷ *Disciplina*, however, comes from both the Latin word *discipulus*, meaning “learner,” and *discere*, meaning “to learn.”⁸ The word “discipline,” although sometimes evoking negative feelings due to its perceived harshness, actually finds its

¹ T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, Graeme Goldsworthy, and D. A. Carson, eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Leicester, England: Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 448.

² Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000), 415–16.

³ Willem VanGemeren, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 480.

⁴ Robert L Thomas, *New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: [including] Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries* (Nashville: Holman, 1981).

⁵ VanGemeren, 481.

⁶ Verlyn D. Verbrugge, *The NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words: An Abridgment of New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 947.

⁷ Merrill C. Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 131.

⁸ Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 131.

English roots in the Latin word “disciple,” meaning “learner.” In other words, discipline, although at times painful, functions as a necessary and critical component of the learning process.

God’s Discipline in the Old Testament

Deuteronomy 8:5 pronounces, “Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you.” These inspired words, more than any other, summarize the biblical concept of discipline. They speak not of a tyrant king lording it over a subjugated people, but of a loving, attentive father seeking the best for his child. The discipline may feel unpleasant at the time, or even severe, yet its goal is always corrective and educative, motivated by loving concern.⁹

God’s Discipline in the New Testament

In the New Testament, discipline largely flows through the body of Christ. Each person makes up a part of this body, and each stands accountable to the rest.¹⁰ The standards for holiness, relationships, and proper worship come through the Word of God. Scripture informs and directs the major brush strokes of a Christian’s life, providing timeless, absolute principles by which to gauge individual and community behavior. Ephesians 4:25 teaches, “Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.” Individuals comprise the church; however, these individuals, gifted and placed within the church by the Holy Spirit, form a united, spiritual community.

The New Testament reveals various methods of discipline, including everything from persuasion, to shunning, to trials, and even putting someone out of the church, or turning them over to Satan.¹¹ Yet, like the Old Testament, all of these find their motivation in love, both for the congregation, by reminding them of the standards and removing the evil, and for the one walking in unrepentant sin.

A Biblical Understanding of Church Discipline

Discipline Equals Love

Proverbs 3:11-12 “My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.”

Discipline Brings Restoration and Healing

⁹ Alexander et al., 448.

¹⁰ Ibid., 450.

¹¹ Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), Logos Bible Software.

1 Corinthians 5:5 "... you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord."

Hebrews 12:10 "For they [human fathers] disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness."

Discipline Instills the Fear of the Lord

Acts 5 (Ananias and Sapphira) "And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things."

1 Timothy 5:10 "As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear."

Discipline Keeps Sin from Spreading

1 Corinthians 5:6-7 "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump."

2 Timothy 2:16-17 "... avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will spread like gangrene."

The Church's Responsibility to Discipline

The Responsibility of the Laity and the Leadership

The task of church discipline falls to every member of the body of Christ. Many believers today, however, assume that church leadership, especially pastors, carry the burden of this responsibility. In fact, most church members fear any type of conflict within the body of Christ, choosing to whisper their concerns in dark corners rather than confronting evil directly. Jesus addresses this issue in Matthew 18:15 when he teaches, "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained a brother."

In Jesus' description of the church discipline process in Matthew 18, the pastor or elder, as an individual, has no special function. His or her place includes presiding over the third step, the congregational rebuke, and it may even involve acting as one of the witnesses in step two. The most critical function a pastor assumes during any church discipline situation entails acting as a mentor and teaching and encouraging his or her people in God's wisdom and love.

Short-Sighted Versus a Long-Term View of Love

One of the troubling trends within the modern Church involves Christians refusing to challenge other Christians involved in unrepentant sin. Many assume they have no right to do so, and some refuse to confront for fear of losing the relationship. Still others believe that love should avoid judgment and, in turn, unconditionally accept people. Hidden within each of these assumptions, however, lies a distorted and self-centered view of love. In fact, these hesitant Christians worry more about their own acceptance than they do about the perilous condition of

their brother or sister in Christ. They fail to realize that godly love speaks the truth even at the risk of losing the relationship. In other words, correction often proves necessary to move people away from destruction and toward the truth. It functions as an “act of kindness and love.”¹²

A Clarification of the Biblical Concept of “Judging”

“Judge Not” Does Not Mean “Live and Let Live”

Perhaps one of the most misunderstood and misapplied passages of Scripture in the twenty-first century resides in Matthew 7. During His famous sermon on the mount, Jesus teaches his disciples,

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye (Matt. 7:1-5).

