

Church Discipline
What is it and How is it Implemented?
A Study

What We Believe and Teach
A Series of Covenant of Peace Church Distinctives
January 2007

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The Covenant of Peace Church
Physical Location: 13600 John Clark Road
Gulfport, MS 39503
Mailing Address: PO Box 2906
Gulfport, MS 39505-2906

www.covenantofpeace.net

Important Note:

The Christian is under no obligation whatsoever to accept and believe any Doctrine simply because the historic Christian Church has taught it for centuries- the age of a teaching is not sufficient validation of its integrity. Likewise, believers have no obligation to accept any teaching because the leadership of a particular Church teaches it.

No one should believe or accept Christian Doctrine unless and until that Doctrine has passed the supreme test of being “*Sola Scriptura*”- which is Latin for, “*From the Scripture Alone*”.

Common Sense; Human Reasoning; Church Councils; Papal Edicts; Tradition; Popularity; Personal Experience; or Church History are not sufficient or reliable Sources from which to develop Doctrine. All Church Doctrine must come from the Holy Scriptures; and from the Holy Scriptures alone.

The Covenant of Peace Doctrinal Statement says,

“The Reformers developed the Doctrine of ‘Sola Scriptura’ (Latin, for ‘by Scripture alone’), which teaches that four things were to come from Scripture and from Scripture alone:

- All Church Doctrine
- All Reproof
- All Church Discipline
- All Spiritual Instruction

This important Church Doctrine teaches that we are free to be led by the Spirit in many areas of our lives- but about these four things- we must be directed by Scripture and by Scripture alone.

By emphasizing Sola Scriptura, the Reformers were trying to achieve the delicate balance between allowing freedom for the Spirit to ‘**teach us all things**’ while maintaining the stability of the Church ‘continuing steadfastly in the Apostle’s Doctrine’.

Sola Scriptura in no way hinders the free flow of God’s Spirit, but as it pertains to these four things (Doctrine, Reproof, Correction, and Instruction in Righteousness), Sola Scriptura upholds the Word of God over that of Church Councils, Papal Edicts, Church Tradition, Personal Experiences, and Supernatural Manifestations. So the answer to the question of ‘*Why do you believe that?*’ is, ‘*That it is what God has said in His Word*’.

Too much of what is believed and taught today in the Church is not based in Scripture alone, but is based on something that sounds good; something that feels good; or something that is popular. That is dangerous. When a book that is written by a nationally known preacher becomes a best seller- that is great for business- but it is not the criteria that we must use in order to form Doctrine from it. We who are serious about what we believe and why we believe it need to make sure that what we believe is Scriptural and we need to make sure that what we teach is from the Bible alone.

The Church has been endued with Power from on High to preach and teach and do those things that the Bible commands- but nothing else. We have no right; we have no

license; we have no authority; and we have no anointing and we have no empowerment to teach or preach or do things that the Bible does not command or allow.”¹

But having said this, we also must be sure that we, who make up the modern visible Church, resist the temptation of arrogantly suggesting that we have more wisdom or more insight into areas of Doctrine than any others- especially those who came before us. Much of the individual pieces of what is collectively called “Christian Doctrine” was “hammered out” by the fathers of the Church through much agony and care over long periods of time. It didn’t come easy- but came as these men humbly searched and researched the Scriptures with fear and trembling to arrive at Truth.

So, whereas we affirm that all Doctrine must be from Scripture and from Scripture alone- we can, nevertheless, glean much by the collective wisdom of the leaders of the Church from ages past by studying both their victories and their mistakes.

Realizing that all humans- even the best humans can and do err; and also realizing that no human effort is inspired like Scripture; and also realizing that Scripture alone is the final arbiter of Truth- we do make as much use of the wisdom of our history as is prudent so as to bring a full understanding of the Holy Scriptures as possible.

The Covenant of Peace Church proudly adheres to The Doctrine of Sola Scriptura and these Distinctives are an honest and sincere effort to verify that our Doctrine is Biblically sound.

¹ *The Covenant of Peace Church Doctrinal Statement; What We Believe and Why We Believe It* (2006) page 13

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Question: What is Church Discipline?

Answer:

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 Case for Discipline

We live in a Time 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: as a terrible Offense to a holy God which has Consequences both now and in Eternity. And that makes Sin to be a very serious Matter. But whether people take Sin seriously or not- it is clear from Scripture that God does. So, if the Church is to be what God created it to be- it must confront Sin.

We also live in a Time where people feel no sense of Community or Commitment 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 to not follow the lost World- but to fervently love one another. And that means that we must care about each other; 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 with 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.

The lost unregenerate world has no desire to confront Sin. The world says, “*No one is going to tell me how to live*”. But that Attitude is not a liberated spirit- But rather an open and hostile Rebellion toward God and the Authority of

Scripture.

