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GODLY DISCIPLINE: BIBLICAL COUNSELING AND
CHURCH DISCIPLINE MODELED AFTER GOD'S
RESTORATIVE DISCIPLINE

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Jeremiah Daniel Greever
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**GODLY DISCIPLINE: BIBLICAL COUNSELING AND
CHURCH DISCIPLINE MODELED AFTER GOD'S
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To the local church,
Commit to the beautifully rewarding work of biblical discipline.

To my parents,
You are the greatest influences upon my life for godliness.

To my vivacious children,
Judah and Noelle, you are an immense joy from the Lord.

And to my dear wife,
Sadie, you are God's kindest gift to me.
I cherish you and every moment the Lord gives us.

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PREFACE

Writing is a humbling exercise precisely because it forces the writer to realize his indebtedness to others. Writing never occurs in a vacuum but is the collective effort of many people. It is with this understanding and with deep gratitude that I express my appreciation to those who made this thesis a reality. I'm thankful for the two churches who graciously partnered with me in the ministry, First Baptist Church of St. John, Missouri, and First Baptist Church of Sedalia, Missouri. Through its various seasons, pastoral ministry has been an immense joy. Over the past few years as pastor of First Baptist Church of Sedalia, Missouri, I've become reinvigorated that these biblical truths are meant to be known to all the church. In this context, the Lord has increased my love for the local church and grown my desire to see these rich truths faithfully applied. I look forward to the blessing of serving the Lord together.

I'm thankful to my supervisor, Dr. Robert Jones, who has been instrumental in helping me develop, expand, and sharpen my thinking. He has pressed and stretched me in essential ways that have grown me as a scholar. I'm also supremely grateful to Jim Hamman who not only trained me in biblical counseling, but also has been a precious friend and mentor to me. Through his mentorship my eyes were opened to the practicality of Scripture and the freedom it abundantly gives.

Though no longer toiling on this earth, I'm thankful for Joshua Clutterham's influence on my life, ministry, and counseling ministry. He was the first person I co-counseled with, and his gentle guidance was vital for me as I began counseling as a young pastor. He truly embodied the high praise, "men of whom the world was not worthy" (Heb 11:38 NASB), and I long for the day when we will be joined together in

the glorious presence of the Almighty.

I'm forever indebted to my parents who immeasurably invested and supported me across the mountains and valleys of life. Their patience, generosity, unconditional love, and encouragement were often what kept me moving forward. They not only instilled in me a penchant for excellence, but also a desire for intellectual rigor. Yet they also taught me that academic excellence is ultimately for a higher purpose—"Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col 3:17). Their example of godliness proved to me from an early age that Christianity is real and faithful living is possible through daily trusting Christ.

Finally, though words are woefully insufficient, I am infinitely thankful for my wife and children. More than anyone else, they collectively sacrificed so that this work could be completed. Without any reservation, I'm confident that none of this thesis would be possible without their encouragement, longsuffering, and continued support. I could not have done this without them. To my dear wife—Sadie Jane, God has used you more than I could ever express to teach me the beautiful grace of his discipline. I have known God's kindness and love in large part because of you. God has often used your gentle spirit to help me grow in godliness. I will forever thank the Lord for bringing us together in marriage and for the joy we have in serving him together. What a privilege to be like-minded in believing our only hope is Christ. I eagerly anticipate growing together through the Lord's kind discipline for our ultimate good. "For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness" (Heb 12:10).

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Discipline is never an easy endeavor. When given the choice most people opt against discipline. Even from a Christian perspective, many Christians do not consider God’s discipline as an expression of grace. Because applications of God’s restorative discipline often recall pain or legalism, they are often neglected in most churches.¹ The absence of restorative church discipline is “perhaps the most visible failure of the contemporary church.”²

Though biblical church discipline is in large part neglected across Christendom,³ Scripture consistently calls the church to mirror God’s discipline (Matt 18:15-20; 1 Cor 5:1-13; 2 Cor 2:5-11; Gal 6:1-5; Titus 3:9-11). Scripture portrays God’s discipline as mercy towards those he loves rather than propagation of legalism (Job 5:17-18; Ps 119:73-76; Prov 3:11-12; Heb 12:4-11; Rev 3:19). Though often including suffering, God’s discipline is presented as necessary for spiritual growth in the believer. In the practical ministry of the church, God’s discipline is most clearly expressed through

¹ Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace: God’s Role and Our Role in the Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: NAVPress, 1994), 77.

² R. Albert Mohler Jr. “Church Discipline: The Missing Mark,” in *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life*, ed. Mark Dever (Washington, DC: Nine Marks Ministries, 2001), 43.

³ According to a 2017 Lifeway Research survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors, 78 percent of pastors have either never been involved in church discipline, have not been involved in church discipline over the past three years, or were unsure. The survey also showed 87 percent of pastors with church attendance under 100 have not participated in church discipline in the last year, while pastors with church attendance of 0-49 (65 percent) and 50-99 (63 percent) respectively have never participated in church discipline. Lifeway Research, “Churches Rarely Reprimand Members, New Survey Shows,” last modified April 5, 2018, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2018/04/05/churches-rarely-reprimand-members-new-survey-shows/>.

restorative church discipline. Thus, the biblical expressions of God’s discipline instruct the local church’s application of restorative church discipline.

Accurately applying biblical church discipline is essential for leading local churches towards moral and doctrinal purity. Arguing for church discipline’s necessity, John Dagg once warned, “When discipline leaves a church, Christ goes with it.”⁴ Biblical church discipline is a restorative “healing, purifying balm” in the local bride of Christ.⁵ Thus, the goal of church discipline is to preserve holiness and restore those who repent of their sin. The aim of loving church discipline is always for restoration and reconciliation.⁶ When faithfully applied, church discipline preserves the church’s holiness and restores the offending sinner to a right relationship with God.

For church discipline to be effective in restoring a sinner, biblical counseling must be an active participant. Since the field of biblical counseling has at times been nebulously defined, for the basis of this thesis, biblical counseling is broadly understood as Christians speaking and applying God’s Word to transform a person’s heart and life into conformity with Christ. This definition allows for both formal and informal counseling, from discipleship to intentional soul care. Thus, though not every Christian is a formally trained biblical counselor, every Christian is called to speak biblical truth (counsel) into the lives of others. Therefore, biblical counseling works to bring believers into a right relationship with God specifically through repentance and heart change.⁷

⁴ John L. Dagg, *A Treatise of Church Order* (Charleston, SC: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1858), 274, as quoted by R. Albert Mohler in “Church Discipline: The Missing Mark,” in *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life*, ed. Mark Dever (Washington, DC: Nine Marks Ministries, 2001), 56.

⁵ Jay Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline: A Right and Privilege of Every Church Member* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 9.

⁶ Robert Cheong and Robert Jones, “Biblical Counseling, the Church, and Church Discipline,” in *Biblical Counseling and the Church: God’s Care through God’s People*, ed. Bob Kelleman and Kevin Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 159.

⁷ Jay Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 55.

Simply put, biblical counseling seeks to restore God’s people to the image and likeness of Christ.⁸ Because biblical counseling and church discipline practically apply God’s discipline, both efforts are invariably complimentary in the local church. Thus, God intends for biblical counseling and church discipline to be modeled and instructed by his ultimate purposes in discipline—holiness and restoration (see figure 1).

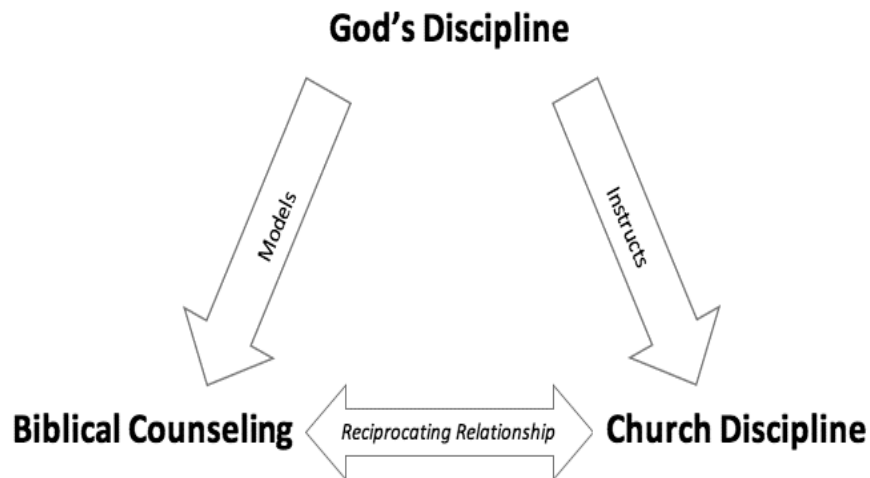


Figure 1. Triangle of Divine Discipline

The work of both biblical counseling and church discipline originates in the nature and application of God’s discipline. God’s discipline serves as the model for the ministry of biblical counseling in patiently laboring to restore Christians to kingdom effectiveness. Additionally, God’s discipline instructs the process of church discipline by describing the necessary steps in confronting sin, restoring the offender, and preserving the holiness of the church. When both practical ministries faithfully emanate from God’s

⁸ Jay Adams, *Ready to Restore: The Layman’s Guide to Christian Counseling* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1981), 5.

discipline, biblical counseling and church discipline form a reciprocating relationship, meaning both ministries often require the other. Both necessarily coexist in harmonious efforts to confront, instruct, and restore one another in the church. Successful application of one ecclesiastic ministry often requires involvement from the other. Church discipline pursues restoration through the sanctifying soul care of biblical counseling. Conversely, biblical counseling pursues restoration in the recalcitrant counselee through the punitive consequences of church discipline. Church discipline and biblical counseling together provide opportunity and incentive for the local church to restore one another in the faith.

Therefore, this thesis will argue God's discipline models and instructs the reciprocating relationship between biblical counseling and church discipline. Drawing from the theological framework of God's discipline in relation to his nature, the necessary relationship between biblical counseling and church discipline in pursuing restoration will be considered (Matt 18:15-20; 1 Cor 5:1-13). Through faithful application of biblical counseling and church discipline, Christians receive the full blessings of God's restorative discipline.

Familiarity with the Literature

Because God's discipline is prevalent throughout Scripture, various books have been written on the subject. From similar perspectives, the primary intent across the related resources is restoration and holiness. While sharing the same goal, the various authors categorically approach this aim from different methods. Thus, relevant literature falls into three primary categories—God's discipline, church discipline, and biblical counseling. Though all three categories necessarily share similar goals of restoration and holiness, little has been written on their comprehensive correlation.

God's Discipline

The categories of church discipline and biblical counseling depend upon a larger theological framework—God's use of discipline. A valuable resource on God's

work through discipline is Jerry Bridges's book, *The Discipline of Grace: God's Role and Our Role in the Pursuit of Holiness*.⁹ Bridges argues God's grace is not in conflict with his discipline but that they are expressions of one another. The same grace that justifies sinners continues by sanctifying believers. "So we see that the very same grace that brings salvation also trains us to live lives that are pleasing to God."¹⁰ The continued presence of God's grace is evidenced through God's discipline. God's work of forming the Christian into the image of Christ is not the absence of God's grace but evidence of its presence. Because godly discipline is essential for the Christian's life, the local church is called to encourage one another through God's discipline. Bridges's book is essential for positively understanding God's grace in the role of discipline.

God's redemptive history follows repeated patterns of fatherly divine discipline over his people. Therefore, divine discipline is not antithetical to God's love but a primary expression of it. In his book, *Love That Rescues: God's Fatherly Love in the Practice of Church Discipline*,¹¹ Eric Bargerhuff demonstrates the connection between God's discipline and his restorative love. Bargerhuff's theology of divine discipline through the Holy Spirit informs his application of practical discipline within the church. A faithful church consistently calls her people to discipline. He argues a church's understanding of God is best demonstrated by practicing restorative church discipline. When discipline is practiced, the church inevitably grows in moral purity. A church's theology of God's discipline always informs their observance of restorative church discipline.

⁹ Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace: God's Role and Our Role in the Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994).

¹⁰ Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace*, 78.

¹¹ Eric J. Bargerhuff, *Love That Rescues: God's Fatherly Love in the Practice of Church Discipline* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010).

The theology of God's discipline is essential for understanding the narrative of Scripture. The Bible repeatedly illustrates God's use of discipline in purifying and restoring his people. James Stoney explains the narrative of Scripture through the lens of God individually disciplining his people in his book *Discipline in the School of God: Its Nature and Effect*.¹² Stoney articulates his argument by pointing to God's disciplinary work in the lives of 23 biblical figures (Adam, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Samson, Ruth, Samuel, David, Elijah, Elisha, Hezekiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Paul). Stoney provides meticulous details to prove God's discipline is for a higher purpose. God's discipline is essential for the Christian life.

Because suffering often accompanies discipline, consideration must be given to God's use of suffering. D. A. Carson wrestles with the reality of suffering, including suffering that emanates from divine discipline in *How Long O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil*.¹³ By articulating an overarching biblical understanding of suffering and evil, Carson addresses divine discipline as a unique cause of suffering for the Christian. Discipline is an important tool that points believers to Christ. Though intense suffering often accompanies God's discipline, its presence is essential for the Christian's life. Carson's efforts are vital for recognizing God's goodness through the suffering of discipline.

Church Discipline

God's primary means of implementing discipline within the church is through restorative church discipline. Because church discipline preserves the holiness of the

¹² James Butler Stoney, *Discipline in the School of God: Its Nature and Effect* (London: G. Morrish, n.d.).

¹³ D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006).

church, right observance of Scripture's commands is vital. Jay Adams's book, *Handbook on Church Discipline: A Right and Privilege of Every Church Member*,¹⁴ addresses church discipline from a biblical framework. Adams combines the biblical mandates for church discipline through the lens of biblical counseling. Drawing heavily from Matthew 18:15-17, Adams outlines the practical steps of church discipline. Ultimately, Christians ought to engage in discipline for the purpose of holiness and restoration. This book helpfully articulates the process of church discipline through loving care instead of cold formality.

Church discipline is a practical expression of God's discipline. In his book, *Calling the Church to Discipline*,¹⁵ Roy Knuteson argues God's discipline must be faithfully applied in the local church. Written to practically help churches, Knuteson argues God's discipline must motivate the church to practice restorative church discipline. Thus, church discipline pours out God's discipline as an expression of love. "Love, therefore, never bypasses discipline but always exercises it for the ultimate benefit of the individual."¹⁶ Though implementing church discipline is often difficult, the goal is always restoration. By placing the impetus for church discipline in God's demonstrated discipline, holiness and restoration are largely dependent upon faithfully practicing restorative church discipline.

Understanding the difficulties of church discipline is essential for faithful application. Historical and cultural issues must be considered before applying church discipline. As one of the foremost evangelical thinkers on cultural worldviews, R. Albert

¹⁴ Jay E. Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline: A Right and Privilege of Every Church Member* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974).

¹⁵ Roy E. Knuteson, *Calling the Church to Discipline: A Spiritual Guide for the Church that Dares to Discipline* (Nashville: Action, 1977).

¹⁶ Knuteson, *Calling the Church to Discipline*, 33.

Mohler's chapter in *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life*¹⁷ addresses why church discipline has become passé in many churches. Biblical church discipline is essential for the doctrinal purity of the broader universal church. Therefore, Mohler emphasizes restoring doctrinal fidelity as the motivation for church discipline. He argues, "correction is for the greater purpose of restoration and the even higher purpose of reflecting the holiness of God."¹⁸ Ultimately, practicing church discipline leads to unification in truth. "Reconciliation is a mandate, not a hypothetical goal."¹⁹

One of the greatest challenges to church discipline is maintaining peace through internal church conflict. Achieving restoration in conflict depends upon Christians pursuing biblical peace together. Robert Jones's book, *Pursuing Peace: A Christian Guide to Handling Our Conflict*,²⁰ addresses the necessity of biblical peace when sin brings conflict to the church. When the heart's desire is to please God rather than dwelling on the conflict itself, peaceful reconciliation is attained. "If both parties seek to please God, full reconciliation is guaranteed."²¹ The guidance of biblical counseling often leads to peaceful restoration. "True forgiveness seeks to restore the relationship to a wise, appropriate level."²² Working for peace within church conflict is an essential step for restorative church discipline.

The purpose of church discipline in these resources becomes clear—God's discipline instructs church discipline in its process, application, and goals. As the church's final word on a person's spiritual condition, church discipline is the

¹⁷ Mohler, "Church Discipline: The Missing Mark," 43-56.

¹⁸ Mohler, "Church Discipline," 49.

¹⁹ Mohler, "Church Discipline," 55.

²⁰ Robert D. Jones, *Pursuing Peace: A Christian Guide to Handling Our Conflicts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

²¹ Jones, *Pursuing Peace*, 52.

²² Jones, *Pursuing Peace*, 165.

ecclesiastical tool to apply divine discipline. Church discipline practically applies divine discipline by restoring an offending Christian to holiness, preserving the holiness of Christ's bride, awaking those who are spiritually dead, and warning others of harboring sin in their lives.

Biblical Counseling

In order for God's discipline to be accomplished through restorative church discipline, churches should be equipped to counsel in truth. Whether a church has formally trained biblical counselors or not, every church must be equipped with Scripture to lead one another in biblical fidelity. The heart of biblical counseling seeks to restore sinners to the Lord, whether through formal or informal counseling. Biblical counseling is well equipped to effectively partner with church discipline in seeking to lovingly restore an offender from Scripture. The effectiveness of biblical counseling in restoration is proven in Jay Adams's book *Ready to Restore: The Layman's Guide to Christian Counseling*,²³ which identifies restoration as the ultimate goal of biblical counseling. "The goal is to restore every Christian counselee to usefulness."²⁴ Adams calls Christians and churches alike to discipline one another towards Gospel effectiveness, even briefly connecting biblical counseling and church discipline. When counselees are unresponsive towards the Gospel, Adams notes church leaders must be consulted.²⁵ This thesis hopes to expand upon this necessary mutual relationship of restoration through discipline.

In order for biblical counseling to be faithfully applied in church discipline, a biblical theology of counseling must be established. Two similar works provide a framework for biblical counseling—Jay Adams's pioneering work *Competent to Counsel:*

²³ Jay E. Adams, *Ready to Restore: The Layman's Guide to Christian Counseling* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1981).

²⁴ Adams, *Ready to Restore*, 14.

²⁵ Adams, *Ready to Restore*, 36.

Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling,²⁶ and Heath Lambert's seminal work *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry*.²⁷ Both resources carefully articulate the unique distinctives of Scripture's sufficiency within biblical counseling. Lambert especially draws particular attention to God's use of suffering in the process of biblical counseling. Though suffering can be self-inflicted, God often uses suffering through discipline to change his people. Both works argue biblical counseling is uniquely positioned to restore Christians through God's discipline.

Though no significant research exists linking biblical counseling and church discipline (as this thesis will expound), some initial connections have been made. In Robert Cheong and Robert Jones's chapter, "Biblical Counseling, the Church, and Church Discipline," in *Biblical Counseling and the Church: God's Care through God's People*,²⁸ biblical counseling and church discipline are briefly connected. Cheong and Jones envision the two efforts as inseparable for faithful church work. "The lines blur as you sit back and consider the relationship between biblical counseling and church discipline...The Lord designed both to be done in community, not isolated from the church family or separate from the church leadership."²⁹ Cheong and Jones understand biblical counseling and church discipline to work together in applying divine discipline in the church.

²⁶ Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

²⁷ Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016).

²⁸ Robert Cheong and Robert Jones, "Biblical Counseling, the Church, and Church Discipline," in *Biblical Counseling and the Church: God's Care through God's People*, ed. Bob Kelleman and Kevin Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015).

²⁹ Cheong and Jones, "Biblical Counseling, the Church, and Church Discipline," 169.

Void in the Literature

The categories of God's discipline, church discipline, and biblical counseling are individually well-researched. However, the corresponding relationship amongst the three topics has never been substantively researched. While much has been written on the theology of God's discipline, little has been written on its practical connection to church discipline and biblical counseling. Further still, minimal research has connected the necessary relationship between biblical counseling and church discipline in practically demonstrating God's discipline.³⁰ Though pursuing the similar goal of restoration through God's discipline, biblical counseling and church discipline have rarely been linked.

Because God's discipline is primarily to restore Christians, the roles of church discipline and biblical counseling tangibly apply divine discipline. In the area of church discipline the need for restoration is well-documented, yet not in the framework of biblical counseling.³¹ In order to best accomplish God's desire of restoration, the local church's collaboration of church discipline and biblical counseling must be considered.