This passage has become a popular cultural phenomenon that many interpret to mean that no one has the right to judge anyone else, ever, even in the church. Yet, like other tabloid news disguising itself as truth, the street application of this passage is only half correct. If one only reads verses 1-2 and stops there, he or she can possibly make an argument for not judging. Yet, Jesus continues by explaining the necessary actions for equitable judgment. He says, “You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye” (v. 5). In other words, the disciples would have to make judgments, yet, before doing so, they must first scrutinize themselves.¹³ By metaphorically removing the log from their own eyes, the disciples will judge with greater compassion,¹⁴ understanding that they too struggle with sin.

¹² Ted Cabal et al., *The Apologetics Study Bible: Understand Why You Believe* (Nashville: Holman, 2007), 937–38.

¹³ Donald Alfred Hagner, *Matthew*, Word Biblical Commentary 33A (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), Logos Bible Software.

¹⁴ Grudem, *ESV Study Bible*, Logos Bible Software.

Church Discipline—A Broader Understanding

Two Sides of Church Discipline

In a general sense, church discipline consists of every aspect of ministry that a church employs to help its members mature in Christ. For example, prayer, Bible reading, accountability groups, and preaching, all involve what theologians call “**formative**” discipline, or discipline that forms the Christian life.¹⁵ “**Corrective**” discipline, however, involves what most people think of when they hear the words “church discipline.” Corrective discipline takes place when a fellow member of the church must be confronted about a sinful action or attitude.¹⁶

The Meaning of Discipleship

Robert Cheong, in his book *God Redeeming His Bride*, states, “We have to see church discipline, not merely as a doctrine of the church to be understood and obeyed, but as an outflow of God’s story of redemption working in the lives of real people in a real world.”¹⁷ This view broadens the understanding of church discipline by teaching that it functions as a normal component of Christian living. In the overarching story of redemption, God uses discipline to change His people for their own good and for the glory of His kingdom. Simply put, church discipline falls neatly within the purview of “discipleship.”

A narrow view of the gospel, or discipleship, contributes to the weak state of church discipline in America. Many Christians embrace the blessings of the new birth, yet reject the painful, life-surrendering submission and persecution that sometimes follows it.¹⁸ A truer representation of discipleship, however, includes the blessings and the pain that conjoin in a Christian’s life. One feels the joy, peace and presence of God, while also experiencing the sting of the crucified flesh.

Church Membership and Discipline

The Nature of the Church

In order to appreciate the concept of membership and its crucial role in church discipline, one must first understand the “nature” of the church. Scholars point out that the New

¹⁵ Bobby Jamieson, *Guarding One Another: Church Discipline*, ed. Mark Dever, Kindle Edition, 9Marks Healthy Church Study Guides (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 215, Kindle.

¹⁶ Mark Galli, “Shaping Holy Disciples,” *Christianity Today*, August 2005, 32.

¹⁷ Robert K. Cheong, *God Redeeming His Bride: A Handbook for Church Discipline*, Kindle Edition (Christian Focus Publications, 2013), 449, Kindle.

¹⁸ Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love*, 1587, Kindle.

Testament word *ekklesia*, or church, speaks not of a society into which one is born, but of a community to which one makes a personal commitment.¹⁹

Paul describes the church as “the body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12). He uses the metaphor of a physical body, with interconnected parts, to illustrate the symbiotic nature of its members. Hammett and Merkle explain,

No member of a physical body is casually related to other members of that body; no member is distant from the other members ... The church as the body of Christ underscores the necessity of church membership (because members of the body cannot survive apart from the body) and highlights the mutuality of love and care involved in church membership ...²⁰

Thus, a Christian’s flippant attitude toward the church exposes an ignorance of Scripture. The Bible never presents membership or commitment to the church as being optional. In fact, spiritual life can only flourish within the context of the believing community.

