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DEVELOPING A CHURCH DISCIPLINE STRATEGY
FOR VERBENA BAPTIST CHURCH,
VERBENA, ALABAMA

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APPROVAL SHEET

DEVELOPING A CHURCH DISCIPLINE STRATEGY

FOR VERBENA BAPTIST CHURCH,

VERBENA, ALABAMA

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PREFACE

The motivation for this project was rooted in the burden God placed in my heart as a result of many life experiences. The discipline I received as a child from my parents, teachers, and coaches taught me right behavior. The keen sense of working together as a family, with classmates on projects, and with teammates competing in sports, ingrained in me the value of unity. My life experiences in the business world reaffirmed those same values. When the Lord called me to pastoral ministry, he revealed in the Scriptures his desire that all disciples was for holiness (1 Pet 1:15-16), growth (2 Pet 3:18), and fruitfulness (John 15:8). Soon I became saddened by the disparaging gap between what a Christian should be and the unbecoming conduct of some church members.

As I review the work necessary to complete the task of this ministry project, I cannot help but be filled with gratitude. Dr. Robert Cheong, my supervising professor, encouraged me to continue to work hard in understanding what God's way of discipline in the church was and was not. This project would not have been completed without his feedback, direction, and pastoral heart on my behalf. Thank you for your shaping of me and ministry to the Lord's church.

One of the many reasons I married my wife, Nita, was the realization that she would hold me accountable in important areas of my life. Indeed, the Lord has used her on numerous occasions to provide good advice and sobering feedback. She has also been an encouragement in ministry as well as suffering right alongside of me in tough times. Nita has sacrificed much in order for God to have his way with me in this project, I love her and I am indebted to her.

A somber and sad reality that I face in completing this project is the thought that my mother, Peggy Sue Allums, will not enjoy this accomplishment with me. My mother suffered with and succumbed to Parkinson's disease in the midst of this project. I miss her but trust I will share eternity with her and other members of my family. My father, Truman Allums, was my first disciplinarian. I am thankful to him for his strong stand for Christian values and great example as a servant of Christ Jesus.

Finally, I want to praise Christ Jesus for his great love for me though I was a rebel. His amazing grace has humbled me, and I stand in wonder at his mercy and kindness. I know it is his grace that has seen this project through and the ministry he has called me to. All praise, glory, and honor to God now and forever. Amen.

Mike Allums

Clanton, Alabama

December 2017

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of Verbena Baptist Church states it exists to provide ways by which Christians who share common beliefs may bind themselves together in covenant relationship to serve the cause of Christ. In order for the purpose of Verbena Baptist Church to be accomplished, its members must exhibit characteristics of Christlikeness within its covenant community. When un-Christian behavior is apparent, the church's mission is thwarted. The practice of church discipline is an essential element to assist the church in establishing and maintaining the image of Christ to a watching world. This project led the church to develop a church discipline strategy to accomplish its stated purpose.

Context

This project will take place in the context of the current ministry at Verbena Baptist Church (VBC), Verbena, Alabama, where I served as pastor since November of 2014. The church was founded in 1880 with the blessing and encouragement of Chestnut Creek Baptist Church, its mother church.

VBC has been blessed with a faithful core of members and institutional longevity, but suffered from a mindset that most members saw as an advantage. By most, VBC would be considered a small church. However, it is actually one of the larger churches in its area. VBC is located in an area with only four other churches in a five-mile radius and each average fewer than one hundred in attendance each week. Most members believed the overall state of VBC was good because they compared themselves to surrounding churches that have not been impacting the community significantly. This

false sense of well-being has led to a belief, among a significant number of VBC members, that the church is healthier than it is. The result of this self-deception has contributed to an attitude that hinders VBC's gospel mission.

VBC has a significant number of members who are family related. These and other church members who have been life-long friends have developed strong bonds and relational roots that run deep. A related problem is the tendency among a few to allow relationships to take precedence over biblical standards. There are times that members overlook a close relative or friend in the church whose actions are out of step with the Scriptures. In those rare cases where bad conduct is not corrected, the church's name is hurt by talk in the community.

VBC has never possessed a detailed process to administer church discipline. Members who have fallen into sin have either drifted away from the church, have been forgotten, or in some rare cases have continued to attend church with no formal correction.

VBC's Constitution and Manual of Operations has a very broad policy toward discipline. Article VI—Membership, Section 3, Deletion of Members, states,

By erasure of a member leaving our church to join a non-Southern Baptist Church. By Exclusion of a member who violates the doctrinal beliefs or practices of our church, or demonstrates an uncooperative spirit or non-participatory behavior, even after every reasonable measure has been taken to resolve the problem (Matthew 18:15-17). By exclusion of inactive members.

The problem with this section is that it does not provide enough information for the church to exercise discipline through a prescribed, detail method. Although there is no provision for excluding inactive members, the section quoted below outlines the restriction of member privileges. However, there is no mention of the church taking the initiative to engage a member who has been absent from the life of the church by lovingly confronting them. Inactive members are addressed in Article VI—Membership, Section 4 “Inactive Members”:

When a member shall fail to demonstrate interest in the church for a period of six months, attending less than one-fourth of our services (except in the case of extenuating circumstances) or withdraws financial support, the member shall be considered inactive and shall not be permitted to vote in the business of the church. An inactive member may be restored to active status by vote of the congregation at any regular church service, after such person indicates a renewed interest in the church and gives satisfactory evidence of intention to remain faithful.

A number of questions arise from the policy regarding members. What is the definition of violating a doctrinal belief of practice? What is considered an uncooperative or non-participatory behavior? Though there is some censorship with inactive members, should the church even allow for such a status? VBC's policy includes some disciplinary wording but falls short of providing a clear and complete plan to see members corrected, restored, and ministered to.

Three areas of concern drove the need for this ministry project. The first issue concerned non-attending church members. In "Wolves and Sheep," Vance Havner states, "There are no inactive members, either members are actively moving toward Christ or away from Him."¹ Inactive members enjoy all the benefits of membership, such as voting on significant items of church business, use of church facilities, special care by the church family, and greater consideration with respect to benevolence needs. However, inactive members are absent from worship attendance, uninvolved in ministry, and unsupportive of the church. These practices negatively impact meaningful membership at VBC, resulting in lack of motivation, indifference, and lack of joy witnessed in the laity. The church has attempted to restore some inactive members through personal contact; however, since there is no clear procedure nor overall church support for such action, the results are rarely successful.

Another area of concern was with members who attended regularly but showed un-Christian attitudes. Although all believers have been given new life in Christ,

¹Vance Havner, "Wolves and Sheep," accessed May 22, 2015, <http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=119072144104>.

believers still struggle with the old sin nature that has not been annihilated (Rom 7). Even the best church members have had a bad day, week, or year. The pressures and problems of life weigh heavily on their minds. Under such burdens, they may say an unkind word or act in an unseemly way without thought. When those attitudes are manifested, it often reveals a serious struggle going on within. A member's unsettled battle within then becomes the church's struggle. These problems unsettle the fellowship of the church, at times causing disharmony, hurt, and loss of ministry focus. Sadly, when these issues arise, the church projects a less than favorable image of Christ. Problems left unattended tend to get worse. VBC must learn to come alongside those struggling with sin and do so in a way that ministers to them in their need, while safeguarding the Lord's flock.

The final area of concern has to do with members who had fallen into scandalous sins. When a believer is discovered to have fallen into such distress, it is often because there has been spiritual erosion. Even worse, when moral failure occurs it affects everyone the believer is associated with to one degree or another. Eventually the matter becomes known, and the circle of awareness expands and creates even more problems. In cases where the church has made an attempt to practice discipline, it lacked an effective policy to address the offense. Efforts were usually informal and rarely resulted in the reconciliation or restoration of the offender. In this context, the project worked to educate the laity and develop a working policy that could help the church apply the appropriate action with members out of step with the gospel. The ultimate goal was to see the member restored.

The majority of VBC members were limited in their understanding of the subject of church discipline. As such, they failed to grasp their own personal responsibility to the Lord to practice discipline as taught in the Scriptures. This project served as a means of educating leaders on the value of developing a church discipline plan and implementing it into the life of the church. VBC's core leadership was comprised of

myself, two bi-vocational staff, three deacons, nine Sunday school teachers and three Discipleship Training teachers.

Just after my arrival as pastor I joined a well-attended Discipleship Training Class, composed of several VBC leaders who had been reviewing and critiquing the church's Manual of Operation as part of their study. From the comments made in these sessions, it was apparent that there was a genuine concern about how to deal with problems related to the doctrine of church discipline. My perceptions were the group indeed realized the current Operating Manual was insufficient for addressing matters requiring correction. Also, when this project proposal was shared with the deacons of VBC, there was overwhelming support. This backing was an indicator that the time was right for the project. Considering the aforementioned feedback, along with the leaders' concern about issues that were voiced during prayer meetings, moving to develop a church discipline plan for VBC seemed appropriate.

Rationale

Church discipline is biblical, has gospel consequences, promotes the health of the church, warns sinners of God's ultimate judgement, and protects the name of Jesus. The overarching rationale for this project was the glory of God reflected in the lives of his people as they live out the gospel. According to Robert Cheong, "God's purposes for discipline must drive the church's purposes for discipline, since we are ambassadors for Christ and ministers of His gospel."² This rationale has important biblical, practical, and evangelistic implications for VBC.

²Robert Cheong, *God Redeeming His Bride: A Handbook for Church Discipline* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2012), 59.

The Biblical Mandate for Church Discipline

The Scriptures are replete with instructions and examples about God's discipline. One of the most significant texts with respect to this subject is Hebrews 12:5-8:

And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. (Heb 12:5-8)

Hebrews 12:5-8 communicates clearly that God the Father disciplines as a response of love to his children. So many today have a distorted view of love. Among VBC church members were those who viewed church discipline as legalistic, harsh, and unloving. Therefore, educating the church to the imperative of living out God's commands by his empowering grace was essential. However, the reality is that all fall prey to sin. Regardless that church discipline does not come across as loving to some, the church should not shrink from its responsibility to hold one another accountable to Scripture. To avoid making members overly discouraged they were reminded of God's mercy and forgiveness. Through sound teaching, VBC learned the necessity of God's grace.

Often, VBC members did not know if they should say anything to a wayward brother or sister, and if so, what to say. While most VBC members want to live their lives in a God-honoring way, they struggle with the difficult work of correcting another member. Furthermore, because sin is so subtle and the prevailing culture so influential, VBC needs a sound procedure for correcting wayward members (2 Tim 3:16-17).

Inactive members VBC demonstrate a misunderstanding of how a Christian's life should be lived out in community (Heb 10:25). The leadership of VBC came to see that every member is a soul worthy of the church's best efforts in discipling them to be mature believers. Whether members were attending regularly or were inactive, all needed to sense they are valued, cared for, and loved. The project intended to focus on re-

connecting inactive members through a loving approach to draw them back through prayer, sound teaching, and relationships.

Attending members who on occasion demonstrate attitudes that miss the mark of being one who is redeemed by Christ hinder VBC's mission and unity. Correcting these attitudes requires wisdom, tact, determination, and patience. In the past, members' inappropriate attitudes had either been dismissed as "who they are" or caused others to alienate them. This project redirected the members of VBC to the Scriptures in order to see the value in having healthy discussions regarding un-Christian actions and provide for them a means to live more holy lives (Gal 6:1).

This project also served to provide ministry to those who were in danger of falling into scandalous public immorality. Members in this danger must be awakened to their sin by following the biblical procedure issued by Christ (Matt 18:15-22). VBC learned the value of demonstrating God's love by caring enough to confront members guilty of public sin.

The Pragmatic Motivation for Church Discipline

Church discipline has valuable practical implications. Discipline should be done not only because it makes church function better, but because it promotes obedience of God's Word (Ps 119:105) with the ultimate goal of growing in holiness (1 Pet 1:15-16) and a love relationship with Him (John 14:15; 21). Discipline gives support to leadership because all members are held accountable for their words, actions, and attitudes. Church discipline serves as a deterrent to excessive complaining, rebellion, or troublemaking. Also, an effective policy that holds people accountable makes membership more meaningful, and results in members taking seriously every aspect of ministry. When God's people follow God's biblical plan, there is less confusion, more joy, and greater effectiveness in ministry (Deut 5:33).

The first practical reason for church discipline is the welfare of VBC. A church that tolerates sin contributes to its members becoming discouraged and may also communicate a sense of injustice, favoritism, or indifference. Believers will rightly reason, “If this sin doesn’t matter, what does?” Therefore, the morale and integrity of the church body is at stake. The Bible and history teach that where there is no standard upheld, people let down restraints (Prov 29:18). This project sought to address sin issues so VBC could maintain a more joyful, healthy, and holy church.

VBC discovered in this project a genuine concern for seeing wayward members restored. A complete church discipline policy was developed to provide support to the leadership of the church to guard against loss of mission vision, childishness, and rebellion. The goal of church discipline was to see members who have strayed from God’s standard restored.

Evangelistic Reasons for Church Discipline

The final reason for this project had to do with the witness of VBC to unbelievers. One complaint from people in the Verbena community was the inconsistency of the Christian message and members’ actions. As a result, they resisted the church’s evangelistic efforts and remained unchurched or lost. VBC’s leadership expressed concern and were motivated as they became engaged through this project. Their desire was to see the integrity of the church restored as the salt and light Jesus said we should be (Matt 5:13-16).

VBC leaders learned that church discipline reinforces the truth that the gospel is to be taken seriously. Often, members mistakenly think that once they have been saved, the work of salvation for all practical purposes is over. Church discipline emphasizes the work of sanctification with respect to the salvation process in obeying the gospel. It is the hopeful expectation that those who participated in the project will come to believe

Christ's command to "go and make disciples" (Matt 28:19) is not a worn-out slogan but is to be a life practice within the church.

VBC members who submit to church discipline will be positively affected by it so that their lives will take on more of the fragrance of Christ (2 Cor 2:15). Such an aroma most assuredly will have a cooperative effect on those whom the Father is drawing (John 6:44). Furthermore, church discipline provides a means for the church to be more focused, intentional, and unified in the gospel priority.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop a biblical understanding of church discipline and lead VBC to implement it into the life of the church.

Goals

Four goals were established to determine the success of this project:

1. The first goal was for the researcher to develop a biblical understanding of church discipline that reflects the gospel and the mission of the church.
2. The second goal was to discover what the understanding of the core leadership of VBC is on the subject of church discipline.
3. The third goal was to correct wrong perceptions of church discipline and in the process add to the knowledge of leaders a proper biblical understanding of the subject.
4. The final goal was to develop a policy of church discipline from the most reliable resources available, reviewed and approved by an expert panel of three pastors who have or are serving in a church that has a robust culture of church discipline.

Definitive research methodology measured when these four goals had been accomplished.³ The research methodology and instruments used to measure the success of each goal are detailed in the following section.

³All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

Research Methodology

The initial goal of this project was for me to develop a biblical understanding of church discipline with respect to the gospel and the church's mission. This goal was accomplished by doing further biblical research and reading more current works as recommended by my supervisor, Robert Cheong. No provision was made to measure the increase in knowledge for this activity.

The second goal of this project was to obtain a clear understanding of the knowledge among VBC leaders with respect to the subject of church discipline. Those leaders include the church staff, current active deacons, teachers, and other various ministry workers. The total number of leaders in this group was nineteen. This information was obtained by administering a Member Accountability Survey (MAS) to this group.⁴ The survey was comprised of questions relating to their understanding of the basic principles for correcting members or restoring those who have been disciplined. Questions were also included that by either traditional or secular standards are condemning, worldly, authoritarian, liberal, or unbiblical in nature to uncover any erroneous understanding. The responses were reviewed and evaluated to ascertain the overall comprehension of what the VBC leaders believed with respect to church discipline.

The third goal was to increase the knowledge of the current leaders of VBC on church discipline. Using preeminently the Bible, Jonathan Leeman's *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love*, and Robert Cheong's *God Redeeming His Bride*, I developed a teaching curriculum and instructed the leadership group over eleven sessions. Each teaching session addressed essential aspects of church discipline in order to correct misunderstandings as well as adding to the knowledge each leader already had. Only one couple had to reschedule a teaching session to catch up with the group. Only those who received the instruction from these sessions were included in the test results

⁴See appendix 1, "Member Accountability Survey." The average adult Sunday attendance at VBC is 100. The church has approximately twenty ministry leaders.

comparison between the two surveys. The success of this goal was based on the *t*-test for dependent samples that demonstrated a positive statistically improved difference in the MAS described in goal 1, and post-survey results of this goal.

The fourth goal was to develop a policy for church discipline. This policy was developed with the hope that VBC would adopt it into the Manual of Operation. The policy defines the church's position regarding criteria and methods of discipline on the basis of biblical authority. The policy was evaluated by a panel composed of three pastors who have served in churches that practice church discipline. The panel used a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, understandability, scope, and applicability of the strategy.⁵ The goal was to be considered successful when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion of each rubric category met or exceeded the sufficient level of which it did. The policy was then presented to VBC leaders for review and discussion. When VBC leaders received the proposed policy there was prayer, review of the policy, discussion, and encouragement. After the review, I introduced the church discipline policy to the church at the June, 2017 business meeting.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

In this ministry project, I used particular terms defined here next to provide clarity and understanding with respect to church discipline.

Accountability. Alan Cairns explains accountability: "The responsibility and liability to judging by God of moral agents for their affections and actions. The inbred sense of accountability is a strong indication that the Creator has written His law on the hearts of all men (Rom 2:15)."⁶

⁵See appendix 2, "Church Discipline Policy Evaluation Form."

⁶Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 3rd ed. (Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002), 8.

Censure. George Kurian writes,

Ecclesiastical penalty ranging from a reprimand, suspension, and exclusion from the sacrament to interdiction and excommunication and removal from office. Canon law recognizes two kinds of censures, one in which the individual is notified while the other requires no such admonition.⁷

Church discipline. Carl Laney defines church discipline as “the confrontive and corrective measures taken by an individual, church leaders, or the congregation regarding a matter of sin in the life of a believer.”⁸

Corrective church discipline. Johnathan Leeman explains corrective church discipline:

The process of correcting sin in the life of the congregation and its members. This can mean correcting sin through a private word of admonition. It may also mean correcting sin by formally removing an individual from membership. The goal is always to correct the transgression of God’s law among God’s people.⁹

Forgiveness. Wayne Grudem writes, “The act of Christians toward a brother or sister who has repented of their sins by receiving them back into the fellowship of the church.”¹⁰

Formative church discipline. Findley Edge explains formative church discipline: “The process of teaching and training by which the Christian is increasingly formed in the image of Christ.”¹¹

⁷George Thomas Kurian, *Nelson’s Dictionary of Christianity* (Nashville: Nelson, 2005), 144.

⁸Carl Laney, *A Guide to Church Discipline* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1985) 14.

⁹Johnathan Leeman, “A Church Discipline Primer,” accessed July 7, 2015, 9marks.org/article/church-discipline-primer/.

¹⁰Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1994), 899.

¹¹Findley Edge, *A Quest for Vitality in Religion: A Theological Approach to Religious Education*, rev. ed. (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1994), 178.

Repentance. Millard J. Erickson defines repentance as “the negative aspect of conversion is the abandonment or repudiation of sin. It is based upon a feeling of godly sorrow for the evil done.”¹²

Restoration. The action of the church seeing a sinning member return to the fellowship of the church through repentance.

Sin. Wayne Grudem writes that sin is “any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature.”¹³

Two limitations applied to this project. First, the information garnered from both surveys to discover the current understanding of church discipline compared to the post-instruction survey relied heavily on the honesty and overall willingness of the respondents. Thus, those being surveyed were assured their responses would be kept confidential. The second limitation was tied to the attendance and attentiveness of each participant in the study sessions. The integrity of the results was affected by both of these factors. Because VBC leader participants did attend and apply themselves, the posted results were positive. On one occasion, a missed class had to be scheduled for two leaders, but otherwise, the group was excellent in attendance and engagement. The classes were scheduled at the most convenient time for the participants. I employed visual aids, lecture style and group discussion as various methods to achieve the most conducive learning environment.

Four delimitations were associated with the project. First, the project taught to deal with only known sin. There obviously is always sin that may never be known, though suspected. However, the church should give the benefit of doubt to a member unless there is ample evidence to prove otherwise. Addressing known sin will likely be a deterrent to those tempted as well as safeguarding against overzealous judging. The second delimitation

¹²Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 935.

¹³Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 490.

was to conduct this project over a twelve-week period. This time frame did allow for surveys, study sessions, and the compilation of a comprehensive church discipline project. Third, the surveys, teaching sessions, and work associated with developing a policy were conducted in conjunction with the leadership of VBC, and by the expert panel of pastors, not the congregation at large. The fourth delimitation was to submit an effective church discipline policy to the church. Every effort was made to communicate to the church the merit of this policy, but the success of this project was not connected to its adoption.

Conclusion

For VBC to uphold and maintain the image of Christ a strategy had to be developed for holding one another lovingly accountable based on Scripture. Members not only needed this project, but so did I. The overarching goal of this project was to educate, encourage, and lead VBC to embrace an effective and biblical church discipline plan for the glory of God. The next chapter addresses the biblical foundation for this project.

