

# *I Will Build My Church*

## The Purpose and Characteristics of Christ's Church

### 11 Purely Practicing Church Discipline

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April 5, 2020

#### **Matthew 18:15-20**

**15 "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.**

**16 But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED.**

**17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.**

**18 Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.**

**19 "Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven.**

**20 For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."**

To the Glory of God

Now we began this new year by examining just what a true, Biblical Church looks like. And the reason we are doing this- is because we desire to be a church like that- so that we may worship Jesus Christ in the manner in which He *deserves* to be worshipped. And we have covered a lot of ground- this is the eleventh Sermon in this Series. And even though we are all concerned about the Covid-19 Virus and our lives have radically changed in the month of March- knowing about this subject and becoming a true, Biblical Church has never been more important than it is right now- because of something that Jesus told us in **Matthew 16:18b**:

**... upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.**

... and we know from our Study that the "Rock" that Jesus was

referring is the Divine Revelation that God the Father gave to Peter (as representative of the Apostles):

### **Jesus is the Christ- the Son of the living God**

... and *everything* that the Church does (that pleases God)- is tied in with this one single Revelation- *including* the Salvation of lost souls. Let me put this another way: *Nothing* that the Church is engaged in- glorifies God- unless this Divine Revelation is at the very core. Let me say this yet one more way: All that the people of the modern church do- that *ignores*; or *minimizes*; or *excludes* this Divine Revelation does NOT glorify God; it actually fights *against* God and His Glory.

But the second part of this Statement by Jesus is of particular interest- especially during the current crisis that has come upon the world. The Owner and Creator of the Universe (having taken on human flesh) said,

**... the gates of Hades will not overpower it [the Church].**

... and this tells us that satan is NOT in charge of the Coronavirus; The United States Government is NOT in charge of the virus; no Man; no angel; no demon; no Power on earth or under the earth is in charge of this virus. God alone- is totally in charge. And the Promise of Scripture is that God is very faithfully and powerfully working this thing that we call, "Evil" together with everything else that God has either sovereignly *allowed* or *caused*- so that two things will happen:

- God will be glorified
- The Joy of every saved soul will be made full

Now sometimes that is easy to see. But many times, it is hard to see how something so evil; so destructive; so terrifying could ever bring God Glory and bring about the fullness of our own Joy. But that is where the Bible comes in. We see several people that are illustrated in the Bible- that had terrible things happen to them. And not only do we see the *beginning* of their struggles- but God was Good to show us their end result. And in every case- God was not absent- He was very near- working His sovereign Will- even through the hardships and trials and

sufferings.

And the reason these examples are given to us- is to show us that God does not wait until we do something first and then responds to what we do. No, God is the One Who causes or allows all things to happen- in order to bring about His Will in the earth.

So, these biblical examples have been given to us- to help us- because we don't always see the end result of our *own* trials and sufferings. And so, these examples give us courage; and they build up our Faith in the Savior, Who lived and died and rose again- that God has NOT abandoned us; God has NOT left us to ourselves. The God, Who never sleeps or slumbers is very busy- working this evil virus- together- with every other Good and Bad thing- to bring about our Joy- and the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, we read the Bible and we believe that, in the midst of a global pandemic- that God is no longer angry with those He has chosen to save- and that everything He is doing- everything- is the very BEST thing that He could do to His child- at that time. And that means that whether we live or die- we are left to trust that we are in the safest place in all the Universe- the Hands of God.

And so, while we use Wisdom; and while we seek to do all that we can do- we rest in the unchangeable Promise from a God, Who cannot lie- that Christ's Church will weather this storm and it will grow stronger; and more holy; and more godly; and more biblical; and the Church will be on the earth- when Jesus parts the sky and returns to present the Church to Himself- in all her glory- as the crowning achievement of all He is and all that He has done!

So, now, more than ever- we should strive to pursue Holiness on purpose; we should pray without ceasing; we should stand on the Promises of God; and we should look for every opportunity to herald this glorious Gospel- to as many people as possible- every day- as God gives us that opportunity!

Now as I told you several weeks ago, we are NOT the first generation of believers who are sincerely striving to become a "Biblical Church." Many hundreds of years ago, godly men penned down a blueprint for becoming Biblical- that has since come to be called, the "Belgic Confession". And in Article 29, the Confession states that there are three "Marks" or identifiers that make up a true, Biblical Church:

- The pure Preaching of the biblical Gospel
- The pure Administration of the Sacraments as Christ instituted them
- The pure Practice of “Church Discipline” for correcting faults.