Born again, regenerate believers absolutely want God to tell them how to live- so they submit themselves to the Authority of Scripture and the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

But periodically, saints fall into Sin. The weakness 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 Sin- we do not only affect ourselves- but we affect the Church as well. It is impossible for a member of the Church to be blessed and every Member not rejoice. Conversely, it is impossible for a member to sin and all the Members not be affected by it.

The very nature of Sin is that, many times, when we sin- we either don't see it or we desire to hide it. But by submitting ourselves to an ongoing, vibrant Ministry that is faithfully and fully proclaiming the Word of God- the eyes of the Members are open to their own Sin. 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 faithful and godly Leaders, who fully proclaim the entire Counsel of God- sinning saints have a way to be restored.

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

Discipline is Needed

Whether it is in the Home, in a Business; Government, 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. 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 Culture- 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, many times, falsely associated with things like, "spiritual Abuse" and "Manipulation" of the worst sort- but nothing could be further from the Truth. Abuse is always Abuse- and it is always Wrong. 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 Scripture and is the Will of God. In fact, in every Church where "spiritual Abuse" or "Manipulation" exists- it is allowed to flourish precisely because no formal written Policy of Church Discipline existed.

The word, "Discipline" come from the root, which means- *to Learn*. Those who followed Jesus were "Learners" or Students. This is what made them different

from the world. 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.

Jesus taught His disciples not only what to believe- but also how to live. 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 seek to be in charge of their own lives always pay a terrible Price in both Frustration and Misery for living unto themselves.

We must understand that undisciplined people are not "Free"- they are "Rebels"- operating in their own carnal natures and who live outside of God's Authority. So, living outside of biblical Discipline is also not "Liberty"- it is "Anarchy"- and is a reproach to God's rule.

By definition, Discipline involves using various Tools or Means. Confrontation; Correction; Rebuke; Exhortation; Encouragement; Praise; Blessing; Repentance; and Restoration are Tools that God uses through His Church to mold and shape us into the Image and Likeness of Jesus Christ.

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. So, Church Discipline is not an Issue of Control- it is an Issue of 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.

Sadly, on occasion, a Christian will wander away from the Fellowship of other believers and find himself ensnared by Sin through either Ignorance or 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 actually 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 fellow saint descends further down into the Abyss of Sin- is to prove that we couldn't care less about him and do not value his soul. This violates everything that makes the Church a Glory to God.

The hard Truth about this Issue is that the lost 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 as possible from us. But we are not the world; and we are not to act like the world. As Members of the Body of Christ, we are commanded to do seven things that the lost World is not commanded to do:

1. To Love God (**Deuteronomy 6:5**)

2. To Love the Truth/Scripture (**Zechariah 8:19**)
3. To Hate Sin (**Jude 23**)
4. To Love each other- Fervently (**1Peter 1:22**)
5. To Guard each other's Souls (**2Timothy 4:2**)
6. To leave the "Ninety and Nine" and go to the "One" (**Matthew 18:12-14**)
7. 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. 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.

So, 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 Member.

A Word About Elders

No one should ever be allowed to become an Elder until and unless they are biblically Qualified to fill that Office. And the Reality is that most people do not qualify- 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 Elders in the first place. And an ordained Elder, who falls into any of these types of Behavior, will be removed from Office.

The Requirements for Elders are as high as they are- 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 (**Hebrews 13:17**).

As Shepherds of the Flock, the Elders love the sheep and are also held accountable by God for the "spiritual Welfare" of the sheep- including that of the wandering sheep. (**1Peter 5:2&3**)

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.

Question: What is the Biblical Process for Implementing Church Discipline?

Answer:

In **Matthew 18**, the Lord Jesus Christ expounds to His Disciples how He desires that we respond when a fellow believer sins. 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.

This Study will be broken down into three categories:

- 1) The *Purpose* of Church Discipline
- 2) The *Process* of Church Discipline
- 3) The *Purity* of the Fellowship

1. The Purpose of Church Discipline

The Purpose of Church discipline is fourfold:

- 1) The spiritual Restoration of fallen Members
- 2) The Strengthening of the Church as a whole
- 3) The Upholding of the Integrity of the Word of God
- 4) The Glorifying of the Lord.

When a sinning Member remains unrepentant in Rebellion and Sin- everyone loses. The individual loses because he is in Sin; the Church as a whole loses because the Fellowship, Love, and Giftings that the erring Member has- is no longer at work; The corporate Witness of the Church in the larger Community is damaged as another believer is added to the long lost of those who don't live up to what they say they believe; and God is not honored or glorified.

But when a sinning Member is lovingly rebuked; and he turns from his Sin and is forgiven, he is won back to Fellowship with the Body and with its Head, Jesus Christ. Everyone wins and the devil loses!