Since the health of the local church depends upon God's plan of restoration, work needs to be done in demonstrating the symbiotic relationship between church discipline and biblical counseling. Biblical counseling assures loving exhortation has been applied in the process of church discipline, while church discipline provides

³⁰ Though recognizing the need to define and clarify the relationship between biblical counseling and church discipline, Robert Cheong and Robert Jones are only able to offer preliminary thoughts in the conclusion of their chapter: "Let's address one final question: What is the relationship between biblical counseling and church discipline...The lines blur as you sit back and consider the relationship between biblical counseling and church discipline. Both reflect the ministry of God's Word in the struggles of life where Christ is the focus, the Spirit accomplishes redemptive work in everyone involved, and God the Father is glorified as His people participate with Him in building up His church in love and advancing His kingdom in the world. The Lord designed both to be done in community, not isolated from the church family or separate from the church leadership." Robert Cheong and Robert Jones, "Biblical Counseling, the Church, and Church Discipline," 169. Not only is the interworking relationship between biblical counseling and church discipline beyond the scope of the chapter, the purpose of restoration within both disciplines is left largely unaddressed.

³¹ The founder of the modern biblical counseling movement, Jay Adams, wrote a brief guide on the importance of restoration within the confines of biblical counseling. See Adams, *Ready to Restore*. However, the role of restoration between the disciplines of biblical counseling and church discipline is mentioned only once in a single paragraph addressing unrepentant counselees (35-36).

motivation in biblical counseling to seek holiness. Connecting these two practical expressions of God's discipline within the church provides believers opportunities for biblical restoration.

Thesis

Disciplinary restoration is vital in God's plan for his people. Scripture reveals God's discipline is fueled by his restorative love. Primarily through the efforts of biblical counseling and church discipline, the local church models God's restorative discipline as demonstrations of love. The relationship between biblical counseling and church discipline is vital because both aim for biblical holiness and restoration. Rather than advocating moralistic legalism, the church's goal through practical discipline is always restoration. Biblical counseling lovingly admonishes sinners to repentance through Scripture (Col 1:28); through increasing stages of reproof—nouthetic confrontation—church discipline lovingly admonishes the offender to repentance (Matt 18:15-18). God uses the practical efforts of biblical counseling and church discipline to bring restoration to the church. Therefore, this thesis will argue God's restorative discipline models and instructs the practical efforts of biblical counseling and church discipline

CHAPTER 2
GOD IN RELATION TO HIS NATURE—HOLINESS
AND RESTORATIVE LOVE

God interacts with his creation according to his divine nature. His attributes move and motivate every expression of divine discipline to produce specific results.¹ These divine attributes give clarity and purpose to God’s discipline, while also presenting a model for practical discipline within the church. God’s gift of discipline specifically demonstrates one of his essential attributes—holiness. Driven by his love, God works for humanity to share in his holiness. This chapter will examine God’s attribute of holiness, which is lovingly expressed through divine discipline. Following this model of divine discipline, we will also consider its practical ecclesiastical expression in church discipline.

God’s Discipline as Reflected in His Character

God displays his nature in every interaction with creation. God always disciplines with an intentional purpose consistent with his nature. To understand the purpose of divine discipline, Christians must first understand the divine attribute that fuels discipline. Consistent with God’s eternal purposes, divine discipline accurately bears witness to an eternal God. God’s actions always reveal his character. God’s discipline specifically points to a foundational characteristic of God. Thus, God intentionally uses discipline to produce his desired results in his people. Divine discipline ultimately derives from the holiness of God.

¹ Throughout this chapter I will use the phrases “God’s discipline” and “divine discipline” interchangeably.

Purpose of God’s Discipline—Holiness

Holiness is God’s absolute and total perfection. God is altogether “other”, meaning that he is incomparable from anything created. Therefore, holiness not only serves to describe God’s sinless perfection, but also the intended state of the believer. Holiness is both what God is and what he desires for his people to be. Though God’s holiness permeates across each of his attributes, his holiness is the fundamental distinction between Creator and creature. Holiness distinctly separates God from all else. Wayne Grudem defines divine holiness as God’s ethical and relational distinction: “He is separated from sin and devoted to seeking his own honor.”² Unable to share his glory with another, holiness distinctively separates God from everything else. Every action and expression of God toward his creation emanates from his holy character.

Understanding God’s interaction with creation requires grasping God’s holiness. The biblical authors describe God as holy in his being, purposes, and interaction with creation (Exod 15:11; 1 Sam 2:2; Ps 99:9; Isa 57:15; Rev 15:4). God’s holiness motivates all creation to give glory to himself, beginning first with angelic worship (Isa 6:2-3; Rev 4:8). The very presence of divine holiness requires moral purity for others to share in his holiness. Before Moses could understand God’s redemptive work for enslaved Israel, he was humbled in God’s presence at the burning bush in Exodus 3:5-6.³ Divine holiness was also experienced on Mount Sinai, where even God’s presence meant death to anyone who trespassed on the mountain (Exod 19:12-13). The separation between a holy God and an impure people was evident to Israel when the veil separated the people from the “Holy of Holies” (Exod 26:33-34). As Israel ultimately settled in the

² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 202.

³ John Frame understands the holiness of objects as tied intrinsically to the holiness of God, saying, “The ground is ‘holy’ not because there is something special or dangerous about the ground as such, but because Yahweh is there, the supremely Holy One. God’s messenger is to stand back, to remove his shoes in respect. He is afraid to look at the face of God.” John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013), 277.

Promised Land, God's presence in the temple led to Jerusalem being designated as the "holy city." Because of holiness, God was distinct from his people (Neh 11:1; Dan 9:24; Rev 21:1-2).

Continuing the Old Testament emphasis on divine holiness, the New Testament provides the perfect demonstration of God's holiness through the incarnate Son of God. Rather than a physical temple housing God's holiness, Jesus Christ became the living tabernacle and earthly embodiment of holiness. Jesus became the pure example of holiness (1 Cor 3:16-17; 1 Pet 1:13-16; 2:21-25). Christ's holiness is also further developed in both the individual and corporate body of believers. The believer's physical body has been joined with Christ in salvation and rendered holy through the indwelling Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:15, 19-20). The holiness of Christ also extends to the corporate bride of Christ. God's holiness is demonstrated through Jesus's example in the universal church (1 Cor 3:16-17). Thus, the holiness of God is practically demonstrated through Christ and those he makes holy (Exod 19:6; Lev 19:2; 20:7; 20:26; 21:8; Matt 5:48; 1 Pet 1:16; for further consideration of the collective body of Christ seen as holy people, cf. Eph 2:21; 5:26-27).

However, man's transgression hindered God's holy presence from residing within sinful man. Rather than embodying divine holiness, sin disfigured the *imago Dei* rendering humanity unable to remain in the presence of a holy God. Though stained from sin, the *imago Dei* remained intrinsically intact in that sin did not removed God's image but distorted God's image within man. John Piper understands God's image as intrinsic to man, saying, "The *imago Dei* is not a quality possessed by man; it is a condition in which man lives, a condition of confrontation established and maintained by the Creator...The *imago Dei* is that in man which constitutes him as him-whom-God-loves."⁴

⁴ John Piper, "The Image of God: An Approach from Biblical and Systematic Theology," *Desiring God* (March, 1971): <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-image-of-god>.

While sin has not removed the *imago Dei*, it has removed mankind's inherent ability to share in God's holiness. Grudem explains mankind's inability to share God's holiness as a wholistic loss:

Since man has sinned, he is certainly not as fully like God as he was before. His moral purity has been lost and his sinful character certainly does not reflect God's holiness. His intellect is corrupted by falsehood and misunderstanding; his speech no longer continually glorifies God; his relationships are often governed by selfishness rather than love, and so forth. Though man is still in the image of God, in every aspect of life *some* parts of that image have been distorted or lost.⁵

Humanity's only hope for sharing in God's holiness is through divine intervention. This intervention came through the first coming of Jesus Christ whose perfect righteousness has been given to God's people. For the sake of his glory, God redemptively worked through Christ's atonement to produce holiness within his people.⁶ Christ's imputed righteousness through penal substitutionary atonement justifies God's people (Rom 4:19-25; 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 7:26). Through his completed redemptive work on the cross, Christ became for us "wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification [holiness], and redemption" (1 Cor 1:30). Due to Christ's redemptive work, God's people were granted definitive holiness that holistically changes a person's life and standing before God. This means every person who has been saved by the grace of God through Jesus Christ has been declared holy as Christ is holy. Yet, while positionally holy before God, Christians are still called to pursue holiness while living in a fallen world. God's people are called to live holy like Christ because they have been declared holy based upon Jesus's merit. Receiving Christ's transformative righteousness produces change, as Kevin DeYoung explains, "In Christ every believer has a once-for-all positional holiness, and from this new identity every Christian is commanded to grow in the ongoing-for-

⁵ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 444.

⁶ Kevin DeYoung articulates God's redemptive work as connected to making his people holy. "You can't make sense of the Bible without understanding that God is holy and that this holy God is intent on making a holy people to live with him forever in a holy heaven." Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in Our Holiness: Filling the Gap between Gospel Passion and the Pursuit of Godliness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 31.

your-whole-life process of holiness...In other words, sanctified is what we are and what we must become.”⁷

Thus, definitive holiness leads to progressive holiness, which is often accomplished through divine discipline. Since God cannot allow sin in his presence, his glory removes sin from the believer’s life. God’s holiness requires progressive holiness within his people. Divine discipline powerfully proliferates progressive holiness. Jerry Bridges defines holiness and discipline as whatever God uses to shape Christians to become more like Christ. “All instruction, all reproof and correction, and all providentially directed hardships in our lives that are aimed at cultivating spiritual growth and godly character.”⁸ Divine discipline elucidates God’s holiness leading to believers sharing in that holiness.

As discussed below, God uses discipline in sanctification. Though definitive holiness is established in justification, progressive holiness is a *sine qua non* of becoming holy like Christ. Bridges once again understands discipline as essential for the Christian life. “Rather, God’s discipline in our lives, and the desire to pursue holiness on our part, be it ever so faint, is the inevitable result of receiving God’s gift of salvation by faith...There is only one possible way to become godly: you must be disciplined toward godliness until you do in fact become godly.”⁹ God’s holiness requires his people to become increasingly holy, which divine discipline seeks to accomplish.

Divine Discipline in the Old Testament

The Old Testament illustrates God’s eternal purpose of producing holiness through discipline. Throughout the Old Testament, divine discipline is displayed as a

⁷ DeYoung, *The Hole in Our Holiness*, 33.

⁸ Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace: God’s Role and Our Role in the Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 72.

⁹ Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace*, 76, 81-82.

means of grace to the individual and the corporate community. Three Hebrew words and their cognates are often used to describe God’s purifying discipline. The most frequent of these terms is *musar*, which describes “discipline (of the moral nature), chastening, correction of God, and exercising a disciplinary, educating influence upon Israel.”¹⁰ From its earliest usage, the idea of discipline indicates instruction. In Job 5:17-21, Job’s friend Eliphaz argues divine discipline is the tool to bring relief and healing from life’s toils. Seeking to comfort Job, Eliphaz implores Job to “not despise the discipline of the Almighty.” Divine discipline is instructional.

Similarly, Proverbs 3:11-12 combines divine discipline with moral correction and fatherly love. Holiness and discipline derive from a loving and caring *pater familias*. Using familial language, God’s discipline is the impetus for covenant keeping. Allen Ross posits divine discipline in the context of a paternal covenant, saying, “This motivation recalls the language of the Davidic covenant, which mentions discipline in love. Indeed, it is the father-son relationship that provides insight into the nature of that discipline.”¹¹ Divine discipline connotes correction from a covenant keeping father. Whereas Proverbs 3 highlights discipline in the context of covenantal holiness, *musar* includes a sense of warning through correction. In Jeremiah 5:3, God warns of a coming *musar* to those who break his covenant. Israel’s refusal to pursue truth and repentance led Jeremiah to warn, “You have consumed them, but they refused to take correction [*musar*].” Israel’s refusal to pursue God’s holiness corporately resulted in painful divine discipline. The instruction and correction of divine discipline was God’s upholding covenant promises to keep Israel holy.

In addition to covenant keeping, *musar* indicates growth in spiritual knowledge

¹⁰ F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (1906; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2012), 416.

¹¹ Allen P. Ross, *Proverbs*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, *Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 918.

and understanding. Both Proverbs 12:1 and Proverbs 15:32-33 describe divine discipline as necessary for understanding God's commands. Divine discipline inevitably produces a greater understanding of God's nature to the believer. Both Proverbs passages point to divine discipline as vital for believers to grow in understanding God's nature.

A second Hebrew word that describes discipline is *yasar*. Focusing more specifically on the familial role in discipline, *yasar* derives from *musar* and means to “let oneself be corrected, admonished by words of man [or] let oneself be chastened by the discipline of God.”¹² Often used in contexts of fathers training sons, *yasar* points to the divine discipline of a holy Father's instruction. The term, *yasar* carries a sense of intimacy in correction. Rather than punitive, *yasar* is used between two parties who not only know one another but are intimately bonded together. Like Proverbs 3:11-12, God's fatherly discipline is seen clearly in Deuteronomy 8:5. Moses encourages Israel in the wilderness with familial language, saying, “Thus you are to know in your heart that the Lord your God was disciplining [*yayaser*] you just as a man disciplines his son.”¹³ Moses appeals to the father/son disciplinary imagery for understanding God's purposes. The father's discipline in the desert exposed the hearts of the people (8:2) through the illuminating Word of God (8:3). The result of the father's discipline in verse 5 immediately proceeds in the following verse—installation of covenantal holiness in God's people (Deut 8:6; 19).

Thus, God's parental discipline inculcates holiness in his people. Eric Bargerhuff notes, “Unless it is described as a decisive judgment against unbelievers, discipline in the Old Testament is always to be found in the framework of the covenant

¹² Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 416.

¹³ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

relationship between God and his people.”¹⁴ God’s desire for a holy people fuels his redemptive work. More than restoring humanity to pre-fall holiness, God’s redemptive work is to re-create humanity into the perfect, holy image of his Son. Because of the covenant relationship, God’s parental discipline increased holiness in Israel (Exod 19:5-6; Lev 20:26; Deut 7:6; 26:18-19). Psalm 118:1-4 describes divine discipline as a certain condition of God’s covenant relationship. Later in the chapter, the psalmist describes the extent of God’s discipline, saying, “The Lord has disciplined [*yasar*] me severely [*yassor*], but He has not given me over to death” (Ps 118:18). Particularly in the parental expression, divine discipline produces covenantal holiness within God’s people. Christopher Wright helpfully describes the imagery of parental discipline and covenantal holiness as God’s training of Israel. “Here the emphasis is on God’s parental discipline of the growing child who needs to learn life’s lessons. This was the purpose of the Sinai theophany (Deut. 4:36). The wilderness, then, was the time of Israel’s adolescence, in which God taught them and disciplined them through hardship and suffering.”¹⁵

Divine discipline of fatherly chastisement results in Israel sharing in God’s holiness. J. C. Ryle describes sharing God’s holiness: “The habit of being of one mind with God...it is the habit of agreeing in God’s judgment—hating what he hates—loving what he loves—and measuring everything in this world by the standard of his Word.”¹⁶ Divine discipline constrains God’s people to share in his holiness. God’s discipline produces holiness in God’s people through reflecting a heavenly Father.

¹⁴ Eric J. Bargerhuff, *Love That Rescues: God’s Fatherly Love in the Practice of Church Discipline* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 81. Though Bargerhuff’s overall argument ultimately concludes that God’s parental discipline is given through redemptive love (see below), his argument is couched in the context of God’s covenantal relationship to his people. Essentially, God demonstrates his redemptive love by making his covenant people holy.

¹⁵ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 124, quoted in Bargerhuff, *Love That Rescues*, 82.

¹⁶ J. C. Ryle, *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots* (1877; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2014), 48.

The third and final Hebrew word for discipline is *towkechah*, defined as “correction, reproof that giveth life.”¹⁷ Similar to *yasar*, this term ties the correction of discipline with instruction. However, *towkechah* also points to the hope of discipline. More than merely correcting God’s people, divine discipline produces life for those trained by it. This discipline gives life because it results in sharing God’s holiness. Rather than remaining in sin, *towkechah* describes discipline that brings believers out of death and into the life of God’s holiness. Solomon points to God’s life-giving discipline in Proverbs 6:23 declaring, “For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; and reproofs [*towkhowt*] for discipline [*musar*] are the way of life” (see also Prov 10:17; 12:1; 15:5). Divine discipline teaches, corrects, and enlivens God’s people to share in God’s holiness.

The Old Testament wholistically describes a holy God who is self-motivated to produce holiness in his people. Because sin persists, God often produces holiness through discipline. Though suffering and pain often accompany divine discipline, God’s process of discipline always disseminates hope.¹⁸ This life-giving discipline of the Lord chastises, instructs, and corrects. As the *pater familias*, God keeps his covenant promises. As members of God’s covenant, God’s people are called to embrace God’s holiness rather than reject divine discipline. Though painful, the discipline of the Lord continually returned an aberrant Israel to holiness. Though afflicted, the psalmist bore witness that divine discipline was good by helping him keep God’s Word (Ps 119:67, 71). Scripture uniformly calls all of God’s people to trust in the Lord who disciplines for the good purpose of producing holiness.

¹⁷ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 407.

¹⁸ Though suffering is not always caused from discipline, D. A. Carson sees God’s disciplinary hand throughout many of the biblical examples of suffering. “Scanning the narratives of Scripture enlightens us: God’s discipline may include war, plague, illness, rebuke, ill-defined and rather personal ‘thorns’, bereavement, loss of status, personal opposition, and much else beside.” D. A. Carson, *How Long O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 65.

Divine Discipline in the New Testament

The New Testament concept of divine discipline concentrates on God's production of holiness within his people. Because fallen man is morally impure, God's redemptive discipline produces holiness in believers. The New Testament calls Christians to progressively conform to Christ's image as the perfection of God's holiness (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; Phil 3:21). In order to conform to Christ's image, sinful proclivities must be removed and replaced with the mind of Christ. God accomplishes this work often by discipline in trials. The normative progression of holiness in the New Testament comes through God-ordained adversity. When a Christian is morally derelict, biblically apathetic, or spiritually lethargic, divine prodding is necessary. God's discipline leads to progressive holiness.

The most significant New Testament passage on divine discipline and progressive holiness is Hebrews 12:4-14. Drawing from two previously discussed Old Testament passages (Job 5:17 and Prov 3:11-12), the author of Hebrews describes God's discipline through the lens of the New Covenant. Rather than doubting God's disciplinary work, Hebrews 12 warns against developing identity amnesia amid trials. Hardships are to be expected in the Christian life as God kindly makes his people holy. David Allen understands Hebrews 12 as "cogently [showing] just how it is that his readers can and should reinterpret suffering and adversity as God's education of their lives, training them for righteous living. The key Old Testament text which the author uses in this section is Proverbs 3:11-12. Discipline in the life of every Christian is comforting evidence that one is in the family of God."¹⁹ While the Old Testament provided the building blocks for understanding the nature of God's discipline, Hebrews 12 explicitly gives God's purpose in discipline—to share in his holiness.

The author of Hebrews compares the discipline of God to an earthly father's

¹⁹ David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, New American Commentary, v. 35 (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 578.

discipline as evidence of legitimate sonship. Though earthly discipline is characterized as a father's best effort, Hebrews 12:10 describes the heavenly Father's discipline as the perfect means of producing holiness. "But He [God] disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness." The primary New Testament word for discipline is *paideuō*, used in Hebrews 12:6, 7, and 10. This word primarily describes "those who are moulding the character of others by reproof and admonition."²⁰ The focus of divine discipline is the result in the one receiving it. Discipline is to make the believer holy. The main function of discipline is to spiritually grow believers in righteousness.²¹

Hebrews 12:9-10 points to earthly fathers as an example of life and holiness as the intended outcomes of discipline. Since an earthly father's discipline demands earthly respect, those who are disciplined from the eternal Father find eternal life. Whereas life comes from God's holiness, death comes from rejecting God's discipline (Prov 10:17; 15:10). God leads his people to life through discipline that produces holy living. Bridges affirms this, saying, "God never saves people and leaves them alone to continue in their immaturity and sinful lifestyle. Those whom He saves, He disciplines."²² The New Testament describes holy obedience as submission to the holy Father, which leads to true life.²³

The second outcome of divine discipline in Hebrews 12:10 is holiness itself.

²⁰ Frederick William Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Chicago Press, 2000), 749. Other examples include Luke 23:16; 23:22; Acts 7:22; 22:3; 1 Cor 11:32; 2 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:20; 2 Tim 2:25; Titus 2:12; Heb 12:6-7; 12:10; Rev 3:19.

²¹ 2 Tim 2:25, in speaking to the work of God's servants, "with gentleness, correcting [*paideuo*] those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth." Discipline is intended to produce repentance and understanding in truth.

²² Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace*, 74.