... and last week, we looked at #2- and so, today I want to cover the final Mark- as identified by the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Reformers:

### **A true, Biblical Church contains the pure practice of “Church Discipline” for correcting the faults of believers**

#### **The Case for Discipline**

We live in an age where Sin is not considered very seriously. But we, who love and serve Jesus Christ, have a *responsibility*; and a solemn *duty* to look at Sin- *any* Sin- the very *same* way that God has revealed Sin to be in Scripture: a terrible offense to a holy God- which has devastating consequences both now and in Eternity for those engaged in it. And that makes Sin to be a very serious matter. The screams of the unregenerate souls in Hell; and the scream of the Lamb of God on the Cross- are the loudest testimonies throughout the Universe- that Sin is infinitely Horrific; Damnation is infinitely Just; and Grace is infinitely Precious.

So, whether people; or our Culture; or our Government take Sin seriously or not- it is clear from Scripture that God does. So, if the people of Christ’s Church are to be what God created them to be- we *must* have at least five responses to Sin:

- We must *agree* that what the Bible identifies as Sin- is Sin
- We must *agree* with God (Confess) that Sin is wrong
- We must *strive* to *hate* Sin in ourselves and in others
- We must *labor* to abstain from Sin ourselves
- We must *strive* to “turn away” (Repent) from Sin when we are guilty
- We must *confront* Sin in ourselves and other genuine believers

Now because Sin is just as bad as the Bible says it is- the language of the Bible reflects God’s disposition toward Sin and our efforts to overcome Sin. The Bible contains language that is sweet; poetic; pure; lovely; encouraging; powerful; and breathtaking. But when the Bible speaks of Sin and our efforts to overcome it- the language of the Bible is the language of war.

So, we must understand that what Human Government has deemed to be “Legal” and what Almighty God has determined to be “Sin” are NOT the same. Simply because a Local, State, or Federal Government has *legalized* a particular Act that Scripture has identified as “Sin” does NOT change anything. God is the sole Arbiter of all Morality- what is “Right” and “Wrong”; what is “Good” and “Evil”; what is “Acceptable” to believers and what is “NOT Acceptable”; and what is “Holy”

and “Profane”- . And so, no Man; no group; no organization; and no Government has the Authority to disannul what God has said.

Sadly, we also live in an age where people feel no sense of “community” with one another as in the past. Neighbors seldom speak; and the closeness and love of past generations is a distant memory. But again, we, who love and serve Jesus Christ, have a *responsibility* and a solemn *duty*- and a JOY- to *not* follow the world; and to fervently love one another with a pure heart. And that means that we must care about each other; and guard; protect; and encourage one another in the spirit of Love that God has graced us with- *especially* when it comes to Sin.

When you combine the Biblical view of Sin and godly Love- you come up with something so unique that the world looks on with wonder- the Church of Jesus Christ. The Church is a real spiritual Body, which is linked by godly Love; and which has an exclusive devotion to God. Nothing else on earth is like the Church.

But when the Church refuses to love; and when the Church refuses to confront Sin, the Church loses its distinction from the world and becomes no different. So, in order for the Church to be the Church- it *must* love; and it *must* confront Sin. And this is nothing new. Five hundred years before Jesus was born- God told Ezekiel about the responsibility that believers have to other believers, who sin:

#### **Ezekiel 3:17-21**

**17 "Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman to the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from My mouth, warn them from Me.**

**18 "When I say to the wicked, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way that he may live, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand.**

**19 "Yet if you have warned the wicked and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered yourself.**

**20 "Again, when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I place an obstacle before him, he will die; since you have not warned him, he shall die in his sin, and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand.**

**21 "However, if you have warned the righteous man that the righteous should not sin and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; and you have delivered yourself."**

The lost, unregenerated world has no desire to confront Sin. The world says, “*No one is going to tell me how to live*” and “*That’s none of my business*”. But that attitude is *not* a “free and liberated spirit”- it is actually open and hostile rebellion toward God and the Authority of Scripture. And genuine believers simply CANNOT be rebellious or hostile toward Scripture.

Born again, regenerated believers *absolutely* desire for God to tell them how to live- so they may live their lives to God’s Glory. Because that is the sole Purpose of Life for those who have experienced the miracle of the New Birth: to live their lives in such a way that *proves* that Jesus is the Treasure of the Universe. And even though believers do sin- we are not *trying* to sin. Genuine believers are

struggling against the lusts of their flesh, by the Power of the Holy Spirit, to be found humbly and joyfully submitted to the Authority of Scripture, in their daily lives- all to the Glory of God. That is what saved people *do*. And even though we are not always successful in accomplishing that- that is nonetheless our primary Goal in Life.