CHAPTER 2
A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION
FOR CHURCH DISCIPLINE

The possibilities of finding a believer who would deny that God has ordained and commanded discipline would be difficult. Yet after considering the doctrinal and methodological positions of evangelical churches, it becomes painfully obvious that church discipline is foreign to most members. As Albert Mohler, Jr., wrote in *The Compromised Church*, “The decline of church discipline is perhaps the most visible failure of the contemporary church.”¹ Even those who have some understanding of the subject, there is a whole spectrum of just what church discipline means. The problem most churches face is a laity that has a skewed view of the love of God as being tolerant of and forgiving sin whether there is true repentance or not. Churches fear the practice of discipline would most certainly require the price of lost membership and revenues. Greg Wills offers sobering statistics that reflect the shift in Southern Baptist life from church discipline:

Baptists in the South practiced a thorough church discipline for about two hundred years. They did so because they believed that Christ commanded it. Between 1884 and 1900 they disciplined about 1.3 million members and expelled about 650,000. But by 1950 only a fading memory of the practice remained.²

For the latter half of the twentieth century to present, church discipline has rarely been practiced by most Baptist churches. Have people become more holy? Is there less of a need today for this biblical practice? Surely, the absence of this historical and biblical

¹R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “Church Discipline: The Missing Mark,” in *The Compromised Church*, ed. John H. Armstrong (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 171.

²Gregory Wills, “Southern Baptists and Church Discipline,” in *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches*, ed. Thomas White, Jason G. Duesing, and Malcolm B. Yarnell III (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 179.

exercise undermines the development of disciples in the area of holiness. Even more it ultimately robs Christ of his glory.

The ultimate guide for doctrine and practice is the Bible. All disciples of Jesus must submit to his plan for their sanctification by living it out in the context of the church as recorded in God's inspired Word. Since Scripture gives everything needed for this purpose (2 Tim 3:16-17) and the goal of a believer is holiness (1 Pet 1:15-16) there is no doubt discipline would be evident throughout the pages of the Bible.

Genesis 3:1-24

A builder knows the importance of laying a good foundation just as a runner strives to do all he can to get off to a good start. The book of Genesis provides insight to the basics of God's plan for redeeming a holy people unto himself (Exod 19:6; 1 Pet 2:9). An essential element in this salvific process is the practice of discipline (Heb 12:5-10). This practice is documented throughout the biblical record and clearly reveals corrective discipline as God's way of protecting, purifying, and perfecting a people for himself.

Obedience to God is visibly defined from the outset of his interactions with man (Gen 1:27-28; 2:16-17). The command to obey is an integral aspect of the covenant God made with man, just as the consequences for failing to follow (Gen 2:16-17).

Genesis 3:1-24 records the account of man's fall in the Garden of Eden. The Lord God created the cosmos along with all that was needed to sustain life. On day six God's crowning creation was man. He made man in his own image to act as his viceroy and display his glory throughout the world. God provided everything needed for an abundant life. Indeed man was given authority over the creation, meaningful work to engage in, and provided a help-meet of his own kind in the form of woman. Adam's environment was referred to as a garden specially made to be his home. God provided all the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual resources in order to make his life a blessing. These blessings were not to terminate in man but in the praise and worship of God (Isa 60:21; Rom 11:36; 1 Cor 6:20; Rev 4:11). Finally, it is important to note that God

exercised formative discipline to both Adam and Eve. He gave them specific instructions as to what trees they had permission to eat and the tree in particular they should not eat. He furthermore declared to them the severe consequence of death if they disobeyed (2:15-17). The bitter fruit of disbelief and disobedience that God warned man of is still the most serious malady humanity suffers from today.

Moses identifies the tempter of original sin as “the serpent.” “The serpent is characterized as ‘more crafty’ (ערום *‘ārûm*) than any of the others God formed; this is a play on the word for ‘naked’ (אֶצְרוּמִים *‘ărûmmîm*) in 2:25.”³ His discourse with the woman begins with a leading question about what God said. He frames the question in a way that contains an element of restriction with respect to partaking of any tree in the garden (3:1). The woman responds by misquoting God that they were not to eat of the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden or touch it or they would die (3:2-3). The serpent states the lie they will not die if they eat. He further asserts that when they eat their eyes would be open, knowing good and evil, and being like God (3:4-5). After this conversation between the serpent and woman, there is no more conversation between the two. The woman left to herself reasons why it would be in her best interest to take the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Walter Brueggeman offers an analysis to this event by the woman:

The observation that the tree was good for food and pleasant to the sight means, in view of 2:9 (see 1:29), that this tree becomes like other trees to her; it also happens to be “desirable for gaining wisdom.” While one may “desire” (נִהְמָד *nehmād*, 2:9) the trees for their beauty, the humans shall not “desire” wisdom (i.e., knowledge of good and evil). The command seems to forbid an immediate acquisition of knowledge, though without suggesting that humans should not have wisdom. The issue involves the way in which wisdom is gained.⁴

As a result man, has since taken to himself what he thinks is right wrong (Prov 14:12:16:25) rather than look to the Lord (Prov 3:5-6, Ps 111:10).

³Terrence E. Fretheim, *Genesis*, The New Interpreter’s Bible, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 359.

⁴Ibid., 361.

God takes the initiative to confront and discipline his image bearers. His first act is to go to Adam, calling to him with the question, “Where are you?” God prompts Adam to respond to him as well as consider why he is hiding. A merciful approach is the way God comes to Adam.

With Adam’s response that he was naked and hid himself, God further questions, “Who told you that you were naked?” Each question is God’s attempt to evoke a true confession from Adam. First John 1:9 records, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” God is teaching the principle that when his people sin, those who are in community with them are to go to them about it and help them to realize their trespass. In the Genesis narrative God asks yet another question, “Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” As Derek Kidner comments, “God’s first word to fallen man has all the marks of grace. It is a question, since to help him He must draw rather than drive him out of hiding.”⁵ Herman Gunkel explains in a more familial way, “He interrogates the man with same certainty as a mother interrogating her child . . . sees through him completely and soon brings him to confess.”⁶ Similarly, probing questions were asked of Cain concerning his sinful countenance and murder of his brother (4:6; 9-10), as was with Peter when Jesus sought to restore him after his denial (John 21:15-17).

Adam’s responses to God’s questions are far from being transparent and complete. He admits he is afraid for being naked but does not answer who told him he was naked. Furthermore, when asked if he had eaten of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Adam does not answer forthrightly. He quickly places the blame on the woman but also implies God was responsible in saying, “The woman whom you gave to me . . .”

⁵Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 1 (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1967), 70.

⁶Hermann Gunkel and Mark Biddle, *Genesis* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 18.

(3:12). The responses by man in this passage are indicative of the messy work of disciplining. Sinful man hides, lies, and conceals the whole truth and tends to project blame on others. Surely any church that seeks to hold its members accountable to Christ's standards must be patient, wise, committed, and skillful in the Word.

God initiates discipline with the man but does not neglect to correct all parties. He turns now to the woman. Again, the Lord asks the woman what she has done. Though she admits her sin, she attempts to deflect her guilt to the serpent (3:13). Finally, God confronts the serpent and declares his punishment. The serpent will be cursed with moving about on its belly. The curse of being so confined to the earth relates to the serpent's stature among animals and how it moves about. Additionally, the serpent is cursed with a perpetual relationship of contempt between it and humans.

The woman's curse is increased suffering in child bearing. Moreover, God shows that her relationship to her husband reflects more of her fallen state than before. Kidner writes, "The phrase 'your desire shall be for your husband' [RSV], with the reciprocating 'he shall rule over you,' portrays a marriage relation in which control has slipped from the fully personal realm to that of instinctive urges passive and active."⁷

To Adam, God notes he listened to his wife and disobeyed him. Obviously, God is driving home the point that he should have listened to his Creator and obeyed. Adam is not cursed, but the ground which he has to work is. The decree God makes on the soil brings additional hardship on Adam and his progeny from this point on. Verse 19 is significant in that God now declares that man will return to the ground from which he came that is now cursed. This judgment is a reference to the promise of death for disobedience.

In consideration of the judgment of conviction of all the parties, Terrence Fretheim makes a poignant observation:

⁷Kidner, *Genesis*, 71.

What are the affects of the sentencing? Most basically, the sentences pertain to their primary roles in life (in that culture), roles of stature among the animals, roles of wife and mother, roles of tiller of soil and provider of food. Every conceivable relationship has been disrupted: among the animals; between an animal and humans; between the ground and humans; between human beings and God; between an animal and God; within the individual self (e.g. shame). More abstractly, one could speak of humiliation, domination and subordination, conflict, suffering, and struggle. The sentences touch every aspect of human life: marriage and sexuality; birth and death; work and food; human and nonhuman. In all of these areas, one could speak of death encroaching on life. Disharmony reigns supreme.⁸

Thus, the ill effects of sin's disobedience are established in this creation setting.

Disobedience to God is a very serious matter and those in a right relationship with him will obey or be disciplined as the ancient father and mother were.

God graciously covers both Adam and the woman with skins from animals. This covering, which required the bloodletting death of a living animal, not only points toward the paschal lamb of the Passover (Exod 12:1-12), but the Lamb of God in Christ Jesus (John 1:29, 36). God is merciful even in the discipline of his own.

God's discipline, along with all of its ramifications, to this point seems more than sufficient. However, God has one final corrective action to take. In verse 24 God banishes Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. He places an angel and flaming sword (a symbol of discipline) at the east of Eden to keep man from taking of the fruit of the tree of life. Because of man's disobedience, man is not "in" the garden but "out." Claus Westermann writes, "After the sign of the 'merciful punishment' (3:21), the real punishment is executed; the Lord God expels the human beings from the garden to live abroad in the earth (v.23)."⁹ Though Westerman may consider this the ultimate punishment, it may also be regarded as a great display of grace on God's part. Now that man's nature is sinful (Jer 17:9; Rom 5:12), the consequence as God stated to them earlier would be death. If, however, he in this state partakes of the tree of life, man is

⁸Fretheim, *Genesis*, 363.

⁹Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11, A Continental Commentary*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 27.

bound eternally in a state of lostness with no hope. God's expulsion of man from his holy garden is a great act of his mercy and grace.

In conclusion, the truth is reiterated; God placed man in the garden to work, live, and enjoy it. He gave man everything he needed in abundance. God warned man of the consequences of unbelief and disobedience. His desire was for them to be blessed. When man disobeyed, God confronted, corrected and punished them. However, he did not forsake them but put his plan in place that at the right time (Rom 5:6-8; Gal 4:4) he would redeem them from being without hope and eternally lost.

Numbers 21:4-9

Before covering Numbers 21:4-9, it is helpful to make some general notations. First, God's disciplinary action on Israel recorded in this passage occurred roughly forty years after Israel had been delivered from slavery and led to the border of Canaan to enter the Promised Land. There, Israel doubted God's ability to give them the Promised Land. A whole generation has passed so that their young might inherit the Promised Land. Tragically, as the text confirms, they demonstrated a lack of trust in God like the former generation.

First, God demonstrated his care for Israel by not taking them through the land of Edom. The Edomites had refused to allow them to pass through their land (Num 20:14-18) and had threatened Israel with war. However, avoiding the land of Edom required a longer and more grueling route and Israel became impatient, frustrated, and discouraged.

Their complaints paralleled those of their forefathers as recorded in chapter 11.

R. Dennis Cole writes of Israel's criticism from a soured heart:

They described their food supply as "miserable" (*haqqēlōqēl*, "worthless, contemptible"), thereby deploring and degrading that which God had so graciously given to them for some forty years. When a person's heart is intent on rebellion and

beset by discontent, even the best of gifts from the Lord can lose their savor; nothing will fully satisfy until the heart is made right.¹⁰

R. K. Harrison gives the spectrum of their contempt by writing,

The journey proved arduous, and again rebellion broke out due to discouragement as well as dissatisfaction with the diet. Their opinion about the manna was expressive (MT לקלל, *qəlōqəl*, “good for nothing,” “contemptible”; KJV “light”; NKJV “worthless”; NAB “wretched”; NEB “miserable fare”; NIV “miserable”).¹¹

Their ingratitude revealed a vulgar rebellion and a caustic disrespect of which had to be corrected.

God’s response for their blatant disrespect and complaining spirit is to discipline them with snakes. These snakes are poisonous, hence the adjective “fiery.” Dennis Olson notes that the term “‘fiery,’ likely referring to the burning sensation of a snake bite upon human skin—an apt metaphor for the fiery anger of God (11:1).”¹² David Stubbs writes, “At the most literal level, the serpents are agents of suffering and death.”¹³ God’s discipline for Israel’s sin is measured, severe, and effective. Not everyone died immediately but certainly enough died to let them know they were in grave danger. The loss of life always has a sobering effect, especially for those closest to those who died. Israel quickly learns God will not condone their sin and the results of sin are death (Rom 6:23).

Israel’s confession is prompt, sincere, and complete as they plead with their leader and intercessor Moses. His compassionate response was to pray to God on behalf of the people. This act of intercessory prayer best depicts the work fellow believers are called to do in the process of church discipline.

¹⁰R. Dennis Cole, *Numbers*, The New American Commentary, vol. 3b. (Nashville: Broadman, 2000), 347.

¹¹R. K. Harrison, *Numbers*, Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 276.

¹²Dennis T. Olson, *Numbers*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1996), 135.

¹³David L. Stubbs, *Numbers*, Brazos Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), 167.

It is significant to note that when Israel confesses, repents, and Moses intercedes, God does not immediately stop the serpents. Rather, he instructs Moses to fashion a snake out of bronze, affix it to a pole, and plant it in the midst of the camp where people can see it. Roy Gane refers to this as a “visual anti venom.”¹⁴ The Lord will use the image of the snake as a remedy for sin. Stubbs writes, “But in it they also can see the judgment of God about them. Like the raising of a battle standard, this action ironically represents who the people are truly following: the serpent, rather than God.”¹⁵

This snake, though just a symbol, is presented as one greater than the snakes that were biting them. The image of Pharaoh’s magicians turning their staffs into snakes in a show of power and authority before Moses’ snake appears to be their way of presenting their gods as just as powerful as Moses’. However, Moses snake, the snake of Yahweh, was greater because it swallowed up the others (Exod 7:9-12). Here God has Moses present a snake of bronze, and when those bitten by the venomous snakes would look upon it, they would be healed.

The timing of Israel’s discipline on their sin is significant in that it is only a couple of years prior to their finally entering the Promised Land after thirty-eight years of wandering. The Lord is disciplining them quickly, deliberately, and effectively so that they might be a prepared people to receive this land that “flows with milk and honey” (14:8).

Jesus used this story as an illustration to communicate to Nicodemus what ultimately must happen in order for God’s discipline to be rendered on mankind. Just as the bronze serpent, which represented the instrument of God’s healing for Israel, so also would Jesus be lifted up as the remedy for man’s sin (John 3:14-16; 2 Cor 5:21). Everyone who looks to Jesus for salvation will be spared from God’s hand of discipline on them for eternity (John 3:18, 36). In this key passage concerning Israel’s sin, in the meta-narrative

¹⁴Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 679.

¹⁵Stubbs, *Numbers*, 169.

of God's delivering them from 420 years of Egyptian slavery and ultimate delivery into the land of promise, it is clear that God is doing more than taking them physically from one place to another. He is discipling or disciplining them to trust and obey. Herein is a common thread seen throughout the Old Testament as well as recorded in the New Testament.

Matthew 18:15-20

This passage reveals the classic outline for church discipline. There are similarities with Matthew 18:15-20 to that recorded in the Old Testament regarding the correction of God's covenant people Israel (Lev 6:2-7; 19:17; Ps 141:5). Furthermore, Jesus has a brief and somewhat similar teaching in the Gospel of Luke regarding the correction of a brother (17:3-4).

Jesus' directives on the matter of discipline in the reference passage are to his disciples. The phrase he uses for the offending party is "your brother" (18:15). Clearly, he is speaking of confronting a member of the faith community. Correction is to be carried out within the ranks of those in the church seeing it has no authority over those outside. The direct instruction here is to the brother who has been sinned against. For one who has been offended not to speak up is to be dishonest and might well lead to the harboring of ill will toward the offending brother.

A reasonable question is, what is the nature of the sin that should evoke correction? Was this a public or private sin? The text seems to indicate it was a private sin between the offender and the one offended. William Hendriksen notes, "It is my judgment, therefore, that the words 'against you' may well have been in the original text, but that even if they were not actually there, they are implied."¹⁶ Should the confrontation always begin privately? Although the text indicates correction should be carried out

¹⁶William Hendriksen, *Matthew*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 698.

discreetly in the first stage, other passages point to public admonishment as an appropriate action (Gal 2:11-14; 1 Tim 5:19-20). Furthermore, a matter between brothers could well explain why discipline narratives of the New Testament vary in their method (Matt 16:22-23; Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor 5:1-13; Gal 6:1-3).

An apparent question arises as to what sins Jesus had in mind when it comes to discipline. Texts such as Proverbs 10:12; 17:9 and 1 Peter 4:8 instruct believers to cover sins with God's love. Should the church ever become hyper sensitive to every suspicious or questionable word or deed, no doubt there would be a crowding out of mercy and grace. Church life would tend to be awkwardly cold and legalistic. However, apparent sin should not be callously dismissed regardless of how insignificant they seem, but some sins are more understandable in Christians than others. So where does the church find balance in this matter? Jonathan Leeman suggests, "Formal church discipline or excommunication is warranted, broadly speaking, when an individual crosses from . . . sins we expect to sins we don't."¹⁷ He further noted three criteria for sins that warrant serious confrontation; sin that is outwardly manifested, serious, and without repentance.¹⁸ Though the kind of sin may be a valid topic, here Jesus does not elaborate. He simply says when it happens, "go."

Jesus limits the exposure of the problem between just the two. Craig Blomberg writes, "Ideally, the two individuals should resolve the problem without involving anyone else. . . . How often personal confrontation is the last stage rather than the first in Christian complaints."¹⁹ The Lord identifies the overarching goal in verse 15 is that one has "gained your brother." The happy result will be an awareness of sin recognized and repented of. A brother is rescued from the clutches of sin and restored for the glory of

¹⁷Jonathan Leeman, *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus* (Wheaton, IL, Crossway, 2012), 49.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁹Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 278.

God. Richard France offers insight into the term “gained” that is usually used with the conversion of an unbeliever, but here is used to rescue a brother from spiritual ruin.²⁰

The Lord prescribes another step in this process—if unsuccessful in the first attempt to correct the brother, go again and take one or two witnesses. The inclusion of others, but limited to two, indicates a broadening of the awareness of the sin and an increased pressure applied to the offender to awaken him to his sin. Here Jesus utilizes the instruction found in Deuteronomy 19:15-16. In Israel’s economy, there had to be at least two witnesses before anyone could be judged for a trespass. Obviously, this step brings additional pressure to the matter in order communicate its seriousness to the offending party. The additional step of taking witnesses also reflects Jesus own heart of persistent grace. William Hendriksen explains, “For his own sake continue to work with him. The heart of the One who uttered the words of 25:37 and the parable of The Barren Fig Tree (see especially Luke 13:8) is being openly displayed here in all its wooing love and patience.”²¹ Again, the goal of purity within the community is attained through repentance and reconciliation or as a last result, expulsion. Through this disciplinary action, the work of sanctification is not only focused on the one who is the offender, but also a work being done in the offender and all those who may be required to participate in the process. The action of discipline requires faith, courage and obedience. Herein is Jesus training the going brother to have the same shepherd’s heart as his.

The third part of this confrontation is described in verse 17. Donald Hagner sheds light on what action should be taken due to the offender’s non-responsiveness: “When the offending person does not listen to the group of two or three (παρακούση twice in this verse, means to ‘disregard’), the matters to be brought to the attention of ‘the

²⁰Richard France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 274.

²¹Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 698.

community' as a whole (τη ἐκκλησία, 'the [local] church')."²² He is to be treated as a pagan or tax collector by the church. Some would argue that Jesus' teaches members of the church should be compassionate toward the offender. Did Jesus not treat a pagan Roman centurion kindly? Also, Jesus called a tax collector, Matthew, to be a disciple (8:5-13; 9:9-10). However, it is clear that Jesus is teaching something entirely different: "The NT parallels (Rom 16:17; 2 Th 3:14) show that Jesus has excommunication in mind. . . . The Greek expression 'let him be to you as,' the 'you' is singular. This suggests that each member of the church is to abide by the corporate judgment."²³

Adjoining this same discourse, Jesus adds in verse 18 that whatever is bound on earth is bound in heaven and whatever is loosed on earth is loosed in heaven. Since this verse is located in the same context of the previous verses of Jesus, it is safe to conclude the church is doing what Jesus has just instructed with respect to church discipline. In his discourse with Peter, Jesus had already told him he would be building his church on "this rock" and he would give Peter the "keys of the kingdom" (16:17-19). Furthermore, Jesus said, "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (6:18-20) and clearly indicates Jesus' teaching about the church. The phrase of binding and loosing in Matthew 6:18-20 is used again in Jesus' instruction regarding church discipline (18:15-20). In both places, the subject has to do with church membership and status. Craig Blomberg writes, "The church's loosing and binding—forgiving or refusing to forgive—carries the very authority of God."²⁴ David Turner affirms, "The locus of authority here is the local community, not

²²Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 532.

²³D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 9 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 456-57.

²⁴Blomberg, *Matthew*, 280.

just Peter or even the apostles as a group. The community is authorized to determine whether a sinning disciple continues with the community or is excluded.”²⁵

Jesus’ teaching gives believers a step-by-step process on going to a sinning disciple. Additionally, he inextricably ties this activity to the life of the church but affirms the faith community’s responsibility and authority to do so.