²³ Those who live according to God's commands are blessed, while those who disregard God's commands are cursed. John MacArthur describes this distinction: "A Christian who continually rejects God's discipline, who refuses to profit from divine correction, can lose his life because of his stubbornness...No one lives so well as the believer who loves God's law and will, who receives everything from his Father's hand willingly and joyously." John F. MacArthur, *Hebrews*, in *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1983), 397.

God not only produces life through discipline, but also produces spiritual children who live holy lives. The Greek word for holiness, *hagiotēs*, indicates the goal of God’s redemptive work—sharing in God’s nature rather than merely modifying behavior. Holiness does not just produce morality; it changes the Christian’s essence and state of being by re-creating the Christian into Christ’s perfect image.²⁴ Like any wholistic transformation, this change to a Christian’s essence necessarily includes pain and sorrow. Holiness produced by discipline is never intended to be pleasant (12:11), but it is meant to be for the Christian’s good. Though divine discipline is painful, neglecting or rejecting the sanctifying work of divine discipline is spiritually fatal. God calls his people to learn from discipline, rather than despise it. Receiving painful discipline from the Lord leads to life, while rejecting discipline leads to death. The Christian must view the goodness of God’s discipline as God’s gift. As Paul Tripp encourages, “We forget that God’s primary goal is not changing our situations or relationships so that we can be happy, but changing us through our situations and relationships so that we will be holy.”²⁵ Though happiness and holiness are not mutually exclusive, holiness often does not initially produce happiness. The temporal nature of discipline normally is not pleasant. However, sharing in God’s holiness does lead to an inexpressible joy from the Father. Joy through discipline does not remove the despondency of discipline, but it does give meaning and purpose to the pain. Divine discipline aims to change the very nature of God’s people to an eternal and holy form of happiness.

The importance of divine transformative discipline is difficult to overstate because it leads to sharing in God’s holiness. When Christians share in the holiness of God, the desire for sin progressively diminishes while affections for the Lord

²⁴ Danker and Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 11.

²⁵ Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 241.

dramatically increase. Discipline progressively weans Christians away from worldliness towards righteousness. Sharing in God’s holiness thus practically results in conforming to the image of Christ, which is the ultimate point of holiness. Tying God’s sanctifying work with conformity to Christ’s image, Bridges explains, “Sanctification or holiness (the words are somewhat interchangeable), then, is conformity to the likeness of Jesus Christ.”²⁶ J. I. Packer points to divine discipline as the ultimate means of sharing in God’s holiness:

The Christian up to his eyes in trouble can take comfort from the knowledge that in God’s kindly plan it all has a positive purpose, to further his sanctification. In this world, royal children have to undergo extra training and discipline which other children escape, in order to fit them for their high destiny. It is the same with the children of the King of kings. The clue to understand all his dealings with them is to remember that throughout their lives he is training them for what awaits them, and chiseling them into the image of Christ. Sometimes the chiseling process is painful and the discipline irksome; but then the Scripture reminds us: “The Lord disciplines *those he loves*, and he punishes *everyone he accepts as a son*. *Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons.*”²⁷

Thus, Scripture points to divine discipline as the regular rhythm of the Christian life. Both the Old and New Testament understand God’s discipline as producing holiness within the believer, whether through punishment or instruction. Rather than condemning Christians, divine discipline is the lifelong process of non-retributive punishment for either specific sins done wrong or deepening spiritual growth. The punishment of God’s discipline upon the believer is always corrective.²⁸

Paul demonstrates this reality in 1 Corinthians 11:32 when warning the Corinthian church to carefully take the Lord’s Supper. Understanding the gravity of the

²⁶ Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace*, 92. Bridges later connects understanding God’s holy character with conformity to Christ: “How can we know whether we are being transformed more and more into the likeness of Christ? We begin by studying His character.” 93.

²⁷ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 222.

²⁸ MacArthur argues God punishes believers through corrective discipline when offenses have been committed. Thus, MacArthur understands sin and discipline as the ultimate good for the Christian. After considering God’s response of corrective discipline to David’s sin of adultery and murder ultimately leading to repentance and restoration (Ps 51), MacArthur concludes, “Yet David was a better man because of God’s discipline. God had a purpose in the discipline—to draw His servant closer to Himself, to convince him not to sin again, and to help him grow and mature.” MacArthur, *Hebrews*, 386.

Lord's Supper, Paul admonishes the church, saying, "when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world." Paul warns of God's correction through punishment. Charles Hodge describes the discipline of punishment as a means of grace:

These judgments were chastisements designed for the benefit of those who suffered, to bring them to repentance that they might not be finally condemned with the world; that is, with unbelievers. The world often means mankind as distinguished from the church, or those chosen out of the world. "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world," John 17, 16. What Paul says of the design of these judgments, proves that even the extreme irreverence with which he charges the Corinthians in reference to the Lord's supper, was not an unpardonable sin.²⁹

Everything in the Christian life, including and especially divine discipline, is to produce holiness by conformity to Christ. Whether through instruction or corrective punishment, divine discipline produces holiness as a father disciplines his child. Through the process of divine discipline, God ensures both life and holiness for his people.

Motive of God's Discipline—Love

While the purpose of divine discipline is to produce holiness, the primary method of accomplishing holiness is the love of God. To the Christian, love shapes every expression of God's will and purpose. Packer argues this, saying, "Every single thing that happens to us expresses God's love to us, and comes to us for the furthering of God's purpose for us."³⁰ Everything emanating from God towards the believer is an expression of his love and goodness. Whatever God uses to produce holiness in divine discipline is ultimately motivated by his love.

To produce holiness in believers, the love of God is displayed through discipline in multiple ways. Discipline lovingly restricts and restrains believers from sin. God lovingly produces holiness through discipline by dissuading believers from

²⁹ Charles Hodge, *1&2 Corinthians: A Commentary on 1&2 Corinthians*, Geneva Series of Commentaries (1857; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 234.

³⁰ Packer, *Knowing God*, 122.

detrimental sin and demonstrating Christ's sufficiency. Rather than permitting his children to pursue the frivolities of the world, God lovingly disciplines so that his people will be satisfied through his Son. Divine discipline also lovingly legitimizes believers as God's children. The presence of God's discipline proves the paternal love of the Father. Since, as Packer says, "God's love is holy love,"³¹ holiness through discipline is a demonstration of divine love. Instead of God's wrath and judgment, divine discipline is God's goodness expressed to his people. God only seeks to spiritually restore those who have been saved by grace, whereas unbelievers never receive the restorative discipline of a good heavenly father. The pain of discipline precipitates from a heavenly Father who lovingly produces the ultimate good of holiness. George Whitefield connected divine love with pain, saying, "O if you are Christians, if the Lord loves you, He will put a thorn in your flesh."³² Thus, the loving Father uses the means of discipline for his people to share in his holiness.

Love That Restrains from Sin

God produces holiness by lovingly restricting and restraining his people from sin. Though God demonstrates love to humanity through a general restraint from egregious wickedness, the Father uniquely restrains his children from sin. Genuine love prohibits sin rather than permits it. God's disciplinary love constrains the believer from permitting sin. Arthur Pink argues that God sometimes uses discipline to restrain believers rather than respond to sin, saying, "Chastisement has for one of its main objects the breaking down of self-sufficiency, the bringing us to the end of our selves...let us not conclude when we see a fellow-Christian under the rod of God that he is necessarily

³¹ Packer, *Knowing God*, 122.

³² George Whitefield, "Repentance and Conversion: Sermon from Acts 3:19," Jawbone Digital Classic Christian Ebooks, last modified February 1, 2017, <https://jawbonedigital.com/repentance-conversion-george-whitefield/>.

being taken to task for his sins.”³³ By lovingly restraining his people, God produces holiness through both prevention and correction.

God’s loving prevention from sin began by first sending Jesus as an atoning sacrifice. John would joyfully proclaim in 1 John 4:10, “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins,” (see also Rom 5:8). Christ’s sacrificial death perfectly expressed the divine love that makes God’s people holy. Understanding Christ’s sacrifice inevitably motivates Christians to please Christ rather than pursue sin. Jesus’s loving gift of atonement becomes the primary impetus for believers to reject sin. The gift of Christ causes believers to live holy. Grudem describes this love of God, saying, “God eternally [giving] of himself to others...as self-giving for the benefit of others.”³⁴

Thus, Christ’s loving sacrifice initiates the believer’s holiness. The Father’s love deters from sin as an earthly father’s love deters a child during temptation. After eloquently describing God’s love, Paul pointedly asks the question in Romans 6:2, “How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” Paul presumes the Father’s love restrains from sin and restores his children to righteousness. Speaking of this sacrificial love, Paul would again claim in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”³⁵ Christ’s sacrificial love restrains from sin’s enslavement and cultivates holiness in God’s people.

According to 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, the Father’s love also constrains his people. Instead of an indifferent obligation, Christ’s love compels those who love Christ

³³ A.W. Pink, *Comfort for Christians* (Pensacola, FL: Chapel Library, 1952), 41.

³⁴ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 199.

³⁵ This text clearly articulates Christ’s loving sacrifice and its full accomplishments. As a direct result of Christ’s sacrifice, Paul’s life was constrained to Christ’s will. Paul lived for his Savior’s will rather than for his own. Therefore, Christ’s sacrificial love demonstrated through discipline restrains and restores the believer’s entire life.

to holistically submit to Christ. David Garland understands submission to Christ as evidence of God's love, saying, "The love of Christ keeps Paul from living for himself and instead causes him to pour out his life for others."³⁶ Though painful, divine love leads to holiness in part by preventing self-centered living. Because the love of Christ controls believers, sinful pursuits continually decrease. The love of Christ effectually draws God's people to a holy Savior.

Yet, while God's love restrains sin, it does not fully remove sin. When sin is inevitably present in the believer's life, God graciously ameliorates through corrective love. Corrective love disciplines the wayward Christian by reorienting the wayward heart to Christ. When the Christian engages in continual sin, God's loving discipline corrects and restores. Rather than punitive punishment, God expresses his love by restoring his wayward people in purity and righteousness. Though often painful, corrective discipline differs from punishment by lovingly restoring the believer to righteousness.

Differentiating between discipline and punishment, Pink argues,

Oftentimes God's chastenings instead of being retributive are corrective. They are sent to empty us of self-sufficiency and self-righteousness: they are given to discover to us hidden transgressions, and to teach us the plague of our own hearts. Or again, chastisements are sent to strengthen our faith, to raise us to higher levels of experience, to bring us into a condition of usefulness. Still again, Divine chastisement is sent as a preventative, to keep under pride, to save us from being unduly elated over success in God's service.³⁷

This depiction of loving correction is replete throughout Scripture. Psalm 89 describes God's discipline as an expression of his love in response to human sin.

Speaking of God's covenant relationship with King David, God establishes his covenant in familial terms. God is the "father" through whom the covenant has been made.³⁸ Yet

³⁶ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, New American Commentary, v. 29 (Nashville: B&H, 1999), 278.

³⁷ Pink, *Comfort for Christians*, 40.

³⁸ Ps 89:19-37. God claims his lovingkindness is upon David in verse 24, closely followed by David's exclamation "He will cry to Me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation'" (Ps 89:24).

God warns that sin among David’s progeny will lead to corrective discipline. Using the Hebrew word for rod, *shebet*, the psalmist warns of God’s disciplinary instrument (Ps 89:32). God consistently expresses his love in the language of a disciplinary rod for the purpose of instruction, training, and correcting in righteousness. The goal of the Father’s corrective discipline is always holiness, while the method is always his abiding love. In disciplining through the rod of correction, God’s covenant relationship necessitates an ever-present love. Describing God’s corrective rod as an expression of divine love, Packer explains, “This kindly discipline, in which God’s severity touches us for a moment in the context of his goodness, is meant to keep us from having to bear the full brunt of that severity apart from that context. It is a discipline of love, and it must be received accordingly.”³⁹

Similarly, the New Testament describes corrective discipline as both painful and loving.⁴⁰ The author of Hebrews acknowledges the pain of discipline while also showing its benefit in Hebrews 12:11, saying, “All discipline [*paideia*] for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.” As the Christian experiences corrective discipline, he progressively understands the sovereign hand of divine love. Differentiating between momentary emotions and enduring divine love, C. S. Lewis writes, “Though our feelings come and go, God’s love for us does not.”⁴¹ As the sovereign over all creation, God always provides for his people’s greatest needs—becoming more like Christ (Rom 8:29). Thus, everything in the Christian life leads to the ultimate good of growth in holiness. John Calvin understands discipline as an expression of God’s love, saying, “The kindness of God ought to have led us to consider and love his

³⁹ Packer, *Knowing God*, 166.

⁴⁰ See above notes on Heb 12:4-11.

⁴¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 1980), 133.

goodness, but since we are so ungrateful that we are rather constantly spoiled by his indulgence, it is very necessary for us to be restrained by some discipline from breaking out into willfulness.”⁴² Divine discipline lovingly corrects wayward Christians by restoring them to righteousness.

Thus, corrective discipline should be seen in the light of God’s mercy and kindness. In love, God spares his people from eternal condemnation through momentary correction. Viewing the mercy of divine discipline, Calvin again describes, “For he does not afflict to destroy or ruin us, but rather to deliver us from the condemnation of the world.”⁴³ God’s love removes present sin to spare us from future punishment.

Finally, God’s model for producing holiness forms the standard for Christian interactions with one another. God calls his people to be agents of loving discipline by restoring wayward believers. In Galatians 6:1, Paul calls believers to restore one another to holiness through “a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.” Divine discipline serves as both the model and the method to humbly correct and restore wayward believers to holiness. God lovingly disciplines his people through whatever means necessary to restore wayward Christians to himself.⁴⁴

Love That Teaches Christ’s Sufficiency

Though God at times restrains his people from sin, God also produces holiness by teaching his children of their complete need for Christ. Because the natural man instinctively looks within rather than without, God’s love draws believers to cling to Christ (1 Cor 2:14). Discipline is one of God’s primary tools to demonstrate the value of Christ and the emptiness of the world.

⁴² John Calvin, *Golden Booklet of the True Christian Life* (1550; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 1995), 53.

⁴³ Calvin, *Golden Booklet of the True Christian Life*, 54.

⁴⁴ For further explanation on the process of restoration specifically from Gal 6:1, see below.

Scripture combines the elements of God’s loving discipline and repentance in Revelation 3:19. Speaking to the church in Laodicea, Jesus warns against lukewarm obedience. Throughout Jesus’s words of warning, Jesus presents himself as the church’s greatest need (Rev 3:18, 20-21). Rather than trusting in human provision (riches and wealth, 3:17), Jesus calls his people to cling to him as the highest treasure. After exposing the Laodicean spiritual poverty, Jesus lovingly rebukes and calls for repentance. “Those whom I love, I reprove [*elegchō*] and discipline [*paideuō*]; therefore be zealous and repent.” While both *elegchō* and *paideuō* share a component of discipline, the former indicates a response to wrongdoing.⁴⁵ Thus, Jesus’s warning to the Laodicean church further proves God lovingly uses all means necessary to restore his people in righteousness. The pain and chastening of God’s discipline does not negate his love, but rather proves it. An indifferent God would permit people to continue in their self-determined path toward condemnation. However, a loving God points to Jesus, the only one sufficient to produce righteousness in his people.⁴⁶

As evidenced to the Laodicean church, understanding Christ’s sufficiency begins with pursuing repentance. The mark of successful discipline is changing from sinful behavior to living a holy life in accordance with Scripture. Discipline accomplishes its goal when God’s people repent and turn to Christ. A heart characterized by inordinate desires requires God’s loving hand of discipline. A zealous God produces righteousness by turning his people to his Son. Though Jesus spoke eschatologically to a specific church in Revelation 3:22, the same application applies generally to any “who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” God’s love always points his children

⁴⁵ Danker and Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 315.

⁴⁶ It should be noted that the preceding teaching before church discipline in Matt 18 is the parable of the shepherd leaving ninety-nine sheep and restoring the one who went astray. Jesus applies the parable, saying, “So it is not the *will of your Father who is in heaven* that one of these little ones perish” (Matt 18:14; emphasis added). Jesus describes the will of the loving Father as pursuing and restoring his wayward people. Jesus then applies the Father’s practical means of accomplishing this restoration through the church in verses 15-18 (discussed in depth below).

to rely solely on Christ. Trusting in the sufficiency of Christ bears evidence of God's love to the believer. When Christians waiver to fully rely upon Christ, divine discipline lovingly restores Christians to their first love.

God's lovingkindness always returns his children to his Son. Out of an abundance of loving-kindness, God conforms his people to the pure image of his Son through any means necessary, including and especially discipline.⁴⁷ As God draws his people closer to the image of Christ, he progressively pulls them away from the sinful desires of the flesh. Divine discipline demonstrates God's love by producing zealous repentance that shares in Christ's holiness.

Love That Legitimizes Sonship

God produces holiness through lovingly legitimizing believers as genuine children. Sonship is proven through loving discipline. As previously mentioned, Hebrews 12:8 explicitly cites divine discipline as evidence of sonship. The writer of Hebrews argues children are disciplined by their fathers, meaning discipline requires a predetermined familial relationship. Only relationally invested fathers labor in the arduous task of discipline. Thus, God displays disciplinary love by affirming sonship in his family.

Yet God's purpose in legitimizing sonship reaches even further. Sonship principally affirms salvation. There are grounds for legitimate concern if God's loving discipline is conspicuously absent from a professing believer's life. Calvin characterizes God's salvific affirmation in discipline, saying, "God would let us perish if he would not call us back to him by his corrections when we have failed, as the Apostle pointedly remarks, 'If ye be without chastisement then are ye bastards, and not sons [Heb 12:8].'"⁴⁸

⁴⁷ See Rom 8:28-29. Conformity to Christ's holy image is an act of God's lovingkindness. God lovingly disciplines his people to look and live more like Christ, which in turn produces holiness.

⁴⁸ Calvin, *Golden Booklet of the True Christian Life*, 55.

Because salvation is the beginning of the spiritual journey instead of the end, God's discipline continues from justification to glorification. The earthly pilgrimage for God's children is a progressive spiritual growth unnatural to the flesh. While justification initially proves sonship, often the clearest indicator of true conversion is the sanctifying mark of God's discipline. Just as Paul urges the church in Corinth to judge only those within the church, so too does divine discipline only exhort those within the family of God.⁴⁹ The mark of discipline is God's loving stamp of sonship.

The author of Hebrews makes clear that suffering caused by divine discipline is a grace. The suffering of divine discipline is purposeful and beneficial to the believer. Hebrews 12:11 teaches that the result of divine discipline ("peaceful fruit of righteousness") supersedes the oft-painful process of attaining it. God demonstrates his grace of divine discipline by affirming sonship and producing righteousness. Pink describes both the pain and blessing of divine discipline:

When the believer is smarting under the rod let him not say, God is now punishing me for my sins. That can never be. That is most dishonoring to the blood of Christ. God is correcting thee in love, not smiting in wrath. Nor should the Christian regard the chastening of the Lord as a sort of necessary evil to which he must bow as submissively as possible. No, it proceeds from God's goodness and faithfulness, and is one of the greatest blessings for which we have to thank Him. Chastisement evidences our Divine son-ship: the father of a family does not concern himself with those on the outside: but those within he guides and disciplines to make them conform to his will. Chastisement is designed for our good, to promote our highest interests. Look beyond the rod to the All-wise hand that wields it!⁵⁰

God also promises through covenantal language the assurance of sonship in discipline. When making a covenant with David, God demonstrates the nature of his love through paternal language, promising, "I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from

⁴⁹ I will address 1 Cor 5:12 in further detail below in the context of church discipline.

⁵⁰ Pink, *Comfort for Christians*, 38.

Saul, whom I removed from before you.”⁵¹ God’s paternal love leads to discipline and correction of his sons. Therefore, God’s love provides assurance of salvation to his people through paternal discipline.

Affirmation of sonship invariably leads to kingdom preparedness. Holiness through discipline prepares God’s children for genuine kingdom work. Without receiving discipline, A. W. Tozer doubts the usefulness of a man, saying, “It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until He has hurt him deeply.”⁵² Knowing the value of learning God’s law, the psalmist connects God’s discipline with spiritual growth. In the context of persecution, the psalmist claims discipline prepares believers for life’s trials (Ps 94:12-13). God blesses through discipline by making his children more valuable to the kingdom. James Stoney illustrates this truth in the life of Paul by explaining:

Surely he justified God for all the discipline to which he had been subjected in order to make him a vessel fit to impart the greatest communication ever made to a man. We little understand all the pains, as I might say, which the Lord takes with us to render us in any measure suited for His Work. He only knows what is fitting, and that this fitness could not be procured by any other means but by the discipline which He who knows behind and before administers.⁵³

Thus, the presence of God’s discipline makes believers more effective sons. God not only produces holiness in his people through his love, but also provides assurance of salvation through discipline. As a result, divine discipline is not to be despised but rather received as a gift from a loving Father.