The Goal of Church Discipline, then, 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 over them in some unbiblical Manner. The main Purpose of Church Discipline is to restore a sinning Member to Holiness; and to bring him back into a pure Relationship within the Body of Jesus Christ. Let's examine the Process that Jesus Himself gave:

In **Matthew 18:15**, Jesus said:

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

Now the Greek word translated as “**gain**” 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 or sister.

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 the four-step Process of Church Discipline:

- 1) Tell him his Sin alone
- 2) Take some Witnesses
- 3) Tell the Church
- 4) Treat him as an Outsider.

Step One (**Matthew. 18:15**). The process of Church Discipline begins on an private, individual level. Jesus said,

Matt 18:12

15 "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 so much; we are to love the Church so much; and we are to love the individual Members of the Church so much- that when a believing member of the Church sins, another individual Member is to go to that sinning member *privately* and confront them in a spirit of Humility and Gentleness. This Confrontation involves two aspects:

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

It is very important that both of these two Parts are accomplished in this initial Confrontation. If the Sin that the offending Member is engaged in- is, in any way, Obscure or Unclear, then he will not understand why or how to repent. That is why it is so important that when confronting a fellow-Member 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 own will on anyone or manipulate them to do as *we* want them to do. Our Motive and Goal in Church Discipline must be Innocent and Pure. We must seek that they come back into a “Right- Relationship” with the Lord.

The Bible Passages that we present must also be clear; and must be brought out in such a way that there is no misunderstanding- the Lord condemns the Offense; and the offending Member is without Excuse. Now the Ball is in his Court.

If the sinning Member repents in response to the private Confrontation, he is forgiven and restored and the Matter is over.²

... if he listens to you, you have won your brother. (Matthew 18:15b)

Step Two (Matthew. 18:16). However, if the sinning Member *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 believing members along to confront him again.

Matthew 18:16

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.

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

BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. (Matthew 18:16b).

There are at least three Reasons why every Fact needs to be “confirmed” by the mouth of these other people:

1. The Witnesses are present to confirm that the Action in question is indeed a Sin- as defined by the Bible
2. The Witness(es) are present to confirm that the offending Member is indeed Guilty of that Sin
3. The Witness(es) also confirm that the sinning Member was properly Confronted and that he has or has not repented.

In order that the first part is accomplished, it is necessary that the Word of God clearly define the Act as a Sin. Thus, the Witness(es) confirms by his biblical Presentation that the Act in question offends God and is, in fact, a Sin.

The second Reason that other Witness(es) are present in the second Meeting is that in the first Meeting, the offending Member may have agreed that the Act was 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

² There may also be a Need for ongoing Counselling.

overcome. 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; certain; 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 genuine “Heart of Repentance” in the sinning Member or one of Indifference or Rejection. Such a Report provides the Basis for further Action on the part of the Church- 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 him 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. If this “change of Heart” *does* occur, that Member is forgiven; restored; and the Matter is dropped.³

Step Three (Matthew. 18:17a). But if the sinning Member still refuses to listen and respond to the Confrontation of the Witnesses- after a period of time- those Witnesses are then to tell it to the entire gathered Church.

Matthew 18:17a

If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church ...

Step Three is necessary due to the Refusal of the erring Member to repent. By refusing to repent, the sinning member has indicated that he doesn’t care if what he is doing is Wrong; and has put his own Selfish Interests above that of the 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 witness 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:

1. How seriously does the Church view Sin?
2. How much does the Church love the sinning Member?
3. 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

³ Again, there may be the Need for further Counselling.

in the Church would ever initiate this Process in the first place. Unless the Church clearly understands the horror of Sin- it will simply 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 Member with his Sin in the first place- much less tell it to the Church. Only if true, genuine, biblical Love is already 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. 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 ignore the red- letter Words of Jesus as it pertains to Church Discipline. But if the Church seeks after Humble Obedience- then what Jesus Commanded here 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?

So, how long should the Witnesses continue to call the person to Repentance before telling the Church? That depends on the Circumstances. Each Case should be approached individually. Whereas ultimately some “Deadline” must be given- the Elders at the Covenant of Peace Church must avoid carrying out the third or fourth Step of Church Discipline until they are absolutely certain that the erring Member has truly sinned; is continuing to sin; and that he has 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 they have not received word of Repentance by a specific date. When that Date has passed, the person's Sin and his refusal to repent are made known publicly, 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 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 takes place- the sinning Member is forgiven and restored at this Point.⁴

Step Four (Matthew. 18:17b). The fourth and final Step in the Process of Church Discipline is “Ostracism.”

⁴ Once again, it may be necessary to initiate ongoing Counselling here.