First Corinthians 5:1-13

Paul writes to the Corinthians for several reasons, but primarily to correct immorality in the church. In 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 the text indicates Paul had received reports of an ongoing scandalous practice of a member that was condoned by the church. He begins by writing, “It is actually reported . . .” (5:1) leaving the impression that this information came to him from a source other than the church. Serious sins that are hidden from leadership by others are done so for many reasons, but most often not on legitimate grounds. This man was sexually involved with the wife of his father (stepmother). There is no indication whether his father is dead or alive. Neither is there any mention of disciplinary action taken against the woman, which likely indicates she was not member of the faith community. This repulsive affair is likely the reason Paul is comparing this sin with not even condoned among Gentiles.

Although Paul is addressing the incestuous affair, he is exercising apostolic discipline on the church as much as he is on the sinning man in their midst. There are several areas for grave concern. First, this type of scandal was so serious that even Corinth frowned on it (5:1). This was no small matter since Corinth was known for being a crossroads of cultures where many forms of immorality were permitted. Tragically, for this type of behavior to be tolerated in the church meant no moral distinction between the church and those outside. In fact, this incident was worse than the pagans would expect

²⁵David Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 445-46.

of their own. Next, the soul of the offender was of concern. If the church's response had been swift, united, and serious, perhaps it would have affected the man in such a way as to give him pause and entertain repentance. Another issue was that the spiritual condition of the remaining membership was in jeopardy. Believers in the Corinthian church learned, like most, by what they saw others do or what sin they saw tolerated in others. Finally, and most importantly, the Lord was mocked and dishonored in this sin and the way it was being tolerated.

Paul charges the Corinthian believers with being "arrogant" (5:2) and "boasting" (5:6), which is a clear indication that they believed their tolerance of this scandal was a virtue. To them, permitting such behavior demonstrated mercy and grace when in fact it was a disgrace. The apostle declares that the appropriate response would be to "mourn" (5:2). Although Paul is across the way in Ephesus when he writes to them, he considers what action should be taken and instructed them to discipline the man by putting him out of the church (5:2-4). He mentions he had warned them in a previous letter "not to have anything to do with immoral people" and specifically one who calls himself a "brother" (5:9-11). This likely only added to the disgust and disappointment of the apostle with the Corinthian congregation. Paul further writes of the action they are to take by turning the offender over to "Satan for the destruction of the flesh" (5:5). Handing one over to Satan may seem out of order, but the Devil's oppression had been used previously as a means for God's purposes. Job was identified by God to be a "blameless and upright man," but he gave Satan permission to afflict him (Job 1, 2). In the conclusion of the book of Job, he states his relationship with God has been perfected as a result of his sufferings (Job 42:42-45). Therefore, this passage in 1 Corinthians gives further understanding that discipline takes many forms. Here one may learn that those who live callously and recklessly with no regard for others in the church are to be disciplined with the corresponding appropriate correction.

The apostle Paul associates sin and this incestuous affair in particular with leaven. He undoubtedly was writing to a congregation that had a significant Jewish element. Paul likens sin to the leavened bread Israel was to get rid of during the festival of Unleavened Bread (Exod 13:6-7; Lev 23:6-8). During that week, Israel was not to have any leavening in their home. Bread eaten that week was different than normal for it was to be unleavened. Leavening causes bread to rise, hence Paul wrote in his letter of them as being “arrogant.” The idea was they were thinking more of themselves than they ought (5:2). Furthermore, once leaven (sin) has been put in the loaf (church body) it spreads until it pervades every part of it. Paul wrote metaphorically to emphasize the insidious nature of sin and how it must be dealt with decisively.

The consequence of failing to discipline has many affects. First, the church was looked upon by unbelievers as no different than the culture and in some respects, worse. The offending brother was not awakened to his sin, so he did not see any need for repentance. Members were confused as to what standards of conduct there should be for believers. Finally, the church which bears the name of Christ was dishonored; this was the most serious and dreadful result of all.

Paul exhorts the Corinthians to remove the sin from their midst so they might be able to celebrate their relationship with Christ as it should be (5:7-8). He closes this passage by addressing the issue of judging. Clearly Paul is instructing this church to exercise church discipline. He notes that those inside the church are to be judged. Believers are not responsible for correcting outsiders (5:12). Lastly, so there is no question, Paul writes, “Purge the evil person from among you” (5:13).

Galatians 6:1-3

Galatians 5 serves as the context for Galatians 6:1-3 concerning correction. Paul writes to clearly note the differences between works of the flesh and fruit of the Spirit so there is no confusion. He emphasizes the divine assistance of the Spirit’s

presence in the lives of believers in order to produce Christ-like fruit and minimize the deeds of the flesh.

Given this back-drop, his attention turns to a believer who has sinned.

Obviously, Paul has a church member in mind since the church only has authority over those within its ranks (1 Cor 5:12). Again, the instruction is to respond to this problem and not just allow it to continue. The apostle also writes that not just anyone in the church should go to the offender but those he characterizes as “spiritual.” So, their qualification would be one of spiritual maturity which also carries with it a demeanor characterized as “a spirit of gentleness” (6:1). Furthermore, Paul stresses an important reason why those who take action toward a wayward brother should do so in the manner he describes is because they may be the very one’s in the future who are overtaken in a sin. In this way, Christ’s church is fulfilling the command of Jesus to “love one another” as well as doing to others as one would have them do to oneself (John 13:34-35; Matt 7:12). The “law of Christ” that Paul refers to is not recited here but there is little doubt that he had this in mind.

Although this is a brief passage, it is obvious the Lord expects his church to care enough for one another that they demonstrate it by lovingly correcting a fellow believer who has fallen into sin. Paul does not prescribe here, nor in the previous example of 1 Corinthians 6, the same steps Jesus taught in Matthew 18. However, believers should be familiar with all such teaching in order to proceed wisely and according to biblical instruction when the need for discipline is necessary. As believers act responsibly in discipline, they distinguish themselves from the world and bring glory to God as was intended (Ps 86:9; Isa 60:21; Rom 11:36; 1 Cor 6:20; 10:31; Rev 4:11).

Hebrews 12:5-11

The last defense of biblical church discipline presented in this chapter centers around the instruction found in Hebrews 12:5-11. The author of Hebrews moves from the history of biblical characters who were known by faith in God (Heb 11) to exhorting Jewish believers in the object of their faith, which is Christ. He argues that Christ suffered

unto death but they had not (Heb 12:1-4). The writer references Christ's sufferings to believers so they will understand that this is a way in which they are trained.

The Jewish Christians to whom the author of Hebrews writes have, at least in his mind, forgotten the Scriptures that identify them as children of their father-God who chastens them. Indeed, the use of the word "chastise" (Gk *paideia*) is significant in this passage since it is used seven times (Heb 12:5-8; 10, 11). This word in its original form means "'instructive discipline,' 'correction of God,' which attests a filial relationship with the Father."²⁶ Good fathers discipline their children. Here the writer actually has adult believers in mind as children, with God superintending their development. Joseph Thayer describes godly discipline succinctly: "Whatever in adults also cultivates the souls, especially by correcting mistakes and curbing the passions; hence, instruction with aims at the increase of virtue: 2 Timothy 3:16."²⁷

Being chastised by God is a clear indication of his affirmation of love and being rightly related to him. This punishment comes from God in any means he chooses, either from outside of the church or within. Further evidence for this is found as the writer addresses the affliction Jesus went through as his son (Heb 5:8; 12:2-4). Jesus suffered from the hands of his enemies and learned obedience. Therefore, when believers are corrected, regardless of the immediate source, God is ultimately the one superintending sanctification through it. Lane writes, "The sufferings the community had endured were actually disciplinary in character. Properly understood, they were a way of training them for the life of committed obedience appropriate to members of God's family."²⁸

²⁶James Strong, *The New Strong's Complete Dictionary of Bible Words* (Atlanta: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 672.

²⁷Joseph Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1996), 473.

²⁸William Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47b (Dallas: Word, 1991), 420.

The Hebrews writer quotes Proverbs 3:11-12 in verses 5 and 6: “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.” The reader is cautioned to take the discipline that comes his way seriously. “There are two opposite but equally wrong ways to respond to discipline: to ‘make light of’ it by refusing to learn from it, or to be so oppressed by it as to ‘lose heart.’”²⁹ Too often believers either pass off correction from the teaching of scripture as meant for everyone but them. They also may view any external suffering that comes their way as anything but the Lord’s discipline when indeed it may very well be. Another aspect of making light of the Lord’s discipline is to know one is being corrected but to hold it in contempt. Jonathan Leeman writes in *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love*:

What people fail to realize is that true love—God’s love—simultaneously attracts and repels all of us. Gaze point the love of God from one angle, and it will appear as the most resplendent thing in all the universe. But walk a few yards and look up again, and you will find that your lip snarls, your fists clench, and your heart becomes morally offended. It’s the same thing you’re looking at—God’s love. You’re just seeing it from a different angle.³⁰

Some believers actually hate God’s correction since they still struggle with their fallen nature that has not yet been annihilated (Rom 7).

The other wrong response cited in verse 5 is to “be weary,” or so discouraged that a believer becomes disengaged in the sanctification process. This discouragement can come from believers attempting to live out their lives apart from reliance on the Spirit on their own effort (Gal 3:1-6; 5:4-8). Trying to live as a Christian without divine help only leads to failure, correction, and hopelessness. Here the Hebrews writer is warning believers not be so discouraged that they stop cooperating with God in the process of their spiritual development. Believers who become easily discouraged at God’s discipline will

²⁹R. T. France, *Hebrews*, in vol. 13 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 171.

³⁰Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 79.

be more apt to believe he is against them. Discouragement leads to hopelessness, so whether it is discouragement because of discipline or discouragement because of continued failure by attempting to live out a life of faith on human effort, the believer is in grave danger. Either response to the Lord's discipline places the believer in peril. Though no discipline is pleasant, verse 6 contains wonderful hope and encouragement to believers: "For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." The Lord's discipline affirms familial relationship to him.

The virtue of patience is added to discipline in verse 7. Correction may be administered very quickly at times while another may be carried out over a lengthy period. When a believer finds himself in a season of suffering he must learn to trust that God's wisdom, timing, sovereignty, and goodness is always sure. Perhaps the best evidence that one is a child of God is when correction is administered, the response is to patiently endure because God loves, cares, and is in control.

Discipline is God's way of keeping the church real or "legitimate." Those who are God's children will endure whatever discipline they are subjected to (Phil 1:6). Those who have posed as his but are not will fall away (John 10:27-29). The Lord's discipline is his way of clarifying, separating, and making distinctions between the holy and unholy. As is stated in verse 8, "If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons." The Hebrews writer pleads the value of discipline by making the comparison between earthly fathers, whom children respect, and a heavenly father who is perfect. When earthly fathers discipline, it is sometimes out of anger or selfish pride and not for the good of the child. Fathers struggle with consistency, being too severe or not enough; however, when the heavenly father corrects his children, it is always measured and appropriate in order to produce a holiness of nature that reflects and honors God (Heb 12:9). In *God Redeeming His Bride*, Robert Cheong aptly writes, "Everything God does is consistent with His character; therefore, everything He does is

motivated by and results in His glory since there is no other like Him.”³¹ Hebrews 12:5-11 provides clear evidence that God disciplines believers for their good and his glory.

Conclusion

The biblical argument for church discipline is beyond refutation. Having carefully inspected Genesis 3:1-24, Numbers 21:4-9, Matthew 18:15-20, 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, Galatians 6:1-3 and Hebrews 12:5-11, one can safely conclude that God disciplined not only his children of the Old Testament, but also those of Christ’s church in the New Testament. Churches who neglect to teach and practice the doctrine of church discipline do so to their own peril. Many today either deny this teaching as valid or know the truth but for the sake of avoiding conflict, ignore it. There is only one way for believers to develop the holy lives to which they are called (1 Pet 1:15-16) and that is through the proper use of biblical church discipline.

³¹Robert Cheong, *God Redeeming His Bride: A Handbook for Church Discipline* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2012), 56.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL, THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE PRACTICE OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Having formed the theological foundation for church discipline, this chapter considers the various historical, theoretical and practical issues related to this project. Consideration of how church discipline has been practiced in the past provides an important context for the current situation. By comparing the spiritual condition of various churches from a time when discipline was more commonly practiced, to the current day where it rarely is practiced, provides valuable evidence for assessing its value.

The objections and challenges to church discipline are recognized and given careful consideration. If there are indeed valid reasons not to practice church discipline, then they should be duly noted. However, if the reasons are not sufficient to abandon the practice of discipline then there should be support to show why it is necessary in order for the church to accomplish the commission Jesus gave it. Few church leaders would disagree that an inherent aversion to discipline has infected many churches today. This condition is much the result of a misunderstanding regarding the nature of God's love. Church discipline is not seen as loving but as uncaring, irrelevant, and out of touch with this generation's understanding. However, a significant number of church leaders and members are becoming aware of the value of church discipline as a valuable means of developing disciples. This chapter addresses the charge that corrective discipline is not unloving, but instead, caring and God honoring.

The implication of the Lord's command for his church to be holy requires making a distinction between believers and non-believers. The Christian community once placed a high value on holiness, reflected in professing believers' speech, conduct, and

lifestyle. Even Christian places of worship were constructed to reflect the holiness of God. Currently there is an emphasis to incorporate the culture's language, thinking, and trends into both places of worship and believers themselves; thus, making it difficult to see any difference between those in the world and those in the church. This chapter provides evidence on how church discipline makes evident those who are believers from those who are not.

The practice of evangelism has been in decline for several decades arguably at the same time corrective church discipline has faded. Although some would argue that church discipline would be a detriment to evangelism, the case will be made as to how sharing the gospel is strengthened through an effective church discipline ministry.

Finally, and most importantly, overwhelming proof is offered to show the connection between church discipline and a meaningful structure for believer sanctification. Far too many believers have been allowed to become members of a church where there is no expectation of them developing as disciples of Christ.

Church Discipline: Late Eighteenth Century to Present

If one believes a return to robust church discipline would be a good thing, then George Santayana's statement, "Those who are unaware of history are destined to repeat it"¹ would indicate it is time to return to the practice of it. Although the average church member is uninformed of the biblical practice, ample resources provide evidence that the healthy practice of church discipline in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century was more of the norm rather than the exception. Believers in Baptist life during that period not only took their own sanctification seriously but had a greater awareness of its effect on the local congregation. Greg Wills writes,

¹George Santayana, *The Life of Reason* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), 284.

They placed discipline at the center of church life, filling their monthly conference meetings with disciplinary matters and viewing the church as a bench of judges. Not even preaching the gospel was more important to them than the exercise of discipline. They were disciplined democracies.²

Although church discipline records from this area and era reflected a no-nonsense approach toward God's moral law, there was also the tendency to be legalistic and judgmental. Wills systematically cites case upon case where Baptist churches in the South exercised discipline for non-attendance, drunkenness, unruliness, dancing, lying heresy and many more transgressions, including resistance to correction by the church. He documents that, with respect to Antebellum Baptist churches, "excommunication brought the full force of ecclesiastical authority to bear on offenders. They had bound themselves to mutual accountability for moral behavior."³ Obviously believers of this period placed a greater importance on the value of living in community than most today.

Further evidence for the practice of church discipline during that period of time comes from its support by Baptist leaders. J. L. Dagg, one of the most respected men of Baptist life from the nineteenth century, produced a well-known manual on church order which contains the poignant statement, "It has been remarked that when discipline leaves a church, Christ goes with it."⁴ Dagg's comment is a clear indication of the expectation churches had in that day to be thoroughly engaged in the practice of church discipline and stands in sharp contrast to what is lacking among Baptist churches today.

The manner in which Baptists educated their pastors affords further support that church discipline was an integral part of ecclesiastical order. The following statement, found in The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's fundamental rules,

²Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South 1785-1900* (New York: Oxford Press, 1997), 8.

³Ibid., 45.

⁴J. L. Dagg, *A Treatise on Church Order* (Charleston, SC: The Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1858), 274.

called the Abstract of Principles, identifies the three essential elements of a New Testament church as being order, discipline, and worship:

The Lord Jesus is the head of the Church, which is composed of all His true disciples, and in Him is invested supremely all power for its government. According to His commandment, Christians are to associate themselves into particular societies or churches; and to each of these churches He hath given needful authority for administering that order, discipline and worship which He hath appointed.⁵

Exercising corrective church discipline as a means for expressing concern was for the spiritual health of the individual as well as the church as a whole. Jesse Mercer addresses the wayward member: “The first thing to be attempted, in all cases is the restoration of the affected member.”⁶ Obviously, church discipline was never intended to be carried out by religious legalistic zealots who are hiding in wait to catch another in a sin so they might cruelly humiliate or remove them from fellowship. On the contrary, its purpose as used by the church of that era was to awaken sinners to their error. Ancestral denominational leaders’ main concern was for the holiness of individual members in the context of the whole, the church. Wills affirms this in writing, “But the chief purpose of discipline, Baptists constantly proclaimed, was the purity of the church.”⁷ Even among the archives of Verbena Baptist Church, dated 1880-1980, was discovered a historical review of significant issues:

In 1884 W.B. Strock, Kineon Wells and W. F. Claughton were appointed to notify a member to attend the next conference to explain some rumors in regard to his conduct as a church member. The member appeared at the next meeting admitting many wrongs for which he believed the Lord had forgiven him. Later the same year the member was convicted by the courts of murder and was excluded from the fellowship of the church. The church resolved to engage in constant and faithful prayer for him.⁸

⁵The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, “Abstract of Principles,” accessed September 21, 2006, <http://www.sbts.edu/about/abstract/>.

⁶Jesse Mercer, *Circular Letter* (Georgia Baptist Association, 1816, quoted in Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 31.

⁷Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 31.

⁸Linda Edwards, “Verbena Baptist Church 1880-1980” (Verbena, AL: Verbena Baptist Church, 1980), 5.

This same document notes several other instances where the church openly documents for its centennial celebration instances of church discipline. Of this eleven-page record of Verbena Baptist's history, one and one-half pages were devoted to church discipline. In the concluding statements of the portion devoted to discipline, there is evidence of a move away from the discipline that was practiced in the nineteenth century: "During the 1920's and 30's members were excluded for un-Christian conduct and from departing from the faith by joining another denomination. Discipline in the church has been greatly relaxed!"⁹

Perhaps some older Baptists would remember stories of church discipline long ago, but most would consider the practice antithetical to the Christian faith. R. Stanton Norman writes, "One of the convictions of our denominational forebears was their pledge to separate themselves from the world and to submit themselves to Christ and to one another. Church discipline was considered one means of achieving this distinction."¹⁰ Discipline was by the "majority," indicating the church maintained a democratic polity. When the congregation participated in discipline, the church functioned well and enjoyed a higher level of purity. E. Y. Mullins recognized this essential by writing, "Baptists assume at least, and seek to embody the assumption in church life, that church members have been 'tamed' by the Spirit of God."¹¹ Denominational leaders have long recognized that for Baptist congregational polity to function properly there must be a redeemed and holy membership. John A. Broadus, a pastor and former President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote about the necessity of a redeemed congregation herewith: "Those who do not lead a godly life or fail to show one's faith by good works should

⁹Edwards, "Verbena Baptist Church 1880-1980," 6.

¹⁰R. Stanton Norman, *The Baptist Way: Distinctives of a Baptist Church* (Nashville: Broadman, 2005), 71.

¹¹E. Y. Mullins, *Axioms of Religion: A New Interpretation of the Baptist Faith* (Macon, GA: Mercer University, 2010), 145.

either be rejected in the appeal for membership or be excluded from membership through ‘strict church discipline.’”¹²

During the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, records of Baptist church conference minutes reveal the importance associated with the practice of church discipline. An emphasis was on the order of the approach to a wayward member in that it should be done one on one. Jim West wrote in his article on case studies of church discipline during this time that there were three levels of discipline: rebuke or admonition, suspension, where those who were censured were permitted to attend church but could not participate in the Lord’s Supper and being barred from the church as well as its activities.¹³

Church Discipline Will Evoke Various Responses and Challenges

Given the prevailing attitude of the culture that has infiltrated the church with respect to an aversion toward authority in general, it should not be surprising that members will react to the notion of church discipline with apprehension. There has always been the potential for, and reality of, abuses associated with religion. These abuses have produced all sorts of dysfunction, hurt, shame, injury, and loss of life. Consequently, it is an imperative for the church to carry out corrective discipline, not only according the letter of God’s Word, but just as importantly, through the Spirit of God. Case studies conducted by Philip Zimbardo, with respect to how people that have power handle it and how people respond to the authority they are under, gave him insight into how power and authority may be abused by “good” people: “Good people can be induced, seduced, and initiated into behaving in evil ways.”¹⁴ As the axiom goes, “Power corrupts and absolute power

¹²John A. Broadus, *The Duty of Baptist to Teach Their Distinctive Views* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1881), quoted in R. Stanton Norman, *More than Just a Name* (Nashville: B & H, 2001), 86.

¹³Jim West, “Nineteenth-Century Baptist and Church Discipline: Case Studies from Georgia,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 45, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 82.