In conclusion, God’s discipline is always driven by his holiness as fatherly love to his children. God’s purposes in divine discipline serve as the *modus operandi* for

⁵¹ 2 Sam 7:14-15. God significantly affirms three related details to his paternal relationship with his children: (1) certainty of sin that requires correction in his people (even in David’s future son, Solomon, the wisest man to ever live); (2) the use of various means to discipline his people (“the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men”); and (3) the continued presence of God’s love even during divine discipline.

⁵² A. W. Tozer, *The Root of the Righteous* (Chicago: Moody, 2015), 165.

⁵³ James Butler Stoney, *Discipline in the School of God: Its Nature and Effect* (London: G. Morrish, n.d.), 84.

the practical expression of sharing in God's holiness. In the church specifically, divine discipline is often practically displayed through the loving work of biblical church discipline. Church discipline follows the example of divine discipline in pursuing purity and holiness in the people of God. The primary method to accomplish these goals are loving correction and restoration. The ecclesiastical goal of church discipline is to lovingly help one another share in Christ's holiness (1 Cor 16:14). By rightly understanding God's holy nature, the church can practically emulate divine discipline. The better the church understands God's character, the better the church will apply divine discipline through the practical process of church discipline.

God's Discipline Reflected in Church Discipline

Having considered God's attribute of holiness expressed through loving discipline, we must further consider its practical application in church discipline. While the Old Testament describes God's discipline through the lives of various Israelites, the New Testament explicitly commands faithful application and implementation of church discipline. Church discipline is meant to tangibly lead God's people in holiness and restored righteousness.

The implementation of church discipline begins by clearly affirming Christ as the head of his bride, the church. The process of church discipline is the bride's act of submission to her bridegroom to preserve purity in holiness. Church discipline is the means of restoring Christ's wayward bride. Rather than allowing sin in God's family, the church must commit to rooting out all sin. Church discipline thus serves as an accurate metric of the church's willingness to submit to the Lordship of Christ. When biblically applied, church discipline strengthens the bride of Christ through obedience to Christ.

Biblical Process of Church Discipline

The first detailed description of church discipline appears in Matthew 18. The context preceding Jesus's instruction elucidates the importance of sustained purity among

Christ's followers. Following an ill-advised question regarding human greatness, Jesus warns against becoming a stumbling block to others (Matt 18:6-11). Warning of everlasting punishment, in verses 8-9 Jesus metaphorically calls his followers to put away sin by whatever means necessary. After warning of sin's consequences, Jesus gives a short parable of a shepherd's commitment to find and reclaim lost sheep. Jesus purposely links the parable to his heavenly Father in Matthew 18:14, saying, "So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish." Seeing himself as the shepherd who fulfills the Father's desires, Jesus reinforces the importance of restoring wayward Christians.

The context of Matthew 18 builds a theological framework around church discipline, warning of sin's damning consequences and the Father's desire to reclaim straying children. The gravity of sin requires a loving Father to reclaim his own. Thus, in verses 15-18 Jesus gives practical instruction for divine discipline to be practically applied through church discipline.

Jesus describes a three-step process to restore a wayward brother through repentance. When a believer sins, Jesus instructs the one aware of the sin to initiate the process of discipline [*elegchō*] through private confrontation.⁵⁴ If the offender remains recalcitrant, the confronting believer is to return with multiple witnesses to increase the pressure to repent. If the person continues to persist in sin, Jesus commands the last resort of bringing the sinner before the church. Those still refusing to publicly repent are to be declared and released as an unbeliever by the church. The process of church discipline is meant to increase pressure for the sake of the offending sinner. As the pressure increases, so too does the realization and weight of sin's significance. Church discipline is intended

⁵⁴ The Greek word, *elegchō*, used in Matt 18:15 for discipline is also used in Rev 3:19 (see above) and 1 Tim 5:20 (see below) to describe exposing sin. In all three contexts (Christian, elder, and church), the responsibility for biblical faithfulness increases, and thus, so too does shame when egregious sin becomes public.

to increasingly expose the sinner's true heart condition. As an act of love to the sinner, church discipline demonstrates the significance of sin while proving God's desire to restore his people. A few points in particular stand out in Jesus's process of church discipline from Matthew 18.

First, church discipline intentionally gives multiple opportunities for repentance and restoration. After each subsequent confrontation, Jesus allows opportunity for the offending sinner to turn from sin. Church discipline is not meant to police one another's morality, but to bring sinners closer to the Lord. Just as God's discipline brings repentance and restoration, so too does church discipline seek restoration. Whether publicly or privately, the process of church discipline implores the sinner to repentance.

Second, though church discipline is codified in the New Testament, its instructions are rooted in Old Testament law. The first steps of private confrontation progress to include multiple witnesses, which is an Old Testament principle. When commanding the church to first privately discipline a brother in sin, Jesus undoubtedly recalled Leviticus 19:17-18. Not only does Leviticus 19:17 call the Israelites to confront (reprove) a sinning neighbor without hatred in the heart, but also calls Israel in verse 18 to "love your neighbor as yourself." Therefore, Jesus's contemporaries would have understood private confrontation of one's neighbor as an expression of faithful love.

Third, in the second stage of church discipline that calls for multiple witnesses, Jesus further draws from the Old Testament by referring to Deuteronomy 17:6 and 19:15. In both passages, guilt cannot be proven by Law unless multiple testimonies bear witness to the alleged offence. For the accused to receive corporal punishment, the Law required multiple trustworthy accounts (see also Num 35:30). This standard is repeated in the New Testament practice of church discipline by requiring testimony from multiple witnesses

before executing judgment.⁵⁵ Similar to Jesus's requirement of confirmation from multiple witnesses in the second stage of discipline, Paul also applies the principle of multiple witnesses when bringing an accusation against church elders. Due to the spiritual responsibility of eldership, in 1 Timothy 5:19-20 Paul warns that only charges confirmed by multiple witnesses should be received. Those who continue in sin are to be rebuked [*elenche*] to prohibit others from following in sin. By requiring multiple witnesses, the process of church discipline better protects against both hasty reprimands and false accusations. Jesus and the rest of the New Testament authors understood the principle of multiple witnesses as protection for both the accuser and the accused.

Finally, Jesus places the power of excommunication in the hands of the church. While not every sin or theological difference warrants excommunication, Jesus clearly indicates that the church has the obligation of excommunication. The church has the power to bind recalcitrant sinners in the bride of Christ.⁵⁶ John Owen describes the power of excommunication, indicating, "An act of authority...But no authority can be exercised in the church towards any person whatever but by virtue of the institution of Christ."⁵⁷

⁵⁵ In John 8:17, Jesus cites the command for multiple witnesses as evidence of his divinity; in 2 Cor 13:1, Paul cites the same against his detractors in defending his apostleship; and in Heb 10:28, the author cites the same as warning against rejecting the multiple witnesses of Jesus as Savior.

⁵⁶ Grudem describes Jesus's teaching on "binding and loosing" as possessing a "heavenly sanction. But it is not as if the church must wait for God to endorse its actions after the actions have occurred. Rather, whenever the church *enacts discipline* it can be confident that God has already begun the process spiritually. Whenever it *releases from discipline*, forgives the sinner, and restores personal relationships, the church can be confident that God has already begun the restoration spiritually (*cf.* John 20:23). In this way, Jesus promises that the spiritual relationship between God and the person subject to discipline will be immediately affected in ways consistent with the direction of the church's disciplinary action. Legitimate church discipline, therefore, involves the awesome certainty that corresponding heavenly discipline has already begun." Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 891-892. In following biblical commands for church discipline, the church has confidence the Lord has already gone before it. Martin Luther similarly understands church discipline as following action already taken by God, saying, "But he speaks in this fashion, if you bind and loose on earth, I will also bind and loose right along with you in heaven. When you use the keys, I will also...it shall be one single action, mine and yours, not a twofold one. It shall be one and the same key, mine and yours, not a twofold one. While you do your work, mine is already done. When you bind and loose, I have already bound and loosed. He binds and joins himself to our work." Martin Luther, "The Keys," in *Luther's Works*, Church and Ministry II, vol. 30, ed. Conrad Bergendoff (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1958), 365, quoted in Bargerhuff, *Love That Rescues*, 158.

⁵⁷ John Owen, "Of Excommunication" in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 16, ed. William H. Gould (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1853), 159.

When the church gathers for excommunication, Jesus promises to be present in their midst (Matt 18:19-20; 1 Cor 15:4). Through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, the church is tasked to bind sinners in the world or to loose the repentant to heaven. The power of excommunicating the recalcitrant offender is thus through the power and presence of Christ in the church. Forgiving and restoring those who repent or excommunicating those who do not requires the wisdom and discernment of Christ. Jesus describes the final step of church discipline as excommunicating the *persona non grata* until he is restored through repentance.⁵⁸

Jesus's process for church discipline is practically demonstrated through the example of the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 5. Writing to the church in Corinth, Paul calls for church discipline to be enforced upon a man who is actively engaging in grotesque sexual immorality. Due to persistent unrepentance and the public nature of the sin, Paul skips the initial steps of church discipline and calls for the final stage of excommunication.⁵⁹ Paul solemnly declares in 1 Corinthians 5:5, "I have decided to deliver over such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." In keeping with Matthew 18, Paul affirms that church discipline is only for those in the church. Rather than judging unbelievers, the church is tasked with purifying its members through church discipline (1 Cor 5:12).

While the initial stages of confrontation are demonstrated in 1 Corinthians 5, 2

⁵⁸ The New Testament is replete with commands not to associate or fellowship with unbelievers so as not to tacitly affirm sin. Rather than restricting friendship with unbelievers, these commands constrain Christians from sharing a covenant relationship, such as the Lord's Supper and baptism. See 1 Cor 5:11; 2 Thess 3:6; 14-15; and 2 John 10-11.

⁵⁹ Due to the public nature of the sin in 1 Corinthians 5, Paul moves to excommunication without applying private confrontation and rebuke. Public sin must be addressed publicly. The circle of rebuke should be as wide as those aware and directly affected by the sin. Jonathan Leeman furthers this progression, saying, "Paul's assumptions about the man *begin* just short of where Jesus's process *ends*. Paul begins with the assumption of an unyielding unrepentance. Jesus's process exists for the purpose of determining whether or not a person is unyieldingly unrepentant—for determining what Paul takes as a given." Jonathan Leeman, *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 60.

Corinthians 2 illustrates the final stage of restoration in the church discipline process.⁶⁰ As a result of excommunicating an offending sinner, Paul calls the Corinthian church to restore a sorrowful and repentant brother. In 2 Corinthians 2:6-11 Paul enjoins the church to forgive, comfort, and reaffirm love for the restored brother. Through both Christ's description of church discipline in Matthew 18 and the practical examples of the various church discipline stages in 1 and 2 Corinthians, Scripture provides sufficient instruction for the church to faithfully administer church discipline.

Purpose of Church Discipline—Holiness

The purpose of church discipline is to practically enforce divine discipline, which inevitably produces the same results. Just as God's discipline provokes responses, so too does church discipline. As a practical instrument of divine discipline, church discipline must always seek first God's purposes. Rather than an instrument for implementing manmade preferences, the purpose of church discipline parallels God's purposes in discipline. As God uses discipline to instruct his children, so too does church discipline positively instruct the entire church. Jay Adams describes God's blessing of church discipline, saying, "Thus, discipline is not, as many have thought, simply the negative task of reading troublemakers out of the church. Rather, first above all, it is God's provision for good order in His church that creates conditions for the instruction and growth of the members. Discipline has a positive function."⁶¹ Those applying divine discipline must always be mindful of God's purposes.

In keeping with God's purposes in divine discipline, church discipline pursues purity and holiness within the bride of Christ. Richard Baxter understood church

⁶⁰ The author of this thesis is uncertain of the precise connection between 1 Cor 5 and 2 Cor 2. While past theologians (e.g., John Calvin, Theodore Beza, Charles Hodge) argue for one combined process of church discipline, modern theologians (e.g., Mark Seifrid, Murray Harris, George Guthrie) argue for two distinct cases of church discipline. For the purposes of this thesis, it is sufficient to note that Paul is practically referencing the various stages of church discipline, whether from the same case or not.

⁶¹ Jay E. Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 17.

discipline as the primary means for maintaining the church's holiness, saying, "The usefulness of discipline is apparent, in the shaming of sin and humbling the sinner, and in manifesting the holiness of Christ, and of his doctrine and Church, before all the world."⁶² Paul's initial confrontation with the Corinthian church powerfully illustrates sin's contamination. Using leaven as an example in 1 Corinthians 5:6-7, Paul argues for the church to remove all sin within the bride of Christ.⁶³ Christ's honor is cast in doubt if his bride publicly shames him by her sin. To maintain purity within the church, Paul commands the church to remove the offender from their midst. Understanding the significance of rooting out sin, Adams writes, "The leaven was to be cleaned out; the undisciplined offender was to be put out of the church for his refusal to repent of his sin lest his influence for evil permeate the whole."⁶⁴ Permitting sin inevitably leads to pervasive sin arising in the church.⁶⁵ Refusal to address sins and remove recalcitrant members threaten the holiness and purity of the church.

The New Testament warns of the danger in allowing sin to remain unchallenged in the church. Church discipline warns the entire church of sin's destructiveness. As previously mentioned from 1 Timothy 5:19-20, the primary purpose in publicly rebuking a sinning elder is to dissuade others from following into sinning. Paul makes careful mention for the offending elder to be reproved before the church, for

⁶² Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Independent, 2018), 82.

⁶³ 1 Cor 5:6-7: "Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed." Paul's usage of "leaven" ties the Old Testament's literal usage of fermented dough with the New Testament metaphor where "implied applications are to corrupt practice and corrupt doctrine respectively." W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White Jr., "Leaven," in *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 363.

⁶⁴ Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, 18.

⁶⁵ Describing the importance of Godly examples, John Calvin writes, "For (such is our tendency to wander from the way) there is nothing easier than for us to be led away by bad examples from right living." John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol 2, ed. John T. McNeill (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 1233.

as Stoney explains, “When we err, there is need of discipline to correct the flesh; but if public, the chastening must be public, for God shews His justice to all His creatures.”⁶⁶ Open rebuke and shame are guardrails to keep the congregation pure from the elder’s sin. Baxter again writes, “It tendeth exceedingly to deter others from the like crimes, and so to keep the congregation and their worship pure.”⁶⁷ Church discipline is a grace from God that deters believers from pursuing sin.

Thus, the church that practices church discipline demonstrates a desire for purity. How a church responds to sin among its members not only exposes the church’s true values, but also reveals the church’s valuation of Christ. The church that approves sin becomes impure, leading to the world openly mocking Christ. John Frame warns, “When churches ignore sin, the world despises them, and the reputation of Jesus Christ himself is dragged through the mud.”⁶⁸ The faithful practice of church discipline honors Christ by preserving the purity of the church.

The New Testament frequently commands believers to guard their purity by not associating with those who are impure in conduct or doctrine (1 Thess 5:14-15; 2 Thess 3:6-9; Titus 3:9-11). In 2 Thessalonians 3:6, Paul warns the church to refrain from fellowshiping with one who lives an “unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us.” Paul’s concern is for open sin to not contaminate the church’s holiness. In his previous letter to the church in Thessalonica, Paul calls the church to discipline the unruly and gently counsel those struggling.⁶⁹ Careful to include doctrinal error alongside immoral behavior, Paul equally warns to “reject a factious man

⁶⁶ Stoney, *Discipline in the School of God*, 66.

⁶⁷ Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 82-83.

⁶⁸ Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 1025.

⁶⁹ 1 Thess 5:14: “We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.” Paul’s list describes the various necessary tones and approaches between church discipline and biblical counseling, which will be discussed at length in chapter four.

after a first and second warning” in Titus 3:9-11. Describing the offender as foolish and perverted, Paul claims the one in sin has already condemned himself. Paul repeatedly warns the church to maintain her holiness and purity by rejecting those in unrepentant sin. By rejecting divisive and immoral members, the church demonstrates greater love by exposing the heart of the offender. The church places hope in the Lord to graciously use rejection and shame to awaken the sinner to repentance. Tripp describes the motivation for helping sinners change, “Not motivated by punishment, but by the hope that the Lord would free this person from the prison of his own sin to know the freedom of walking in fellowship with him.”⁷⁰

The kindness of God’s discipline through pain is illustrated through David’s experience in Psalm 119:65-72. Twice in the acrostic *teth* section the psalmist claims affliction is for his good.⁷¹ On both occasions, God uses afflictions to draw the psalmist back to the Lord and his Word. God-given affliction ultimately produced holiness. This same truth concerning the Father’s discipline is expressed in church discipline as well—God-ordained affliction is intended to produce repentance and holiness in the straying believer. Though church discipline is admittedly a painful process, it points to a loving God who uses painful affliction to restore his people in holiness.

Thus, church discipline maintains the holiness and purity of the church and restores one another in truth. Describing discipline as essential for the church, Calvin writes, “Accordingly, as the saving doctrine of Christ is the soul of the church, so does discipline serve as its sinews, through which the members of the body hold together, each in its own place.”⁷² As Christ’s bride faithfully pursues church discipline, its holiness and

⁷⁰ Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, 209.

⁷¹ Ps 119:67 and 71. Though the psalmist does not explicitly state the cause of the affliction, the specific method of the affliction is immaterial. The loving Father uses all affliction for good in his children’s lives. Therefore, whatever the cause of the psalmist’s affliction does not change the eternal purpose—a loving Father who ordains affliction to produce holiness.

⁷² Calvin, *Institutes*, 2:1230.

purity leads to restoring the truly repentant.

Motive of Church Discipline—Love

When the church practically applies divine discipline through church discipline, the church equally pursues God’s goal of loving restoration. Just as God’s method in discipline is love, so too is the method of church discipline love. Though sometimes painful, church discipline serves as an expression of love to the offender. Calvin understood church discipline as an expression of love, saying, “Although excommunication also punishes the man, it does so in such a way that, by forewarning him of his future condemnation, it may call him back to salvation. But if that be obtained, reconciliation and restoration to communion await him.”⁷³ Church discipline demonstrates God’s love by actively restoring wayward members of God’s family. Genuine repentance is *sine qua non* for restoration in church discipline.

The heart of a repentant believer freely confesses sin due to an unavoidable desire for reconciliation with the Lord. The internal struggle of genuine repentance is described in Psalm 32:1-7. The psalmist claims God is willing to forgive, but only in conjunction with true confession. Unwillingness to repent is described as a physical torment and intense guilt. Only when the psalmist acknowledged his sins and freely confessed his transgressions did he receive full forgiveness. The psalmist describes repentance as confessing, rejecting, and full turning from sin.⁷⁴ The same God who lovingly calls the church to restore repentant sinners is the same God who is praised in Psalm 32:5, “And You forgave the guilt of my sin.” God’s love means repentant sinners are restored through his grace. The practical process of church discipline displays God’s

⁷³ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2:1238.

⁷⁴ Thomas Watson gives an expanded description of true repentance, saying, “Know that repentance is a spiritual medicine made up of six special ingredients: 1. Sight of sin, 2. Sorrow for sin, 3. Confession of sin, 4. Shame for sin, 5. Hatred for sin, and 6. Turning from sin. If any one is left out it loses its virtue.” Thomas Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance* (1668; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), 18.

grace by lovingly restoring believers to holiness.

After describing both the fruits of the flesh and the Spirit, Paul describes the process of biblical restoration in Galatians 6:1-2. Following a warning against falling into sin (1 Tim 5:19-20), Paul calls for restoration through a disciplinary process. Paul indicates that restoration should be pursued by the ones who are “spiritual,” literally describing one led by the Holy Spirit.⁷⁵ Adams describes this statement, saying, “All those who have the Spirit (i.e. all regenerate persons), who at that moment do not need to be restored themselves, ought to be ready to counsel another whom God providentially places in their pathway.”⁷⁶ Paul indicates those who administered church discipline should quickly restore the one who repents. Bargerhuff urges the essential step of restoration in church discipline, saying, “The church that once acted resolutely in *discipline* should now act with just as much urgency and swiftness in *forgiving* and *restoring* him.”⁷⁷ Though no timetable for restoration is given, Paul does describe the spirit of restoration as gentleness. The timbre is one of familial correction motivated by love for one another. In the same way that the heavenly Father gently restores his children through divine discipline, so too must the administrators of church discipline gently restore the repentant sinner. The familial relationship of God’s family motivates those administering church discipline to do everything through loving gentleness.

⁷⁵ “Spiritual” is defined by the fruits of the Spirit listed in Gal 5:16-26: “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.”

⁷⁶ Jay E. Adams, *Ready to Restore: The Layman’s Guide to Christian Counseling* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1981), 15.

⁷⁷ Bargerhuff, *Love That Rescues*, 170-171.