The Authority of the Church

The authority of the church also holds an important place in the discussion of membership and church discipline. Leeman asserts, “Just as the Bible establishes the government of your nation as your highest authority on earth when it comes to your citizenship in that nation, so the Bible establishes the local church as your highest authority on earth when it comes to your discipleship to Christ ...”²¹ This truth should impact every Christian’s perspective on the church. It indicates the compulsory nature of membership and participation in the body of Christ. To choose Jesus means choosing his people as well. You cannot have one without the other.²² Christ expects His disciples to grow, and growth occurs through interdependence and mutual accountability. Although this concept alarms some Christians, an understanding of the authority of the church lays the groundwork for healthy church discipline.

The Nature of Membership

Church discipline and membership go hand in hand. Membership distinguishes between the committed and the uncommitted. It also establishes a relationship between the local church and the believer, and provides “oversight of a Christian’s discipleship ...”²³ In essence,

¹⁹ Hammett and Merkle, 308, Kindle.

²⁰ Ibid., 391, Kindle.

²¹ Leeman, *Church Membership*, 24.

²² Ibid., 30–31.

²³ Leeman, *Church Membership*, 64.

membership functions as a type of covenant. It involves the church and the individual Christian pledging their commitment to one another as they serve Christ.

Membership creates boundaries for the church, differentiating between those who belong and those who do not.²⁴ Drawing this line is essential in light of 1 Corinthians 5:12 where Paul asks, “For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?”²⁵ Consequently, before implementing discipline, the church must provide a litmus test for determining its members. Failing to do so, or having a blurred line between members and non-members, may result in resistance to corrective discipline. Thus, the church must teach its beliefs and expectations, allowing its membership candidates to make an informed decision, and enabling the church to know its own.

Before You Discipline—Teach

Clear instruction on church discipline must occur before correction commences. Without appropriate instruction, people resist discipline, causing the church to descend into an even healthier state. Church leaders should take advantage of every opportunity to teach about church discipline. They should preach about it, “discuss it in groups,” and ensure that every member has a copy of the church’s policies and procedures for implementing corrective discipline.²⁶

Before You Discipline—Organize

As parents expecting a newborn prepare a nursery in advance, so must the church organize itself before using corrective discipline. This requires foresight, making sure that certain aspects of the church’s organizational structure reflect its plan to administer biblical discipline when that time arrives.

Cleaning up the church’s membership rolls should be the first of these preparations.²⁷ Not to belabor this point, but “practicing church discipline requires churches to know who the church is.”²⁸ This step requires honesty, as leaders often embrace the fantasy of bloated membership rolls. Yet, knowing who belongs to the church simplifies the care and accountability process.

²⁴ Jamieson, 130, Kindle.

²⁵ Wayne Grudem, ed., *ESV Study Bible : English Standard Version.*, ESV text ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008).

²⁶ Adams, 115.

²⁷ Leeman, *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus*, 135.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 135–136.

Next, leaders must review the church's documents to ensure that they clearly state its moral boundaries and its process for implementing correction.²⁹ Some churches have a constitution and bylaws, whereas others use statements of faith or some other formal document. Whatever the medium, it must be clear and forthright about expectations, as well as what happens when a person fails to meet these expectations.³⁰ This helps to protect the church from lawsuits arising from a misguided understanding of biblical love and discipleship.

Educating the church's leadership team also helps to create a strong foundation for correction.³¹ If division exists in this area, and the pastoral staff does not agree on principles and practice, "disunity in the church will result."³² In other words, the leadership team must agree on the biblical mandate for, and the implementation of church discipline. Without this unity, division, and ultimately chaos, may occur.

The Steps of Discipline

Before exploring the mechanics, or steps of church discipline, a few important observations need to be made. The first observation reiterates the restorative nature of church discipline. Correction should never stem from a spirit of "condemnation, anger, or with a harsh attitude."³³ James 1:20 teaches, "...for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God." The offended person may not like what happened, but his or her motive for confrontation must always come from a desire to restore the sinning brother or sister.

Love assumes the best about a person. It also takes into consideration that the offender may not realize that he or she is committing a sin.³⁴ In 1 Corinthians 13:7, Paul teaches, "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." In essence, love forms the foundation of healthy church discipline. It may appear naïve or overly trusting, yet it searches for the best in a person, and when it does have to correct, it does so out of a legitimate concern for his or her well-being.