¹⁴Philip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect* (New York: Random House, 2007), 211.

corrupts absolutely.” The warning is that anyone who seeks to correct another, especially when done from a position of authority, is to do so as God has prescribed in his Word: motivated by love. There are several other arguments to consider for not embracing church discipline such as the potential for membership or attendance loss, the stress it puts on a congregation as it works through the change required, the resistance to appearing condemning or mean spirited, the awkwardness as well as the fear of confronting a sinning brother and the risk of being sued.

The claim that corrective church discipline will cause a loss of members is a significant concern for churches. Members want to “feel good” about the church they attend and generally favor having more people rather than less. Larger numbers and nicer facilities for most is a sign that “we are doing something right.” A loss of members for the institution or practice of church discipline would not only cause a decrease in the number of people attending, but also affect tithes and offerings in a negative way. Large giving, like big numbers and the size of the campus, is associated with having God’s favor. Furthermore, members who have become relationally enmeshed sacrifice holiness for the idolatrous relationship they have embraced. As a result, when a friend is offended by correction that is administered, their partner stands with them in rebellion rather than with Christ. Indeed, if a church has not been practicing any discipline at all, it will be difficult to establish a corrective ministry for fear of losing members. There certainly would be a greater potential for confusion if a church attempted to establish standards and hold people accountable if they had never practiced it to begin with.

The natural reaction of people to the unfamiliar is usually negative. Since most churches are not familiar to church discipline, the fear and anxiety it evokes may indeed cause some to withdraw. However, a closer look reveals that with all the accommodations churches have made to make believers’ participation in church life easier, more “relevant” and personally satisfying, the commitment level of many is shallow. Furthermore, weekly worship attendance is shrinking anyway. Although during the late twentieth and early

twenty-first centuries Baptist churches increased in numbers, much of it was due to appealing to individuals' perceived needs. These efforts were exercised apart from church discipline. This approach actually gave the appearance of health, but within, members were becoming worldlier and spiritually weak. John White and Ken Blue describe that growth in the following way: "The church's growth is largely cancerous growth, and we do not even know it."¹⁵ Thom Rainer argues that the church has missed the mark by not expecting more from its members, which includes church discipline.¹⁶ Clearly, the church's objective is the glory of God put on display through the holy lives of the members of Christ's church. Many churches have a form of godliness but no real spiritual power.

The fear of appearing mean spirited or unloving is a concern for most in the church. The prospects of confronting a believer in sin, with the possibility of having to take extreme measures produces a reluctance to practice corrective church discipline. Far too many in the church have embraced a passive image of Jesus that never confronts, corrects, or condemns. This misconception of Jesus is a problem compounded by a lack of biblical instruction on the subject of church discipline. The result is a church with each member drawing their own conclusions when faced with the biblical teaching of church discipline. Those with this misunderstanding experience an internal conflict when instructed correctly. Since the prevailing attitude toward proper church discipline is negative, many have an aversion to accept and implement church discipline.

Few would argue that a true friend is not only one who celebrates life, encourages, and exhorts through difficulties, but also cares enough to confront. John Townsend affirms this loving practice: "One of the most caring things anyone can do for their loved ones is to make them aware of behavior or attitude that is not good for them,

¹⁵John White and Ken Blue, *Healing the Wounded* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), 34.

¹⁶Thom S. Rainer, *High Expectations* (Nashville: Broadman, 1999), 112.

for love, or for their growth.”¹⁷ If loving enough to confront is true among friends in a secular sense, how much more should it apply to spiritual kin in the local church setting?

Leeman writes,

The local church that chooses to emphasize God’s love but not God’s holiness is a church that doesn’t actually understand what God’s love is, because God’s love is wholly fixed upon God and his glorious character in all its aspects. Such a church has probably substituted an idol in place of God’s love. As such, the church that hesitates to draw sharp membership borders or to practice church discipline because these things don’t seem loving needs to know that it’s been duped into a man centered caricature of love. It’s been co-opted by the culture. It may well be worshiping an idol.¹⁸

Regardless of the prevailing culture’s distorted view of love, the church exists to uphold the truth (1 Tim 3:15) of what God’s love really is.

Increasingly, the church has been the new target for legal attacks. Lawsuits were once limited on rare occasion to attenders or members who might seek to be made whole because of an accidental injury; however, churches are now vulnerable to litigation for any perceived wrong. As such, no church wants to find itself in a courtroom defending its actions to discipline a church member along with the negative publicity that would go with it. Thomas F. Taylor explains,

What is a minister’s worst nightmare? How about a large group of lawyers gathered together to discuss the best way to sue clergy and churches? In 1992 the American Bar Association hosted just such a seminar, and similar ones have been held regionally across the country since then. What is disturbing about these meetings is not their intention of bringing those clergy or church that act illegally to justice—wrongdoers should be held responsible—but the emphasis oftentimes on how to land large settlement amounts.¹⁹

It is not uncommon to see advertisements, whether on billboards or television commercials, of legal professionals encouraging anyone who thinks they have been harmed to seek legal restitution. Individual citizens live with the real possibility that they may be sued at

¹⁷John Townsend, *Loving People* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 116.

¹⁸Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 101.

¹⁹Thomas F. Taylor, “Will Your Church Be Sued?” *Christianity Today* 41, no. 1 (1997): 42.

any time. That concern and fear finds its way into the church through its members. Churches who practice discipline would seem to be far more likely targets of legal action than those who rarely correct members.

Although lawsuits are a possibility, the church should not shrink from its responsibility to correct members. In fact, concern of a lawsuit filed against the church may serve as motivation for carefully thinking through the particulars of correcting a member, including actions being shared with the whole membership. Cheong offers several helpful suggestions in safeguarding the church, such as

carrying out discipline within Biblical and written church guidelines . . . acting with the same urgency required by law on severe matters . . . keeping sufficient notes and records regarding a matter . . . and responding in a loving and redemptive manner in the process of corrective discipline.²⁰

The church that proceeds within the framework of the law and in accordance with biblical standards may do so with confidence because they are operating within the boundaries established by the government and God. If a church is challenged legally after taking such measures, it will not only be in a much better position for a favorable ruling, but will have the satisfaction that they are honoring God.

What if the leadership is reluctant to establish and exercise discipline for selfish reasons? There may be objections because certain influential member's lives are not in line with gospel standards. If this type of situation is a reality in the church, then those individuals who will not change are likely to offer the most resistance to a biblical corrective church discipline ministry. Resistance to a ministry that will require those who do not want to be held accountable may take the form of diversion, threats, or passive aggressive behavior in an effort to derail a church discipline ministry.

The described reasons why church discipline should not be practiced is certainly not an exhaustive discussion on the matter. However, one may be sure that corrective

²⁰Robert Cheong, *God Redeeming His Bride* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2012), 188.

church discipline will disturb the life of the church to one degree or another when a church begins to practice it. Conflict in the church inevitably arises when sin is challenged, which is dangerous because people tend to want to defend or justify themselves. Bolton writes that conflict “at best is disruptive and at worst it is destructive. Once it erupts, conflict is difficult to control. Destructive controversy has a tendency to expand.”²¹ Great wisdom, resolve, patience, and unity are required by leaders as well as the rest of the church. In many situations, a confronted member will seek support from family and those that they have close relationships with in the church, which is why it is important to educate, encourage, and thoroughly prepare a church for practicing church discipline.

Church Discipline Provides a Means for Making a Distinction between the Regenerate and Unregenerate

Light gives people the ability to make distinctions and see danger. When there is inadequate light, it is difficult to see details or make out images in order to identify something. It is one thing to stumble in the dark, but quite another to stumble in the light of day. One who sees danger in daylight and does not note it puts themselves and others at risk. Those in authority, along with other caring persons, surely have a responsibility to warn others of a dangerous situation. The same is true in the church. When the people of God, who have the light of God’s Word and illumination of God the Holy Spirit, do not mark off those who by their conduct reflect a spirit contrary to Christ, they place everyone in the body at risk and shamefully discredit the gospel message and mission.

Practicing church discipline would be challenging enough even if one could assume that all members within a church were regenerate. However, churches are plagued by members who selfishly, and in some cases hatefully, carry on in a way that makes their profession of faith dubious at best. Even among the twelve who followed Jesus was

²¹Robert Bolton, *People Skills* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 206.

one whose heart was not right (John 17:12). This problem also exists within the church.

Norman wrote,

The Baptist understanding of a regenerate church membership is not a claim that every Baptist is converted or that every Baptist church has a pure, regenerate membership. Many unconverted people, some honestly misled about their faith and others more deceptively intentioned, are unfortunately counted among the members of Baptist churches.²²

For the sake of clarification, the point should be made here that church discipline that ends with the removal of a member occurs only after all efforts have been made to see a professing brother restored to the faith community. This action marks the individual in such a way that others clearly see this person is not acting as a born-again believer. The two-fold purpose of church discipline is (1) correction and restoration of a church member and (2) excommunication of a church member who displays a refusal to separating himself from his sin and has to be removed for the safety of believers as well as the purity of the church. Maintaining the integrity of the body of Christ preserves an atmosphere that is conducive to a church's harmony of fellowship. "Two cannot walk together unless they be agreed" (Amos 3:3). Hence, the church cannot be in good fellowship unless they agree not only on the doctrines of the Christian faith but the corresponding practice of those same teachings. Mohler affirms,

Fearing law-suits and lacking courage, these churches allow sin to go unchallenged, and heresy to grow unchecked. Inevitably, the false unity they seek to preserve gives way to the factions that inevitably follow the gradual abandonment of biblical Christianity.²³

Ultimately identifying and separating unbelievers from the church re-establishes an atmosphere of order to the church so it may keep its gospel focus.

²²Norman, *More than Just a Name*, 84.

²³R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "Church Discipline: The Missing Mark," in *The Compromised Church*, ed. John H. Armstrong (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 186.

The church that allows the unrepentant sinner to remain in its fellowship sends a confusing message to the membership. God wants his people to be keenly tuned in to the seriousness of sin so they will not be deceived by it. Cheong writes,

Out of His love, God removes His children from His covenant community when they cling to wickedness rather than to Christ, whether it is through false teaching or false living, so that they might come to their senses. God also removes those from His covenant community who do not belong to His family, children of wrath who have not been redeemed by the blood of Christ.²⁴

It is not until the church confronts the sinning member that they confirm his real condition. After working through the process of church discipline, if the member demonstrates by his response to correction that he would rather hold to his sin than repent, he must be identified in that way.

God's way is demonstrated throughout Scripture by making distinctions. In Genesis, he separates creation by forming boundaries, ordaining animals to produce after their kind. With respect to his people, God outlined in the book of Leviticus clear lines between the clean or holy and what was not. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus clearly taught when he would return there would be a separating into only two distinct categories, saved and lost (Matt 3:12; 13:30; 22:10-14; 25:32). Dever contributes in this same vein:

God will have a holy people to reflect His character. The picture of the church at the end of the book of Revelation is of a glorious bride who reflects the character of Christ Himself, while, "Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood" (Rev 22:15).²⁵

So much of what is considered acceptable or even good by leaders in all areas of culture today is ungodly and sinful. As a result, believers not only find themselves at odds with this prevailing attitude, but are considered intolerant, unloving, and in some cases, immoral. Many churches fail to realize just how much of the world's philosophy they have been influenced by. Jesus leaves believers, individually or collectively, no

²⁴Cheong, *God Redeeming His Bride*, 7.

²⁵Mark Dever, "Biblical Church Discipline," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 4, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 41.

room to coexist with sin. There are no classes of believers in the church. One is either a believer or not. The status of “believer” assures unity and focus within the body. Granted, believers may function in varying ways, and there are differing roles in the church, but all believers are to be united in living out the gospel objective of Christ-likeness. Leeman writes,

The problem with these arguments is that Jesus says a person must be born again to enter the kingdom of God. Paul says a person must be a new creation. Churches should therefore be extremely interested in what people are. Are they born again? Are they new creations?²⁶

This kind of awareness requires the church to be vigilant in their assessment of the condition of the local church body. According to Leeman, “the Bible sees just two: believing or not believing; children of God or children of the Devil; baptized or not baptized. The church is called to draw a line—a boundary—right down the middle.”²⁷

Some would argue that Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 13, where he instructed the disciples not to remove the tares that grew among the wheat, is support for not performing church discipline. However, later in the passage Jesus interprets the parable by stating the tares as those who are in the “world” as opposed to the church. In harmony with this teaching, Laney cites statistics from a case study that suggest the frequency to expel a wayward member is greater than most might think:

Most people think “successful” church discipline means that through confrontation and correction, the sinner has repented and returned to fellowship with Christ and His church. Certainly no one would deny that genuine repentance and restoration to fellowship bear the mark of “success.” Unfortunately, restoration does not always occur. Of the twenty-one pastors who presented case studies in church discipline, only eight reported cases which resulted in repentance and restoration. In the other thirteen, those under discipline refused to repent and either left the church or were excommunicated.²⁸

²⁶Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense*, 164.

²⁷Ibid., 165.

²⁸Carl J. Laney, *A Guide to Church Discipline: God’s Loving Plan for Restoring Believers to Fellowship with Himself and with the Body of Christ* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 1985), 10.

Even in the event of having to place one outside of the church, there is still the consolation that the Lord is being honored. Laney writes,

Church discipline should result in a purified church. Paul ordered the Corinthian church to exercise church discipline on the brother who was involved in an immoral relationship, and he used a metaphor of purification: “Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump. . . Remove the wicked man from among yourselves” (1 Cor 5:7,13).²⁹

Finally, Lauterbach used the analogy of working a garden to bring clarity to the debate over corrective church discipline:

However, reality set in. Weeds grew. They took over the flower beds. There was only one solution. We had to go outside and pull the weeds. We had to do so every week. Wherever there was a weed, we pulled it. So it is with the church. That is what Matthew 18 is about. “When your brother sins” is the equivalent of “when the weeds appear.”³⁰

Church Discipline Will Support Evangelism

Corrective church discipline will impact the practice of evangelism because of its connection to discipleship. When a member is corrected for inconsistency in worship attendance, he is confronted in his sin of not showing love toward God and the brethren. Although this form of correction is part of shaping a disciple, it also has implications for evangelism. Laney writes, “Congregational discipline is really an act of discipleship which functions as the corollary of evangelism. Evangelism ministers to those outside the church who are in bondage to sin.”³¹ Evangelism is sharing the gospel of Christ with those outside the church in bondage to sin in order that they may be freed and brought into the church through the new birth. Marlin Jeschke writes how both evangelism and discipline are related: “In discipline, as in the presentation of the good news to non-Christian, a person is presented the opportunity of being liberated from the power of sin in all its forms by

²⁹Laney, *A Guide to Church Discipline*, 107.

³⁰Mark Lauterbach, *The Transforming Community: The Practice of the Gospel in Church Discipline* (Carol Stream, IL: Christian Focus, 2003), 72-73.

³¹Laney, *A Guide to Church Discipline*, 14.

coming under the rule of Christ.”³² The potency of holiness found in a local church is what makes them salt and light to the people of the community. When the people of God are living holy lives, it gives credibility to the gospel as it is proclaimed. However, when church discipline is neglected, not only is there a failure of care for the spiritual condition of its members, but an undermining of any gospel proclamation efforts to the lost.

One of the most appalling defects of much present-day evangelism is the absence of consistent and sustained emphasis upon holiness, justice, and authority of God. This deficiency is illustrated very concretely in the failure to proclaim and apply the binding authority of God’s law summarily recorded in the Ten Commandments. Murray writes, “It is as these commandments are brought to bear upon the hearts and lives of men . . . [that] . . . the sharp arrows of God’s commandments can pierce the heart of the King’s enemies and only these can lay low the self-sufficiency of human pride.”³³ The gospel presented by those who have been unchanged by it is a contradiction. For the gospel to be authentically communicated, there must not only be a holy message but a holy vessel that it is delivered by. Indeed, Jesus alludes to the principles of growth through what is seen in nature. Just as a fruit tree must be pruned for the tree to be even more fruitful (John 15:2), so the believer and church must be pruned of the sin that contradicts the gospel message. Laney writes about this pruning with the “result of church discipline illustrated by the account of Ananias and Sapphira is church growth, ‘And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number’(Acts 5:14).”³⁴

Dever explains,

Church discipline is a powerful tool in evangelism. People notice when our lives are different, especially when there’s a whole community of people whose lives are

³²Marlin Jeschke, *Discipling the Brother* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1979), 181-82.

³³John Murray, *The Claims of Truth* (Cambridge, University Press, 1976), 129-30.

³⁴Laney, *A Guide to Church Discipline*, 107.

different—not people whose lives perfect, but whose lives are marked by genuinely trying to love God and love one another. When churches are seen as conforming to the world, it makes our evangelistic task all the more difficult. As Nigel Lee of English Intersivity once said, we become so like the unbeliever they have no questions they want to ask us. May we so live that people are made constructively curious.³⁵

The church that practices biblical church discipline is much more likely to take other aspects of church life more seriously. Considering the present culture of church in America, any fellowship that would practice correcting wayward members would also be valuing and holding one another accountable in other areas of church life. Church membership, prayer, the faithful proclamation of the Scripture, giving, worship, serving, and evangelism would all be emphasized because they too are biblical church practices. Believers are to model to the world a life that has been transformed and reflects the transforming power of God to hopeless man. Richard Lovelace writes, “Christians should build straight houses in the midst of a world where crooked people are building crooked homes...Their live should appear to the world as centers of divine righteousness, peace and joy.”³⁶

Just as good words of those who live out the gospel have a tendency to spread, so do words of those who claim to be redeemed by Christ but live contrary to the gospel. Bolton confirms this as he writes about issues that are damaging and contrary to the gospel: “Destructive controversy has a tendency to expand.”³⁷ When congregations are united and living out holy lives before all, evangelism will have its greatest effectiveness. More importantly, God will be most glorified in such a setting.

³⁵Dever, “Biblical Church Discipline,” 40-41.

³⁶Richard Lovelace, *Renewal as a Way of Life* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 59.

³⁷Bolton, *People Skills*, 206.

Church Discipline Will Provide a Meaningful Structure for Believer Sanctification

One of the most cherished teachings of the church is the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. Wayne Grudem gives a brief definition of that doctrine: “All those who are truly born again will be kept by God’s power and will persevere as Christian until the end of their lives, and that only those who persevere until the end have been truly born again.”³⁸ The believer who embraces this teaching will immediately find himself held in tension by the fact that in order to be assured of his salvation he must live his life by the grace of God on a daily basis. How does one do this? Christ had in mind the church as a primary means of grace by which his sanctification is maintained and matured. One of the early church Fathers, Cyprian of Carthage, said, “He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the church for his mother.”³⁹ The Scriptures bear witness that the only thing Jesus ever purchased was the church (1 Pet 1:18-19). Jesus established, bought, sustains, and is coming back for his church. The church is likened to a bride that the groom, Jesus, is coming back for and that she is to be without spot or blemish (Eph 5:26-27). That means she, the church, is with spot and blemish. Christ’s objective is to get her ready for his return. Therefore, believers may conclude that a means of grace Christ has provided for his people to persevere until the end is through the perfecting of the saints through his church.

The Importance of Living in Spiritual Community

Many believers, especially in America, are indoctrinated with the idea of living independently from community. Stroebel writes of this condition and how it has infiltrated the church:

³⁸Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 2000), 788.

³⁹Dan Graves, “On the Unity of the Church,” accessed October 12, 2106, <https://www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/incontext/article/cyprian/>.

What is probably the hardest for us to swallow is the belief that our hearts are not private property but communal property. Freedom in the Christian life come through being known deeply. Freedom entails both acceptance and continued admonishment and guidance in our life with Christ.⁴⁰

Every Christian must understand that he is a recovering addict of sin. While he lives in this flesh and until the time of his glorified change, he will constantly battle with sin. Indeed, all believers struggle with an unhealthy relationship with sin. According to Hemfelt, Minirth and Meier, “That will be one of your biggest problems from now on, this blindness to self. Self-deception, denial, all the old defense mechanisms are waiting in the wings, ready to come into play.”⁴¹ The authors identify one of the important challenges to dealing with sin but the ultimate blindness is in not realizing God and experiencing his great love. As a church grows in God’s love there is an awareness of the necessity of being in relationship with others who genuinely care enough to keep each other from going back into bad patterns. This activity is all a result of living in relationship with God where the Spirit does his work of comforting, guiding, teaching, giving of gifts and convicting (John 16:7-11;13-14;14:16; 1 Cor 12). As God’s people dwell in his presence in a love relationship, God’s nature come to life in each individual and the community as a whole. This serves as the basis for real caring among one another since our affections are toward God with the manifestation of that love displayed in obedience. In Paul’s writings to the Corinthians, he noted that bad company corrupts good conduct (1 Cor 15:33). On the basis of this truth statement, believers may consider the opposite is true: those who surround themselves by godly oriented people, being led by the Spirit will have a greater likelihood of living holy lives for the glory of God.

⁴⁰Kyle Stroebel, *Formed for the Glory of God* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2013), 150.

⁴¹Robert Hemfelt, Frank Minirth, and Paul Meier, *Love Is a Choice: The Definitive Book on Letting Go of Unhealthy Relationships* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 256.

With respect to overcoming the addiction of sin, Hemfelt, Minirth and Meier write about a believer's biggest handicap: "That will be one of your biggest problems from now on, this blindness to self. Self-deception, denial, all the old defense mechanisms are waiting in the wings, ready to come into play."⁴² Biblical church discipline provides believers with support to learn community, exercise transparency, and deepen relationships in order to draw on the resources God has provided through its membership. Robert S. McGee writes about such believer support: "God very often uses other believers to demonstrate His love and acceptance of us. The strength, comfort, encouragement, and love of Christians toward one another are visible expressions of God's love."⁴³ Caring Christians who are involved in each other's lives provide a valuable influence in the work of sanctification.