Paul sets the tone for biblical restoration in Galatians 6:1 by describing the process of restoration. The one who restores is called to be humble, persistent, loving, gracious, cautious, and gentle. The restorer must assume the best yet prepare for the worst in church discipline. Restoration not only grants forgiveness for the offense, but also removes the burden of guilt from the offender. As Adams clarifies, “The past as a debt is discharged; he is no longer held liable.”⁷⁸ The restorer must make every effort to restore the repentant sinner to God’s redemptive holiness.

Biblical restoration is demonstrated through tangible evidence of newfound holiness. Increased kingdom effectiveness is the *raison d’etre* of restoration. Those who live obediently to God’s Word are used more wholistically to accomplish God’s kingdom purposes. Expanding from Galatians 6:1, the author of Hebrews concludes that the purpose of discipline is to share in Christ’s holiness by practically serving others. Those trained by the Lord’s discipline (including church discipline) are described in Hebrews 12:12-15 as sufficient to help the weak and lame, pursue peace, and grow others in the grace of the Lord. When God brings one to repentance, restoration through church discipline publicly demonstrates God’s redeeming grace. James describes this process of restoration in James 5:19-20 with the emphasis being a loving redirection away from death toward freedom from sin. Frame clarifies the emphasis of church discipline, suggesting, “That is, discipline aims not merely to punish, but to turn the offender away from his sins, to repentance. It’s for *his* sake. So church discipline is not a cruel thing, but a loving thing.”⁷⁹ Restoration brings the sinner back to biblical truth for the sake of living in holiness and truth.

The process of restoration in church discipline is seen clearly in 2 Corinthians 2:5-11. Following the verdict of excommunication, Paul describes the former offender as

⁷⁸ Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, 92.

⁷⁹ Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 1025.

repentant and sorrowful. Because of his repentance, Paul calls the church in Corinth to both “forgive and comfort him.” The word for comfort, *parakaleo*, according to Adams means “giving the returning brother or sister whatever help—and all the help—needed to be reestablished properly in the congregation.”⁸⁰ Sin does not remove congregational assistance to the offender, but instead shapes the comfort following repentance. God uses loving comfort to bring the repentant believer back from being “overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.” God protects repentant believers from being overcome by guilt through the assistance and comfort of believers.

In conjunction with giving comfort in restoration, Paul also calls the church to reaffirm their love to the one previously excommunicated. Adams understands affirmation of love as meaning “the offender is to welcome him into the full status of brotherhood in which we show him once again the brotherly love he lost when he was removed from the family.”⁸¹ Restoration is the process of familial reconciliation. The church must guard against harboring bitterness or anger toward the restored brother. Rather, the church must demonstrate a genuine love through total forgiveness. By loving the restored brother, the church follows God’s example of love in restoring his children to holiness. As God restores through perfect love, so too does the church lovingly restore wayward brothers and sisters in Christ to holiness.

Restoration culminates in the active work of forgiveness. The forgiveness described in 2 Corinthians 2:7 is modeled after God’s forgiveness. Following confession and genuine repentance of sins, God fully and freely forgives (1 John 1:9). As the church models God’s desire for holiness through love, so too does the church model God’s forgiveness in the final stage of restoration. Throughout the process of church discipline, the church’s hope is for repentance and restoration through forgiveness. Jesus makes this

⁸⁰ Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, 94.

⁸¹ Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, 96.

plain in Luke’s condensed description of church discipline in Luke 17:3-4, “Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.” Luke’s truncated account of church discipline highlights Jesus’s emphasis on restoring and forgiving in lieu of the instructive steps in Matthew 18. Knowing the difficult nuances tied to forgiveness, Jesus calls for the depth of forgiveness to know no bounds. Forgiveness no longer holds the offense against the offender. Adams describes the totality of forgiveness: “His offense may be remembered only to help him to learn to act differently in the future. The offense will not be mentioned to him, or to others, and will not be the subject of brooding on the part of those who granted forgiveness.”⁸² Luke explains forgiveness as a continual process for both the one receiving forgiveness and the one giving it. While genuine repentance progressively limits repeated offenses, biblical forgiveness is often a sanctifying process. Forgiveness responds to true repentance by not bringing up the offense again.

Whereas Luke offers a condensed version of Jesus’s instruction on church discipline, Matthew describes both the steps of church discipline and the heart that motivates forgiveness. Concerned with the extent of forgiveness, Peter asks Jesus how often to forgive offenders. Jesus hyperbolically answers that forgiveness is limitless. Jesus plainly views forgiveness as a continual, ongoing practice. Elaborating on Jesus’s exposition, Chris Brauns concludes, “Jesus’s point is that we ought to forgive an unlimited number of times.”⁸³ Forgiveness is often a lifelong process.

Anticipating the question of heinous offenses, Jesus immediately gives a parable of a slave forgiven an astronomical amount who in turn fails to forgive a fellow

⁸² Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, 93.

⁸³ Chris Brauns, *Unpacking Forgiveness: Biblical Answers for Complex Questions and Deep Wounds* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 120.

slave a modest amount in Matthew 18:21-35. Due to the former slave's inability to forgive the latter, the lord sent the previously forgiven slave to be tortured for his lack of mercy. Jesus concludes the parable in Matthew 18:35 with an important application about God's forgiveness—"My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart." While Jesus firmly calls his followers to practice church discipline, he equally warns against failing to restore a brother in forgiveness. Believers must never lose sight of church discipline as an act of mercy to a fellow brother or sister in Christ. Every stage of church discipline is intended to lovingly draw the offender to restoration in righteousness. Bargerhuff points to the essence of forgiveness in church discipline, saying, "So then, church discipline should be seen as a way in which God's forgiveness and love are being communicated as the Spirit works in the practices of the church."⁸⁴ Through the parable of the wicked slave, Jesus highlights the heavenly Father's forgiveness as the foremost motivation for brotherly forgiveness. Putting other's sins in perspective, Robert D. Jones observes, "No one has ever sinned against you as much as you have sinned against God."⁸⁵ Just as the Father lovingly forgives and restores his wandering children, so too are Christians to lovingly forgive and restore the repentant offender.

Conclusion

The character and nature of God expressed primarily through his holiness are to be reflected through the loving, ecclesiastical process of church discipline. Though the full extent of every biblical description of divine discipline lies outside the scope of this chapter, we considered Old and New Testament passages that provide a framework for understanding God's purpose in discipline. As a father seeks to develop holiness within

⁸⁴ Bargerhuff, *Love That Rescues*, 136.

⁸⁵ Robert D. Jones, *Pursuing Peace: A Christian Guide to Handling Our Conflicts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 142.

his children, so too does the heavenly Father lovingly discipline his children to produce holiness. However, God always works to restore his people as a gracious expression of his love. God loves his children by restoring them to a lasting holiness.

These divine attributes that fuel divine discipline are practically applied through the process of church discipline. Though the primary instruction of church discipline comes from Matthew 18:15-18 and is illustrated in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 and 2 Corinthians 2:5-11, the New Testament expounds upon the pertinent themes of purity, rebuking, excommunicating, confessing, repenting, restoring, loving, and forgiving. The process of church discipline practically binds Scripture's description of a healthy church with submission to the Lord and keeping his commands. Understanding God's holy nature that motivates divine discipline inevitably leads to the church's faithful application of loving one another through church discipline.

CHAPTER 3

GOD'S DISCIPLINARY WORK THROUGH BIBLICAL COUNSELING

God is not limited in his application of discipline. God applies discipline with or without human involvement. The New Testament portrays God's application of discipline in the church primarily through both formal and informal means. In order for the church to participate in applying God's discipline, God's people must have a firm grasp on practical ministries such as biblical counseling. The better churches understand divine discipline, the more effectively God's people will apply discipline through counseling. To properly understand the role of divine discipline in biblical counseling, we must consider the fundamental structure and purpose of biblical counseling.

God's Discipline Reflected in Biblical Counseling

Biblical counseling significantly overlaps with the role and purpose of divine discipline. God intentionally uses the church as an invaluable tool to combat sin and speak truth into his people's lives. A primary means of human involvement in divine discipline is the ministry of biblical counseling. While certain counseling roles are specific to elders (i.e., formal rebuke to the recalcitrant sinner), all Christians within a local church are tasked with counseling one another in biblical faithfulness. Though nearly identical to discipleship in the incipient stage, biblical counseling becomes clearer and more pronounced in further formal stages. Discipleship and biblical counseling both walk alongside a fellow believer to help grow in biblical faithfulness, but biblical counseling takes further steps going into greater depth (often through formal counseling).

By intentionally speaking truth and helping others grow in holiness, biblical

counseling especially pursues what God pursues in discipline. Biblical counseling intentionally walks alongside another Christian to grow in spiritual wisdom and maturity. Through intentional and specific means, biblical counseling overlaps with divine discipline to accomplish God’s purposes. To various degrees, all members of the church engage in applying divine discipline through the ministry of biblical counseling in various capacities.

Divine Discipline Reflected in Biblical Counseling through Admonishment

Both divine discipline and biblical counseling incorporate admonishment in affecting the lives of God’s people. Biblical counseling incorporates the ministry of admonishment from the New Testament command to *noutheteō*, meaning to “counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct; *admonish, warn, instruct.*”¹ Jay Adams historically conceptualized biblical counseling as a ministry of admonishing one another. Defining the biblical commands of admonishment, Adams writes, “Nouthetic confrontation, in its biblical usage, aims at straightening out the individual by changing his patterns of behavior to conform to biblical standards.”² Biblical counseling necessarily involves helping another person change to be like Christ, which often requires admonitions. Thus, biblical counseling incorporates the act of admonishment [*noutheteō*] through Scripture as a primary means of helping other believers grow in sanctification.

This admonitory aspect of biblical counseling comes from Romans 15:14 where Paul confidently claims, “you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish [*nouthetein*] one another.” Paul understands

¹ Frederick William Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Chicago Press, 2000), 679.

² Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 46.

admonishment to be the calling and responsibility of every Christian who is filled with goodness and knowledge. Along with salvation, Paul's prerequisite for admonishing others is a personal desire for godliness and an understanding of biblical truth. Christians are equipped to admonish one another through the inherited grace of God's goodness and the skillful possession of spiritual knowledge.³ Paul envisions Christians biblically reasoning with one another by continually speaking truth. Through biblical admonishment, the goal of biblical counseling is progressive holiness.

Biblical counseling grows one another in holiness by speaking to a person's heart. Biblical counseling understands change originates from the human heart, which inevitably leads to behavioral change (Prov 4:23; Matt 15:15-20). The role of admonishing one another is appealing to the battleground of the heart. Understanding that the heart is the crux of the battle, Paul Tripp says, "The primary battle would be fought and won in *human hearts*...What we need most is a heart ruled by the Lord."⁴ Biblical counseling majors on transforming a person's heart, which begins by clearly admonishing in truth.

God's discipline similarly admonishes believers through exposing sin and reorienting the heart. Rather than merely affecting external behavior, God's discipline pursues wholistic change. Divine discipline produces heart holiness and purity that changes lives.⁵ In the same way that God's discipline is unmistakable to its recipient, so too is biblical confrontation unmistakable. Just as divine discipline produces heart

³ Explaining the necessity of knowledge in admonition, John Gill writes, "Goodness and knowledge are necessary to admonition, and qualify persons for it. If a man is not a good man himself, he's not fit to admonish another; and if he has not knowledge, he'll not be able to do it as it should be; and without humanity and tenderness, he'll not perform it aright, and with success; but all this being in these persons, they were able and fit for it." John Gill, *An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, Newport Commentary Series (1746; repr., Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist, 2002), 566.

⁴ Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 4, 264 (emphasis added).

⁵ See chapter two and Heb 12:10-11.

holiness, so too does biblical admonition pursue heart holiness. The *modus operandi* for divine discipline is heart transformation through biblical confrontation. Biblical counseling is the vehicle for pursuing God's disciplinary goal of reorienting the disoriented heart.

Divine Discipline Reflected in Biblical Counseling through Instruction

Overall, the purpose of biblical instruction is meant to shape Christians' lives. In addition to heart confrontation, biblical counseling seeks to provide truthful instruction directly from Scripture. When describing the role of Scripture, Paul claims in 2 Timothy 3:16 that it is "profitable for teaching [*didaskalian*] for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness." Scripture's authoritative instruction applies to the believer's growth in godliness.⁶ Because biblical instruction is God's inspired words, biblical counseling teaches for the purpose of growing in holiness.⁷ As Augustine stunningly prays to God, "What your Scripture says, you say."⁸ Biblical adherence forms habits and behaviors that are consistent with God's holiness. God gave his Word to instruct and teach his people, which is the same purpose of biblical counseling.

Scripture guides Christians in a similar way that biblical counselors strive to shape believers through instruction. Whereas Paul uses *didaskalian* in 2 Timothy 3:16 to demonstrate how Scripture forms the believer, he previously used the same word for ecclesiastical instruction in 1 Timothy 4:13. He calls the elders of the church (and those

⁶ Danker and Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 241.

⁷ Specifically pertaining to the Greek word, *theopneusto* [*θεόπνευστος*] translated as "inspired", B. B. Warfield comments, "What is *θεόπνευστος* is 'God-breathed,' produced by the creative breath of the Almighty. And Scripture is called *θεόπνευστος* in order to designate it as 'God-breathed,' by the product of Divine spiration, the creation of that Spirit who is in all spheres of the Divine activity and executive of the Godhead...What it affirms is that the Scriptures owe their origin to an activity of God the Holy Ghost and are in the highest and truest sense His creation. It is on this foundation of Divine origin that all the high attributes of Scripture are built." Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration*, vol. 1 of *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (1932; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1932), 280.

⁸ J. I. Packer, *Freedom & Authority* (Vancouver, BC: Regent, 1992), 30.

approved by the church) to “exhortation [*parakleseis*] and teaching [*didaskalia*].” Paul consistently commands Christians to provide continual instruction in the context of mutual one-another ministry. Both Scripture and those who explain Scripture are to instruct believers how to live rightly with the Lord.⁹ Thus, biblical counselors are often the primary agents of instruction for struggling believers. As biblical counselors intentionally focus on biblical instruction, Scripture inevitably shapes the lives of the Christian counselee.

Biblical counseling appeals to the counselee’s heart with biblical instruction to correct ungodly behavior. Biblical counselors understand that change often occurs from both empathetic listening and corrective biblical instruction. Wayne Mack explains the significance of giving biblical instruction in counseling, saying, “Scripture makes clear that instruction plays a necessary part in every person’s spiritual growth and that is indispensable in the process of solving problems. So if we want to help people change, we must be skilled in biblical counseling instruction, and we must make it an important part of our counseling.”¹⁰ Biblical instruction gives the counselee motivation and direction to pursue righteousness. Biblical instruction is essential in biblical counseling to lead others to holiness.

The mutual marriage of divine discipline and biblical counseling is found, at least in part, in the role of biblical instruction. Scripture instructs and forms the believer’s doctrine. Through biblical instruction, biblical counseling directs and corrects the developmental stages of spiritual growth. Thus, by employing biblical instruction through

⁹ In speaking directly to Timothy, Paul is clearly advising elders in their responsibility to instruct other believers. “The act of teaching, *teaching, instruction*...of Timothy in role as superintendent or overseer.” Danker and Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 240. However, Paul further expands the ministry of instruction to include those who are gifted in both instruction and exhortation (Rom 12:7-8). Thus, Paul’s command to provide biblical instruction must be expanded beyond church elders to include those endowed and approved by the elders to give biblical instruction.

¹⁰ Wayne Mack, “Providing Instruction through Biblical Counseling,” in *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically*, ed. John MacArthur (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 162.

the ministry of the Word, biblical counseling achieves the same goal as divine discipline. Both means of grace practically produce holiness in God’s people. Randy Patten sees directives and instruction as a vital component of biblical counseling. “This happens [giving instruction] because the Bible instructs us how to please God with regard to our perspectives, behaviors, and heart longings...Counselees will frequently need biblical wisdom.”¹¹ Biblical counseling practically instructs counselees with Scripture in order to increase holiness.

Both biblical counseling and divine discipline prioritize biblical instruction, regardless of its initial reception. Though the process at times is admittedly unpleasant, a loving brother’s biblical instruction leads to humble submission to the Word of God.¹² Because Scripture repeatedly calls Christians to forsake ingrained sin, divine discipline and biblical counseling can at times appear harsh. However, both divine discipline and biblical counseling actively lead to spiritual and practical holiness. Lee Lewis and Michael Snetzer explain this apparent dichotomy of unpleasant instruction and spiritual betterment:

We would also see the discipline that comes through His instrument, the church, as a sign that He loves us and wants to lead us to life. Using our illustration of the Christian life as a garden, discipline is analogous to pruning. Pruning keeps us from growing contrary to the Master Gardener’s intended purposes and removes non-fruit-bearing branches from our lives.¹³

Thus, instruction serves a vital role in spiritual growth as both forming through Scripture and correcting through discipline. God’s discipline and biblical counseling both

¹¹ Randy Patten, “The Central Elements of the Biblical Counseling Process,” in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling: Changing Lives with God’s Changeless Truth*, ed. Bob Kellemen and Steve Viars (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2021), 330.

¹² An especially pertinent verse describing the blessing of receiving unpleasant instruction is Prov 27:5-6: “Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.” The mark of whether instruction is loving is whether it is biblical and pointing to the Lord.

¹³ Lee Lewis and Michael Snetzer, “The Pursuit of Holiness,” in Kellemen and Viars, *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling*, 187.

incorporate biblical instruction, leading to heartfelt mortification of sin and genuine growth in holiness. Biblical instruction is key for biblical counseling. Biblical counseling is one of the functional arms of divine discipline practically applied in the church. As Christians are biblically instructed through both divine discipline and biblical counseling, God uses instruction, teaching, and discipline for the good of his people.

Divine Discipline Reflected in Biblical Counseling through Rebuke

Divine discipline and biblical counseling also coalesce through biblical rebuke. Scripture informs spiritual rebuke just as it does spiritual instruction. After emphasizing teaching and instruction in 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul further claims the inspired Word of God reproves or rebukes [*elegchōs*] the believer. Scripture actively shapes the Christian's life through rebuke, or quite literally "strong disapproval" of anything ungodly.¹⁴ Reproof purposefully shapes the Christian closer to the image of Christ.

Yet, Scripture also describes rebuke as corrective, specifically in the role of discipline. A cognate of *elegchōs*, *elegchō*, connects rebuke with "to penalize for wrongdoing, punish, discipline, reprove, correct."¹⁵ Three verses after defining the various roles of Scripture, Paul calls Timothy to "reprove [*elenxon*], rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction" (2 Tim 4:2). Along with biblical instruction, one of the primary functions of eldership is rebuking wayward believers. In his letter to Titus, Paul lists the requirements of eldership as holding fast to sound doctrine with the ability to "refute [*elenchein*] those who contradict" (Titus 1:9). Church elders are obligated to rebuke believers who have strayed from truth. A few verses later, Paul explains the need to reprimand sinful Christians, saying, "For this reason, reprove [*elenche*] them severely so that they may be sound in the faith" (Titus 1:13). The pattern of biblical rebuke is

¹⁴ Danker and Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 315.

¹⁵ Danker and Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 315.

expanded in the New Testament to be applied by all Christians. Though elders are tasked with rebuking those who stray, all Christians are called to love an offending brother to the point of biblical confrontation.¹⁶ Christians prioritize correcting wayward counselees with biblical instruction and rebuke.¹⁷ The church rebukes not only to conform one another to the image of Christ, but also to correct those who stray from the image of Christ.

Therefore, the New Testament usage of *elegchō* is primarily for rebuking Christians who are in sin. However, the New Testament also connects the ministry of *elegchō* with the work of divine discipline, explicitly made clear in Hebrews 12:5. In the clearest delineation of divine discipline in Scripture, the author of Hebrews ties God's discipline [*paideias*] with God's reproof [*elenchomenos*].¹⁸ Hebrews 12 uses the discipline of the Lord and his reproof synonymously as expressions of God's love towards his people. Heath Lambert describes divine discipline through the lens of God's love, saying, "The discipline is a kind of displeasure, but it is the displeasure of love that a kind father shows to his children because they are his." Lambert goes on to describe discipline as God's love because it produces godliness within the believer. "The suffering of discipline makes us more godly."¹⁹ Divine discipline is not the absence of love, but the abundant presence of it. The rebuke of divine discipline brings the Christian closer to the restored image of Christ. Hebrews 12:5 shows God's love both in Scripture's formative and corrective rebuke.

¹⁶ Jesus explains in Luke 17:3-4 that biblical confrontation in response to sin is the responsibility of all Christians, not just church elders. Jesus instructs biblical confrontation, saying, "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him." (See also 2 Cor 2:8)

¹⁷ After describing the inter-related generational ministry of the church, Paul concludes Titus 2 with one final call to rebuke— "These things speak and exhort and reprove [*elenche*] with all authority. Let no one disregard you" Titus 2:15.