But in our effort to be that kind of believer- periodically, we fall into Sin. The weaknesses of our flesh plagues the best of us. And we have to understand that since we are part of a Body (The Church) when we do sin- we not only affect *ourselves*- but we affect the corporate Testimony of the Church as well. It is simply *impossible* for a member of the Church to be blessed and yet every other member not rejoice with them. Conversely, it is also impossible for a member to sin and all the rest not be affected by it. But the horrendous nature of Sin, is twofold:

- Many times, we don't see Sin in ourselves
- Many times, we desire to hide Sin

By definition, Sin is deceptive. The Apostle Paul was “carried along” by God the Holy Spirit to write,

### **2Timothy 3:13**

**But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.**

But just what does it mean for someone to be deceived? The Bible calls deception, “spiritual blindness”. Being deceived stops an individual from “seeing”. But what is it that they cannot see?

### **2Corinthians 4:3&4**

**And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.**

But God has been Good to provide the Church with various “Vehicles” or “Tools” or “Means of Grace” that will open our eyes and stop us from being deceived. Among these “Means” are:

- Hearing, reading, studying, and learning the Bible
- Prayer
- Godly Fellowship
- The Sacraments (Baptism and the Lord's Supper)
- Fasting
- Service

... and by availing ourselves to these various “Means” our eyes are open to Truth; our hearts are filled with a Love for God and each other; and our minds are

determined to put Divine Truth into action. And Sin has a much harder time hiding from us. And by developing what the Puritans called, a “Culture of Repentance”, the members of the Church find it much easier to confront and confess Sin and then turn from it. So, by the Church having godly Leaders, who fully proclaim all the Counsel of God- sinning saints have a way to be restored.

So, now all that remains is our human tendency to hide our own Sin. (**Genesis 3:8; Jonah 1:3**). And God has graciously made a Provision for that too. It is called, Church Discipline.

## **Discipline is Needed**

Whether it is in the home, or in your business; in government or the military; or in your own personal life, Discipline is both needed and vital. It is abundantly clear that the *lack* or the *absence* of Discipline in these areas always leads to chaos and dysfunction. For example, we are all paying a huge price in our Culture today because far too many parents are simply unwilling to discipline their children. Society at large is imploding because it is unwilling to discipline criminals. But we are paying an even greater price because the modern Church has ceased to love its members enough to exercise Church Discipline.

In our laid back and chaotic world- just mentioning the word, “Discipline” causes fear and turmoil in the hearts of many. We are so used to operating in a rebellious self- centered manner that the thought of having to “tow the line” causes panic. Today, the term, “Church Discipline” is falsely associated with terrible sins like “spiritual abuse” and “manipulation” of the worst sort- and the Reality is that there have been abuses and excesses in Church Discipline in the past.

But we need to realize that when abuse or manipulation is present- Church Discipline is not. Abuse is Abuse- no matter who is doing it or why. And Abuse is *always* wrong. And Spiritual Manipulation is Witchcraft and is not of God. But Biblical Church Discipline has never been either of those things- because Discipline is clearly taught in the very Scriptures that tell us of the Love of God. But in every case where Spiritual Abuse or Manipulation exists- it is allowed to flourish precisely because no formal written policy of Church Discipline exists.

Now the word, “Discipline” comes from the root, which means- *To learn*. Those who followed Jesus were “Disciples” or “Disciplined Ones” or “Students” or “Learners”. This is what made them different from the world. And this is why God could use them. It is a cardinal rule of God that the Lord will not use anyone who is unruly and unwilling to submit to His Authority.

In the Bible, Jesus taught us not only what to *believe*- but also how to *live*. And those who follow Jesus today and who are used by God- are *always* those who have abdicated their own self- wills; and who have graciously and humbly submitted to Christ’s Discipline. Those who rebel and who strive to be in charge of their own lives- always pay a terrible price in frustration and misery for living unto themselves.

We must understand that undisciplined people are not “Free”- they are simply Rebels- operating in their own carnal natures and who refuse to humbly submit to God’s Authority. And rebels are *always* arrogant and self-righteous- because they genuinely think that they are above God’s Demands and that God’s Promise to damn all unrepentant sinners doesn’t apply to them. So, we must know that living outside Biblical Discipline is not “Liberty” or “Freedom”- it is Anarchy- and a reproach to God and His absolute Rule over what He alone has made.

Now, by definition, “Discipline” involves using various “tools” and “means”. Confrontation; Correction; Rebuke; Suffering; Persecution; Trials; Exhortation; Encouragement; Praise; Blessing; Repentance; Restoration; etc. are all Tools that God uses through His Church to mold us and shape us into the Image and Likeness of Jesus Christ (Sanctification).

So, any Church that seeks to be Biblical; and which desires to be found faithful to Jesus Christ- *must* employ Discipline upon those whom God has added to the Church. We should never add to or take away from Scripture. But we should expect people, who publicly confess that they are saved- to live as though that Confession is true. So, we should demand everything from people that the Lord Christ demands from them in sacred Scripture. So, Church Discipline is not an issue of control or manipulation- it is an issue of humble and joyful Obedience to God’s Word and His charge given to the Church.