Church Discipline Provides a Caring Culture

Much of church discipline has to do with reacting to bad or negligent behavior. However, a church that teaches and practices discipline provides an atmosphere where sins may be corrected before becoming harmful acts. Hemfelt, Minirth, and Meier write,

With this stage . . . you need the help of an outside person or persons. Your group may help, your reparent, perhaps a trusted friend not otherwise involved in your recovery. The object of this stage is to spot trouble early on and make a course correction before a problem develops.⁴⁴

For the purposes of this discussion, a group of caring Christians within the context of the local church is a valuable support resource to assist repentant believers in the process of sanctification.

⁴²Hemfelt, Minirth, and Meier, *Love Is a Choice*, 256.

⁴³Robert S. McGee, *The Search for Significance* (Nashville: W Publishing, 2003), 69-70.

⁴⁴Hemfelt, Minirth, and Meier, *Love Is a Choice*, 256.

A church whose membership has not practiced church discipline will find it hard to share personal struggles and be transparent at first. However, through teaching and reminding all believers of who they were, and who they are now as accepted in the beloved through Christ's sufficient work (Eph 1:6), an atmosphere of humility and confidence will be established for a healthy and holy community.

Conclusion

Church discipline is a means by which the church carries out its mission of making disciples. A snapshot of church history from the late eighteenth century to now marks a sharp distinction in the quality of discipleship between periods of time when churches practiced discipline as opposed to present day where the majority of churches do not. However, church discipline is not the goal; it is a tool Christ has ordained to be used in facilitating living in a loving community with members and their God. If the implementation and practice of church discipline is not carried out in accordance with biblical teaching and guided by the Spirit, it is likely to produce people who rely more on human works than the grace of God. Initiating corrective discipline in a church will prompt diverse responses; however, all Christians should first seek the favor of honoring Christ above all. As church discipline is practiced, the morale of a local fellowship is increased while those in the community who do not know Christ recognize the marked difference in the lives of church members. When God's gospel is shared by people exemplifying holy lives, the harmony of message and lifestyle gives support to evangelism. Finally, the church that practices discipline demonstrates real care for its membership by providing a framework by which members can develop more fully in godliness.

When Jesus was accused of casting out a demon by the power Satan, he responded by stating that any kingdom or house divided against itself cannot stand (Mark 3:22-26). This same principle applies to Christ's church. When believers depart from the essential beliefs of God's Word, evidenced in either word or deed, the church is divided. Church discipline is a means for holding the church together in unity. Christ is not divided,

nor is his church. This unity is in the singular purpose and person of Christ. The church's mission is the glory of God through Jesus Christ. Cheong writes, "Ultimately, through what we commonly refer to as church discipline, God calls His church to what reflects the gospel message and what accomplishes His gospel mission. Nothing more. Nothing less."⁴⁵

⁴⁵Cheong, *God Redeeming His Bride*, 149.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Upon arrival at Verbena Baptist Church in December of 2014, I discussed with the five active deacons my doctoral project pertaining to church discipline. I explained the overview of what this project would entail, the church's involvement, and how it would be beneficial to the fellowship. This providential discussion came at a time when the deacons were lamenting over the lack of discipline in inconsistent attendance, giving, and service. In this meeting, the deacons expressed their support for the project and subsequently reported to the congregation at the January 2015, business meeting what I had shared with them about the project. Those who attended the business meeting expressed support of the project.

In February 2017, I reminded the deacons of the project and asked for their support and participation in the project. At that time, three active deacons currently served. This group, along with other leaders of the church, which included staff, teachers, assistants, and workers from all the various ministries, were invited to participate in the project.

As the project implementation approached, other events and activities were also taking place. A spring renewal meeting was held for four days in March and the church also hosted a Baccalaureate service for Verbena High School. Additionally, customary "high days," such as Easter and Mother's Day, encroached on the project's emphasis. Although prayers were offered on behalf of the project, the membership tended to be more preoccupied with the events and activities with which they were the most familiar.

Preparation and Administration of MAS Instrument

The Member Accountability Survey (MAS) was formulated as a part of the original project proposal.¹ The survey contained statements regarding membership and church discipline.

The first phase began on March 23, 2017, with the refining of the MAS instrument. Each of the statements were crafted in a way to elicit a response from the participant that would indicate their level of understanding. Before completing the survey, some statements were corrected or rephrased for clarity. Some statements prompted participants to think about church discipline from a personal standpoint, while other statements required them to respond considering the local church as a whole. Values were assigned to each statement with the highest value being 6, with that response being the most biblically desired. The optimum desired answer was either “Strongly Agree” or “Strongly Disagree.” There were no optimum desired responses that fell in between. Any responses descending from the desired answer received a point decrease in value to the lowest value of 1. The MAS Survey Value Key² reveals those point values by which the surveys were scored.

The deacons were reminded on April 19, 2017, that the project would begin on Sunday, May 7. There was unanimous support from the men. The initial survey date and time were announced from the pulpit for two Sundays and the information was also included in the worship guide.

Developing Course Materials and Instruction

The development of the course materials began in April 3, 2017. Originally, my plan was to use Jay Adams’ *Handbook of Church Discipline* as the main resource.³

¹See appendix 1.

²See appendix 2.

³Jay Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986).

However, my supervisor, Robert Cheong, encouraged me to broaden my own understanding by doing further reading on church discipline from a variety of sources. After several months of additional research in 2016, I began gathering quotes, excerpts, and material for the class. I anticipated revisions to the course materials based on what the initial survey revealed. Nevertheless, I was confident that significant material relating to the basics of church discipline could be a part of the curriculum regardless of adjustments based on the survey responses. The course materials were completed on April 29, 2017. Table 1 shows the title for each session, its sequential number, topics or issues addressed, and the resources primarily used.

Table 1. Teaching sessions

Study	Session	Topic/Issues	Resource
God's Love	1	Misconceptions About Love	The Church & the Surprising Offense of God's Love
God's Love	2	Nature of God's Love, Holiness of God	The Church & the Surprising Offense of God's Love
God's Love	3	Authority and God's love	The Church & the Surprising Offense of God's Love
God's Love	4	Commitment, Accountability	The Church & the Surprising Offense of God's Love
God's Love	5	Covenant With One Another	The Church & the Surprising Offense of God's Love
Christ's Bride	6	Christ's Bride the Church	God Redeeming His Bride
Christ's Bride	7	The Bride's Preparation	God Redeeming His Bride
Christ's Bride	8	Authority to Correct	God Redeeming His Bride
Christ's Bride	9	Covenant Relationships	God Redeeming His Bride
Church Discipline	10	Definition, Scripture Ref's	Bible
Survey Study	11	Review/Bible References	Bible

The first five sessions were taken from *The Surprising Offense of God's Love* by Jonathan Leeman. Most people, including a vast number of professing believers, have a skewed understanding of God's love. The muddled perception of God's love is arguably

the greatest roadblock for most people accepting and practicing authentic biblical church discipline. Leeman explains that Americans in general, and even American Christians, tend to view loving churches as “those churches make us feel relaxed and comfortable, not judged. We can be ourselves there. Nonjudgmental-ism is important in our friendships too: ‘I know she’s my friend, because she doesn’t judge me. I can be real with her.’”⁴ People who have embraced such a flawed understanding of God’s love will more than likely never accept the practice of church discipline. Therefore, the teaching sessions to correct false understanding with respect to church discipline began with instruction about the true nature of God’s love.

The next four sessions were devoted to a study in church discipline that I named “Christ’s Bride.” Numerous scriptural references and Robert Cheong’s book *God Redeeming His Bride* were used as resources.⁵ The purpose of this section of teaching was to help participants understand that the church is not just a social gathering, man-derived institution, or place for religious activity. Rather, participants were taught that the church is an assembly of born again believers that are called out of the world and into a community of faith to be Christ’s bride. Just as a bride prepares for her wedding and union to her husband, so does Christ’s bride. The course material in this section was intended to reveal that each member has a personal and collective responsibility to prepare for Christ’s return. The metaphor of a bride is used in conjunction with Paul’s analogy of a body with many members (1 Cor 12:12; Eph 4:4).

The final two sessions addressed church discipline using the Bible as the primary resource. Session 10 was a study of the subject of church discipline in general, while session 11 was a review of the survey statements.

⁴Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 47-48.

⁵Robert Cheong, *God Redeeming His Bride: A Handbook for Church Discipline* (Fearn Scotland: Christian Focus, 2013).

Each session was designed for lecture style teaching with follow along handouts and the visual support of a graphic projector presentation program. After each statement or topic was discussed, time was allotted for questions or comments. This combination of learning styles tended to be the most effective for the project participants. Just prior to May 7, 2017, the material to be used for each teaching session was completed.⁶ The content of the lessons was designed to communicate the truth about church discipline to the participants in a way that was both relevant, rational, and above all, biblical.

Administering the MAS

Sunday afternoon, May 7, 2017, the MAS survey was administered. Each of the nineteen leaders who attended were required to sign in. Each participant drew a slip of paper from a basket that revealed the individual code number he or she was to include on the survey. Everyone was instructed not to put a name on the survey, only the personal code. Participants were also encouraged to save the slip because they would need to use this same code on the follow-up survey. I read the “Agreement to Participate” clause to the participants and everyone agreed to participate in the project. The group was then instructed to respond to each statement with only one of the following responses: Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Disagree Somewhat (DS), Agree Somewhat (AS), Agree (A) or Strongly Agree (SA). After approximately thirty-five minutes, all the surveys were completed. I scored the initial survey and was not surprised that it revealed deficiencies in the understanding of church discipline. Several responders scored poorly, but a few also scored very well. One participant answered with all the optimum responses. Overall, the group yielded a median score of 111 of 144.⁷

⁶See appendix 4.

⁷See appendix 5.

Instruction on Church Discipline to Correct Error and Increase Knowledge

Following the completion of the initial survey on May 7, 2017, the VBC leadership class launched into teaching sessions 1 and 2. Participants were somewhat reserved. I attributed that to the fact they had just taken a survey that challenged them to think about a subject to which they had previously not given much thought. At the conclusion of session 2, the group was informed of future dates and times of the church discipline classes that would follow.

Teaching Sessions 1-5 “God’s Love”

Session 1 covered the world’s false impressions of God’s love. The current emphasis on individualism, consumerism, commitment phobia, and skepticism were examined to expose how each of these influences have in their own way been used to undermine the true meaning of God’s love. Left unchecked, these attitudes lead to isolation, selfishness, a contempt for authority, and unbelief, which are contrary to the Christian faith. Several commented that they observed how some people they knew personally had a tendency toward isolation. The session ended by learning how the modern concept of love is nothing more than sophisticated idolatry, to which many succumb.

Session 2 was a continuation of the previous session to address the misconception of love, but came from the view of the nature of God’s love. Since God is love (1 John 4:8), one must understand God to understand what true love means. The participants and I examined scriptures that helped the participants understand that God is Holy. His holiness involves not only his benevolence, mercy, and grace, but also his purity, justice, and righteousness. The session taught how God’s love is primarily centered on himself, not man. This erroneous belief is counter to the worldly man’s myopic self-focus. I taught that God does not compromise the truth about his love at the expense of sinful man. This session concluded with instruction about how church membership is not

just about salvation, but about God's discipline, which is intended for a believers' good and holiness.

Sessions 3 and 4 were conducted at the same meeting. In session 3, the class considered the relationship between authority and love. The class discussed how even among the ranks of VBC church members there was a latent aversion to authority. I taught the class the benefits of submitting to godly authority. Christ set the example by submitting to the Father's plan and will. Through God's plan coupled with Christ's submission came all believers' means of salvation. The class learned that Christ's subservience, though equal with the Father, provided all those who would submit to his plan an escape from eternal judgment as well as the life everlasting. I emphasized to the class that submitting to God and the authority he has established is good and life giving.

When the class returned from a break, session 4 began. A continuation of the instruction on authority from session 3 now transitioned to a discussion of the authority of the church. It was noted that the church has Jesus proxy and authority on earth to safeguard the image of the gospel. Furthermore, the class discussed how possessing Christ's authority carries with it a great responsibility and is not to be taken lightly. The class was taught that this obligation is a shared responsibility of each member of the church. Every member is to submit to church authority and exercise one's own membership authority for the benefit of all.

In the final session I taught VBC leaders the covenant commitment Christ has made to his church. The covenant God made with his people in the Old Testament was discussed to describe the nature of his commitment. However, the New Testament Christ establishes a better and effectual covenant. I taught how each individual believer enjoys this relationship with Christ through faith. This information was included in the session because it reveals the strong tie that binds believers not only to Christ but also to one another. Although it is possible for this relationship to be resisted, the tie is impossible for one who is truly redeemed to break because it is Christ who is overseeing the work

(Heb 12:2; Phil 1:6). Furthermore, the class learned how the work of Christ, which binds believers to him in unity, also binds believers together in this covenant relationship. Therefore, members are accountable and responsible to Christ and one another in the church. The teaching session yielded good discussion and several positive comments.

Teaching Sessions 6-9 “Christ’s Bride”

Sessions 6 through 9 used Cheong’s *God Redeeming His Bride* as the primary resource. The first session simply expounded on the teaching that Christ has a bride he has chosen and is committed to. She is not worthy nor could ever be worthy of his love. However, in spite of her lack, he lays down his life for her. The information in this session reminded participants of the enormity and extravagance of Christ’s love for them. It is on that basis all believers should respond in love, adoration, obedience, and commitment. The desired result is believers being transformed by his divine grace.

The next session dealt with the church as a bride preparing for Christ’s coming. The class material included addressing how many members today do not comprehend the need for other members to be a part of their own sanctification. When pride gets in the way, a member is far more likely to opt for autonomy. I taught how God never intended for believers to live their lives in isolation (Gen 2:18; Eccl 4:9-12), especially as believers (Heb 10:25).

Session 8 was developed to address authority. Christ is the head of the church (Col 1:18) and he has ultimate authority. However, just as the Father gave authority to Jesus to represent the Father and to speak his words, Jesus has delegated his authority to others. Christ did this with his disciples (Luke 9:1-2, 6; 10:9, 17). Believers are modern day disciples whom Jesus has given authority to represent him (Matt 16:19; 18:18). So, for believers, the ultimate authority is God’s Word and then authority is given to those who hold the office of leadership in the church. Though some have greater authority in the church (Heb 13:7; 17; Rom 13:1), all have the authority to correct an erring brother

(Matt 18:17). Responding appropriately to God’s authority is what makes those who are believers and members of the church distinct from others. The goal of this teaching session’s material was to reveal how authority rightly exercised to correct sinful attitudes or behavior, along with the recipient’s receiving it appropriately, demonstrates the power of the gospel lived out in this present age to a watching world.

Session 9 began by addressing the topic of covenanting among members. VBC leaders studied how members were to be in covenant with each other. The class learned that relationship does not lessen their responsibility for one another but rather increases it. Interestingly, both Leeman and Cheong resources had differing overall themes but addressed many of the same topics, notably authority and covenanting.

Session 10—“Church Discipline”

This session’s material provided a working definition for church discipline: “Church discipline is the practice of correcting church members when they have sinned in expectation that the offender will repent and be reconciled to God and the church. It is also intended to protect other church members from the influence of sin.”⁸ In this segment, I pointed out that some form of discipline is present in almost every area of life. People in general experience discipline in schools, sports, transportation, family, workplace, and in a myriad of other settings. Discipline may be practiced between as few as two, like in a marriage, but also among great numbers of peoples, as observed on the world scene with the International Court of Justice. I challenged the class with a probing question: “If discipline is necessary in all aspects of life, why would Christ not deem it good in the workings of his church?” This question seemed to prompt the class to consider the appropriateness of church discipline as well as spark a lively discussion.

⁸See appendix 4, “Teaching Materials and Handouts.”

Session 11—“Survey Study”

The final session reviewed each statement of the MAS survey using a slide presentation. At the top of each slide was a statement, and directly underneath were scriptural references relating to it. The presentation program did not identify the desired answer but based on the comments I suspected VBC leaders for the most part was coming up with the appropriate answers.

Comments and Responses from Participants

The participants’ responses throughout the teaching sessions, but especially toward its end, were of reserved agreement. Only two or three of the nineteen leaders held any reservations about the doctrine of church discipline. Overall, the group agreed with the teaching. However, it was also quite obvious that they were not ready to charge ahead with enthusiastic support. I suspect it was not only because the subject seemed out of the norm, but also because most of the leaders realized it would be extremely hard to convince the church of its value. The sentiments expressed include, “Churches need to get back to this practice,” or “I believe if more churches would do this, we would be the better for it.” Almost all the comments in favor, which most were, exhibited some hesitancy.

Follow Up Survey

The post-instruction survey took place on the afternoon and evening of May 28, 2017. The original nineteen survey participants were there. They were not required to sign in since those who would take this second survey would identify themselves only by the code they had previously used. Once again, the group received instructions to mark only one of the options for each of the twenty-four statements on the survey. The survey was completed in approximately twenty minutes, and the participants were given an opportunity to share. Several commented that they had an increased appreciation for the subject of church discipline. One elderly participant in particular commented how she

remembered church discipline being used many years ago in a church when she was a little girl.

After the surveys were scored and added to the spreadsheet program, the results were considerably better. An overall 17 percent increase was realized from the initial survey to the post instruction survey.⁹ Only 1 participant scored less on the second survey, but it was only 1 percent less. On the initial survey, only 1 participant had a perfect score, while on the second survey there were 3. The participant with the greatest increase scored 23 points better on the second survey. After evaluating the data, I was reminded that knowledge does not always coincide with belief. In the book of James, it is recorded, “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (Jas 4:17). However, true knowledge is an essential part of developing faith (Hos 4:6; Rom 10:17). Therefore, this project at a bare minimum deposited vital knowledge on the biblical subject of God’s nature and church discipline

Developing a Church Discipline Policy for Verbena Baptist Church

The next task of the project was to develop a church discipline policy. The task was approached with prayer and the feedback from deacons as well as a fellow brother who is also my accountability partner. The most important areas of the policy included content, biblical faithfulness, scope, and value. These elements were also included on the evaluation form used by the expert panel.¹⁰

Content of the Church Discipline Policy

The first consideration was content. This document had to meet the needs of the church with respect to church discipline. My goal was to craft a policy that would adequately address the church’s needs in a two to three-page document.

⁹See appendix 5.

¹⁰See appendix 3.

The content of the policy was broken down into six sections. First was an introduction where *church discipline* was defined. Following were portions of the policy which addressed “Members’ Responsibility to One Another,” “Goals of Church Discipline,” “Guiding Principles for Church Discipline,” “Scriptural Examples of Known Sins that Should be Corrected” and finally, “Forms of Church Discipline.”

Biblical Faithfulness of the Church Discipline Policy

An all-important aspect of the content was that it be true to God’s Word. The document was fashioned with careful attention to Scripture. Therefore, the policy was undergirded by biblical references that are directly related to church discipline or are strongly suggested.

Scope of the Church Discipline Policy

The scope of the policy was limited in two ways. First, the church discipline policy applied only to VBC members. Non-members who may attend VBC, contribute money, or enjoy some of the benefits of the church, are not subject to this policy. Guests and non-members have no official standing with respect to VBC. Second, the policy is to be used in responding to only known sins committed by VBC members that can be factually established. Rumors or suspected sins are not to be considered.

The policy is intended to deal with sins that may not be known throughout the congregation and for the moment are more threatening to the wayward member than the church as a whole. Furthermore, the policy is fashioned to aid the church in dealing with sins such as false teaching, causing division, strife, immorality, or anything that tarnishes the name of Christ. Sins that are characterized as peccadillos, or minor indiscretions, are not intended to be dealt with through a formal act of church discipline, but rather, a member correcting another in the normal life of the church.

Value of the Church Discipline Policy

The worth of this policy was considered with respect to biblical support, practicality, and that of possessing a document succinct enough to be workable yet comprehensive enough to address the needs of VBC in the area of church discipline.

Formation of the Church Discipline Policy

The formation of the policy began on May 17, 2107. After praying, considering the guiding issues, reviewing church by-laws of other churches that practice church discipline, and discussing it with VBC deacons, I began formulating a policy for the evaluation panel to critique. After pulling together and considering all the information derived from the various sources, the policy began to take shape. On May 30, 2017, the policy was ready for the panel to review.

Enlisting the Evaluation Panel for the Church Discipline Policy

An important part of the process of developing a church discipline policy was the evaluation of an expert panel. Those who were considered viable candidates needed to have had not only considerable knowledge on the subject of church discipline, but have either served in or presently serve in a church where church discipline was practiced. I approached three men who agreed to serve on the panel. Two of the pastors were currently serving in a church that was a new plant. These two were intimately involved in the formation of church policies, including church discipline. The third pastor had done his thesis project on church discipline while in seminary, and had previously served in a church where it was being practiced.

I discussed with each of the pastors my project, the context of our church and its history. Each pastor reviewed the church discipline policy and offered helpful feedback. There were suggestions to provide more biblical citations, expand on the examples of sin to be dealt with, and a warning to not come across as condemning. I made adjustments by including some recommendations from the panel I believed would improve the policy.