¹⁸ For further elaboration on *paideias* in conjunction with divine discipline, see chapter two of this thesis.

¹⁹ Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 266.

Spiritual rebuke differs from biblical admonishment because rebuke requires confronting sin.²⁰ While both *noutheteō* and *elegchō* are corrective in nature, the latter more explicitly confronts sins while the former appeals to the heart. Biblical counselors rebuke Christians when observable or perceived sin is present, whereas admonishment primarily warns Christians against sin and its progression. Richard Trench argues, “to rebuke another, with such effectual wielding of the victorious arm of the truth, as to bring him, if not always to a confession, yet at least to a conviction, of his sin.”²¹ Though frequently painful and uncomfortable, spiritual rebuke turns believers from sin to God’s holiness. Though similar in application, the context and outcomes of *noutheteō* and *elegchō* vary with the latter given primarily in the milieu of confrontation and restoration.

Therefore, though biblical counseling does more than express divine discipline, it does practically apply divine discipline. Biblical counseling applies divine discipline by rebuking wayward believers. Though church elders are given the final task of public rebuke, every Christian within the church should be sufficiently equipped to biblically rebuke an offending brother. God often uses biblical rebuke to awaken a believer from a spiritual stupor. Whereas biblical admonishment convinces through instruction, spiritual rebuke confronts and corrects immoral behavior. In this sense, spiritual rebuke has more to do with a believer’s relationship to the Lord than proximity to the person who is confronting. Regarding the heart of rebuke, Paul Tripp says, “Confrontation has little to do with us. It is all about the Lord, motivated by a desire to draw people back into close, obedient, and loving communion with him.”²² Fundamentally, biblical counseling

²⁰ Intrinsic to biblical rebuke is the necessity for wholistic change. Biblical change begins in a person’s heart and is evidenced through external actions. Jay Adams describes the pursuit of biblical change in biblical counseling: “The Christian counselor is to minister God’s Word in a life-transforming way, such that God Himself changes the counselee—from the heart outward.” Jay E. Adams, *How to Help People Change: The Four-Step Biblical Process* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 7.

²¹ Richard Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 13.

²² Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, 201.

practically applies rebuke as a tool of God's redemptive disciplinary efforts.

Ultimately, the model for spiritual rebuke in biblical counseling derives from divine discipline. Divine discipline supplies both the model and method for rebuking. Just as God progressively disciplines his people, so too does biblical counseling continually rebuke those in sin. Rather than becoming a believer's conscience, biblical counselors invest in a lifestyle of loving rebuke when sin becomes apparent. Tripp again describes the continual rhythm of rebuke saying, "The Bible presents confrontation as one of the cords of a strong relationship, a normal part of the interaction that makes the relationship what it is...the model here is ongoing honesty in an ongoing relationship."²³ Biblical counseling follows God's model of disciplinary rebuke by lovingly confronting sin wherever it is present. In a loving biblical counseling relationship, spiritual rebuke often ameliorates the Christian's heart condition.

Spiritual rebuke also leads to a right standing before God. As biblical counselors rebuke Christians, the Christian in turn seeks reconciliation with God. Patten understands biblical rebuke as necessarily including both confrontation and spiritual restoration. "When counselees recognize and acknowledge their sin, help them confess their sin to God and seek His forgiveness. You might also urge them to seek the forgiveness of other people if it's appropriate to do so."²⁴ The biblical counselor shares God's heart of restoration through the process of reproof. Biblical counselors help counselees genuinely respond to their sin to be right with the Lord. As counselees acknowledge and confess their sin before the Lord, biblical counselors provide guidance for restoration to the Lord.

²³ Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, 202, 203.

²⁴ Patten, "The Central Elements of the Biblical Counseling Process," 331.

Divine Discipline Reflected in Biblical Counseling through Understanding

While divine discipline's goal is holiness (see chapter 2 and below), its process requires continual growth in spiritual understanding. A right relationship with the Lord means possessing spiritual understanding (Ps 119:34; Prov 4:5, 7; Eph 4:18; 1 John 5:20). Because a right relationship with the Lord requires spiritual growth, growing in understanding is paramount for the believer. Every Christian must strive for understanding that comes from God. Holiness and right standing before God is given only through a right understanding of God.

Thus, God actively grows his people in spiritual understanding through Scripture and divine discipline. In the context of the local church, God applies these methods of understanding through the ministry of biblical counseling. As God sanctifies his people through biblical understanding, biblical counseling endeavors to grow counselees in spiritual understanding.

Proverbs is arguably the book of the Bible that most prioritizes understanding. Solomon urges his son to discern understanding (1:2), warns against trusting human understanding (3:5), and adamantly implores others to gain all understanding (4:1; 4:5; 4:7). Because of its significance, Solomon carefully addresses the various methods of attaining understanding. In Proverbs 19, Solomon connects understanding to both counsel and reproof. He first encourages, "Listen to counsel and accept discipline" (19:20), before instructing a few verses later, "but reprove one who has understanding [*lanabown*] and he will gain knowledge," (19:25), leading to the final warning, "Cease listening, my son, to discipline, and you will stray from the words of knowledge" (19:27).

The collective instruction from Proverbs 19 suggests divine discipline not only uses reproof (as previously discussed from Prov 3:11-13 in chapter 2), but also works to give understanding. Spiritual understanding comes from God's discipline. However, Solomon makes clear that spiritual understanding comes from both divine discipline and biblical counsel (19:20). God's discipline that gives understanding (19:25) is the same

discipline that comes from biblical counsel (19:25).

Therefore, biblical counseling is a primary, practical means of helping Christians grow in spiritual understanding. Counsel is essential for correcting wayward Christians or those who are potentially pursuing sin. Solomon's warning at the end of Proverbs 19 is a reminder that rejecting the discipline of God (given through biblical counsel) inevitably leads to spiritual straying (19:27). Thus, biblical counselors labor to impart wisdom and understanding to the counselee. As counsees grow in wisdom, so too will they increase in godliness. Biblical counseling is the primary and practical arm of divine discipline to impart understanding in sanctifying Christians.

The connection between biblical counseling and understanding is further defined in the New Testament. Twice in Colossians, Paul applies the action of *noutheteō* to emphasize his apostolic ministry that ought to be present in the church as well. In Colossians 1:28, Paul uses the action of *noutheteō* to emphasize growing in wisdom and godliness. "We proclaim Him, admonishing [*nouthetountes*] every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ." Paul describes his ministry as giving biblical warnings and instructive counsel as God's impartation of wisdom. Again, in Colossians 3:16, Paul moves from his apostolic ministry to the shared labor of the church, saying, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing [*nouthetountes*] one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God." The ministry of admonishment that originated in Paul's apostolic ministry has been shared with the members of Christ's body.

Situated between Paul's calls for admonishment is the goal of admonishment—understanding. In Colossians 2:2, Paul explicitly describes the result of a *noutheteō* ministry as growth in understanding, "That their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding [*syneseōs*], resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery,

that is, Christ himself.” Biblical counseling leads to an understanding that makes a man complete in Christ.

God often uses biblical counseling to preemptively protect his people from sin or false teaching.²⁵ Biblical understanding deters Christians from falling prey to sinful desires and behavior. Though biblical understanding is formative (i.e., 2 Tim 3:16, “training in righteousness”), understanding from biblical counseling is often corrective. Due to humanity’s natural inclinations, growing in spiritual understanding requires correcting sinful thinking and responding (Rom 2:10-12). As counselees grow in understanding, so too do they burgeon in holiness. A heart truly understanding the truths of the Lord pursues holiness. The Christian life that experiences growth in understanding also increases in holiness.

Yet, spiritual understanding must be more than cognitive understanding and knowledge. Biblical understanding is a heart reorientation to the beauty and worth of Christ. It is the recognition and heart belief that God is worthy of obedience and Jesus is worthy of faith.²⁶ Humans pursue what they value and desire the most. As God shapes his people’s hearts through spiritual understanding, the heart’s affections are reoriented from sinful passions toward the God of all satisfaction. Biblical counseling is the mouthpiece to give counselees a right perspective, proclaim the beauties of Christ, and warn of sin’s

²⁵ The context of Col 2 specifically concerns the threat of false teaching. Christians are warned not to be deluded “with persuasive argument” (2:4); nor taken “captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world” (2:8); nor allow others to “keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels” (2:18). The main goal of Colossians 2 is to root the church in biblical doctrine and understanding that will ensure orthodoxy when threatened with heterodoxy.

²⁶ The connection between a person’s heart and mind is vital. Genuine cognitive growth produces heart dependence, reliance, and love for Jesus. After warning about the darkened understanding and ignorance of the unbeliever in Ephesians 4:17-19, Paul describes a changed heart as growing in love for Jesus. “But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus,” (Eph 4:20-21). Understanding the necessary role of the heart, William Gurnall wrote, “Head knowledge of the things of Christ is not enough; this following Christ is primarily a matter of the heart. If your heart is not fixed in its purpose, your principles, as good as they may be, will hang loose and be of no more use in the heat of battle than an ill-strung bow. Half-hearted resolve will not venture much nor far for Christ.” William Gurnall, *Daily Readings from The Christian in Complete Armour* (1655; repr., Chicago: Moody, 1994), 3.

disappointment. Biblical counseling helps shape a person's perspective to the God who always sanctifies. As Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp write, "If you are a believer, you are in the process of being remade to reflect the character of Jesus himself."²⁷ When the Lord actively works in a Christian's life through biblical counseling, the heart responds by understanding Jesus as the greatest value and worth of life.

Divine Discipline Reflected in Biblical Counseling through Love

As established in chapter 2, divine discipline is an expression of God's love to his people (Heb 12:6). Any divine act that produces holiness is an expression of God's love. Every interaction between God and his people is an expression of his love because God's every action toward the believer is for their ultimate good. In short, God's love is every expression of redemption to his people. Thus, rather than offer a blanket endorsement of humanity's condition, God's love refuses to leave us in a natural, fallen state. As David Powlison wrote, "God does not accept me just as I am; he loves me *despite* how I am. He loves me just as *Jesus* is; he loves me enough to devote my life to renewing me in the image of Jesus."²⁸ The practical expression of divine discipline does not change his motivation of love that enables it. Though divine discipline ultimately produces holiness, God's love constrains him to pursue the offending Christian. Similarly, biblical counseling ultimately produces holiness through the constraining motivation of love. The attribute of love is central to the essence of who God is and must be the foundational motivation of biblical counseling (1 John 4:8, 16).

The distinctive attribute of love is infused throughout both divine discipline and biblical counseling in Colossians 3:14 and 16. After listing fruits characterizing the

²⁷ Timothy Lane and Paul David Tripp, *How People Change* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2008), 93.

²⁸ David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition through the Lens of Scripture* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 170.

chosen of God (3:12-13), Paul identifies love as the ultimate fruit of godliness. “Beyond all these things put on love [*agapēn*]” (Col 3:14). The author of Hebrews uses the same word to describe the motivation of God’s discipline, “For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines [*agapa*]” (Heb 12:6). Paul’s usage of *agape* “describes God’s love, as well as the love Christians should have for God, the world, and each other.”²⁹ God’s love expressed in divine discipline is the model for believers to emulate to one another. Christians should be moved by what moves God. Louis Berkhof identifies God’s attribute of love observing, “That perfection of God by which He is eternally moved to self-communication.”³⁰ Since God’s love always compels him, love must equally compel those who are transformed by God’s love. Love must motivate and shape the Christian life (John 13:35; 1 Cor 13:4-7; 16:14; Gal 5:22-23). Every act of godliness is fueled from a heart of love. Without love, all Christian interaction and efforts fall short of God’s commands (1 Tim 1:5).

Just as love motivates divine discipline, so too is biblical counseling motivated by God’s love. The very effort of helping another person grow in godliness is an expression of love. After calling Christians to put on love in Colossians 3:14, in verse 16 Paul connects Christian love with admonishment. “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing [*nouthetountes*] one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” Every interaction of biblical counseling between believers must be influenced and motivated by love for God and one another. Love precedes and motivates biblical counseling. If a Christian is unable or unwilling to put on love (3:14), then he is ill-equipped to give biblical counsel (3:16). While many other theological aspects are

²⁹ Richard R. Melick, Jr., *Colossians*, New American Commentary, vol. 32 (Nashville: B&H, 1991), 300.

³⁰ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (1932; repr., Louisville: GLH, 2017), 48.

important for counseling (i.e., knowledge of biblical truth, ability to explain and listen well, etc.), nothing truly matters without a heart of love.³¹ Paul makes clear from Colossians 3 that biblical counseling requires a spirit of love toward one another.

A biblical counselor's heart of love evidences itself in various ways. The most obvious and significant demonstration of God's love in biblical counseling is caring enough to help others grow in godliness. Helping someone put sin to death and become sanctified is a difficult and often uncomfortable task. Biblical counseling is not for the faint of heart. What motivates a person to confront, admonish, give up time, and commit emotional energy solely for the betterment of another person? The only plausible answer is altruistic love. Those filled with God's love demonstrate his love to others. Truly caring for one another is a clear sign of having already received God's love (1 John 4:19-21). Love puts another person's needs first and desires their best. In biblical counseling, love selflessly builds up another Christian's area of weakness. Biblical counseling demonstrates the love of divine discipline by caring enough to help other Christians grow in the Lord. Just as God lovingly disciplines his people, so too do biblical counselors lovingly help counselees grow in sanctification. Even through difficult and awkward situations, God's love must always fuel biblical counseling.

Biblical counseling also demonstrates God's love by speaking difficult truths. Selfishness often leads to nonconfrontation, but love speaks the truth. Biblical counseling pursues what is best by speaking truths that help the counselee. Along with Paul's command to speak the truth in love in Ephesians 4:15, James prioritizes restoring one another through speaking difficult truth in James 5:19-20: "My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sin."

³¹ Paul makes clear that actions not motivated from a heart of love are worthless, saying, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Cor 13:1).

James envisions a difficult situation where a professing Christian has sinned and needs restoration. The one who loves his brother pursues restoration by speaking truth in love. The connection between James 5:19-20 and Ephesians 4:15 cannot be overstated, because both passages call Christians to speak to one another in a context consistent with biblical counseling (producing godliness and restoration). Together, the two passages elucidate the process of lovingly speaking to counselees. James 5:19-20 tells Christians *what* to speak (the truth), while Ephesians 4:15 tells Christians *how* to speak (in love). The most important help a Christian can offer is to help someone understand the truth that leads to redemption and restoration. However, truth spoken harshly or lacking in concern for the person's spiritual wellbeing fails to accomplish God's purposes. Alone, truth and love are insufficient. God requires both simultaneously to accomplish his purposes of restoring his people. God's love motivates biblical counseling by lovingly speaking difficult truth to all counselees.

Perhaps the most applicable expression of divine love in biblical counseling is patience and forbearance. Biblical counselors love counselees by patiently extirpating sin through the laborious process of spiritual growth. The process of spiritual growth is often slow, tedious, and repetitive. Humans are not machines quickly fine-tuned, but instead require nuance and finesse in counseling. Through the frequently lengthy process of counseling, the biblical counselor must be driven by love. As God is patient and long-suffering in his discipline, so too must biblical counselors be long-suffering in working with growing counselees. Love refrains the counselor from prematurely expediting the counseling process, while instead intentionally focusing the counseling on the need of the moment. A loving biblical counselor often is the catalyst for a counselee's increased love for the Lord. As Robert Cheong writes, "Our Spirit-led repentance needs to result in new obedience—that is, in turning to Christ and depending upon Him to help us love God and

others as He first loved us.”³² Love begets love, and the necessary evidence of a counselee’s changed heart is love for the Lord and one another.

Biblical counseling is driven by love because the biblical counselor never forgets the preponderance of God’s love. Effective biblical counselors have experienced God’s disciplinary love and winsomely counsel from a heart of love. Biblical counseling is intrinsically shaped and modeled after God’s disciplinary love.

Divine Discipline Reflected in Biblical Counseling through Holiness

As the *coup de grâce* of this chapter, holiness is the coalescence of both divine discipline and biblical counseling. As argued in chapter 2, God’s purpose in divine discipline is always for Christians to share in his holiness. Divine discipline is the primary means by which Christians grow in holiness. God is always holy, and divine discipline is always seeking to replicate God’s holiness in believers. Sharing in God’s holiness is a *conditio sine qua non* of being a Christian. As Jerry Bridges points out, “Holiness then is required for *fellowship with God*.”³³ The holy essence of God is replicated in God’s people. Pursuing the same goal as divine discipline, biblical counseling also necessarily focuses on helping believers grow in holiness. Biblical counseling helps Christians become holy in the pursuit of continual holiness (sanctification). The parochial focus of divine discipline and biblical counseling thus centers on the pursuit of holiness.

Paul describes this dual pursuit in 1 Thessalonians 5. Within a few verses, Paul calls both elders and believers to admonish one another to grow in sanctification (5:12,

³² Robert Cheong, “Repentance: The Pathway to Abiding in God’s Love,” in Kellemen and Viars, eds. *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling*, 360.

³³ Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 23.

nouthetountas and 5:14, *noutheteite*).³⁴ Paul not only describes admonitory confrontation as a good labor, but in 5:14 commands Christians to confront and admonish the unruly, quite literally the undisciplined [*ataktous*].³⁵ The counselee's unwillingness to live a disciplined life before the Lord prompts biblical counselors to admonition. Michael Martin describes an undisciplined life noting, "Refer[ing] to someone or something that is out of order. In an active sense such a person is unruly or insubordinate."³⁶ Those who live outside of a biblically ordered life require discipline by God through confrontation and admonishment. The gravity of rejecting practical expressions of divine discipline result in implementing church discipline.³⁷ Idleness and subsequent undisciplined lifestyles evidence unbelief that directly oppose God's purposes. Failure to live a holy life leads to admonishment, while the pursuit of holiness demonstrates growth in Christ.

Paul furthers the principle of admonishing the unruly in 1 Thessalonians 5:23. The purpose of biblical confrontation (along with other commands in 1 Thess 5) is stated as "the God of peace Himself sanctify [*hagiasai*] you entirely." God works in and through his people for the purpose of sanctification, or literally to "*consecrate, dedicate, sanctify*."³⁸ God is constantly in the process of making his people into Christ's image,

³⁴ The context and general purpose of 1 Thess 5 is summed up in Paul's desire for these believers—"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass" (1 Thess 5:22-23). For further explanation on the explicit connection between holiness and sanctification, see chapter two).

³⁵ The word here describes a life and behavior unfitting for a Christian, specifically following one's fleshly desires. Paul uses this word to indicate a person living for personal preferences and proclivities: "To being out of step and going one's own way, *disorderly, insubordinate*." Danker and Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 148.

³⁶ D. Michael Martin, *1 Thessalonians*, New American Commentary, vol. 33 (Nashville: B&H, 1995), 177.

³⁷ The adverbial form of *ataktos* is *ataktōs* and is used in 2 Thess 3:6 to call the idle, undisciplined person to church discipline. The sin of an undisciplined lifestyle is evidence of either having never received divine discipline (an indication of not being a member of God's family, Heb 12:7-8) or rejecting God's discipline (thus further evidence of an unredeemed heart).

³⁸ Significantly, the Lexicon attributes sanctification as a divine action—"God consecrates his own." Thus, this text indicates that the process of sanctification is always a divine work, even if accomplished through human means. Danker and Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 10.

which is essential for growing in holiness. John MacArthur explains the process of becoming holy as God’s enduring work. “The real cause of all spiritual progress is this alone: God Himself is working within you to effect your sanctification. That’s why sanctification can never be totally deterred...the God who rules all things and always does what He desires—that God is at work in you, and He is never thwarted.”³⁹ Holiness vitally separates the Christian from the world in favor of Christ. Sanctification changes heart desires, passions, thinking, and reactions. Rather than responding through fleshly desires, growing in sanctification produces consistency with Christ. Growing in holiness inevitably results in an undisciplined life progressively conforming to God through his discipline. Since holiness is the goal, the pursuit of both divine discipline and biblical counseling is to help sanctify the believer.

Biblical counseling helps counsees pursue holiness in numerous ways, perhaps nowhere more obvious than confronting undisciplined living. Scripture calls believers to live controlled, moderate, and disciplined lifestyles. Christians who depart from disciplined living need biblical accountability and confrontation. As Bridges warns, “To persist in disobedience is to increase our necessity for discipline.”⁴⁰ Rejecting God’s commands requires divine discipline to produce holiness. Thus, biblical counseling holds a counselee’s lifestyle accountable to Scripture, which calls the counselee to faithful obedience. Holiness requires evidence of self-control as a certain sign of the Spirit’s presence.⁴¹ Biblical counseling is the God-given mechanism to confront undisciplined lifestyles and to instruct in holiness.