²⁹ Ibid., 135.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 136.

³² Ibid.

³³ Bradly, 80.

³⁴ Thomas Bear, *Church Discipline: Bring My Sheep Back*, 930, Kindle.

Also worth noting is that God often uncovers sin through “circumstances and other acts of providence” rather than by direct revelation to His leaders.³⁵ Although members may walk in unrepentant sin for extended periods of time without anyone knowing it, leaders and other members bear no responsibility until a sin comes to light. Congregants, however, should not pry or snoop, without cause, searching for sin in the lives of other members. This violates Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 13:7 that encourages Christians to believe the best about one another.

Self-Discipline

One of the more discreet aspects of church discipline is self-discipline, which acts as the starting place for the discipline process. Adams asserts, “Self-discipline is the beginning and end of church discipline because it is the most basic element in all discipline.”³⁶ Galatians 5:23 includes self-control as one of the nine fruits of the Spirit.³⁷ It involves policing oneself and responding to the nudges of the Holy Spirit. Yet, when an individual remains ignorant of his or her sin, or refuses to use self-discipline, corrective discipline must ensue. Yet before commencing with corrective discipline, certain considerations should receive attention.

Pre-Confronting Checklist

1. The offended party must ensure that the offense results from a violation of Scripture and not from a difference of opinion.³⁸ To prevent this from happening, the offended person should write down the Scriptures that deal with the sin, ensuring that they have a biblical case for confrontation.³⁹
2. The offended Christian must also examine his or her heart for unrepentant sin. Neglecting this step may result in a confrontation marred by twisted motives, such as diverting attention to another person in the name of self-preservation.⁴⁰ Inspecting one’s heart enables a Christian to help someone else more effectively.
3. Seeking God’s wisdom directly, versus conferring with others, is also a crucial element in the pre-confrontation process.⁴¹ Yet, typically, Christians discuss sensitive issues with

³⁵ Bradly, 47–48.

³⁶ Adams, 107.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁸ Cheong, 1619, Kindle.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1623, Kindle.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 1638, Kindle.

uninvolved persons, leading to “gossip and/or slander.”⁴² In steps one and two, church discipline seeks to restore a believer using as few people as possible.

4. One should also assess any hesitation.⁴³ Cheong defines a “hesitation” as anything that may cause a Christian to reconsider confrontation.⁴⁴ For example, the risk of losing a relationship leads some Christians to question the need for confrontation, although this does not constitute a good excuse to avoid it. On the other hand, a hesitancy may result from the Spirit encouraging the offended party to slow the process down, making sure that one has ample grounds for such action.⁴⁵

One-On-One

Once the believer works through the pre-confrontation checklist, he or she must go to the person who has committed the offense. Again, the sin may not have been personally directed against the offended person. Matthew 18:15 declares, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault.” Luke 17:3, on the other hand, says, “If your brother sins, rebuke him ...”⁴⁶ Scholars believe that Matthew’s passage does not limit confrontation to direct offenses only, or where one Christian sins directly against another.⁴⁷ If so, confronting would rarely occur. Sins such as alcoholism, greed, and pornography do not always take aim at anyone personally, but offend and impact everyone connected to the sinning individual. Thus, “offense,” in this context, means any unrepentant sin that grieves another Christian.

The first course of action, when confrontation becomes necessary, entails establishing a time and place to meet.⁴⁸ This should take place “soon after arranging the meeting. Long delays cause undue tension and anxiety.”⁴⁹ Furthermore, address this issue face-to-face. Confronting people on the phone or by email may feel like a less threatening way to handle things, yet eye contact and non-verbal language are crucial for effective communication.⁵⁰ One must also give careful thought to the meeting place. A neutral location should be chosen, one conducive to

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 1640, Kindle.

⁴⁶ Hammett and Merkle, 2187, Kindle.

⁴⁷ Gordon J. Wenham et al., eds., *The New Bible Commentary*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), Logos Bible Software.

⁴⁸ Cheong, 1638, Kindle.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

open conversation. Attention to these details will improve the chances of a successful encounter.