Each rubric category evaluated by the three pastors received sufficient or exemplary marks. The goal was considered successful since more than 90 percent of the evaluation criterion of each rubric category met or exceeded the sufficient level.

Meeting with and discussing aspects of the policy with members of this panel provided additional insight into the developing of this policy. I also was greatly encouraged by these men for my efforts to take on such a project. Furthermore, my supervisor, Robert Cheong, provided valuable feedback in the formation of the policy.

Presentation of the Church Discipline Policy to Verbena Baptist Church Leadership

The church discipline policy for VBC was delivered to the leadership on May 31, 2016.¹¹ Leaders had just completed the second survey. After receiving the policy there was time for questions and some discussion. I shared with the leaders that the policy had come about by the process of my project the church had been notified of and given its permission to proceed on.

I further explained how a panel of pastors had helped in its formulation. I asked the leadership to review the information and share with me their thoughts. Three responded later with favorable comments. I also requested the VBC leadership read the policy and encouraged them to contact me if they had any questions. I further informed them the policy would be delivered to the church at the June business meeting.

Presentation of Church Discipline Policy to Verbena Baptist Church

Since the deacons had already received the completed church discipline policy, there was no need to update them prior to the June 7, 2017, business meeting.

The night of the business meeting, I asked permission of the moderator to address the church with respect to sharing information only. While copies of the policy

¹¹See appendix 7.

were being distributed, I informed the members present that there would be no move on the policy that evening. I also mentioned I would like to consider a vote to integrate this policy into the VBC Operation Manual perhaps in August or September of 2017.

Developments after Presenting the Church Discipline Policy to the Church

In March of 2017, I began to notice a withdrawing of support as well as a negative attitude from three members of VBC. My response was to continue to be cordial and respectful but observant as well. The nonsupport and poor attitude of the three continued for several weeks. After the June 7, 2017, business meeting, three members expressed their discontent with my leadership as pastor, and moved behind the scenes to have other members of the congregation sign a petition calling for my resignation as pastor of Verbena Baptist Church. Although they did not mention the church discipline policy directly, a complaint about some of my teaching was directly related to the issue of church discipline. As a result of this and other activities that jeopardized the well-being of the church, I resigned effective June 17, 2017. Although the church discipline was not voted on while I was pastor, there is a possibility it will be considered. Regardless, my efforts and the goal of developing a church discipline strategy for Verbena Baptist Church were fulfilled.

CHAPTER 5

FINAL ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

Chapter 4 described each step in the process of the church discipline project. The purpose of this chapter is to present a final report of the development and presentation of a church discipline policy to Verbena Baptist Church in June of 2017. An evaluation of the process and results of this project are offered in order to make an assessment as to whether the goals were achieved. Additionally, this chapter will address the strengths and weaknesses of the project. Before concluding, theological and personal reflections with respect to the project will be noted. The close of this chapter and project will include my final remarks.

Evaluation of the Project Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop a church discipline strategy so that VBC may provide ways by which Christians who share common beliefs may bind themselves together in covenant relationship to serve the cause of Christ. The leadership of VBC was evaluated as to their level of understanding of church discipline. This was accomplished by administering a survey regarding church discipline. The curriculum addressed the participants' misunderstandings that were discovered in the initial survey. One example of a wrong belief was that several leaders saw themselves as inordinately separated from the church, resulting in a less than desired understanding of each member's responsibility in the spiritual community.

Teaching materials had already been formulated on the subject of church discipline, but was refined as a result of analyzing certain misunderstanding. The VBC leadership was then taught in eleven sessions on the subject of church discipline.

Afterwards, the leadership took the survey again and the results marked a significant increase in knowledge.

A church discipline policy was drafted and refined to meet the requirements of being satisfactory or exemplary in all categories. The policy was presented to the leadership and there were favorable comments. Finally, the policy was presented to the church for consideration to be voted on at a future business meeting. However, over recent months a small group of dissatisfied members had come together with criticisms aimed at me. Eventually there were calls for my departure. Before I had an opportunity to discuss the policy with the church or join them in corporate prayer over the matter, I resigned.

I would have preferred to see the church discipline policy successfully adopted to become a part of VBC's operation; however, that did not happen. Needless to say, I was disappointed. Speaking as a pastor, it grieves my heart that there are times when members resist God's will for their lives. An abundance of scriptural evidence supports the practice of church discipline. Further sorrow comes from the fact that I may not have administered the project in the most effective way, leading to the reaction from some. My heart was to see VBC be a more joyful, effective Christ-honoring church.

Evaluation of the Project Goals

The first goal of this project was to develop a biblical understanding of church discipline that reflected the gospel and the mission of the church. This additional information also helped me see how the subject of discipline is a practice God has ordained in every aspect of life. Some of these sources have already been used to support various positions in the project, but I will add to this section a few other significant ideas that improved my understanding of church discipline. Again, there is no way of reporting any statistical improvement in my knowledge, but this exercise was necessary and beneficial to me and the project. Table 2 shows the books that were purchased and read by me to broaden my understanding of church discipline.

Table 2. Resources that increased my knowledge of church discipline

Book Title	Author
<i>A Guide to Church Discipline</i>	J. Carl Laney
<i>The Transforming Community</i>	Mark Lauterbach
<i>Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus</i>	Jonathan Leeman
<i>Life in the Father's House</i>	Wayne A. Mack and David Swavely
<i>God Redeeming His Bride: A Handbook for Church Discipline</i>	Robert K. Cheong
<i>The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love</i>	Jonathan Leeman
<i>Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches</i>	Thomas White, Jason G. Duesing, and Malcolm B. Yarnell III, editors
<i>Love That Rescues</i>	Eric J. Bargerhuff

Before doing the additional research, I tended to lump punishment and discipline together. However, Laney used a story about the execution of a rapist and murderer to link to punishment. Judgment is intended to administer payback or retaliate a wrong done by the offender. By contrast, he explains that “discipline . . . is designed to encourage the restoration of one involved in wrong doing.”¹ Bargerhuff contributed to this distinction between punishment and discipline:

For if church discipline was to be seen as a punitive or retributive action of the churchy, then it would essentially be communicating to the Christian community that the atonement that Christ accomplished on the cross was insufficient to atone fully for the sins of God’s chosen people.²

Going into this project I confess being too quick to judge members, bordering on condemnation. Leeman’s remarks helped me reconsider the status of believers who are “in Christ.” Those in faith community who stumble in sin occasionally may be temporarily out of God’s fellowship, but are never condemned (Rom 8:1): “People must be given the benefit of the doubt” and likened the way we should deal with others as

¹Carl J. Laney, *A Guide to Church Discipline* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1985), 79.

²Eric Bargerhuff, *Love That Rescues* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 130.

“innocent until proven guilty.”³ Lauterbach’s *The Transforming Community* gives in-depth insight into the shared responsibility of the church membership to demonstrate God’s holy nature genuinely through correction: “Pursuing holiness does not mean pretending to be holy. We are sinners who need the gospel. Admitting our sin and facing it squarely is a deep reminder of our need of a Savior.”⁴ These teachings are just some of the specifics of church discipline that added to my understanding of the subject. The next goal was to discover VBC’s core leadership’s understanding of church discipline. The church has and is suffering from a lack of discipline. VBC is not making disciples as commanded by the Lord. Since there has been no serious commitment or policy in place to address delinquent members or leaders who fail to perform their duty, the church has not been effective in living out the gospel. For the church to advance in its quest for maturity and disciple making, a better understanding of God’s loving discipline is necessary.

The “Membership Accountability Survey (MAS)”⁵ administered to the leadership of VBC. The information collected from this survey revealed that the leadership had a low level of understanding of church discipline. The median score of the nineteen leader participants was 111 of 114 points (see appendix 5). My initial reaction of disappointment was tempered with realizing the church for the most part had no significant teaching on church discipline. This survey was given after I had been the pastor of VBC for two and one-half years, and since this project was often on my mind, matters pertaining to the subject of church discipline naturally came out in teaching and preaching

³Jonathan Leeman, *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 74.

⁴Mark Lauterbach, *Transforming Community: The Practice of the Gospel in Church Discipline* (Carol Stream, IL: Christian Focus, 2003), 76.

⁵See appendix 1, “Member Accountability Survey.”

opportunities. Therefore, I believe the leadership had already increased somewhat in its knowledge of church discipline but to what degree, there was no way of knowing.

Statement 14 on the survey was “The church is for all people, not just some.” This was the lowest scored question by the group on the initial survey. The median score on this question was 37 points of a possible 114 (19 participants with a possible score of 6 per response). The truth from Scripture is that the church is made up of the redeemed, saved, or born-again believers; not just anyone. Statement 13 on the survey was the next lowest score was 65 points of a possible 114. That statement was, “The church is for sinners.” That statement has an element of truth, but is not a truth statement. The church is for repenting sinners (Titus 2:14; 1 John 1:8-10). The third poorest score was statement 3, which dealt with authority: “The Bible teaches the only person a Christian should submit to is Jesus Christ.” The Bible contains numerous examples and explicit teaching about submitting to all authority and even to one another in the church (Rom 9; Eph 5:21). The median score for this statement was 67 points of a possible 114.

VBC leadership’s level of understanding needed to be increased in order for its faith, practice, and influence to increase. The survey revealed that a significant amount of what the participants believed regarding church discipline had been influenced by consumerism, individualism, skepticism, prior abuses regarding the practice, and an aversion to authority. The goal of discovering the initial understanding of VBC’s leadership was accomplished.

The third goal of this project was to correct wrong perceptions of church discipline and, in the process, add to the leaders’ knowledge a proper biblical understanding of the subject. Information gleaned from the survey, though not knowing specifically who each response was from, allowed me to target issues of misunderstanding or barriers to a better understanding of church discipline. In the process of achieving this goal, eleven teaching sessions were administered utilizing handouts, slide presentations, and allowing for time to discuss aspects of church discipline. After the classes were

completed, the leadership's understanding seemed to be improved but I had no evidence to support this perception other than feedback from the participants.

The follow-up survey was administered on May 28, 2017, and this time the process took only about twenty minutes as compared to thirty-five minutes before. The post-MAS survey took place immediately following the last teaching session. Each survey statement was reviewed along with the scriptures that revealed the appropriate response to the statement. Although the participants were left to draw their own conclusions, I acknowledge this did skew the post-MAS survey in a positive way. As participants worked through the survey, their demeanor was more relaxed and they seemed more confident. After the completion of the exercise, I expressed my thanks to them and commented on how their participating in the project would benefit them and the church in days to come. Some expressed appreciation for the process and commented that their understanding of church discipline had changed. A few also commented that it was a part of church life that all churches needed to practice. Once the scores had been tallied and entered into the spreadsheet from the previous survey, the marked contrast was evident and encouraging. There was a net median increase in scoring of over 17 percent.⁶

T-Test Evaluation

A six-point Likert scale was used to determine the numeric values for each question of the survey. The most desirable response yielded a score of six points, descending one point per response to a minimum value of one. Each of the leader's scores were totaled and those who completed both the pre- and post-series survey were compared using a 1-tail, paired t-test, which showed a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(18)}=5.954, p<.05$) in the participants' understanding of church discipline (see appendix 6). Again, I acknowledge that by reviewing the survey and providing scriptural references

⁶See appendix 5, "Membership Accountability Survey Results and Comparison."

for the proper response, the results may have been skewed in a positive direction. However, the actual responses of the participants were their own and it is my judgment that the goal of realigning the participants' concept of church discipline and adding to their knowledge on the subject was met.

The survey had twenty-five questions, with one question not included in the six-point Likert scale. Therefore, the maximum score for the survey was 144 points. After the data was inserted into the spreadsheet, the results showed an average increase for those who filled out both surveys of 22.37 points. The person demonstrating the greatest positive change in score increased by 33 points. Only one participant of the 19 showed a decrease when the initial and follow-up surveys were compared.

The fourth and final goal of the project was to develop a policy for church discipline. My thinking was VBC, being a small congregation of approximately one hundred, needed something with enough detail and instruction to provide a means for administering church discipline. Initially, the policy began with a reminder of the Christian's life being a call to discipleship with others in the community of the church. Seven points were highlighted as to the responsibilities each has in the fellowship of the church, while significant content addressed more specific instruction with respect to church discipline. The final two pages included sections identifying goals of church discipline, guiding principles for church discipline, a representative list of sins that require church discipline, and forms of church discipline.

The policy was then shared with three pastors who agreed to serve as an expert evaluation panel to grade and provide valuable feedback for an effective policy. Each pastor provided encouragement and valuable feedback. Some of the changes that resulted in this feedback required the policy include wording that required the church to specifically act in correcting sin. Scriptural references were added to the "Guiding Principles for Church Discipline" and "Examples of Sins That Should Be Corrected" sections. In the final section, "Forms of Church Discipline," modifications were made to

bring better clarity and exemplify the grace of God. The pastors who evaluated and provided feedback did so using the “Verbena Baptist Church, Church Discipline Policy Evaluation Form.”⁷ The criteria in the policy to be evaluated included content, biblical faithfulness, scope, and value. The three members of the evaluation panel returned their forms to me and all of the criteria were judged as sufficient or exemplary. The policy in its final form entitled “Church Discipline”⁸ was distributed to the leadership of VBC for review and comments. Private conversations with several members included responses of appreciation, encouragement, and the belief the policy would be helpful. In the June 7, 2017, business meeting, I presented copies of the Church Discipline policy to membership of VBC who were present. I explained that the policy was a product developed through the efforts of the church discipline project and that we should give serious consideration to the adopting of this policy before the start of the new church year by September. The development of a church discipline policy followed the sequence described in chapter 1 under section “Project Methodology.” After considering all the elements of this process, it is determined that the goal of developing a church discipline policy was accomplished.

Strengths of the Project

Strengths of the project worth mentioning have implications for the VBC members and the church collectively. The first strength was that the church actually became engaged in discussion on the topic of church discipline. For many churches today, the subject is considered taboo. The Bible and other reputable resources were used to introduce, train, and guide the instruction of VBC leaders. Not only was there a healthy discussion but leaders’ knowledge on the biblical practice increased. As a result, some of the leaders with significant influence were becoming more empowered to not only

⁷See appendix 3, “Church Discipline Policy Evaluation Form.”

⁸See appendix 7, “Church Discipline Policy.”

personally embrace this aspect of God's sovereign love but to encourage the church to take it seriously.

Another strength was seeing how the leaders were already moving confidently toward more accountability. As mentioned, as I taught over the last two and one-half years, aspects of the doctrine of church discipline would naturally flow from me to the membership. Therefore, the deacons and other leaders were already encouraging one another in faithfulness, accountability, and dealing with sinful attitudes that had previously hindered the church. The following intentional teaching and the working of the project only reinforced a change that was already in the process. Through this project, the leaders were beginning to see how important being a member of Christ's church was. They were not only feeling the weight of their responsibility to live out the gospel but as leaders of VBC they were also taking on a sense of increased satisfaction with respect to the service they were already involved with. Their view of what had been routine and mundane before, was now increasing in significance.

Finally, the project brought to light why the church was not having the kind of impact or reputation it should. I am convinced some had a sense of sadness, grief, and even frustration as to where the church had fallen short in ministry and missions. Many began to understand why evangelism was not more effective. They also realized that many members had either not understood their responsibilities to Christ's church or had not taken their relationship to Him seriously. Otherwise there would not have been a lack of faithful attendance, disengagement from service, and some of the leaders exhibiting unchristian attitude at various times. However, there were those whose sincerity and passion for Christ that did participate in the project, heard the teaching and were showing signs of encouragement, hope, and change. Those who responded positively to the teaching began to visualize what kind of powerful impact the church could have by living out the gospel in a loving and authentic way.

Weaknesses of the Project

While it is important to recognize the positive aspects of the project, there were weaknesses to report. Some church members were outright opposed to this project and thought that a move toward more accountability would be disastrous. Interestingly, the leadership personnel of the church began to change some eight to ten months prior to the first survey being administered. For the most part, those who had held positions of leadership earlier who had not been faithful in service resigned or retreated from their responsibilities. This small group of five let it be known they did not like hearing messages about being accountable or hearing about aspects of church discipline from the pulpit. These leaders were replaced by other leaders who had a positive attitude and were excited. Although the small discontent group of five no longer held positions of leadership, they did continue to attend. Their attitude eventually affected other members as well as three other leaders. Those three leaders chose not to participate in the project.

Another weakness with the project had to do with the fact that it was “the pastor’s school project.” I think it is somewhat natural for a person to think that whatever one is passionate about, others should be passionate about as well. If more people had been personally invested in the project, I believe it would have been better received.

What I Would Do Differently

I have learned from being a pastor now for some twenty years that some issues are more difficult than others for a church. The topic and practice of church discipline is one of those issues. I am convinced a mistake made in the process was not starting earlier in asking the church to give the subject of church discipline more serious thought. If this had been done, the church could have devoted more time in prayer to God about the matter. The discipline of prayer is a means for believers aligning their hearts and minds with God’s will. Given enough time in prayer, there is a greater likelihood more hearts would have been fully convinced of the necessity to address such a seemingly counterproductive matter. Therefore, starting earlier and being more engaged in prayer would, in my mind,

have made a significant difference. If there had been more emphasis months prior to the start of the project on the subject of discipline, I believe the membership would have been personally invested and more passionate about the teaching.

Furthermore, if I had the opportunity to do the project over, I would have invited one or two people from another fellowship or ministry to come along beside me in teaching the church on the subject of church discipline. I have learned that, at times, church members believe the pastor's project is more about the pastor than the well-being of the church. This sense of skepticism, which led in some cases to doubt, negatively influenced some in the church toward the project. However, if I had brought in other leaders to whom the congregation may have viewed as experts, or more objective or credible, then the church may have been better prepared to give serious consideration to the issue. As a result, the membership would have viewed themselves as personally involved and seen the project as a worthy endeavor.

I would have approached the topic of church discipline with less of a clinical manner and more of a caring pastor's heart. If I had started earlier, there would have been more of an opportunity to spend time one on one with people to share with them my heart about why this practice is so important. The greatest regrets I have was not starting earlier, calling the church to more prayer over the matter and sharing my heart about this important aspect of God's love.

Theological Reflections

Two years ago, I remember telling my accountability partner, who is also is a member of VBC, that most pastors would see as ministerial suicide taking on a project to implement church discipline into a church that has had no recent experience with it. Although the situation almost came to that, the Lord spared me. I saw God at work through this project but also the forces of darkness that would wage war against it.

One of the theological issues this project ran into was that of man's resistance to dealing with sin in a Christ honoring way. The Bible identifies man as a sinful being

that God seeks to redeem (John 1:12; 6:44). Furthermore, even those who have been regenerated still struggle with their own sin that has not been annihilated (Rom 7). Therefore, the practice of church discipline is essential for the growth and maturity of a believer. I discovered that members will agree about the teaching, profess the doctrine is sound, and even say it should be practiced. However, when it gets down to actually embracing church discipline as policy, even believers resist efforts and give many excuses as to why it should not be practiced. This vacillating attitude was true for a significant number of members at VBC. As the project neared, I naturally began to speak more about it and teach on it when appropriate. I often sensed anxiety and noticed bewildered looks from several people. There was a sense that many were not only hesitant but resistant to accept the teaching on church discipline. This resistance to the biblical means of sanctification through church discipline may be described in three ways. First, the current cultural Christian worldview embraces the notion that it would not be loving to correct a fellow believer. To do so would be viewed as unloving and judgmental. Second, a believer's sin nature is resistant to submitting to Christ's lordship through the means of church discipline. Finally, the demonic resistance of Satan and his minions act in concert to cause as much confusion and thwart efforts to establish a meaningful tool to confront sin. The apostle Paul called this spiritual warfare (Eph 6:12).

Although some did not wholeheartedly receive the teaching on church discipline, a good number of members did. This project has proven to be effective in establishing an understanding of the nature of God, Christ's church, and each believer's responsibility. I am a better believer and pastor today than before the project began. Additionally, almost two dozen leaders at Verbena Baptist Church are equipped with a knowledge on church discipline that they did not possess before. The core theological truth that God loves his own through discipline was reaffirmed throughout this project from beginning to end.

God Disciplines His Own

From the beginning of this project I embraced the truth that God deals with all believers as a good Father who disciplines His children. He does so for the sake of godliness. The Scriptures are replete with the doctrine of discipline from Genesis to Revelation, hence the grounds for church discipline. Hebrews 12:5-10 stands as a key passage for the support of church discipline:

And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.

After completing the work necessary in the performance of this project, I am now more convicted that the doctrine of church discipline is absolutely necessary for the well-being of believer’s individually, collectively as the church, and for God’s glory. Church discipline is necessary because it is a means that provides other believing members the sense of empowerment, conviction, and freedom to express God’s love to another believer. This difficult work of maintaining purity and holiness in the church is accomplished through admonishment, correction, rebuke, or as a last resort, separation. Last, discipline is an aspect of God’s nature. With Israel, he sets them apart from the other nations to be his holy people as a means for others to come to God. In the New Covenant, Christ’s people are to be his holy people, the church, who are a means to draw others to him while preparing for his return.

Personal Reflections

Several lessons come to mind as I reflect on the personal impact of this project. First, I have learned that, just as Jesus taught, I am to remove the beam from my own eye before attempting to pluck a speck from my brother (Matt 7:3-5). The Lord has given me the ability to make distinctions and identify inconsistencies. These qualities, along with

my tendencies that come from being a man, first-born in my family, ongoing struggle with sin and a pastor positions me to be at times harsh, impatient, and intolerant with others shortcomings. The process of working through this project caused me to consider my motivation and the state of my own soul before being too quick to point out a fellow believer's shortcomings.