Biblical counseling also helps counsees pursue holiness by teaching both the

³⁹ John F MacArthur, *Our Sufficiency in Christ* (Dallas: Word, 1991), 205.

⁴⁰ Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, 23.

⁴¹ Self-control is the final fruit of the Spirit, serving as the ultimate unifier of all previous fruits. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law,” (Gal 5:22-23).

holiness of God and the sinfulness of man. Counselees will never fully understand the Lord's discipline until gaining a better understanding of his holiness. Grasping the holiness of God gives counselees a sense of personal unworthiness, leading to a gratitude for God's mercy. When counselees have an accurate understanding of mankind's sinfulness, God's holiness powerfully motivates personal holiness. Though sinful man could never earn God's favor, God mercifully disciplines those whom he loves so they will grow in holiness. Once again, Bridges points to holiness as God's goal for Christians. "This call to a holy life is based on the fact that God Himself is holy. Because God is holy, He requires that we be holy...Holiness is nothing less than conformity to the character of God."⁴² Biblical counselors help counselees comparatively see their own sinfulness in relation to the holiness of God. This dichotomy exemplifies the Christian's motivation for pursuing righteousness. The process of growing in holiness inevitably follows the pattern of divine discipline—putting sin to death and putting on righteousness. Just as divine discipline eradicates sin and spurs Christians to righteousness, so too does biblical counseling highlight God's holiness as the motivation for putting on righteousness. Describing the bifurcation of putting sin to death and growing in holiness, Berkhof vividly states, "It is like the airing of a house filled with pestiferous odors. As the old air is drawn out, the new rushes in."⁴³ As biblical counseling helps counselees understand God's holiness, so too will counselees grow in personal holiness.

Biblical counseling finally pursues holiness by clearly teaching Scripture to counselees. Because Scripture is the corrective and instructive means for spiritual growth (see above), biblical counseling clearly teaches Scripture that produces holiness in counselees. Obedience to Scripture is the primary means by which the counselee grows in

⁴² Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, 9.

⁴³ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 454.

holiness. Berkhof again describes the role of Scripture in pursuing holiness, “Scripture presents all the objective conditions for holy exercises and acts. It serves to excite spiritual activity by presenting motives and inducements, and gives direction to it by prohibitions, exhortations, and examples, 1 Pet. 1:22; 2:2; 2 Pet. 1:4.”⁴⁴ As biblical counselors teach counselees adherence to biblical truths, holiness proceeds. Just as God disciplines through truth, so too does biblical counseling instruct counselees through Scripture. Biblical counseling thus becomes a primary means for the private ministry of the Word leading counselees to personal holiness.

Divine Discipline Reflected in Biblical Counseling through Restoration

Biblical counseling reflects divine discipline by sharing both process and result. Biblical counseling admonishes, instructs, corrects, gives understanding, loves, and pursues holiness through the formative lens of divine discipline. God has kindly given the ministry of biblical counseling to combat sin that produces a holy, sanctified life. Through the difficulties of confrontation, rebuke, and correction, divine discipline is finally reflected in biblical counseling through the process of restoration.

The redemptive theme of Scripture is restoration. The presence and persistence of sin requires restoration between God and his creation. John Owen attributes the need for reconciliation between God and man as the direct result of sin. “Reconciliation is the renewing of friendship between parties before at variance, both parties being properly said to be reconciled, even both he that offendeth and he that was offended. God and man were set at distance, at enmity and variance, by sin.”⁴⁵ The pages of Scripture post-Genesis 3 display redemptive history through God’s restoration of creation to himself.

⁴⁴ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 456.

⁴⁵ John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2007), 150.

Though God is restoring at the macro level, he is also restoring at the micro level as well. God desires individual restoration and often uses divine discipline to achieve this aim. God's promise to his people throughout redemptive history has been one of corporate and individual restoration (Joel 2:25-26; 1 Pet 5:10). Though God can give restoration apart from the church, his chosen means of restoration is often through the church.

Paul describes the necessary process of restorative ministry in the church in Galatians 6:1-2. "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore [*katartizete*] such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ." Paul highlights the process of restoring an offending brother as fulfillment of Christ's law, literally "the whole tradition of Jesus's ethical teaching, confirmed by his character and conduct and reproduced within his people by the power of the Spirit."⁴⁶ God's redemptive plan for his people is restoration to himself and one another. Biblical counseling becomes the ecclesiological means of rescuing an offending brother from moral destruction to a right relationship with God.

In the process of restoring sinning Christians to the Lord, biblical counseling directly applies divine discipline. While the goal of divine discipline is holiness, the inevitable result is a restored relationship with God. Though a shepherd might forcibly return a straying sheep, he intentionally assures the returned lamb of its standing in relation to the shepherd. So too is divine discipline—though God breaks the bones of the ones he loves, he lovingly restores his children to himself.⁴⁷ Divine discipline breaks the sinner's will to sin and restores his heart to a right relationship with God.

⁴⁶ F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 261, quoted in Timothy George, *Galatians*, *New American Commentary*, vol. 30 (Nashville: B&H, 1994), 416.

⁴⁷ In one of the clearest biblical examples of repentance, the psalmist helpfully describes the pain of divine discipline in conjunction with the sweetness of a restored relationship with God. "Make me to hear joy and gladness, let the bones which You have broken rejoice...Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit," (Ps 51:8, 12).

God uses biblical counseling in the church to practically produce the same result of restoration. In Galatians 6:1, Paul calls those who are spiritual [*pneumatikoi*] to be agents of God's restoration. Believers filled with the Holy Spirit are to skillfully restore one another.⁴⁸ By guarding their own hearts, biblical counselors enter the messiness of sin and point sinning Christians to Christ. Biblical counselors who demonstrate a heart of restoration follow God's heart for restoration. As Jay Adams pointedly concludes, "Restoration to usefulness, therefore, is the objective of Christian counseling."⁴⁹ Practically applied discipline in the church is always for the purpose of restoring the Christian to God. Biblical counseling points sinful Christians to the Lord, ultimately reflecting God's purposes in divine discipline.

The hope for the hurting and struggling counselee is biblical restoration. Biblical counseling gives hope to counselees through the assurance of restoration. Though biblical counseling cannot guarantee outcome, it does guarantee God's promise to restore his people. Paul elucidates assurance in Romans 5:10 by pointing to the restoration of redemption. "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled [*katēllagēmen*] to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled [*katallagentes*], we shall be saved by His life."⁵⁰ God's holy purposes are displayed

⁴⁸ Essential in the process of divine discipline, biblical counseling, and ultimately restoration is the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit's power and enablement, biblical counseling lacks any ability to restore the counselee to God and others. Martyn Lloyd-Jones pointedly explains the role of the indwelling Holy Spirit: "The Holy Spirit comes to dwell within believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and revolutionizes their lives; nothing less than that." Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Saved By Grace Alone: Sermons on Ezekiel 36:16-36* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2018), 123. John MacArthur further depicts the indwelling Spirit as, "It was not only that the Spirit would be *present with* them; the greater truth was that He would be *resident within* them permanently...In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was often present with believers, but He did not indwell them...In the New Testament era, however, believers have a permanently resident Paraclete, not *with*, but *within*." John F. MacArthur, "The Work of the Spirit," in *Introduction to Biblical Counseling: A Basic Guide to the Principles and Practice of Counseling*, ed. John F. MacArthur, and Wayne A. Mack (Dallas: Word, 1994), 136.

⁴⁹ Jay E. Adams, *Ready to Restore: The Layman's Guide to Christian Counseling* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1981), 5.

⁵⁰ Paul continues the theme of reconciliation as a divine gift upon entering a relationship with Christ. "And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation" (Rom 5:11).

through divine reconciliation. As Paul articulates in Romans 8, reconciliation is intimately tied to the hope of the gospel—a restored relationship with God means the hope of the promises of God.⁵¹ Biblical counseling points counsees to the hope that no sinner is beyond God’s grace or ability to restore. Particularly for counsees inundated with guilt, the promise of God’s restoration is powerful and freeing. Though restoration with others might not be possible in this life, restoration with God is always possible through believing and following his promises. The common New Testament refrain of restoration [*katartizō*] centers around Gospel hope (1 Cor 1:10; 2 Cor 13:11; 1 Thess 3:10; Heb 11:3). Restoration proves that God has not abandoned the counselee but has worked in essential ways to bring the counselee back to Christ. Biblical counseling reorients the counselee’s heart and perspective to see the hope of restorative grace. When biblical counseling points to the promise of restoration through divine discipline, the believing Christian receives the assurance and blessing of restoration. Biblical counseling points counsees to the hope of God’s restorative grace. There is always hope in God’s work of restoration.

The assurance of restoration is first with the Lord and then with one another. Reconciliation with God necessarily means a willingness to reconcile with one another. In essence, loving God means loving the ones God loves. Biblical counseling helps counsees understand that Gospel hope inevitably leads to pursuing reconciliation with others, where possible and appropriate. Reconciled relationships give others hope that no relationship is outside of God’s restorative power. Any relationship can be reconciled through the power and grace of God. Biblical counseling points to the hope of restored

⁵¹ Before describing reconciliation with Christ, Paul elaborates the hope that comes through justification (and ultimately reconciliation) through a right relationship with Christ. “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom 5:1-5).

relationships with one another and reconciliation among believers. As divine discipline restores believers to God's holiness, so too does biblical counseling restore counsees to Christ and his church.

Finally, biblical counseling understands that restoration is the final step towards concluding the counseling process. Restoration completes the need for the intensive discipleship relationship of biblical counseling. Restoration to God and others indicates a heart reoriented to Christ and a life that functionally pursues holiness. Reconciliation to God invariably means restoration to holiness. Similarly, reconciliation with God also means living rightly with others as an ambassador for the Lord. As Adams describes, "The goal of restoration ought to guide the whole of one's attitudes and activities...he [the biblical counselor] counsels to restore him [the counselee] to usefulness."⁵² When biblical counseling has helped correct and instruct counsees in these essential areas of restoration, then biblical counseling concludes. Christians are sufficiently equipped to pursue holiness when they have been biblically restored to God and one another. Biblical counselors are always working for the completion of counseling, and restoration to God and others is evidence of that conclusion.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to unequivocally connect the various facets of divine discipline within biblical counseling. For biblical counseling to address heart issues and accurately hold counsees accountable, we must derive insights from the nature of God's disciplinary measures. Through the course of this chapter, seven key connections were made between divine discipline and biblical counseling. The first connection was through admonition, which is the ministry of confronting counsees struggling with sin. We secondly considered the formative instruction of Scripture both through the Word itself

⁵² Adams, *Ready to Restore*, 5.

and the ones teaching the Word. Thirdly, biblical counseling reflects divine discipline through biblical rebuke. As counselees remain in sin, biblical counselors rebuke the unruly and lead away from sin and death. The fourth reflection of divine discipline was the process of gaining understanding, which biblical counseling pursues at every opportunity through the Word of God. We next considered how biblical counseling expresses God's loving discipline. Just as God lovingly pursues righteousness within his people, so too do biblical counselors lovingly pursue counselees to grow in righteousness. Sixthly, biblical counseling strives to assist believers in becoming holy. God's highest pursuit is for his people to share in his holiness. Biblical counseling always maintains the goal of the counselee is to increase in holiness. Finally, we considered how biblical counseling reflects divine discipline by helping restore believers to the Lord. Biblical counselors labor to restore counselees in their relationship with God. Restoration is the intentional and inevitable result of bringing a believer to the Lord in holiness. Biblical counseling concludes when a Christian has been restored to a right relationship with the Lord.

Understanding the explicit biblical connection between divine discipline and biblical counseling is vital for biblical counselors to sufficiently help counselees struggling with sin. The process and method of God's discipline provides the blueprint for biblical counseling to lead counselees to the Lord. Biblical counselors must discern how to properly respond to each counselee and to never lose sight of the goal. When biblical counselors rightly understand the method, process, and goal of God's discipline, they are better able to provide loving soul care that ultimately restores believers to the Lord in holiness.

CHAPTER 4

THE INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BIBLICAL COUNSELING AND CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Divine discipline practically manifests itself to the work and ministry of the church. Biblical counseling and church discipline both uniquely apply various aspects of divine discipline in the lives of believers. The symbiotic relationship between biblical counseling and church discipline satisfactorily completes one another. In this chapter, we will consider the practical application of divine discipline through the interrelated relationship of biblical counseling and church discipline. The goal of this chapter is to connect the ecclesiastical expressions of divine discipline and demonstrate the essential relationship between them. By clarifying the reciprocating relationship between biblical counseling and church discipline, both ministries will grow in greater effectiveness. To understand how biblical counseling and church discipline sharpen one another, we must first consider how the two are interrelated.

Biblical Counseling and Church Discipline Necessitate One Another

In God's grand design, he chose the local church to be the primary location for implementing church discipline and biblical counseling. Christians are commanded to biblically engage one another to bring about God's purposes. Scripture repeatedly calls Christians to intentional one-another ministry, which involves pursuing others in godliness. Wayne Mack describes the importance of biblically ministering to one another: "There are fifty-eight 'one another commands' in the Word of God, and, realistically understood, it's impossible to understand how these commands may be truly fulfilled

toward other believers without committed involvement in a local church.”¹ Faithful Christianity is evidenced through applying God’s purposes through various one-another commands.

Because biblical counseling helps one another biblically grow in Christ, applying divine discipline in the church requires faithful practice of both biblical counseling and church discipline. Both ministries focus on and prioritize applying biblical one-another commands to help spiritually grow and restore struggling and wayward Christians. Together, biblical counseling and church discipline are the two ecclesiastical arms for restoring one another in holiness. Mack argues that the church is required to restore one another, saying, “If a brother or sister in Christ is caught in a pattern of sin, we’re commanded to do what we can to restore that person so that they can function in ministry once again for Christ.”² God not only commands the local church to be intimately involved in growing one another in holiness, but also gives the local church the tools to best accomplish this goal.

As we saw in chapter 2, church discipline is the loving process of restoring a straying believer to holiness. Through progressive stages, church discipline is the God-ordained mechanism for applying pressure to the sinning Christian and calling attention to the gravity of sin. At each step of church discipline, every effort is made to reconcile the offender to the Lord and the church. Church discipline embodies the great preponderance of Scripture’s one-another commands by calling Christians to godliness. At the same time, as we saw in chapter 3, biblical counseling is the ecclesiastical mechanism for pursuing heart change, particularly in wayward Christians. Rather than viewing offending Christians as lost causes, biblical counselors give hope that

¹ Specifically addressing the importance of intentional involvement in one another’s lives, Mack also says, “Other people’s problems should be our problems as well, in the sense that we’re to show compassion for them and assist them in any way possible.” Wayne Mack, *To Be or Not To Be a Church Member? That Is the Question!* (New York: Calvary, 2004), 26.

² Mack, *To Be or Not To Be a Church Member?* 27.

reconciliation and holiness are attainable through biblical change. At every step of biblical counseling, we make every effort to bring the counselee into a right relationship with God. The ministry of biblical counseling intentionally leads Christians to restoration with the Lord. Therefore, both church discipline and biblical counseling are uniquely paired as essential instruments to practically apply divine discipline in the church. The intricate similarities of biblical counseling and church discipline are so common that they frequently draw from the same well. Robert Cheong and Robert Jones describe the interrelated relationship between these ministries by suggesting, “The lines blur as you sit back and consider the relationship between biblical counseling and church discipline.”³ When the local church is spiritually healthy, both biblical counseling and church discipline simultaneously occur in the lives of believers. Through the similar structure, goals, and motivations, biblical counseling and church discipline necessitate one another for the church to be healthy in Christ.

Biblical Counseling and Church Discipline Pursue the Same Goals

The primary similarity between biblical counseling and church discipline is the shared goal of producing holiness.⁴ Both ministries strive to enact God’s redemptive work in God’s people while battling sin. The symbiotic relationship between biblical counseling and church discipline is codified by the shared vision of victory over sin. When biblical counselors invest countless hours with counselees struggling over sin, the

³ Robert Cheong and Robert Jones, “Biblical Counseling, The Church, and Church Discipline,” in *Biblical Counseling and the Church: God’s Care Through God’s People*, ed. Bob Kellemen and Kevin Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 169.

⁴ As has been repeated throughout this thesis, God’s goal throughout every expression of divine discipline is holiness. John Owen describes holiness as the ultimate emphasis of the Christian life, saying, “Holiness befits the house of the Lord forever, without it no one will see the Lord...This, then, should be the great differentiating character of the church in the world, that they are a holy, humble, self-denying people. Our master is holy; his doctrine and worship are holy; let us make every effort to ensure that our hearts also are holy.” John Owen, *Duties of Christian Fellowship: A Manual for Church Members* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2017), 93.

focus ought always to be the hope of biblical freedom. The power of turning from sin to righteousness comes from the Lord's redemptive work through the proclamation of his Word. Biblical counseling continually seeks to win the counselee to the beautiful freedom of the Gospel.

Church discipline equally combats unrepentant sin by pursuing a holy, right relationship with God. Church discipline bluntly addresses a Christian's sin for his own good. By involving as few participants as necessary, church discipline initially pursues personal holiness rather than public shame. The goal when confronting an offending brother is to win the offender to gospel freedom. As Alexander Strauch memorably explains, "The purpose of this private meeting is to seek and to save, not to seek and to destroy."⁵ Church discipline prioritizes the holiness of the church and the offending believer so that the confronter willfully labors to privately rebuke his brother. If the offender rejects private rebuke, the process of church discipline continually pursues the unrepentant by applying additional pressure through multiple witnesses. If the offender remains recalcitrant, then he is brought before the church for a final plea to pursue holiness. Throughout the entire process of church discipline, the goal is to lead the offender to the holiness of the Lord. John Owen explains why church discipline emphasizes the moral purity of one another because the glory of God is at stake in the local church. He writes,

We should observe one another's walk out of a sense of the glory of God, of the honour of the gospel, and out of concern for each other's souls. What is exemplary in another's behaviour should be followed, what is failing should be pointed out, and what is wrong may be reprov'd, that in all things God may be glorified and Christ exalted.⁶

Thus, both biblical counseling and church discipline prioritize, emphasize, and

⁵ Alexander Strauch, *If You Bite & Devour One Another: Biblical Principles for Handling Conflict* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 2011), 94.

⁶ Owen, *Duties of Christian Fellowship*, 87.

specialize in winning a brother. By pursuing intentional one-another ministry, both ministries pursue the heart of the offending believer. The biblical principle of winning the heart of a straying believer is found in passages that speaks to both church discipline and biblical counseling. When listing the progressive steps of church discipline, Jesus begins the process in Matthew 18:15 by saying, “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won [*ekerdesas*] your brother.” From the outset of church discipline, Jesus clearly emphasizes winning, rather than shaming the brother. But Jesus’s instruction begs the question—what are Christians to win our brothers *to*? Undoubtedly, the context indicates that church discipline wins the offending brother *from* being treated as a Gentile, ultimately leading to condemnation.⁷ But church discipline does more than save a fellow believer from judgment. Instead, church discipline wins the offending believer to a restored relationship with one another. Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop describe winning the offending brother, saying, “Only God can work heart change. Our job is merely to lift a mirror to a believer’s heart so he can see his sin.”⁸ Winning an offending brother is winning his heart to the Lord. Paul furthers Jesus’s idea of winning others to holiness by repeatedly using “winning” [*kerdesō*] in 1 Corinthians 9 as a referent to winning both Jew and Gentile to the Gospel. The issue of winning those around him to the Gospel is such a priority to Paul, he uses the term five times in four verses. Paul’s emphasis in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22 is to win both Jews and Gentiles to become fellow partakers of the Gospel. “For though I am free from all men, I have made

⁷ The secondary emphasis of Matt 18 is the judgment coming for those who persist in sin and reject God’s disciplinary efforts. Throughout the chapter, Jesus horrifyingly describes the impending doom from which church discipline desperately strives to save unrepentant sinners. Matt 18:6, 8-9, 17, “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea...If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire. If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell...If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

⁸ Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop, *The Compelling Community: Where God’s Power Makes a Church Attractive* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 176.

myself a slave to all, so that I may win [*kerdesō*] more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win [*kerdesō*] Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win [*kerdesō*] those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win [*kerdanō*] those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win [*kerdesō*] the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.” The work of every Gospel ministry is to win others to a relationship with Christ. The biblical emphasis of winning a brother not only spares him from eternal judgment, but also assures him entrance into eternal life. As Tara Barthel and David Edling accurately describe, “Church discipline is a means of God’s grace in our lives.”⁹ The goal of church discipline is to win one another to a holy, right standing before God.