## **Saved People Who Sin Should be Restored**

### **Galatians 6:1**

**Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.**

On occasion, a Christian will wander away from the Fellowship of other believers; and find himself ensnared by Sin through ignorance; mistakes; or even willful disobedience. The world views this as a “private matter” and makes statements like, “*That’s not my concern*”.

But the Church is *not* like the world. And because we understand all too well the consequences of Sin; and because we love the sinning member- we not only have the “right” to intervene- we have the “duty” to do so. To stand idly by while a covenant member of Christ’s Kingdom descends further down into the abyss of Sin- is to prove that we really couldn’t care less about them; and that we really don’t value their soul. Ignoring Sin violates *everything* that makes the Church to be a Glory to God.

The hard Truth about this Issue is that the world really doesn’t care. And because it is so much easier to just “let it go”- the tendency is to do whatever requires as little effort as possible from us. But again, the Church is not the world. And we are not to act like the world. As members of the Body of Christ, we are *commanded* to do five things that the world is not commanded to do:

- To hate sin (**Jude 23**)



- To love each other fervently (**1Peter 1:22**)
- To guard each other's souls (**2Timothy 4:2**)
- To leave the ninety and nine (**Matthew 18:12-14**)
- Restore fallen brethren (**Galatians 6:1**)

Nowhere in Scripture are the people in the Church given the license to just “let it go”. So, regardless of how uncomfortable this Subject may be- we simply *cannot* ignore Church Discipline and think that we are in right standing with God. Now, even though the modern Church has practically *abandoned* this issue- we must come to terms with the fact that without Church Discipline- the Church is operating in rebellion to Jesus Christ.

And because this is true- it then becomes *necessary* for the Church, and particularly its Overseers (Shepherds or Elders) to actively seek the Repentance and Restoration of the sinning Christian.

## **A Word About Elders**

No one should ever be allowed to become an Elder until and unless they are Biblically qualified to fill that position. And the truth is that most people do not qualify to be an Elder- even most people who are saved and who are going to Heaven. Elders should be the “cream of the crop”; and should be men of great integrity and godly character- living lives that are beyond reproach (**1Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9**). Men who abuse others; or who are power hungry; or who desire to manipulate other people are *disqualified* from ever being an Elder in the first place. Our own Church's By-Laws are clear: an ordained Elder, who falls into any of these types of behavior, will be removed from Office.

And the reason the requirements for Elders are so high is because so much is required from them. The people of the Church must be able to trust the Elders because they are commanded to submit to them. For example, **Hebrews 13:17** says:

**Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.**

As Shepherds of the flock, the Elders genuinely love the sheep; and are also held accountable by God for their spiritual welfare- including that of the “wandering sheep.”

## **1Peter 5:1-5**

**Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid**

**gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.**

According to Jesus' parable in **Luke 15:3-8**, when a sinning member is restored back into the fold- both the Church and all Heaven rejoices. So, we must understand that the main Purpose of administering Church Discipline is the glorious Restoration of sinning members.

So, just how is Church Discipline supposed to be administered? Well, Jesus Himself taught us in **Matthew 18:15-17**:

**If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. "But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that *BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED.* "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.**

Here, the Lord Jesus Christ expounds to His Disciples how He desires that we respond when a fellow- believer sins. And it is an amazing process. The Principles He sets forth in these verses are the Principles that must guide the Body of Christ as we seek to implement Discipline in the Church today. And I think the best way to preach this is to break it down into three Categories:

- The Purpose of Church Discipline
- The Process of Church Discipline
- The Purity of the Fellowship

## **1. The *Purpose* of Church Discipline**

The purpose of Church discipline is fourfold:

- The spiritual restoration of fallen members
- The strengthening of the Church as a whole
- The upholding of the integrity of the Word of God
- The glorifying of the Lord.

When a sinning believer remains in ongoing rebellion and blatant Sin- *everyone* loses. The individual loses because he is in Sin; but the Church as a whole also loses because the Fellowship, Love, and the Giftings that the erring member has- is no longer at work; The corporate Testimony of the Church- out in the greater Community is damaged because "another 'believer' is added to the long list of those

who don't live up to what they say they believe (hypocrite)"; and God is not honored or glorified.

But when a sinning believer is lovingly rebuked; and God the Holy Spirit takes that Rebuke; and brings him into Conviction; and he turns from his Sin and is forgiven- he is won back to Fellowship with the Body and with its Head, Jesus Christ. And everyone wins and the devil loses!