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 Member refuses to listen even to the entire Church, then he is to be **“turned over to satan”** so that he may learn not to blaspheme. The Bible says that the unrepentant Member is to be ostracized; *assumed* to be a “Gentile and a tax-Collector”; he 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 primarily used of “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.

It is important to note here that Jesus’ use of these Terms doesn't mean that the Church is to treat these people badly. It simply means that when a professing Member refuses to repent- he is acting as though he isn't a believer and has become a “spiritual Traitor” to the people of God- living outside of the Fellowship of the Church. So, the other Members are not to let him associate and participate in the Blessings and Benefits of the Christian Assembly.

Now the most common Question about Church Discipline I get almost always pertains to this 4th Step: *“How could any Church conduct anything so severe as Church Discipline in 21st century America? This is barbaric. Where is the Love? How could anyone claiming to be a Christian participate in treating people so badly?”* But the Answer is very simple: *“Because this is exactly what our Savior commanded that we do.”* And when they ask, *“By what Authority do you engage in Church Discipline?”* We respond, *“The inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of the living God is our Authority. No less than Jesus Himself, who is Love incarnate, commanded that we do this.”* And then when they ask, *“Isn't the Process of Church Discipline, as outlined by Jesus, barbaric and cruel?”* We respond, *“No. What is cruel is how satan deceives people into believing that Sin is fine and has no Consequences.”* So, instead of asking, *“What Right does the Church have to administer Church Discipline?”*, the correct Question should be, *“What Right do any of us have to live in direct Rebellion to the Word of God without Repentance and then believe that we are in Right standing with God and His Church?”* So, when they say, *“How could a Christian Church do anything like this?”* We should respond, *“How could any genuinely born-again soul continue to refuse to repent- even after he has been clearly and repeatedly shown- from the Bible- that he is sinning?”*

Dear friends, God is Love. And yet, the incarnate God (Jesus Christ) is the very One Who established Church Discipline. What we mistakenly believe is that Love has no Obligations; no Requirements; and no Responsibilities. But God's Love has always contained those Elements; and for anyone to blatantly spurn God's Love and live in unrepentant Rebellion is celestial High Treason- which cannot be tolerated.

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 text- book Definition of Idolatry.

Psalm 50:21b

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

Isaiah 55:8&9

8 “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord.

9 “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

Another great Question is: *“Are there any references to Church Discipline being carried out by the Church in the Bible?”* Because the Answer is, *“Yes!”* 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. (**1 Corinthians 5:13**). The believers there were not even to share a meal with him (**1 Corinthians 5:11**), for dining with someone was symbolic of a hospitable and cordial fellowship.

Paul also exercised this discipline with two other men:

1 Timothy 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 or barbaric or even unchristian- exercising Church Discipline is fully in accordance with God’s Word and by valuing our view over God’s we are, in effect, saying that God was wrong to put this in the Bible.

3. The Purity of the Fellowship

As far as the welfare of the Church is concerned, the purpose of putting the brother out is to protect the purity of the fellowship (**1 Corinthians 5:6**), to warn the assembly of the seriousness of sin (**1 Timothy 5:20**), and to give a testimony of righteousness to a watching world.

But as far as the welfare of the brother *himself* is concerned, the purpose of the ostracism is *not* to punish but to awaken him, and it must therefore be done in humble love and never in a spirit of self-righteous superiority (**2 Thessalonians 3:15**).

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 away, but He may allow him to sink still deeper before he becomes desperate enough to turn from his sin. But if we do not warn those who sin with a clear sound- and they die in their sins- God will punish them- but He will require their blood at our hands.

Ezekiel 33:1-9

1 Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

2 Son of man, speak to the children of thy people, and say unto them, When I bring the sword upon a land, if the people of the land take a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman:

3 If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people;

4 Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head.

5 He heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning; his blood shall be upon him. But he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul.

6 But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand.

7 So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me.

8 When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.

9 Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.

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 try to call him back, the opportunity should be taken. In fact, such opportunities should be earnestly sought after. 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 into repentance. So in order to help the wayward brother repent- the confronting brother must see to it that he also is free from sin.

Matthew 7:1-5

1 Judge not, that ye be not judged.

2 For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

3 And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

4 Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

5 Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

This passage does not say that we can't ever correct an erring brother. This passage simply says that if you go to confront a brother with known sin in your life- you will be judged in the same fashion.

So to be qualified to confront a sinning brother- we must first remove all offense from our own lives- then we are able to help that brother remove his.

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 implemented by times.

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 man can come to the Father except through Jesus Christ. Obedience to God's Word is not 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.

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 either the individual Churches, who do not practice it, have never heard of it either or they have overruled Gods' Word with their own human wisdom and reasoning.

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:

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

... Church Discipline will address the Problem of Hypocrisy.

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.

May God help us all as we seek to implement the Word of God into our Church concerning Church Discipline.