

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

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In **Matthew 18:15-17**, Jesus outlines a structured approach to church discipline, emphasizing steps to encourage repentance and restoration. Here are the itemized steps with their specific references:

1. Private Confrontation

- *Matthew 18:15*: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother."
- **Purpose:** Begin privately to address the issue gently and protect the person's dignity, aiming for reconciliation without involving others unnecessarily.

2. Take One or Two Witnesses

- *Matthew 18:16*: "But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses."
- **Purpose:** Bringing witnesses adds credibility, ensures fairness, and provides accountability, following the biblical principle found in *Deuteronomy 19:15*.

3. Tell It to the Church

- *Matthew 18:17a*: "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church."
- **Purpose:** Involve the broader church community for the sake of prayer, guidance, and collective encouragement, appealing to the individual to repent and be restored.

4. Treat as an Outsider

- *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."
- **Purpose:** If the person remains unrepentant, the church is to regard them as outside the community, similar to an unbeliever, with the aim of driving them to self-reflection and eventual reconciliation with the church and God.

This structured process underscores the heart of church discipline: restoring the believer, maintaining church unity, and upholding holiness within the body of Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, Paul addresses the issue of church discipline specifically regarding a case of sexual immorality within the Corinthian church. He outlines several principles and actions to take in cases of serious, unrepentant sin. Here are five points with their references:

1. Acknowledge the Sin

- *1 Corinthians 5:1-2*: "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you... And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you."
- **Purpose:** Recognize and take seriously the presence of blatant sin within the community, acknowledging the need for action rather than tolerating or excusing it.

2. Remove the Unrepentant Sinner

- *1 Corinthians 5:2, 5*: "Let him who has done this be removed from among you... deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord."
- **Purpose:** Paul instructs the church to separate the unrepentant individual from fellowship, allowing consequences that may lead to repentance and ultimate salvation.

3. Avoid Fellowship with Unrepentant Believers

- *1 Corinthians 5:9-11*: "I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people... not even to eat with such a one."
- **Purpose:** For the sake of the church's purity, do not engage in close fellowship with anyone who claims to be a believer yet lives in unrepentant sin, applying this broadly to various types of sinful behavior (sexual immorality, greed, idolatry, etc.).

4. Maintain the Church's Purity

- *1 Corinthians 5:6-8*: "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?... Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."
- **Purpose:** Recognize that unchecked sin can corrupt the entire community, and strive for holiness and integrity as a church.

5. Judge Those Inside the Church

- *1 Corinthians 5:12-13*: "For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. 'Purge the evil person from among you!'"

- **Purpose:** Paul clarifies that the church has a responsibility to uphold standards among its members, differentiating between church discipline for believers and leaving judgment of non-believers to God.

In 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15, Paul addresses church discipline specifically for members who are idle and disruptive, refusing to work and live in accordance with the church's teachings. Paul provides practical steps for addressing this behavior, with an emphasis on restoration. Here are the itemized points with their scripture references:

1. Withdraw from the Disorderly

- *2 Thessalonians 3:6*: "Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us."
- **Purpose:** Paul instructs the church to distance themselves from anyone who persistently ignores apostolic teaching, both to protect the church's integrity and to make the individual aware of the seriousness of their actions.

2. Note the Person and Do Not Associate with Them

- *2 Thessalonians 3:14*: "If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed."
- **Purpose:** By avoiding close association with the unrepentant person, the church creates an opportunity for the individual to feel the weight of their actions, leading to a sense of shame that could prompt self-examination and repentance.

3. Treat Them as a Brother, Not an Enemy

- *2 Thessalonians 3:15*: "Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother."
- **Purpose:** The aim of church discipline is restoration, not alienation. Even while distancing, the church is to treat the erring individual with brotherly love, offering correction in a way that encourages their return to faithful living.

These steps from Paul provide a balanced approach to church discipline, combining separation with a loving, restorative intent aimed at guiding the person back to obedience and fellowship.

In Galatians 6:1, Paul provides guidance for addressing a believer who has fallen into sin, emphasizing gentleness and humility in the approach to church discipline and restoration. Here are the items with their scripture reference:

1. Restore the Sinner Gently

- *Galatians 6:1a*: "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness."
- **Purpose:** The goal of church discipline is restoration, not punishment. Believers who are mature in faith ("spiritual") are called to help the fallen individual return to faithful living, using gentleness to avoid harshness or condemnation.

2. Watch Yourself to Avoid Temptation

- *Galatians 6:1b*: "Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted."
- **Purpose:** When helping others, believers must remain vigilant over their own spiritual state, staying humble and self-aware to avoid falling into similar temptations or becoming prideful in their correction.

This verse highlights the balance between restoring a fallen believer with compassion and maintaining personal humility and self-discipline in the process, ensuring that church discipline is done in a way that reflects Christ's love and grace.

Lessons from Philemon

In the letter to Philemon the account of Paul's appeal to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus offers a model of gentle, restorative discipline. In this short letter, Paul advocates for Onesimus, a runaway slave who became a believer, encouraging Philemon to welcome him back with forgiveness and love. Here are the itemized guidelines for church discipline and restoration from this account, with relevant scripture references:

1. Appeal with Love and Respect

- *Philemon 1:8-9*: "Though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus."
- **Principle:** Rather than using authority to compel obedience, Paul chooses a loving appeal, showing respect for Philemon's decision. This sets a tone of humility and mutual respect, encouraging a voluntary, grace-filled response.

2. Acknowledge the Sinner's Transformation

- *Philemon 1:10-11*: "I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.)"
- **Principle:** Paul recognizes the positive change in Onesimus since becoming a Christian, highlighting the redemptive work of the Gospel. By focusing on this transformation, he fosters a hopeful perspective that values the sinner's restoration over their past wrongs.

3. Seek Reconciliation, Not Retribution

- *Philemon 1:12*: "I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart."
- **Principle:** Paul's approach encourages reconciliation between Philemon and Onesimus. Church discipline should aim to restore broken relationships and promote unity within the community, focusing on healing rather than punishment.

4. Encourage Forgiveness and Acceptance

- *Philemon 1:16*: "No longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother..."
- **Principle:** Paul encourages Philemon to accept Onesimus as a brother in Christ, indicating a shift in their relationship from mere legal obligation to genuine familial love. Discipline should foster an environment of acceptance and forgiveness, affirming the offender's new identity in Christ.

5. Offer Support and Willingness to Bear Burdens

- *Philemon 1:18-19*: "If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it."
- **Principle:** Paul demonstrates accountability and willingness to bear Onesimus's potential debts. This act models sacrificial support, encouraging the church to share burdens in the restoration process.

6. Trust God to Work in the Heart of All Parties

- *Philemon 1:21*: "Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say."
- **Principle:** Paul trusts that God is working in Philemon's heart and believes he will act beyond what Paul requests. This shows that discipline should involve faith that God will move individuals to respond with grace, trusting Him to bring about true reconciliation.

The story of Philemon and Onesimus provides a model of church discipline that emphasizes grace, transformation, and restorative action over punishment, aiming to rebuild community and affirm the identity of every believer in Christ.