So, the primary Goal of Church Discipline is *not* to throw people out of the Church; or to feed the Self-righteous Pride of those who administer the Discipline. It is not to embarrass people; or to exercise Control in some unbiblical manner. The main Purpose of Church Discipline is to restore a sinning believer to biblical Holiness; and bring him back into a pure Relationship within the Body of Jesus Christ. For example- in **Matthew 18:15**, Jesus says:

**If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.**

The Greek word translated as “**won**” in this verse, was originally used to describe the accumulation of wealth in the sense of monetary Commodities. Here, it refers to the gaining back of something of great value that has been lost- namely an erring brother.

When a brother or sister strays- a valuable Treasure is lost. And the Church should not be content until he or she is restored. The Body of Christ is in the business of Recovery and Restoration. This is the godly Purpose of Church Discipline.

### **Galatians 6:1**

**Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.**

## **2. The *Process* of Church Discipline**

In **Matthew 18:15-17**, The Lord Jesus Himself sets forth a four-step process of Church Discipline:

- Tell him his sin privately (**Matthew 18:15a**)
- Take a witness (**Matthew 18:16**)
- Tell the Church (**Matthew 18:17a**)
- Treat him as an outsider (**Matthew 18:17b**)

**Step One** The process of Church Discipline begins on a private, individual level. Jesus said,

### **Matthew 18:15a**

**If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private...**

It is clear in this passage that we are to love the Lord and the Church and the individual members so much- that when a believing member of the Church engages in ongoing and unrepentant Sin- Jesus says here that *another* individual believer is to go to that sinning member *privately* and confront them- in a spirit of humility and gentleness. This Confrontation involves two aspects:

- Clearly exposing his Sin so that he is aware of it
- Calling him to Repentance.

It is very important that both of these two parts are accomplished in this initial Meeting. If the Sin, that the offending brother is engaged in, is in anyway obscure or unclear, then he will not understand *why* or *how* to turn from it. That is *why* it is so important that when confronting a brother in love and tenderness, we bring with us the Word of God which will clearly articulate the Offense.

If we simply state our opinion, or give some obscure man- made rule, or offer some cultural quirk, then the brother can simply ignore what we have said. We must never seek to impose our will on anyone; or *manipulate* them to do as *we* want them to do. Our desire must be innocent and pure. We must seek that they come back into a Right Relationship with God and His Word.

The Bible passages that we present must be clear; and must be brought out in such a way that there is no misunderstanding- the Lord condemns the Offense. And then we reason with the sinning member- that they have publicly confessed that they are saved and a Christian. And a truly saved person should desire to obey the Bible. Yet, in this case- they aren't. And so, we call them to Repentance.

And the Purpose of this is so that there is no misunderstanding at all- God clearly condemns what they are doing- and they are without excuse. Now the ball is in their court. Genuine, heartfelt Repentance is the only Solution. And if the sinning brother repents in response to the private Confrontation, that brother is forgiven and restored and the matter is over. In **Matthew 18:15b**- Jesus said, **... if he listens to you, you have won your brother.**

**Step Two** However, if the sinning brother *refuses* to listen to the one who has rebuked him privately, the next step in the Discipline Process is to take one or two more believers along to confront the sinning member again. In **Matthew 18:16**, Jesus said,

**But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED.**

Jesus said that the purpose of taking other believers with you is so that,

**... so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED**

Now there are three reasons why every word needs to be “established” by the mouth of these other people.

- The witnesses are present to confirm that the action in question is indeed a Sin as defined by the Bible
- The witness(es) are present to confirm that the offending member is indeed guilty of that Sin
- The witness(es) also confirm that the sinning member has been properly confronted and that they have not repented.

In order that the first part is accomplished, it is necessary that the Word of God define the action as Sin. Thus, the witness(es) confirms by their Biblical presentation that the Action in question offends God and is, in fact, a Sin.

The second reason that another witness(es) is present in the second meeting is that in the first meeting, the offending brother may have agreed that the action in sinful- but has denied that he is guilty of participating in it. By having an eye-witness at the second meeting, this obstacle to Repentance is overcome. Now it needs to be said here that hearsay or gossip does not count; and will be destructive if brought into this meeting. The knowledge must be sure; and it must be firsthand.

The presence of additional witness(es) is as much a protection for the one being approached as it is for the one approaching. After all, a biased person could erroneously say, “*Well, I tried to confront him, but he won’t repent*”. It would be presumptuous to think that one person could make that ultimate determination, *especially* if he was the one who had been sinned against. The witness(es) need to confirm whether there is a humble heart of Repentance; or one of indifference and/or rejection. Such a report provides the basis for further action because the situation has been verified beyond the report of one individual.

At this point, the great Hope is that the one or two, who are brought along to confront the sinner, will not have to become public witnesses against the member before the rest of the Church. Ideally, their added Rebuke will be sufficient to induce a change of heart in the offending member that the initial Rebuke did not cause. And, once again, if this change of heart *does* occur, that member is forgiven and restored, and the matter is dropped.