Some point out that Jesus' command in Matthew 18:15 to "... go and tell him his fault ..." actually connotes persuasion.⁵¹ Daniel Cawdry observes, "He does not say, accuse him, chide him, revile or reproach him ... but to convince him ..." ⁵² In other words, the offended Christian should work to persuade the sinning brother or sister of their wrong doing, hoping to bring them to repentance.

Moving to the Next Level

Jesus designed church discipline to increase in pressure, or consequences, when a person resists repentance. From a discipleship standpoint, remaining in sin is not an option. Thus, believers must accept the responsibility to move discipline to the next level when necessary.

Although Jesus provides clear guidelines for church discipline in Matthew 18, His silence on some of the finer details on the topic infers some flexibility in its practice. For instance, Jesus never sets time frames between the different steps of correction. Thus, the church can proceed at variable speeds depending upon the individual situation. Sometimes the process may move more slowly, as when a believer takes some level of responsibility for his or her sin. Then, again, it may move more quickly as it does in 1 Corinthians 5, where the man sleeping with his father's wife shows no remorse.⁵³ Every situation has a unique set of factors and should receive individualized attention.

Moving to the next level of discipline remains the responsibility of the offended party. Church leadership, however, should support this action and provide guidance. Neglecting to continue to the next level shows a reckless disregard for God's restoration plan.

Witnesses

Should the one-on-one confrontation fail, Jesus instructs His disciples to involve one or two other witnesses. He commands, "But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses" (Matt. 18:16). In doing this, Jesus borrows from an Old Testament practice that required multiple witnesses of a crime before a conviction could take place.⁵⁴ Yet, in this context, scholars

⁵¹ Daniel Cawdry, *A Discourse on Church Discipline and Reformation*, ed. Therese B. McMahon and C. Matthew McMahon, 2012, 597, Kindle.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Leeman, *Church Membership*, 114.

⁵⁴ Armstrong, 51.

believe that Jesus intends for the witnesses to be more than just first-hand reporters. Mohler suggests, “Jesus seems to intend for the witnesses to be an important presence in the event of the confrontation, thus adding corroborating testimony concerning the confrontation of a sinning brother.”⁵⁵ In other words, the witnesses observe the spirit of the accuser, the quality of his or her confrontation, and the response of the offending Christian. The information gathered either confirms or denies the original accusation.

One’s choice of witnesses is another important consideration. Witnesses should exhibit spiritual insight and “possess credibility” among fellow members.⁵⁶ They must represent the body of Christ well, making it more likely that the church will support their findings.⁵⁷ The offended Christian should also choose witnesses with the offender in mind. Love should propel him or her to select believers that the accused person respects.⁵⁸ In Philippians 2:4, Paul exhorts his readers, “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others ...” Thus, Christians should remember this verse when selecting witnesses.⁵⁹ Again, restoration remains the ultimate goal of church discipline. Therefore, the church should choose witnesses that improve the likelihood of success.

The witnesses, on the other hand, must position themselves for maximum effectiveness. Objectivity must be protected by limiting the amount of information the accuser gives to the witnesses. Only the pertinent facts of the case are needed. Like a jury, witnesses must strive to maintain impartiality, limiting themselves to the essential details of the case.⁶⁰

Confidentiality

Jesus teaches in Matthew 18:15, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone.” The last part of this verse, “between you and him alone,” does not encourage, but commands confidentiality. Biblical reconciliation seeks to restore broken relationships at the lowest possible level with the least amount of information changing hands.⁶¹ The discipline process, however, cannot guarantee continued confidentiality.⁶² Non-disclosure remains contingent upon the response of the offending brother or sister. If

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Bear, 1524, Kindle.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 1406, Kindle.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 32.

⁶² Cory D. Shipley, “Increasing the Knowledge of Pastors and Church Leaders about Biblical Church Discipline” (DMin Thesis, Oral Roberts University, 2009), 100.

repentance follows the one-on-one confrontation, then the issue is dead, and all discussion ceases. If repentance does not result, however, the Bible instructs the offended party to elevate the problem to the next level.