Finally, I remain firm in my conviction that every church should be practicing church discipline in some form. Even though Verbena Baptist Church will likely not adopt the policy I presented, some members who remain have been instructed and enlightened with a more accurate view of the Father's love. They also will have a better understanding of the nature and character of God. . I have sorrow in my heart because I will not be with those who I worked, laughed, prayed, worshiped and cried with during my ministry there. Perhaps the Lord will one day pull back the curtain and show us just how much he used our flaws, quirks, stubbornness, and yes, even sin, as a means of perfecting our sanctification. I pray for and trust for nothing but the best for Verbena Baptist Church.

Although this ending was difficult, God has shown himself merciful and faithful to me. When I was downtrodden by the stresses and troubles at the conclusion of my time at VBC, God opened a door of opportunity at just the right time. Presently, I am in the process of being called to new pastorate some sixty miles away. I am excited and thankful another ministry opportunity has been made available so soon. As I move to this new challenge and location I do not know how the church has been dealing with church discipline matters. However, the lessons I learned from this project I know will be vital to either maintaining or steering the church in God's time in the sound practice of church discipline.

Conclusion

This project was not as much an exercise in academia as an opportunity to be challenged and experience the grace of God. I knew going into this project there would

be challenges, tensions, disagreements, and resistance. I have no natural desire to move toward a situation like that; however, with what God has taught me through life experiences, his Word, and the leading of his spirit, I was compelled to take on this project. No doubt others could have done a better job and perhaps been more successful, but it was Verbena Baptist Church where the Lord placed me, with the burden to do battle with that which put Christ on the cross, namely sin.

Finally, it is my desire that others who may review this project will see the value in church discipline. Hopefully, there will be some encouragement or aspect in what I have shared from which someone would draw strength. The cultural Christianity that plagues far too many Baptist churches today falls far short of God's intended plan for a holy church. Until fellow believers become informed, convicted, and convinced about the problem of a worldly church, the issue will persist. God grant his people the grace of loving the Lord so much that they will have a zero tolerance for sin among his people and an increased desire to live holy lives for his glory.

APPENDIX 1

MEMBER ACCOUNTABILITY SURVEY (MAS)

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding and practices of spiritual leadership of the participant. This research is being conducted by Michael Allums for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Date _____

Your Personal Code _____

Directions: Circle your opinion to the statements using the following scale

SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, DS = Disagree Somewhat,

AS = Agree Somewhat, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

1. How long have you been a member of Verbena Baptist Church? ____ year(s)
2. Faithful attendance at a local church is commanded in the New Testament. SD D DS AS A SA
3. The Bible teaches that the only person a Christian should submit to is Jesus Christ. SD D DS AS A SA
4. How one lives and conducts their life is between them and the Lord and no one else. SD D DS AS A SA
5. The Bible teaches the church should always confront the sins of members in one form or another. SD D DS AS A SA
6. The New Testament teaches that believers should definitely obey their church leaders. SD D DS AS A SA
7. God disciplines his children for the purpose of holiness. SD D DS AS A SA
8. Confronting a sinning member can do more harm than good. SD D DS AS A SA

9.	Church members are basically good hearted and only need to answer to the Lord.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
10.	A sinning church member who will not repent may not be saved.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
11.	Jesus confronted and corrected his disciples when they were in error because he loved them.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
12.	Holding one another lovingly accountable for our actions communicate concern, care, and a passion for honoring the Lord.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
13.	The church is for sinners.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
14.	The church is for all people not just some.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
15.	The church should be more concerned with getting more people in the church at whatever cost.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
16.	The ordinance of the Lord's Supper may only be partaken by those church members in good standing.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
17.	The New Testament does not clearly teach church discipline.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
18.	Church discipline is not necessary in these modern times.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
19.	It is better to overlook a member's sin to keep them in the church than to confront them.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
20.	If we point out another member's sin, we are not condemning them.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
21.	If a member chooses to leave the church, we should let them go with no questions asked.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
22.	It is God's responsibility to correct a sinning member, not mine.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
23.	The church should not grant a letter of a member to another church if they have caused trouble or have been practicing sin.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
24.	A church has the right to dismiss anyone from the church for any reason.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
25.	If the church corrects a wayward member it will cast a negative image on the church.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

APPENDIX 2

MEMBER ACCOUNTABILITY SURVEY VALUE KEY

The values assigned to each statement are as follows: The most desired or optimum response has a value of 6. Following that most desired response the value descends by 1 value point. The least desired response of each statement has the value of 1.

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding and practices of spiritual leadership of the participant. This research is being conducted by Michael Allums for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Date _____

Your Personal Code _____

Directions: Circle your opinion to the statements using the following scale

SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, DS = Disagree Somewhat,

AS = Agree Somewhat, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

1. How long have you been a member of Verbena Baptist Church? ____ year(s)
2. Faithful attendance at a local church is commanded in the New Testament. 1 SD 2 D 3 DS 4 AS 5 A 6 SA
3. The Bible teaches that the only person a Christian should submit to is Jesus Christ. 6 SD 5 D 4 DS 3 AS 2 A 1 SA
4. How one lives and conducts their life is between them and the Lord and no one else. 6 SD 5 D 4 DS 3 AS 2 A 1 SA
5. The Bible teaches the church should always confront the sins of members in one form or another. 1 SD 2 D 3 DS 4 AS 5 A 6 SA
6. The New Testament teaches that believers should obey their church leaders. 1 SD 2 D 3 DS 4 AS 5 A 6 SA
7. God disciplines his children for the purpose of holiness. 1 SD 2 D 3 DS 4 AS 5 A 6 SA

8.	Confronting a sinning member can do more harm than good.	6 SD	5 D	4 DS	3 AS	2 A	1 SA
9.	Church members are basically good hearted and only need to answer to the Lord.	6 SD	5 D	4 DS	3 AS	2 A	1 SA
10.	A sinning church member who will not repent may not be saved.	1 SD	2 D	3 DS	4 AS	5 A	6 SA
11.	Jesus confronted and corrected his disciples when they were in error because he loved them.	1 SD	2 D	3 DS	4 AS	5 A	6 SA
12.	Holding one another lovingly accountable for our actions communicates concern, care, and a passion for honoring the Lord.	1 SD	2 D	3 DS	4 AS	5 A	6 SA
13.	The church is for sinners.	6 SD	5 D	4 DS	3 AS	2 A	1 SA
14.	The church is for all people not just some.	6 SD	5 D	4 DS	3 AS	2 A	1 SA
15.	The church should be more concerned with getting more people in the church at whatever cost.	6 SD	5 D	4 DS	3 AS	2 A	1 SA
16.	The ordinance of the Lord's Supper may only be partaken by those church members in good standing.	1 SD	2 D	3 DS	4 AS	5 A	6 SA
17.	The New Testament does not clearly teach church discipline.	6 SD	5 D	4 DS	3 AS	2 A	1 SA
18.	Church discipline is not necessary in these modern times.	6 SD	5 D	4 DS	3 AS	2 A	1 SA
19.	It is better to overlook a member's sin to keep them in the church than to confront them.	6 SD	5 D	4 DS	3 AS	2 A	1 SA
20.	If we point out another member's sin, we are not condemning them.	1 SD	2 D	3 DS	4 AS	5 A	6 SA
21.	If a member chooses to leave the church, we should let them go with no questions asked.	6 SD	5 D	4 DS	3 AS	2 A	1 SA
22.	It is God's responsibility to correct a sinning member, not mine.	6 SD	5 D	4 DS	3 AS	2 A	1 SA
23.	The church should not grant a letter of a member to another church if they have caused trouble or have been practicing sin.	1 SD	2 D	3 DS	4 AS	5 A	6 SA
24.	A church has the right to dismiss anyone from the church for any reason.	6 SD	5 D	4 DS	3 AS	2 A	1 SA
25.	If the church corrects a wayward member it will cast a negative image on the church.	6 SD	5 D	4 DS	3 AS	2 A	1 SA

APPENDIX 3

CHURCH DISCIPLINE POLICY EVALUATION FORM

Policy 1 Evaluation					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Content					
The policy is simple to understand.					
Does the policy provide clarity to the subject of corrective church discipline?					
Biblical Faithfulness					
Is the church discipline policy faithful to the Scriptures?					
Scope					
Is the scope of the policy sufficient?					
Are the details of the policy written in a way that provides for useful application?					
Value					
Do you believe this policy will provide a means of effectively addressing issues that need correcting at VBC?					

Please include any additional comments regarding the policy below:

APPENDIX 4

TEACHING MATERIALS AND HANDOUTS

Session 1: God's Love
The Idolatry of Love

All you need is
LOVE



How does our conception of love hinder our understanding of how we should interact with one another?

Understanding & practicing a belief of the church requires us to consider how the present way of the world has influenced us.

Individualism has left us detached, which sent us searching of a love that makes us feel complete. We want churches to do the same.

Consumerism has caused us to focus on the desirability of the object of love, rather than on the process of being loving. We view churches like products which satisfy us or not.

Commitment phobia takes commitment out of love and love becomes about what's advantageous to me. The idea of commitment is removed from our view of churches.

Skepticism remove all judgment from love, causing us to expect unconditional acceptance from churches. Pragmatism also results.

What is individualism at its core?

It is a hatred of authority. Behind the hatred of authority is a diminished God.

Church membership, then, begins with repentance.

How do our common cultural conceptions of love today hinder our acceptance of church membership and discipline?

We have made love into an idol that serves us, and so redefined love into something that never imposes judgments, conditions, or binding attachments.

Session 2: God's Love
The Nature of Love
"Bring me that higher love" Steve Winwood

What is God's like and why does it offend us? The Nature of Love

What is the connection between our understanding of God's love and church membership?

In Ways we don't expect, God's love both attracts and repels us, which means God's gospel and God's church also attract and repel us.

The doctrine of God's love is more Complicated biblically and theologically Than people realize. Theologians before Luther centered on God's love upon God.

Many theologians since Luther have opted for a reductionistic understanding Of God's love—love merely as an Unconditional gift. This common evangelical understanding of love today fundamentally changes the purpose of the church and the shape of church membership.

The Scriptures show that God's love is holy—it centers on himself.

The Scriptures show that God’s purposes in redemption are also holy, centering on himself.

Therefore, we can define love as “the lover’s affirmation of and affection for the beloved and the beloved’s good in the Holy.”

God’s love, God’s gospel, and God’s church offend us because they all center on him.

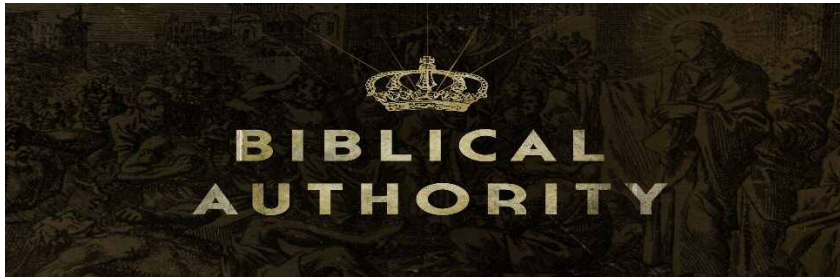
God’s love and God’s judgment work in concert, not in opposition. This also is offensive.

A church is a church that seeks out the Holy to affirm and separate it from the unholy.

**God’s love creates and affirms us, but it does so for the purposes winning praise to himself.
The holiness or God-centeredness of God’s love offends us because it brings both salvation and judgment.**

Church membership and discipline therefore offend us because they picture both salvation and judgment, and draw a line between them.

Session 3: God's Love
The Rule of Love
"We've got to let love rule" Lenny Kravitz



What is authority?

How does it relate to love?

And what role does it play in the church?

The idea of authority frightens us, for understandable reasons.

Therefore, many church leaders and pastors today present us with a vision of the loving community of relationship which downplays the idea of authority. If this is true, why?

Yet God is not a God of just relationships, He is a God of authority, and authority is what holds the church together.

What is submission and how does it relate to love

Submission is love for God and giving oneself to the pursuit of his glory.

At the same time we rightly mistrust authority because sin in its very essence, is the abuse of the authority God has given his creatures.

Christ's life, death and resurrection present the world with a picture of authority redeemed, an authority he then hands to his people.

The local church is where Christians enact their submission to Christ and practice his loving rule toward others.

Yet we must always keep in mind that authority in this fallen world is both complex and mixed.

Authority, grounded in holy love, creates life.

It creates a whole new reality that is both marked off and shaped.

Session 4: God's Love
The Charter of Love

"The power of love is a curious thing make one man weep, make another man sing"
Huey Lewis

What is authority does Christ give the local church and why?

Hypocrites & heretics confuse people about the gospel & the nature of Christ's love.

Therefore, Christ authorized the church to mark off the people of God.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus demonstrates concern over who is identified with his name and who is not, because identifying with him is identifying with the heavenly Father.

In Matthew 16, 18 & 28, Jesus gave the apostles & the apostolic church the power of the keys. This authorized the Church to guard the gospel, to affirm credible professions, to unite such professors to itself, to oversee their discipleship, & to exclude hypocrites.

Even with all its imperfections, the church represents Jesus on earth. It gives witness to his coming salvation and judgment.

The church, therefore, is God's proxy on earth.

The fact that the church is Christ's proxy on earth means that the Christian must submit to the church on earth, which means submitting to the local church.

How then can we formally define local church membership and discipline?

As the forming or breaking of a covenant between a Christian and a church.

This covenant between a Christian and a local church does not remove a Christian's responsibilities to other Christians, but it does give a Christian more responsibility over the members of his or her church.

Christ authorizes the church to proclaim & protect the gospel, to vouch for his followers, to unite them to itself, to oversee their discipleship, & to exclude imposters.

He gives the church this authority in order to safeguard the image of his gospel in a fallen world which continually misunderstands & mis-portrays his gospel love.

Session 5: God's Love
The Covenant of Love
“Love is a burning thing, and it makes a fiery ring.” Johnny Cash

What exactly is this commitment or “covenant” of local church membership?

We can answer the question of what a “local church covenant” is by considering the relationship between Christ’s “charter” and his new covenant.

Church membership involves identifying ourselves with Christ and Christ’s people. The work of mutual identification occurs through covenants.

In the Old Testament, God broadly used covenants to identify a people with himself and establish his kingdom.

In the New Testament, he sent his Son to establish a better, effectual covenant. This new covenant, which unites us to Christ representationally, by the Spirit, and by faith, is the foundation of the church.

The “covenant” of local church membership is what results when Christ’s charter Draws together and marks off Christ’s new covenant people.

As with the covenants of the Old Testament, the covenantal commitment shared by members of the local church serves nine specific purposes.

The covenant commitment of the local church makes the invisible new covenant visible. It's an earthly symbol, sign, or analogy of this wonderful heavenly reality.

The commitment believers make to one another to form a church is a covenant-like commitment. Since Christ has identified them with him through his covenant & since he has authorized them to identify themselves with him through his charter, they covenant together in such a fashion that his name is protected & their good is promoted.

Session 6: Bride of Christ

Slide 1

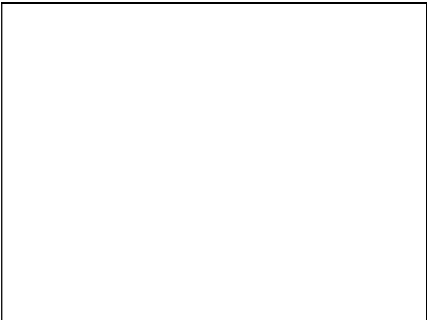


Slide 2

Christ's Bride...The Church

Although we are an unlikely bride, Christ chose us anyway as His bride, knowing that His love would cleanse and change us for His glorious wedding.

Slide 3



Slide 4

Christ's Bride...The Church

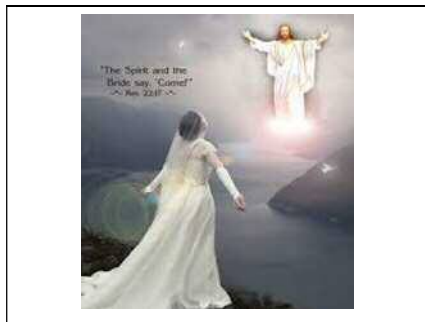
Col 3:15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.

Rom 12:6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, *let us prophesy* according to the proportion of faith;

Rom 12:7 Or ministry, *let us wait on our* ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching;

Rom 12:8 Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, *let him do it* with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

Slide 5



Slide 6

Christ's Bride...The Church

Rev 21:9 And there came unto me one of the seven angels...saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.

Slide 7

Christ's Bride...The Church

When we fail to see ourselves as the church we will get everything wrong.

Slide 8

Christ's Bride...The Church

God redeems are thoughts by:

- 1. Reminding us He is God and we are not.*
- 2. Trusting God when we don't want to or are told otherwise.*
- 3. Realize God redeems us through every life situation.*

Slide 9

Christ's Bride...The Church

1Co 12:26 And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

Eph 4:25 Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

Eph 5:29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:

Eph 5:30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.

Slide 10

Christ's Bride...The Church

Eph 4:11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

Eph 4:12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

Eph 4:13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

Slide 11

Christ's Bride...The Church

The ministry of the Word has two aspects that always go hand in hand—being both instructive and corrective. In other words, we are to be comforting and confronting one another on a regular basis.

Slide 12

Christ's Bride...The Church

Rev 21:9 And there came unto me one of the seven angels...saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.

1Co 12:27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

Rom 12:4 For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:

Rom 12:5 So we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

Slide 13



Slide 14

Christ's Bride...The Church

- The bride and the groom are radically different. The bride is completely human, while the groom is God the Son, Jesus, who is fully human, full God.
- The bride is not worthy of the groom's love since she is impure and unfaithful
 - You and I would never enter into a life-long marriage covenant with someone we knew would cheat on us time after time. But Christ chose us anyway as His bride, knowing that His love would cleanse and change us for His glorious wedding.

Slide 15

Christ's Bride...The Church

As with all of His commands, Jesus calls us to live in ways that confront our sinful tendencies and which will give Him glory as we imitate Him and reflect Him.

Session 7: Bride of Christ

Slide 1

Christ's Bride...The Church

- We are saved individually to live collectively with others as the bride of Christ
- As will all His commands, Jesus calls us to live in ways that confront our sinful tendencies & which will give Him glory as we imitate Him & reflect Him.

Slide 2

Christ's Bride...The Church

- Fundamentally, our pride damages our relationship with God and others since we do not want anyone to get in the way of the glory we desire.
 - In this battle, Christ knows our tendency towards autonomy
- We tend to think we don't need anyone else's help to live rightly and therefore withdraw from others who may "get into our business"

Slide 3

Christ's Bride...The Church

- Faithful attendance at a local church is commanded in the New Testament.
Hebrews 10:24-25
- The church is not for sinners but repentant sinners.
- The church is not for all people. It is only for those who have been born again.

Slide 4

Christ's Bride...The Church

- Church members are not basically good hearted and only need to answer to the Lord.
- The church's purpose is to make disciples who glorify God...not getting people into it whatever the cost.
- How one lives and conducts their life is not a matter solely between themselves and the Lord but also the church.

Slide 5

Christ's Bride...The Church

We wrongly assume God thinks and acts like us. When we do we avoid Him out of shame, we flee from Him thinking He is the enemy. He simply wants us to repent.

Slide 6

I will **betroth** you to me forever;

13 I will **betroth** you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will **betroth** you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the LORD.

Hesin 2:17-20

Slide 7

Christ's Bride...The Church

If the gospel seems foolish to the world, then church discipline will definitely seem foolish. In reality, church discipline seems foolish to many members of the church.

Slide 8

Christ's Bride...The Church

God's discipline begins with you and me.

Slide 9

Christ's Bride...The Church

We reject Christ whenever we believe the thoughts that swirl in our heads rather than what He declares to us through His Word.

Slide 10

Christ's Bride...The Church

Out of love, God removes His children from His covenant community when they cling to wickedness rather than to Christ, whether it is through false teaching or false living, so that they might come to their senses.

Slide 11

Christ's Bride...The Church

God's purposes for discipline must drive the church's purposes for discipline, since we are ambassadors for Christ and ministers of His gospel.

Slide 12

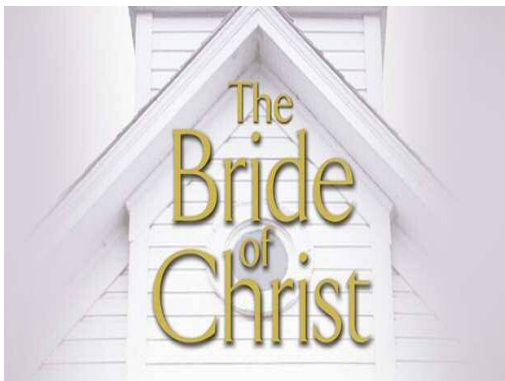
Christ's Bride...The Church

God's mission in His story of redemption is to make Himself know, to spread His glory (Isa 6:3; Ps 72:19; Habb 2:14).