**Step Three** If the sinning member continues to refuse to listen and respond to the Confrontation of the witnesses- after a period of time- those witnesses are to report this to the Elders. And the Elders are to tell it to the entire Church.

**Matthew 18:17a**

**If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church;**

Step three is only necessary due to the *continued* refusal of the erring member to repent. By refusing to repent, the sinning member has indicated that he doesn’t care that what he is doing is wrong- and has put his *own* selfish interests above that of the Lord, Whom he says he loves, and Christ’s Church. This

Arrogance puts the Church into a very difficult position. By doing nothing, the Church would give credibility to anyone who commits Sin and yet refuses to repent- thus *undermining* the need for *anyone* to repent of Sin. The effect of this would be a Church that is overrun with unrepentant members, who live in willful disregard for their own individual Testimony or the corporate Witness of the Church.

The willingness of the Church to go from Step Two to Step Three is based upon how the Church answers these three Questions:

- How seriously does the Church view Sin?
- How much does the Church love the sinning member?
- How much does the Church value being obedient to Jesus Christ?

If the Church does not have a Biblical view of Sin- it is unlikely that anyone in the Church would ever initiate this process of Discipline at all. Unless the Church clearly understands the horror of Sin- it will not go through the process of Church Discipline.

And if the Church does not have a biblical view of Love- then again, no one in that Church would ever try to confront the sinning brother with his Sin in the first place- much less tell it to the Church. Only if true, genuine, biblical Love is present in the Church will the process of Church Discipline be manifested.

It is certain that Jesus expects His Church to exercise Church Discipline. The Scriptures are clear about this Issue. There is no doubt that Church Discipline is in the Bible. So, the only real issue is whether or not the Church is going to submit to the Authority of Scripture and obey Jesus about this issue. If the Church has *isolated* itself from the Authority of Scripture on other matters- it is highly likely that it will just ignore the Words of Jesus as it pertains to Church Discipline. But if the Church seeks after humble Obedience- then what Jesus commanded will be carried out.

This “**telling it to the Church**” is most appropriately done by bringing the matter to the attention of the Elders, who in turn, will oversee its appropriate communication to the Church as a whole.

## **How Long?**

But just how long should the witnesses continue to call the sinning member to Repentance before telling the Church? That depends on the circumstances and the Sin. Each case should be approached individually- but Sins involving Human Sexuality must be handled quickly. So, whereas ultimately *some* “deadline” must be given- the Elders at the Covenant of Peace Church must patiently carry out the third or fourth stage of Church Discipline until they are absolutely certain that the erring believer has truly sinned, and is continuing to Sin, and that they have refused to repent when appropriately confronted.

The Elders will routinely send a letter by registered mail- warning the individual that the third (or fourth) step of Discipline will be taken if the Church

has not received some word of Repentance by a specific date. When this date has passed- the person's Sin and refusal to repent are made known publicly to the entire membership of the Church, either before the entire assembly during a Communion Service or by some other appropriate and public means.

It has been the custom at the Covenant of Peace Church, upon enacting this third step, to clearly indicate to the whole Congregation that they are to pursue the person aggressively; and plead with him to repent before the fourth step becomes necessary. That crucial and potent Procedure often draws the sinner to Repentance and Obedience. And if Repentance does take place, the sinning believer is forgiven and restored at this point.

**Step Four** The fourth and final step in the process of Church Discipline is Ostracism (Excommunication).

**Matthew 18:17b**

**... and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.**

If a sinning believer refuses to listen even to the entire Church, then they are to be **“handed over to satan”** so that he may learn not to blaspheme.

**1Timothy 1:18-20**

**This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme.**

Jesus taught that a member of the Church, who is engaged in blatant, public, and grievous Sin, and who refuses to repent- is, after three genuine attempts at Reconciliation- *assumed* to be a **“Gentile and a tax-collector”**; and has *forfeited* his Privileges as a member; and should *not* enjoy the Fellowship of the saints as though nothing has happened.

Now the term “Gentile” (unbeliever) was originally used to describe “non-Jews”, who held on to their traditional paganism and had no part in the Covenant Worship, or social life of the chosen people of God. On the other hand, a “tax-collector” was an outcast from the Jews by choice- having become a traitor to his own people. In other words, the sinning member- who refuses to repent- is proving, by their unwillingness to repent- that they really are NOT believers, but unsaved betrayers of Jesus and Christianity.

It is important to note here that Jesus’ use of these terms does not mean that the Church is to treat these people badly. It simply means that when a professing believer refuses to repent, the Church is to treat him as if he were outside of the

Fellowship. They are not to let him associate and participate in the Blessings and Benefits of the Christian Assembly.