Christians err when they guarantee absolute confidentiality in a church discipline situation. Promising to do so goes beyond biblical teaching.⁶³ Yet, even when other believers join the process, a form of confidentiality still applies. Pertinent information stays within the expanded circle of accountability. Moving it beyond this circle breaks confidence and may lead to gossip.⁶⁴

One Person Should Lead

If the offending person does not repent after a one-on-one encounter and witnesses become a part of the process, one of the witnesses should take the lead.⁶⁵ This brings greater objectivity to the confrontation by allowing someone other than the offended party to move the process forward.⁶⁶

The leading witness should also establish time limits for the meetings. Some suggest that an hour and a half to two hours allows plenty of time for the first meeting with the witnesses.⁶⁷ Yet, “even if full resolution is not achieved during this time, you can make good headway into understanding the issues and the hearts of those involved.”⁶⁸ Without time limits, meetings can last longer than necessary, further straining the broken relationship. If the problem persists after the first meeting, another can be scheduled for the near future.

When to Include Elders (Pastors)

Jesus never teaches that elders must assume a leading role in discipline. This does not mean, however, that their presence and wisdom are unimportant. Pastors lay the groundwork for healthy discipline in their congregations. Moreover, some believe that a pastor’s presence adds influence and increases the effectiveness of the confrontation.

⁶³ Adams, 30.

⁶⁴ Ivy, 901, Kindle.

⁶⁵ Adams, 62.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Cheong, 1875, Kindle.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Tell It to the Church

When a Christian ignores the warnings of an offended brother or sister, as well as those of the witnesses, the church body gets involved. In Matthew 18:17 Jesus instructs, “If he refuses to listen to them [witnesses], tell it to the church.” In other words, the seriousness of the confrontation increases, resulting in greater public visibility.

Yet, different churches interpret “tell it to the church” differently. For example, some understand “tell it to the church” to mean notifying church elders only, “since they are God’s appointed leaders of the church.”⁶⁹ Others insist that “tell it to the church” means including only the “most relevant group of people” involved in the confrontation. No one else needs to participate.⁷⁰ Still others, however, hold to the position that “tell it to the church” means exactly what it says—bring it before the entire body of believers. In view of what Jesus seeks to accomplish, the latter viewpoint seems more likely. By this time, the offending person has had ample opportunity to repent and maintain a fair level of privacy. Yet, if steps one and two fail to bring restoration, then the offender must come before the membership body.

The Entire Church Body

Many pastors struggle with the idea of bringing a rebellious Christian before the entire church body because they want to protect the church from “unnecessary grief.”⁷¹ Yet, Jesus did not instruct his disciples to “tell it to the leaders of the church,” but to “tell it to the church” (Matt. 18:17).⁷² This allows the congregation to speak with one voice, using its corporate influence to persuade the wayward brother or sister to change.⁷³ Bringing the unrepentant sinner before the membership body is meant to have an extreme effect. In doing so, the church stands together to pray for, and encourage, the unrepentant person to turn from his or her wickedness.⁷⁴

Before bringing the impenitent person before the church body, however, pastors need to coordinate with the leadership team, the offender’s family, and any other pertinent

⁶⁹ Ibid., 2171, Kindle.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 2172, Kindle.

⁷¹ Bear, 1480, Kindle.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

individuals.⁷⁵ If these people are not appropriately informed and supportive of the action, division and disruption may take place.

Gathering the Saints

In today's culture, the idea of bringing an unrepentant sinner before the church evokes the image of a Sunday morning crowd, complete with visitors and guest speakers. Yet, this does not accurately construe the meaning of "tell it to the church." Bradley states, "Under no circumstances should the process be conducted in a regular worship service for fear of strangers and unbelievers in attendance. The appropriate method is to call a special meeting of official church membership."⁷⁶ Hence, only a gathering of the members serves as an appropriate environment for this step. Including non-members in this process, people not initiated into the beliefs and expectations of the church, will result in confusion due to the absence of a unified spirit.