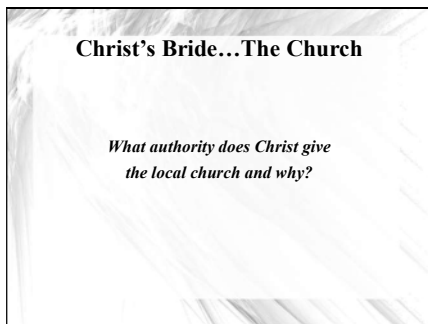
Specifically, God brings glory to Himself through His relationship with His people and thorough His people reflecting Him in their relationship with one another and the world. God spreads His glory by displayin His love through His redeeming discipline.

Session 8: Bride of Christ

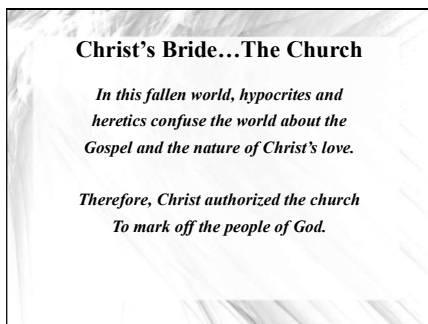
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Slide 2



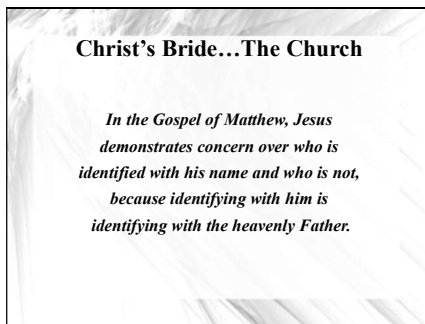
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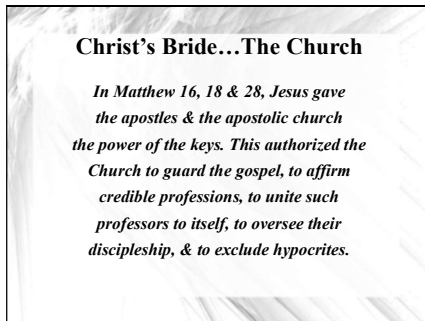
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Slide 5



Slide 6

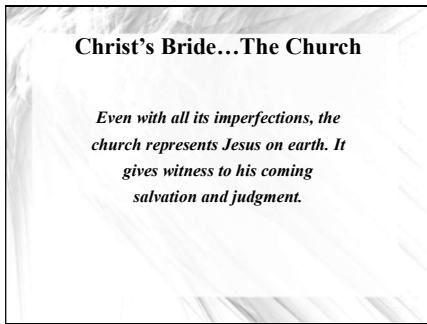


Session 9: Bride of Christ

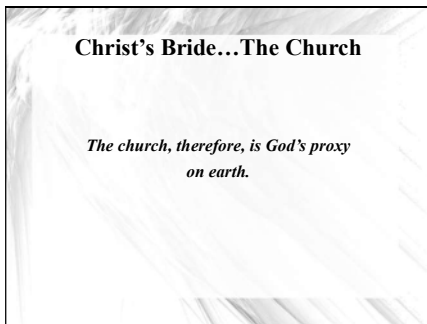
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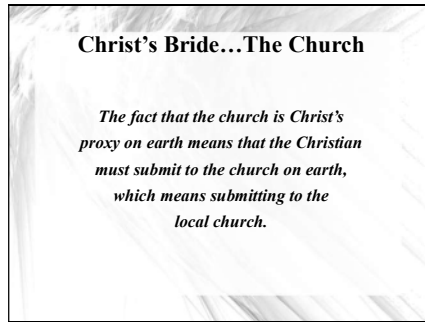
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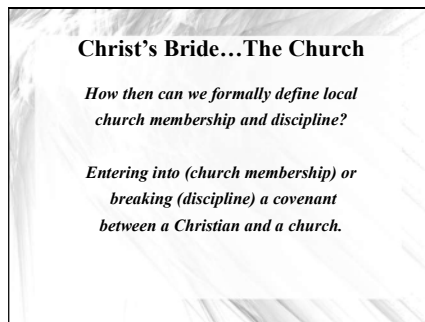
Slide 9



Slide 10



Slide 11



Slide 12



Slide 13

Christ's Bride...The Church

This covenant between a Christian and a local church does not remove a Christian's responsibilities to other Christians, but it does give a Christian more responsibility over the members of his or her church.

Slide 14

Christ's Bride...The Church

Christ authorizes the church to proclaim & protect the gospel, to vouch for his followers, to unite them to itself, to oversee their discipleship, & to exclude imposters. He gives the church this authority in order to safeguard the image of his gospel in a fallen world which continually misunderstands & misportrays his gospel love.

Session 10: Church Discipline

Slide 1

Church Discipline

Definition

Church discipline is the practice of correcting church members when they have sinned in expectation that the offender will repent and be reconciled to God and the church. It is also intended to protect other church members from the influence of sin.

Slide 2

Church Discipline
We believe in discipline in...

- World
- Nation
- Schools
- Sports
- Clubs
- Events
- Family

Church? Why?

Slide 3

Church Discipline

Among Christians today, church discipline is critiqued by some and outright rejected by others.

Why?

- Individualism
- Skepticism
- Anti-authority
- God despising
- Resists being bound to anything

Slide 4

Church Discipline
What the Bible says about....

- Individualism

1 Thess 4:9 But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love *one another*.

The Bible emphasizes “community” and “togetherness.” 43 times in the New Testament the phrase “one another” is used

Slide 5

Church Discipline
• What the Bible says about....

- Skepticism

Heb 11:6 But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

The Bible explicitly teaches “faith” in God’s way, word and person.

Slide 6

Church Discipline
• What the Bible says about....

- Anti-authority

Rom 13:1 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

Rebellion is of Satan (1 Sam 15:23)

Slide 7

Church Discipline

What the Bible says about...

- God despising

Joh 3:20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. 21 But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

Slide 8

Church Discipline

What the Bible says about...

- not being bound to anything

Rom 12:10 *Be kindly affectioned (devoted) one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another*

Slide 9

Church Discipline

The Culture's False Love Says...

“Know that God loves you by not permanently binding you to anything (especially if you really don't want to be).”

“Know that your neighbor loves you best by letting you express yourself entirely and without judgment”

Slide 10

Church Discipline

Can you imagine any family being a good family, producing well rounded children in a loving atmosphere apart from rules, authority and discipline?

The church is the family of God. No church can be considered healthy, producing Christlike members in a loving atmosphere apart from rules, authority and discipline.

Slide 11

Church Discipline

“In any organization, family, country or church where anything goes, eventually everything will.”

Slide 12

Church Discipline

What are the goals of church discipline?

- 1. Restore the relationship between a Christian in sin & Christ.**
- 2. Restore the relationship between a Christian in sin & other believers of the church.**
- 3. Rebuke & expel an unrepentant church member to awaken them from their sin.**
- 4. Rebuke & expel an unrepentant church member to protect the flock & maintain purity.**
- 5. Rebuke & expel an unrepentant church member as a warning for church members.**

Slide 13

Church Discipline

1Pe 4:17 For the time *is come* that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if *it* first *begin* at us, what shall the end *be* of them that obey not the gospel of God?

1Pe 4:18 And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

Slide 14

Church Discipline

1Co 11:29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

30 For this cause many *are* weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. 31 For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.

Slide 15

Church Discipline

Who has the responsibility to practice church discipline?

Simply.....Everyone

Session 11: MAS Survey Study

Slide 1

Faithful attendance at a local church is commanded in the New Testament.

Mat 18:20 For where 2 or 3 are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

Heb 3:13 But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

Heb 10:25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Act 2:42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Slide 2

The Bible teaches the only person a Christian should submit to is Jesus Christ.

Heb 13:7 Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of *their* conversation.

Heb 13:17 Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you.

1Th 5:12 And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you;

1Th 5:13 And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. *And* be at peace among yourselves.

Slide 3

How one lives and conducts their life is between them and the Lord, no one else.

1Pe 5:5 Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all *of you* be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

Slide 4

The Bible teaches the church should confront the sins of members in one form or another.

Mat 18:15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

Gal 6:1 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. **2** Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

Slide 5

The New Testament teaches that believers should obey their church leaders.

Heb 13:7 Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of *their* conversation.

Heb 13:17 Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you

Slide 6

God disciplines his children for the purpose of holiness.

Pro 3:12 For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son *in whom* he delighteth.

Pro 13:24 He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.

Heb 12:6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

Slide 7

Confronting a sinning member can do more harm than good.

1Ti 4:16 Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

Jud 1:21 Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. **22** And of some have compassion, making a difference: **23** **And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.**

Slide 8

Church members are basically good hearted and only need to answer to the Lord.

1 John 1:8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Slide 9

A sinning church member who will not repent may not be saved.

1Jn 2:19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would *no doubt* have continued with us: but *they went out*, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

Gal 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, **20** Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, **21** Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told *you* in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Slide 10

Jesus confronted and corrected his disciples when they were in error because he loved them.

Mat 16:23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, **Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.**

Luk 22:25 And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. **26** But ye *shall not be* so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.

Slide 11

Holding one another lovingly accountable for our actions communicates concern, care, and a passion for honoring the Lord.

Heb 10:26 For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, **27** But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

Slide 12

The church is for sinners.

1Jn 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. **9** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1Jn 5:4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, *even* our faith. **5** Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

Rev 3:12 Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God

Slide 13

The church is for all people not just some.

1Th 4:16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: **17** Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Slide 14

The church should be more concerned with getting people in the church at whatever cost.

Jud 1:4 For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. **5** I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not.

Illustrations: 1. Crusades 2. "Joining the church"
3. Reciting a prayer

Slide 15

The ordinance of the Lord's Supper may only be partaken by those church members in good standing.

1Co 11:26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. **27** Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink *this* cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. **28** But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup. **29** For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

Slide 16

The New Testament does not clearly teach church discipline.

Matthew 18:15-19

Heb 12

Gal 6:1-2

1 Cor 5

Acts 5:1-11

Slide 17

Church discipline is not necessary in these modern times.

2Ti 3:16 All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Heb 13:8 Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.

1Pe 1:25 But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

Slide 18

It is better to overlook a member's sin to keep them in the church than to confront them.

Pro 27:5 Open rebuke *is* better than secret love.

6 Faithful *are* the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy *are* deceitful.

2Sa 12:7 Nathan said to David, Thou *art* the man.

Mat 18:15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

Gal 6:1 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

Slide 19

If we point out another member's sin, we are not condemning them.

Pro 27:6 Faithful *are* the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy *are* deceitful.

Eph 4:15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ:

Slide 20

If a member chooses to leave the church, we should let them go with no questions asked.

1Pe 5:5 Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all *of you* be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

I Corinthians 13

Mat 7:12 Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

Slide 21

It is God's responsibility to correct a sinning member, not mine.

Gal 6:1 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. 2 Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

Slide 22

The church should not grant a letter of a member to another church if they have caused trouble or have been practicing sin.

Mat 18:17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

Slide 23

A church has the right to dismiss anyone from the church for any reason.

NO!

Slide 24

If the church corrects a wayward member it will cast a negative image on the church.

Mat 10:28 And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Gal 1:10 For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.

Eph 5:11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*.

Mat 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

APPENDIX 5

MEMBERSHIP ACCOUNTABILITY SURVEY
RESULTS AND COMPARISON

Table A1. MAS results and comparison

Participant Code Number	Initial Survey Score/Points	Final Survey Score/Points	Net Increase/Decrease
VBC 1	92	115	25.00%
VBC 2	130	128	-1.54%
VBC 3	92	125	35.87%
VBC 5	94	127	35.11%
VBC 7	97	116	19.59%
VBC 8	111	117	5.41%
VBC 10	124	144	16.13%
VBC 12	108	117	8.33%
VBC 13	130	136	4.62%
VBC 16	135	144	6.67%
VBC 21	103	139	34.95%
VBC 22	109	136	24.77%
VBC 23	120	134	11.67%
VBC 24	91	112	23.08%
VBC 26	105	138	31.43%
VBC 33	144	144	0.00%
VBC 34	105	139	32.38%
VBC 38	105	133	26.67%
VBC 39	117	133	13.68%
Composite Score	111.16	133.53	17.28%

Note: The total possible points a participant may score is 144
(6 points per statement x 24 statements)

APPENDIX 6
T-TEST RESULTS

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means

	<i>Variable 1</i>	<i>Variable 2</i>
Mean	111.1578947	133.5263158
Variance	248.0292398	393.5964912
Observations	19	19
Pearson Correlation	0.597686382	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	18	
t Stat	-5.954369464	
P(T<=t) one-tail	6.18781E-06	
t Critical one-tail	1.734063607	
P(T<=t) two-tail	1.23756E-05	
t Critical two-tail	2.10092204	

APPENDIX 7

CHURCH DISCIPLINE POLICY

Verbena Baptist Church (VBC) believes the Christian life is a life of discipleship, which means that it is to be characterized by godly discipline. This includes consistently training oneself for godliness (1 Timothy 4:7) as well as the corporate discipline that comes through being united to a local church. Church discipline is necessary for the growth of believers, unity of the church and purity of the gospel.

Church discipline is an aspect of God's love (Heb 12:6) carried out through the formal teaching of God's Word but also informally through the examples and ongoing ministry of its members. Either through word of deed church discipline has as its target the making of disciples (Eph 4:11-13; Rom 12:1-16; 1 Cor 12:4-27). Very simply stated, church discipline occurs when the church is engaged in the Christian activities of teaching, preaching, exercising of spiritual gifts, fellowship, working, sharing and solving problem together (1 Pet 4:7-12).

In the sad event a member scandalously or habitually departs from the gospel's pattern into sin, more severe forms of discipline may be required. The type of church discipline described in the remainder of this section has to do with what may be considered confrontive and corrective. These actions may be taken by an individual member, the church's leaders or the congregation itself regarding an issue of known sin in the life of a member.

Members Responsibility to One Another

- **Loving one another** (John 13:34, 35; Romans 12:9; 13:8–10; 1 John 3:18).
- Caring and watching over one another (Phil 2:3-4).
- Regular assembling together for spiritual edification and worship (Heb 10:25; Acts 2:42).
- Striving for peace and unity (Eph 4:3).
- Sharing life together in such a way that each are mutually benefited in spiritual growth and further developed into a holy place for the Lord (Eph 4:12,29; 2:21,22; 1 Cor 14:12).
- Faithfully engage in prayer for one another (James 5:16).
- To strive to maintain the purity of the gospel in doctrine and practice in accordance with Sacred Scripture (Ps 93:5; Zech 14:2; 1 Cor 14:33-40; 11:2).

Church discipline may be further required when a member strays from the above pattern by becoming divisive, sowing discord or distorting the gospel in unsound doctrine. It will be the responsibility of the church to persuade a wayward member to resolve any offenses, correct errors, and remove problems before serious action must take place. All such attempts should be face to face and normally in accordance with the Lord's instruction found in Matthew 5:23,24; 18:15-18. In matters that are more serious or pose a clear and present danger to the church's witness and harmony, at the judgment of the

pastor and deacons, a matter may be taken directly to the church, as indicated in 1 Corinthians 5 and Titus 3:10-11.

Discipline may be initiated either before or after a member seeks to withdraw from membership if the church leadership determines that such discipline may serve to guard and preserve the honor of God, protect the purity of the church, or restore the wandering member to the Lord. While the church cannot force a withdrawing person to remain in this congregation, the church has the right and the responsibility to encourage restoration, to bring the disciplinary process to an orderly conclusion, and to make a final determination as to the person's membership status at the time withdrawal is sought or acknowledged.

Goals of Church Discipline

1. Repentance, restoration, and spiritual growth of the individual disciplined (Heb 12:1–11; Matt 18:15–17; 1 Cor 5:5; Gal 6:1);
2. Instruction in righteousness and welfare of other Christians, as an example to them (1 Cor 5:11; 1 Tim 5:20; Heb 10:24–25);
3. Holiness and purity of the church (1 Cor 5:6–7; Eph 5:27; Rev 21:2);
4. A good and consistent witness to the community and unbelievers (Matt 5:13–16; John 13:35; Acts 5:10-14);
5. To glorify God as His people put on display His holy character so all the nations may know of His goodness (Deut 5:11; John 15:8; Eph 1:4; 1 Pt 2:12).

Guiding Principles for Church Discipline

- Act in a loving, patient, and redemptive manner, rather than being harsh, abrupt, or vindictive (Gal 6:1-2).
- Be consistent in applying discipline in the church (Phil 1:27; 2 Pet 3:11).
- Be careful not to show favoritism as discipline is administered (Rom 2:11; 1 Pet 1:17).
- Always speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15; 1 Pet 1:22).
- Communicate only to people who have a legitimate right to know (Prov 2:11; 2 Cor 6:3).
- If discussing unproven allegations with officers, label them as such; do not allow unsupported charges to be publicly proclaimed by the church (Matt 18:16; 2 Cor 13:1).
- Decisions are to be based on biblical support (Ps 119:105; Prov 3:5-6; 2 Tim 3:16-17).

Some Scriptural Examples of Known Sins that Should be Corrected

- Sexual Immorality (1 Cor 6:9, 18-19; Heb 13:4)
- Drunkenness or Drug abuse (1 Cor 6:10; Gal 5:21)
- Vulgar talk or jesting (Exod 20:7; Prov 10:21; Eph 4:29; Matt 12:36-37)
- Gossip (Prov 11:3; 20:19; Jas 1:26; 1 Cor 5:13)
- Chronic absences from meetings (home bound, sick and military personnel are excused) (Heb 10:25; Matt 18:20; Acts 2:42)
- Failure to support the ministries of the church in giving (Deut 16:17; Prov 21:26; Mal 3:10; Mark 12:41-44; 2 Cor 9:6)
- Sowing discord (Prov 6:16-19; Rom 16:17)
- Excessive or sinful anger (Ps 37:8; 1 Cor 13:4-5; Gal 5:19-20; Eph 4:29-32)

- Teaching or promoting doctrinal beliefs that are not in accordance with scripture (Gal 1:8; 2 Cor 11:13-14; Titus 3:10).
- False accusations (Exod 20:16; 1 Pet 3:16; 1 Pet 2:1-25; Titus 2:3)
- Rebellion to the biblically established authority of the church (Rom 13:1-2; Heb 3:15; 2 Tim 4:3-4)

Forms of Church Discipline

- A. **PRIVATE REBUKE**—If a member has sinned yet demonstrates a willingness to repent, submits to the admonitions of the church leadership, he may only receive a lesser correction. This in no way lessens the seriousness of the matter lest the enemies of the Lord increase, the fellow believers become emboldened to sin or the offender is not confronted with the gravity of his sin where he may repent and be restored. Therefore, at the discretion of the church leadership, the member may receive private correction from at least two members of the church leadership. .
- B. **EXCLUSION**—If a member is habitually absent (attending less than one-fourth of the meetings in a six month period) from the meetings of this church without just cause or fails support VBC or is unwilling to resolve conflicts or settle differences in a Scriptural manner, or requests severance of membership, he or she may be excluded from the membership at the recommendation of the church leaders and vote of the congregation.
- C. **REMOVAL**—The most serious step VBC can take in corrective discipline is to remove a member because of unrepentant sin. In extraordinary situations when a member has sinned publicly, scandalously or divisively and without biblical repentance (2 Cor 7:8–12), the church leadership may recommend the church remove that member immediately (1 Cor 5:4–5; Titus 3:10–11). When restoration is not secured by the processes required in Matthew 18:15–18, further steps must be taken to correct offenders. Written charges shall be given to the accused offender if he requests a hearing with church leadership. The pastor and deacons shall meet with the accused, unless the person refuses to appear. After a fair and impartial hearing of all the witnesses accessible, and all facts ascertainable, the elders must form a judgment. If they believe the accused to be guilty and deserving of severe biblical discipline, they shall recommend the offender be removed at a duly called congregational meeting. The congregation shall have the right to remove a member by a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting. The vote will be taken by a show of hands or by standing. Removal always has as its end the glory of God, the purity of the body of Christ and the restoration of the offending party.
- D. **RESTORATION**—It is the joyful duty of VBC to forgive and restore to membership those persons who give satisfactory evidence of being repentant (2 Cor 2:6–8; 7:11). One who is restored must give evidence of repentance. Church leadership shall meet with in order to assess the tone of the confession and renouncement of the excluded's sin. Furthermore, leadership may require a reasonable time frame (days or weeks) in which to make this determination to assure the aims of the discipline have been accomplished. Such action is to be reported to the church. Upon recommendation of the pastor and deacons the congregation shall have the right to restore a removed member by a majority vote of the members present and voting at a duly called business meeting.

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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING A CHURCH DISCIPLINE STRATEGY FOR VERBENA BAPTIST CHURCH, VERBENA, ALABAMA

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Robert K. Cheong

This project sought to develop a church discipline strategy for Verbena Baptist Church, in Verbena, Alabama. Chapter 1 presents the context of ministry at Verbena Baptist and identifies the goals and means of measurement. Chapter 2 provides exegesis of five passages of Scripture (Gen 3:1-13; Num 21:4-9; Matt 18:15-18; Gal 6:1-5; and Heb 12:5-11) to show that every Christian fellowship should embrace the doctrine of church discipline. Chapter 3 presents the historical practice of church discipline in contrast to the present, and how vital aspects of church life are affected by its function. Chapter 4 describes the project implementation and further analyzes the project's context, cultivating attitudes toward the project and preparation for a church discipline policy. Chapter 5 evaluates the effectiveness of the project based on completion of the specified goals. Ultimately, this project seeks to equip Verbena Baptist Church with the tools and confidence for the furtherance of its mission in Christ Jesus.

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