Now it is important to understand that the word, “Ex-Communication” comes from a Latin word that means: “*Out of Communion.*” So, the sinning member is no longer “in communion” with Christ’s Church. It is also important to understand that when the local Church goes to Step 4 and excommunicates someone- the sinning member is not merely “out of communion” with that local church- but with the entire worldwide Body of Jesus Christ!

Now, years ago, when most churches were trying to obey the Bible- this meant that the sinning member, who had gone through all four steps of Church Discipline, could not belong to any other Church. No other assembly would welcome that person- until they went back to the original church and repented and reinstated their Communion. Sadly, in far too many cases – an unrepentant member can be excommunicated from one church and be singing in the choir of another church by next Sunday. This is not a sign of great Revival, dear friends. It is rebellion to the Word of God and a sign that so many, in the modern Church, do not value the Bible as being inspired.

Now the Question that is often asked is: “*How in the world could any Church ever conduct anything so severe as Church Discipline in 21<sup>st</sup> century America?*” And the Answer is very simple: “*Because this is exactly what our Savior commanded that we do in Scripture.*” And when they ask, “*By what Authority do you engage in Church Discipline?*” Our Answer is straight forward: “*The infallible and inerrant and inspired Word of the living God.*”

But then some might ask, “*But isn’t the process of discipline as outlined by Jesus barbaric and cruel?*” And our Response is, “*No. What is cruel is how satan deceives people into believing that Sin is okay and has no consequences. God is Love and the incarnate God (Jesus Christ) is the very One who established Church Discipline. What is cruel is when we mistakenly believe that Love has no Obligations; no Requirements and no Responsibilities. God’s Love has always contained those Elements; and for anyone to blatantly spurn God’s Love; and live in rebellion is High Treason and cannot be tolerated.*”

So, instead of asking, “*What right does the Church have to administer Church Discipline*”, the correct Question should be, “*What right does any professing believer have to live in direct rebellion to the Word of God and think that he is in correct standing with God and His Church?*”

The worst mistake that we can make here is to assume that God is like us and that He thinks and operates like us. He doesn’t. And to judge God’s Ways based upon our own human reasoning is to bring God down to our level- which is the textbook definition of Idolatry.

**Psalms 50:21b**

**... You thought that I was just like you ...**

**Isaiah 55:8&9**

**For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.**



**For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.**

### **Scriptural Examples**

But are there any other biblical references to this action being done by the Church in the Bible? I'm glad you asked, because there sure is.

- When a man in the Corinthian church refused to forsake an incestuous relationship with his stepmother- the Apostle Paul commanded that the man be removed from their midst. (**1Corinthians 5:13**). The believers there were not even to share a meal with him (**1Corinthians 5:11**), for dining with someone was symbolic of a hospitable and cordial Fellowship.
- Paul also exercised this Discipline with two other men:

**1Timothy 1:20**

**Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.**

According to the Words of Jesus and the precedent of the early Church as recorded in the Bible, the one who is persistently unrepentant is to be totally *ostracized* from the Fellowship of the Church; and treated like an outcast, not a brother. Even though our modern Culture may view this as “harsh”; “barbaric”; or even “unchristian”- exercising Church Discipline is fully in accordance with God’s Word. But by valuing *our* view or sentiments over God’s- we are, in effect, saying that God was wrong to put Discipline in the Bible.

### **3. The Purity of the Fellowship**

As far as the general Welfare of the Church is concerned, the Purpose of “putting the brother/sister out” (Ex-Communication) is threefold:

- To protect the Purity of the Fellowship (**1 Corinthians 5:6**)
- To warn the Assembly of the seriousness of Sin (**1 Timothy 5:20**)
- To give a Testimony of Righteousness to a watching world

But as far as the Welfare of the unrepentant member is concerned, the Purpose of Excommunication is *not* to punish but to *awaken* them. And it must therefore be done in humble Love; and never in a spirit of Self-righteous Superiority

**2Thessalonians 3:14&15**

**If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.**

So, here, the Bible says that even though the Church is commanded by Scripture to excommunicate an unrepentant member- and to treat him *as though he were unsaved*- he is NOT unsaved. He is still a brother in Christ. And so, even though we are not to “socialize” with him- we are to *continue* to reach out to him- as a brother- and beg him to repent. The Bible is crystal clear about this- an excommunicated person is NOT our enemy.

When a Church has done everything it can to bring a sinning member back to the purity of a godly life but is unsuccessful, the Bible is clear that the individual is to be left to his Sin and his Shame. If he is truly a Christian, God will not cast him completely away. But the Lord may well allow that unrepentant believer to sink much deeper into Sin and Misery before he becomes desperate enough to turn away from his Sin and “come home”. But if we do not warn those who Sin with a clear sound- and they die in their Sins- God will surely punish them- but He will require their blood at our hands.