Excommunication

The final step of corrective discipline involves removing the unrepentant sinner from the church. This takes place when an individual refuses the preceding steps of biblical correction. The body of Christ must intensify their efforts when a Christian seems content in his or her sin, and "there's no evidence that the Spirit is making him or her uncomfortable ..."⁷⁷ Jesus tells His disciples, "And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector" (Matt. 18:17). In other words, treat the unrepentant individual as an outsider, as someone who no longer belongs. Paul contextualizes Jesus' words when instructing the Corinthians, "...not even to eat with such a one" (1 Cor. 5:11). In Paul's mind, the expected consequence for persistent unrepentance is exclusion from the privileges of the body of Christ, including daily fellowship.⁷⁸ Spiritually speaking, a believer in this position has already severed communion with God and other Christians by relentlessly pursuing sin.⁷⁹ Excommunication simply provides an outward symbol of an inward reality.

Excommunication also stands as the final attempt at restoration. It seeks to change the mind of the wayward Christian and bring him or her back into the fold. Moreover, it recognizes the perilous, eternal consequences of allowing a rebellious believer to continue in deception, and seeks this last-ditch effort to rescue the lost soul.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 2207, Kindle.

⁷⁶ Bradley, 75–76.

⁷⁷ Leeman, *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus*, 711, Kindle.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 707, Kindle.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Ivy explains, “The removal of the unrepentant brother does not mean we are unloving and unwilling to help this man with emergency or even neighborly needs. However, we do nothing which makes him feel he is in right standing with God or the local church.”⁸⁰ The ostracism, therefore, should include relational distance as it pertains to friendship and spiritual camaraderie. The rebellious individual must feel the sting of the exclusion, understanding that normal, close relations cannot be reestablished until repentance takes place.

As for the treatment of excommunicated family members, Christians have a fundamental obligation to meet the primary needs of their loved ones. That means that married couples continue to honor the covenant with their spouse, and relatives maintain a respectful, caring relationship with excommunicated loved ones.⁸¹ Although family members do not pretend that the excommunicated relative still serves Christ, they cannot neglect the care and responsibilities that come with their family position.

Members Who Refuse to Disassociate

Once excommunication takes place, the body of Christ should cooperate to ensure that restoration remains tenable. Excluding a member does not mean that the church forgets an individual. It does mean, however, that the body continues to pray for and withholds fellowship from, the Christian. If some enforce the discipline while others do not, its effectiveness diminishes. In reality, when members refuse to cooperate with the excommunication of a rebellious Christian, they become guilty themselves of rebellion and subject to disciplinary action. Obedience to Christ means supporting His judgments, and the judgments of Christ have been entrusted to the church.

Unwelcomed Return

Occasionally an excommunicated member will return to the church unwelcomed. Ivy suggests, “Do not allow any church members to try and physically remove him from the facilities or you could face a law suit. The elders should declare that the meeting is closed, and then inform the man that he is trespassing in a private meeting”⁸² If the excommunicated individual still refuses to leave, however, leadership should warn the person that police involvement will come next.⁸³ This action should not stem from anger or vindictiveness, but from the desire to maintain order and discipline within the church.

⁸⁰ Ivy, 971, Kindle.

⁸¹ Joel L. Coker, “Cast Out from Among the Saints: Church Discipline Among Anabaptists and English Separatists in Holland, 1590-1620,” *Reformation II*, 2006, 11.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 2990, Kindle.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

Restoration

Restoration occurs when an offending brother or sister repents of his or her sin. This can take place anywhere in the discipline process. Depending on the nature of the sin, however, restoration may require a process to help the offender settle back into a faithful walk with Christ. In some situations this journey may not take long. In other instances, particularly when an individual persists in sin, the restoration period may be more extensive.

Restoration not only focuses on readmitting someone into the body of Christ, but it also ensures that “the disorienting haze of sin,” and the spiritual blindness that accompanies it, dissipates.⁸⁴ Although God’s forgiveness comes immediately, the consequences of sin linger. Thus, the body of Christ must assist struggling Christians to regain their spiritual equilibrium and resettle into a life of discipleship.

Different elements within a restoration plan may include required reading, Scriptural and other, counseling, seminars, small group involvement, etc.⁸⁵ Each element reinitiates formative discipline, reinforcing biblical standards and helping an individual through times of temptation. The development of an accountability team also serves as a crucial component for restoring people to health.⁸⁶ This could entail assigning two or three mature Christians to provide regular contact for the restored individual. Too often, this type of intentional process does not happen in churches.⁸⁷ For this reason, repentant Christians sometimes struggle to re-acclimate to spiritual life.

