

Church Discipline And Restoration

PURPOSE: To outline the process utilized by The Chapel in Wadsworth regarding church discipline and restoration overseen by the Oversight Elder Board (OEB).

Definition: Being a disciple of Jesus Christ involves both formative discipline to lead us away from sin and corrective discipline when we are in sin. This policy governs corrective discipline. Corrective discipline is God's exercise of spiritual authority through a local church for the purpose of restoring an erring believer and to maintain the integrity of the local church. (Sugden and Wiersbe, Leeman)

Responsibility for Discipline

1. Elders (Pastors, Oversight Elder Board (OEB) Members) - are required to exercise the spiritual authority given by Christ to:

- a. Maintain sound doctrine (1 Timothy 4:16)
- b. Restore and preserve unity (Philippians 4:3)
- c. Keep watch over souls (Hebrews 13:17)
- d. Admonish in the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:12)

These spiritual leaders have been entrusted with spiritual authority for restoration and edification of the body, never to tear down (2 Corinthians 10:8; 13:10). As they equip the saints to do the work of the ministry, they must use God's Word for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness - (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). They will give an account to Jesus for His flock (Hebrews 13:17).

2. Individual Members - each is required to exercise self-discipline. This includes response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit to confess sin (1 John 1:8-10) and to examine oneself, especially before the mirror of the God's Word (James 1:22-25; 1 Corinthians 11:28-32). To be in a position to help restore other believers, it is necessary to first judge oneself so there will be no hypocrisy (Matthew 7:1-5).

3. Corporate Membership – the local Body of Christ is expected to judge those believers within the assembly (1 Corinthians 5:1-6:8; 1 Peter 4:17). It is recognized that all Christians are imperfect, seeking to grow in Christ by the power and direction of the Holy Spirit. Honest, gentle, direct, and fitting conversations should be a normal part of our loving participation in one another's formative and corrective discipline. (Galatians 6:1-5; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Romans 13:8, 15:14; Colossians 3:12-17).

Biblical Character and Motivation for Discipline

1. Church discipline must always be exercised out of LOVE. Jesus Himself said, "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline" (Revelation 3:19).
2. HOLINESS is the personal calling of each believer (Hebrews 12:10) as well as the corporate calling for Christ's bride (1 Thessalonians 4:7).
3. OBEDIENCE to the desire of Christ Jesus our Lord to have a pure bride also requires that discipline be exercised (Ephesians 5:25-27).
4. To Preserve UNITY (Romans 16:17; Philippians 4:2,3; 2 Timothy 2:23-26) and address overt immorality (1 Corinthians 5:11) in the body.

Benefits Derived from Discipline

1. For the offender:

Restoration and to avoid suffering harm (2 Corinthians 7:8-13; 1 Corinthians 5:5); suffering death (James 5:19); being condemned with the world (1 Corinthians 11:32)

2. For the Church:

Pursuing the sanctification of Christ's bride (Ephesians 5:25-27)

3. For the community:

Seeking and maintaining a proper identification and condition which distinguishes genuine believers (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians 5:11)

Product of Discipline

The Church should understand that the profitable products of discipline are very often experienced through a process that can be very painful. When we are trained by corrective discipline it leads to the peaceful fruit of righteousness (Hebrews 12:5-17).

Proper Response

Submission
Reverence

Improper Response

Despising (making light of)
Fainting (losing heart)

Results of a Failure to Discipline

Failure to discipline greatly hinders the testimony of the local church, and particularly its influence and power for good. It is an unacceptable degrading to the witness of Christ, and results in the progression of corruption and spiritual decay. Within the sphere of grace there must operate standards for faith and conduct (Matthew 5:13-16; Romans 6:1-14).

Cautions

1. The Church is not to extend discipline beyond its intended purpose (2 Corinthians 2:1-4).
2. Failure to forgive may result in:
 - a. the believer being swallowed up by too much sorrow (2 Corinthians 2:7).
 - b. Satan taking advantage of us (2 Corinthians 2:11).
3. We must not treat the offender as an enemy but a family member (2 Thessalonians 3:15).
4. Discipline must be exercised with impartiality.
5. All steps are to be made with a heart desire to restoration and healing (Galatians 6:1-4). Nothing is ever to be done with punishment or revenge in mind; that is at God's discretion (Romans 12:18-21).

The Exercise of Discipline

When a Christian is 'trapped/caught in some sin', spiritual people must seek to restore with gentleness and bear his burdens (Galatians 6:1-2) with an attitude of grief mixed with fear (looking to oneself lest he also be tempted). Compassion, pity, and forgiveness are tempered with the need for genuine repentance (2 Corinthians 2:4). Discipline is always exercised in love for our good to promote healing. The exercise of discipline involves humility, honesty, obedience to God's Word, prayer, and a forgiving spirit.

Steps Taken in Discipline Process

Step 1: Matthew 18:15 - Personal counsel and encouragement to morality or reconciliation to bring God's grace of forgiveness, restoration, and unity. Whenever possible, the offended party must go and tell the fault privately. The purpose is not to justify or soothe emotional hurt, but to restore the brother or sister.

If he/she listens then restoration has begun.

If he/she will not listen

Step 2: Matthew 18:16 - Two or three individuals will go and give counsel and encouragement to morality or reconciliation to bring God's grace of forgiveness, restoration, and unity. This may include a Pastor or OEB Member. Again, the purpose of a corrective discipline meeting is to pursue restoration of the person related to the sin.

If he/she listens then restoration has begun.

If he/she will not listen

Step 3: Matthew 18:17a - Consideration by Elders and an appropriate group of their choosing, representative of "the church", including an invitation for the one in question to participate, to seek resolution of the problem. At this step, the Elders can ask the offending party to step out from any or all ministry areas here at The Chapel in Wadsworth while the discipline process continues.

If he/she listens then restoration has begun.

If he/she will not listen

Step 4: Mathew 18:17b Refusal to listen after such careful attempts will result in a vote of the OEB to remove the individual from the church. The individual will no longer be a Member of The Chapel in Wadsworth and no longer welcome to serve, participate in a Community Group or Bible study, and receive official church communications. In appropriate circumstances worship service attendance may be prohibited. (Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14; Titus 3:9-11).

Such circumstances involving non-member attenders will be handled similarly.

Restoration

At any time, when the offending individual is ready to repent and embrace the corrective discipline process, where necessary, the OEB will work with him/her to develop a thorough plan of restoration.

At the discretion of the OEB, full involvement in certain teaching or public ministries may be restored. However, restoration does not always imply a return to teaching or public ministries.