### **Ezekiel 33:1-9**

**And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, “Son of man, speak to the sons of your people and say to them, ‘If I bring a sword upon a land, and the people of the land take one man from among them and make him their watchman, and he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows on the trumpet and warns the people, then he who hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, and a sword comes and takes him away, his blood will be on his own head. ‘He heard the sound of the trumpet but did not take warning; his blood will be on himself. But had he taken warning, he would have delivered his life. ‘But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet and the people are not warned, and a sword comes and takes a person from them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require from the watchman’s hand.’ “Now as for you, son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; so you will hear a message from My mouth and give them warning from Me. “When I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked man, you will surely die,’ and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require from your hand. “But if you on your part warn a wicked man to turn from his way and he does not turn from his way, he will die in his iniquity, but you have delivered your life.**

The Command not to have Fellowship or even social contact with the unrepentant brother does not exclude *all* contact. When there is an opportunity to admonish him and to call him back- that opportunity should always be taken. In fact, such opportunities should be earnestly sought after and prayed for. But the contact should be for the purpose of Admonishment and Restoration and no other. We must remember that time does not heal this wound. Only genuine acknowledgement of Guilt and Repentance can bring the wayward brother back into the fold.

### **A Secondary Benefit**

There is a *secondary* Benefit in Church Discipline that is easily overlooked. In order for a brother to be qualified to go to another and confront him with his Sin, it is necessary that he be in right relationship with God himself. A hypocrite *cannot* bring a sinning brother or sister to Repentance. So, in order to help the wayward member repent- the *confronting* member must see to it that they are striving to be humbly and joyfully Obedient to Scripture themselves.

#### **Matthew 7:1-5**

**"Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at 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,' and behold, the log 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.**

Now, much to the dismay of the unsaved world that quotes this Passage frequently- this Passage does *not* teach that we can't ever correct an erring member. This Passage simply says that if you go to confront someone - with unrepented Sin in your *own* life- you will be judged in the same fashion that you give to them. So, to be qualified to confront anyone about their Sin- requires that we must *first* remove all offense from our *own* lives- then we are able to help that member remove theirs.

### **Questions and Answers**

Due to the fact that we are living in the time of the "Falling Away" (2Thessalonians 2:3), many in the modern Church have not even heard of the term "Church Discipline" much less ever seen it implemented one time. So, Studies like this may invoke Questions which deserve Answers.

**Q.** Is Church Discipline a relatively new thing?

**A.** No. The Lord Jesus Himself instituted Church Discipline (**Matthew 18:15-17**), and it is clear that the Church in the Bible implemented it (**1Corinthians 5:6, 11, 13; Galatians 6:1; 1Timothy 1:20; 5:20**). In addition, for approximately the first 1850 years of Church History, the overwhelming majority of *all* the Churches had a written policy of Church Discipline that was enforced.

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**Q.** Isn't Church Discipline unloving, harsh, and brutal?

**A.** That all depends on whether you think Jesus and His Apostles were unloving, harsh, and brutal. By modern human standards a lot of things that we are commanded to do in Scripture is considered to be "unloving", "harsh", and "brutal"- including preaching the Gospel; compelling people to repent; and believing that no one can come to the Father except through Jesus Christ. But obedience to God's Word is *never* being unloving- it is being faithful. Submitting to the Authority of

Scripture is not harsh- it proves our love and devotion to Jesus Christ; and placing God's Wisdom above our own is not being brutal- it is being wise.

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**Q.** I have never heard of Church Discipline before. If this is Scriptural, why don't more Churches practice it?

**A.** The fact that you could be raised in Church and never even hear about Church Discipline is testimony to how far the modern Church has fallen from its first Love. Church Discipline is Scriptural and so, either the Leaders of those individual Churches, who do not practice it, have never read or studied the Bible very much- or they have *overruled* Gods' Word with their own human wisdom and reasoning.

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**Q.** Does this mean that you are going to haul me up in front of the Church simply because I smoked a cigarette?

**A.** First of all, no one is talking about "hauling" anyone anywhere. Church Discipline is not utilized in an arbitrary way. Secondly, it sounds as if you have to come to terms with the answer to two questions:

- If you feel that smoking cigarettes is wrong- why do you continue to smoke?
- Haven't you been offended by people in the Church who do not "live what they preach?" Church Discipline will address that problem.

Remember that the first two Steps of Church Discipline are conducted *privately*. Only by continuing to refuse to repent after being lovingly confronted of Sin on two different occasions privately- do the next two Steps come into play. So, it is not the fact that someone sins that causes them to go into Step three and four of Church Discipline- it is their *refusal* to repent.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.