⁸⁴ Cheong, 2751, Kindle.

⁸⁵ Shipley, 118.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Adams, 95.

Other Considerations

When Minors are Caught in Sin

Church discipline for minors seeks the same outcome—restoration. Yet, the church cannot discipline minors without parental involvement.⁸⁸ In God’s economy, parents serve as the authority figures in their child’s life, and, as such, function as the primary disciplinarians.⁸⁹ Thus, the church should work in cooperation with parents when disciplining minors.

The discipline of very young children remains the sole responsibility of the family. Formal church discipline does not apply in such cases. For teens nearer to adulthood, however, steps one, two, and sometimes three, may serve as appropriate measures of correction as long as they are coordinated with the minor’s parents or guardians.

When Government Authorities are Involved

At times, a brother or sister in Christ may encounter legal problems with local, state or federal governments. In such cases, the church has no obligation to accept outside charges without first conducting its own investigation. In fact, as far as the church is concerned, a believer remains innocent until proven guilty.⁹⁰ Bear suggests that, “At least two witnesses from the church should investigate the matter fully in order to report factual information back to the church.”⁹¹ The church must proceed with caution, remembering that history contains many instances of governments falsely accusing godly people.⁹² Furthermore, the standards of the state and the standards of the church do not always coincide. The state exists to maintain social order, an order not always aligned with biblical morality, while the church exists to disciple its members and to proclaim the gospel.

Other Churches

At some point, the question may arise as to whether other congregations are bound by another church’s excommunication. Near the turn of the twentieth century, Baptist denominations believed that anyone excommunicated under their authority remained so until loosed, by them, from such judgment.⁹³ In other words, an offender would remain excluded until he or she could prove to the original disciplining body that he or she had changed. From a

⁸⁸ Bear, 1650, Kindle.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 1645, Kindle.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 1668, Kindle.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 1673, Kindle.

⁹³ Leeman, *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus*, 83–84.

restoration standpoint, maintaining disciplinary continuity between churches seems like the most loving thing to do. If one church has a valid, biblical reason for excommunication, the same reason will apply to any other church.

Legal Concerns

Legal action against the church is another potential hazard when practicing church discipline. For this reason, the sections of this paper dealing with formative instruction and pre-discipline organization are crucial to protecting the church. Although lawsuits may come, the vast majority of them remain preventable.

The fear of litigation causes many churches to avoid church discipline. Moreover, because mainstream culture rejects traditional, biblical morality, pastors and congregants often feel as if they fight a two-front war—against those both inside and outside the church. Yet, these legal risks do not remove the church’s responsibility to carry out God’s discipline.⁹⁴ The church must never waver in the face of worldly disapproval, but must choose whom it will fear the most, God or the world.

Conclusion

Jesus never described true discipleship as an easy path. In fact, He warned those who wanted to follow Him to “count the costs.” Resisting sin and choosing to walk by the Spirit is not for the faint of heart. Thus, Jesus created the Church to act as a living organism, providing mutual support, accountability, wisdom, healing, mission and discipleship. Yet, discipleship infers discipline, a discipline that has expectations of growth toward Christ-likeness. In other words, Christians must encourage one another toward right living and bring correction when another believer fails to uphold biblical standards.

Church discipline springs from love. Yet, it is not a worldly or self-centered love, seeking approval by overlooking destructive behavior. Rather, corrective love risks everything in hopes of rescuing an endangered soul. The world does not understand this type of concern. Instead, it defines “love” as embracing all forms of behavior and never questioning another person’s actions. In reality, this is not love. Biblical love focuses on God’s character and His design for humankind. It recognizes that there are absolute standards of behavior and that only those who submit to these standards will gain eternal life. Church discipline, motivated to this end, attempts to help Christians stay on the right path.

Using this handbook, based upon Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 18 and other New Testament passages on the subject, will not guarantee restoration or repentance. Only the individual in question can determine the outcome. It will, however, create an environment of accountability where Christians feel safe and can thrive as they know that persistent, unrepentant sin will not be tolerated among the community of believers. Implementing church

⁹⁴ Shipley, 88.

discipline will cost the church something, but the fruits of that labor will far outweigh the daily challenges and discomfort of doing so.

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