The New Testament depiction of biblical counseling equally emphasizes winning one another to holiness. The principle of winning a sinning brother to godliness is described in contexts that delineate aspects of biblical counseling—specifically Galatians 6:1-2 and James 5:19-20. The similarities between the passages are two-fold. First, both passages envision a situation where a professing Christian’s sin is made known to the church. Galatians 6:1 envisions the situation as “Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass”, while James 5:19 similarly describes, “My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth.” Whether publicly or privately, both passages describe an ecclesiastical dilemma forcing a response. The dilemma is forced upon those in the church called “brethren” [*Adelphoi*], which primarily refers to those who have “close affinity; membership in the Christian community.”¹⁰ The emphasis of familial

⁹ Tara Klena Barthel and David V. Edling, *Redeeming Church Conflicts: Turning Crisis into Compassion and Care* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 159.

¹⁰ Frederick William Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Chicago Press, 2000), 18.

relationship establishes the essential role of speaking into one another's lives. As Strauch points out, "This eternal family relationship is stronger than any blood relationship."¹¹ When persistent and unrepentant sin in the church becomes known as envisioned in these texts, believers have a biblical responsibility to lovingly respond.

The second similarity between Galatians 6:1-2 and James 5:19-20 is the principle of winning the brother to a restored relationship with the Lord. This principle of winning a brother is described in Galatians 6:1, "You who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness," while James 5:19-20 describes it as, "if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." In both passages, the Christian who is standing in truth (spiritual) wins the offending brother to a right standing before God. The biblical command for Christians is to win one another to holiness.

Just as church discipline pursues winning an offending brother to godliness, so too does biblical counseling pursue one another to holiness. Biblical counseling shares the same goal as church discipline in seeking to turn the sinner from his wicked ways and to the freedom of a right standing before God. As Galatians 6:1-2 and James 5:19-20 make clear, winning an offending brother occurs through the process of restoration. Writing from a distinct counseling perspective, Jay Adams highlights the goal of restoration in both biblical counseling and church discipline, saying, "At every point in the disciplinary process, the whole concern is to bring about reconciliation...The purpose of church discipline is to win others back to the Lord and to bring about reconciled

¹¹ Strauch, *If You Bite & Devour One Another*, 95. Additionally, Strauch sees the familial dynamic that shapes Christian relationships as permeating throughout the New Testament: "The term brother or sister (sisters are included in the term brothers) occurs approximately 250 times throughout the New Testament." Strauch, *If You Bite & Devour One Another*, 94n6.

conditions between brothers.”¹² When counselees are restored to the Lord, the biblical counselor has won his brother. The mutually shared goal of biblical counseling and church discipline is winning one another in the church to a holy standing before God.

Biblical Counseling and Church Discipline Are Both Motivated by Divine Discipline

Divine discipline is the source for biblical counseling and church discipline.¹³ Both the direction and motivation for biblical counseling and church discipline derive from the auspicious model of divine discipline. These symbiotic ministries in the church are practically fueled by God’s disciplinary demonstration in the spiritual realm. God is most motivated by what grabs the attention of his people to grow them in his holiness. As C. S. Lewis once stated, “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”¹⁴ So too are biblical counseling and church discipline motivated by the same emphasis of holiness. The thrust for applying biblical counseling and church discipline originate from the sanctifying work of divine discipline.

Rather than a figment of human invention, biblical counseling and church discipline follow the biblical mandate of applying God’s discipline. Just as divine discipline comes from the heart of God, so too does biblical counseling and church discipline come from the heart of God through the Word of God. As God desires to restore his people to his holiness, he calls the church to share in this rescue mission. As God desires holiness in restoration, so too does biblical counseling and church discipline work towards holiness in the church. The intended holiness is wholistic restoration in

¹² Jay Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More than Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 287, 288-289.

¹³ For previous consideration of divine discipline, see chapter two of this thesis.

¹⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 91.

nature, originates in the heart, and manifests itself externally through observable action. Joel Beeke and James Greendyk identify God’s intended goal, saying, “In the first place, personal holiness demands personal wholeness...Thus, holiness is an inward thing that must fill our entire heart, and an outward thing that must cover all of life.”¹⁵ More than a dry, heartless mechanism, Scripture describes the ministries of biblical counseling and church discipline as applied in the same way as divine discipline—through love. Scripture commands the church to share in practically displaying divine discipline through biblical counseling and church discipline (Matt 18:15-20; Rom 15:14; 1 Thess 5:11; 2 Thess 3:13-15; Titus 3:9-11). The church does not have the luxury of choosing whether to follow Scripture’s directives in applying divine discipline. To varying degrees (dependent upon position in the church—elder or laity), every church member has some role in church discipline. As Mark Dever affirms, “God Himself disciplines us and...He commands us to do the same for each other. The local church congregation has a special responsibility and a special competence in this regard.”¹⁶ Christians are called to put on the heart of God’s love in working for the good of others and the glory of God through biblical counseling and church discipline.

Yet, the shared goals of biblical counseling and church discipline can easily be misconstrued as unloving in nature. Just as God’s discipline is rooted and motivated in his love, so too is biblical counseling and church discipline rooted and motivated by what God loves. Biblical counseling and church discipline are consistent with all Christian ministries which are driven by love, as John Owen states, “Love is the fountain of all duties toward God and man.”¹⁷ The twin ministries of practical discipline are particularly motivated by three interrelated loves—love for God’s glory, love for the church’s purity,

¹⁵ Joel R. Beeke and James D. Greendyk, *Knowing and Living the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 1997), 260.

¹⁶ Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 174.

¹⁷ Owen, *Duties of Christian Fellowship*, 34.

and love for the offending believer. As Tara Barthel and David Edling candidly state, “Redemptive confrontation—speaking truth in love—means that we are motivated by two concerns: love of God and love of neighbor.”¹⁸ As the church is motivated by the love for God and love for neighbor (both the church and offender), the ministries of biblical counseling and church discipline come to the fore.

Biblical counseling and church discipline are motivated first and foremost by a love for God and his glory. John Piper summarizes the thrust of love, “Love is the overflow of joy in God that gladly meets the needs of others.”¹⁹ When Christians love God and his glory, the inevitable result is working with others to become right with God. Christians understand that sin originates out of a heart that has lost or rejected God’s glory. Therefore, loving God results in zealous reinstatement of God’s glory manifested in the heart of every man. Whenever sin is present, the answer is always to develop an expansive vision of who God truly is in all his glory. Sinning Christians are restored to a faithful God when fellow Christians point them to God and his holiness. The answer for the sinning Christian is for the church to love God by safeguarding his glory. Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck describe the glory of God as the motivation for confronting spiritual dryness in the church saying, “No matter the church’s problem, what is most needful is to see God in His glory. Lost your first love? Being persecuted? Impure? Bad theology? Spiritually dry? Full of weakness? Apathetic? You need to know God better.”²⁰ Biblical counseling and church discipline are fueled by what motivates God’s discipline—love for God and his glory. Love for the Lord motivates the ministries of the church.

¹⁸ Barthel and Edling, *Redeeming Church Conflicts*, 197.

¹⁹ John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003), 119.

²⁰ Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We’re Not Emergent (By Two Guys Who Should Be)* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 252.

But biblical counseling and church discipline are also motivated by love for the church and its purity. Permitting sin in the church stains the bride of Christ. Christ died to sanctify and make his bride holy, resulting in the progressive eradication of sin within her midst (Eph 5:25-27). Biblical counseling and church discipline enable us to love God and to love those whom he loves—the church. When the church faithfully practices biblical counseling and church discipline, it evidences a desire to be holy as Christ commands, while also expressing an unwillingness to look the other way regarding sin. Biblical counseling and church discipline prioritize the spiritual health of the church by confronting and biblically responding to sin. Joe Thorn explains that disciplinary measures in the church flow from a desire to love the church, saying, “A church that practices church discipline well is a church that demonstrates real care for the entire body through accountability, correction, instruction, and ultimately restoration.”²¹ Biblical counseling and church discipline respond to sin in the church out of an abounding love for the bride of Christ.

Finally, biblical counseling and church discipline is motivated by a love for the offending Christian. Though it might not initially appear loving to the one receiving it, practical expressions of discipline in the church are the ultimate expression of love to the offender. Once the moral boundary has been crossed and sin has been committed, the church must lovingly respond to the one sinning. Just as God tenaciously pursues wandering Christians, so too do the ministries of biblical counseling and church discipline lovingly pursue the hearts of the straying Christian. Though often initially appearing harsh and invasive, the church’s practical measures are the greatest acts of love to a Christian caught in the web of sin. Recognizing the difficulty in confronting sin, Barthel and Edling point to love as the motivator, saying, “Speaking the truth must be

²¹ Joe Thorn, *The Character of the Church: The Marks of God’s Obedient People* (Chicago: Moody, 2017), 99.

done in love, for the ultimate good of the one being confronted and for the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31), or else it is not redemptive confrontation.”²² The onus is upon the church to define love from a biblical worldview rather than a secular worldview. When the eternal destiny of a person’s soul is at stake, the offending Christian must understand the necessity of the drastic steps in biblical counseling and church discipline. Cheong and Jones point out the importance of characterizing love in a biblical context, explaining, “But we must define love as the Lord does and not allow unbiblical notions to cast His redemptive discipline as unloving or to minimize other godly qualities like holiness, obedience, and purity.”²³ The ministries of the church are always loving in nature. The motivation for biblical counseling and church discipline comes from God’s disciplinary love to the struggling and wayward Christian. As Dever concludes, “Our purpose in church discipline is positive for the individual disciplined, for other Christians as they see the real danger of sin, for the health of the church as a whole, and for the corporate witness of the church to those outside. Most of all, our holiness is to reflect the holiness of God.”²⁴

Ultimately, the ministerial work in the church towards sinning Christians finds direction and motivation from divine discipline. The love that God displays to Christians through divine discipline is practically applied through the shared ministries of biblical counseling and church discipline. By loving God and the church, these ministries can best love the offending Christian for the ultimate purpose of restoration in holiness. Dietrich Bonhoeffer elucidates brotherly love in his lengthy commentary on living life together in the church, saying,

²² Barthel and Edling, *Redeeming Church Conflicts*, 197.

²³ Cheong and Jones, “Biblical Counseling, the Church, and Church Discipline,” 161.

²⁴ Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 192.

The practice of discipline in the congregation begins in the smallest circles. Where defection from God's Word in doctrine or life imperils the family fellowship and with it the whole congregation, the word of admonition and rebuke must be ventured. Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to his sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a brother back from the path of sin. It is a ministry of mercy, an ultimate offer of genuine fellowship, when we allow nothing but God's Word to stand between us, judging and succoring. Then it is not we who are judging; God alone judges, and God's judgment is helpful and healing. Ultimately, we have no charge but to serve our brother, never to set ourselves above him, and we serve him even when we must speak the judging and dividing Word of God to him, even when, in obedience to God, we must break off fellowship with him. We must know that it is not our human love which makes us loyal to the other person, but God's love which breaks its way through to him only through judgment.²⁵

Biblical Counseling and Church Discipline Occur Simultaneously

Though specific situations require formalized counseling or church discipline meetings, the great preponderance of expressions in the church occur simultaneously with one another. As we will consider below, biblical counseling and church discipline are interlocking ministries that continue where the other leaves off. Biblical counseling and church discipline specifically intersect where either the counselee has rejected biblical guidance from formal counseling, or when a church member becomes recalcitrant. Even in the context of a defiant church member, elders could determine biblical counseling as necessary before moving towards excommunication. However, the biblical vision for the church is not compartmentalized ministries. The outworking of God's redemptive work bleeds across every ministry of the church. In a certain sense, continual ministry to the people of God are interrelated implementations of God's discipline. Alfred Poirier sees the ministry of the church as sharing in the ministry of discipline, saying, "Hence, discipline actually begins with the regular pastoral duties of discipling God's people through preaching, teaching, counseling, and equipping the saints."²⁶ Since both biblical

²⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community* (New York: HarperCollins, 1954), 107.

²⁶ Alfred Poirier, *The Peacemaking Pastor: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Church Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 232.

counseling and church discipline are primarily invested in restoring Christians to holy living, both ministries occur simultaneously in the life of the church. The two ministries often overlap and continue one another in an indiscernible manner (see figure 2).

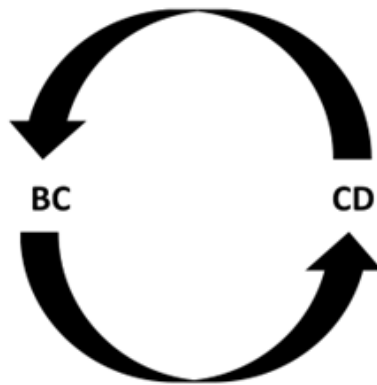


Figure 2: Simultaneous Ministries of Biblical Counseling and Church Discipline

Both biblical counseling and church discipline initially develop from similar patterns. Both ministries involve privately approaching an offending brother for the purpose of winning him to godliness. At the initial stage, confrontation is indiscernible from biblical counseling and church discipline. Though the conclusion of biblical counseling and church discipline becomes discernable, the process ought to be strikingly similar in the church. Especially when Christians engage in sin, both biblical counseling and church discipline seek to correct the sinning believer. As the community of believers strive to help the wayward Christian, both biblical counseling and church discipline are functionally applied. At least in the initial phase, the two ecclesiastical mechanisms occur simultaneously in God’s grand rescue of redemption. Referring to both biblical counseling and church discipline, Cheong and Jones write, “Both reflect the ministry of God’s Word in the struggles of life where Christ is the focus, the Spirit accomplishes redemptive work in everyone involved, and God the Father is glorified as His people

participate with Him in building up His church in love and advancing His kingdom in the world.”²⁷

Biblical counseling and church discipline progressively diverge from parallel paths when the case requires involvement from other people. While certain circumstances can lead biblical counselors to involve additional counselors (i.e., requiring a counselor with specific expertise), the normative process of biblical counseling is consistent, intentional discipleship. Though biblical counseling occurs both formally and informally (i.e., through intentional counseling and through intentional community), it often is indistinguishable from the first stage of church discipline. However, church discipline branches into unique territory in the next stage requiring two or three witnesses (Matt 18:16). By incorporating others to strengthen the admonition and plea for reconciliation, church discipline widens the concentric circle to further emphasize the necessity of repentance. When the offending person rejects continual calls to repentance in the second stage of church discipline, the separation between biblical counseling and church discipline becomes more apparent. Entering the second stage of church discipline gives a formality to the process due to the inclusion of additional witnesses. At this important formal stage of church discipline, the distinction between biblical counseling and church discipline becomes clear. The point of divergence is at the juncture of a person’s blatant rejection of repeated calls to repent. Though the ministry of biblical counseling continually strives to convince the other of sin, church discipline steps into a unique stage by involving other Christians. By making a distinction between biblical counseling and church discipline in this pivotal second stage (and subsequent third stage, if necessary), the cooperating ministries can more clearly handle the stages of sin (see figure 3).

²⁷ Cheong and Jones, “Biblical Counseling, the Church, and Church Discipline,” 169.

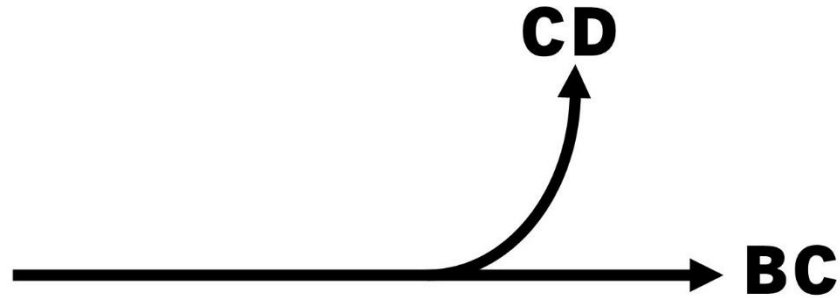


Figure 3: Diverging Ministries of Biblical Counseling and Church Discipline

However, even in the separation into more defined ministries, both ministries still incorporate one another through the disciplinary process. Though no longer working concurrently, biblical counseling remains a vital resource for the sustained efforts in church discipline to reconcile the offender and vice versa. We must not make the mistake to presume that two or three witnesses merely affirm the presence of sin. Rather, because the emphasis in Matthew 18 is one of restoring a sinning brother, the second stage of church discipline seems to indicate additional help (perhaps even counselors) as witnesses. As witnesses, biblical counselors can speak truth into the sinning brother's life, as well as give urgency for repentance and restoration. Though subtle distinction exists between the two ecclesiastic efforts of biblical counseling and church discipline, both ministries work together for a shared goal, purpose, and method.

Thus, though biblical counseling and church discipline begin to distinguish themselves from one another in the latter stages of each ministry, they inevitably occur simultaneously with one another. As the church community makes efforts to restore one another to holiness, invariably biblical counseling and church discipline co-exist in shared capacities.

The Practical Application of Biblical Counseling and Church Discipline

Because biblical counseling and church discipline are instruments of divine

discipline, it is essential to understand their practical application within the church. Since biblical counseling and church discipline involve people implementing each ministry, we must consider how the ministries apply together. When the dual ministries of biblical counseling and church discipline are understood, churches and believers alike better support the disciplinary work and become personally involved.

Understanding the practical expressions of discipline in the church lead to a community of support. It is vital for the entire church to understand that engagement in practical discipline is intended for all Christians, not just church leaders. When the entire church shares the vision of discipline, support and intentionality will follow. Even for those unable to practically engage in disciplinary efforts, understanding biblical counseling and church discipline gives opportunity to encourage others who are engaging in the ministries. The more biblical counseling and church discipline are simultaneously applied in a church, the more the entire congregation can collaboratively support the effort.

For the great majority of the congregation, the practical application of biblical counseling and church discipline drastically modifies how Christians become personally involved. As Christians better understand the nature and blessing of divine discipline, so too will they desire to serve as agents of discipline in the church. Similar to biblical counseling, discipline is practically applied through the involvement of the entire church. Colin Marshall and Tony Payne describe the collective effort in applying God's discipline by suggesting, "This can only mean that God wants all Christians to be speaking to each other regularly, urging and encouraging each other to stick with Christ."²⁸ One of the blessings of biblical counseling and church discipline is the effort of regular members pursuing one another. When disciplinary measures are normalized in the

²⁸ Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2009), 46.

context of the local church, the members take ownership in helping each other. As Dever and Dunlop simply state, “Ordinary church members must address *each other’s* sin.”²⁹ When biblical counseling and church discipline are simultaneously applied in the church, the entire church participates in shaping disciples in holiness.

Biblical Counseling and Church Discipline Practically Pursue Discipleship

The point of God’s discipline and its ecclesiastical expressions is to grow Christians in discipleship. Biblical counseling and church discipline are expressions of discipleship because both ministries singularly focus on growing others in the image of Christ. The practical expressions of discipline in the church are the God-given means for spiritually growing Christians and the local church. The former is pursued through one-another discipleship, while the latter is strengthened by unified, corporate intentionality. J. I. Packer describes the practical ministry of discipline in the church, saying, “[Next] comes *discipline*, not primarily in the unhappy but sometimes unavoidable form of judicial process and excommunication, but primarily in the form of discipling and nurture, with pastoral and spiritual direction, and the practice of what are nowadays called the disciplines of the spiritual life.”³⁰ The measurement of where one stands in the discipleship process is often tied to the practical applications of biblical counseling and church discipline.

In the context of practical expressions of discipline, what becomes clear is that Christians ought to be involved in one another’s lives. While Christians are given freedom of conscience,³¹ at no point does this principle remove Christian accountability

²⁹ Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop, *The Compelling Community: Where God’s Power Makes a Church Attractive* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 173.

³⁰ J. I. Packer, *Knowing Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 94.

³¹ Scripture plainly teaches that God is Lord of the conscience, rather than the sensitivities, proclivities, and preferences of others. (Rom 14:1-23; 1 Cor 10:29; Jas 4:12)

to one another. Scripture commands Christians to heartily invest in one another to become better disciples of Christ. The ministerial mechanisms of biblical counseling and church discipline presume active Christian involvement in one another's lives. Whether by exposing spiritual blind spots, applying accountability, or giving biblical direction, Christians disciple one another. As believers invest in one another through biblical counseling and church discipline, those under their care grow closer to Christ.

One simple way that discipleship applies practical discipline is by pointing others to Jesus. Though theologically driven by divine discipline, biblical counseling and church discipline plainly help others possess a grander vision of Jesus. The hope in church discipline is restoration through Christ; the hope in biblical counseling is holiness from Christ. For the average church member, the simplest condition of applying the ministries of discipline is discipling one another to Jesus. Perhaps the most succinct delineation of this truth is explained in C. S. Lewis's children's fantasy series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Lewis describes spiritual growth not primarily from a theologically definitive statement, but from an experiential growth with Jesus. As the protagonist, Lucy, interacts with Aslan, the representation of Christ, Lewis waxes:

“Aslan,” said Lucy, “you’re bigger.”

“That is because you are older, little one,” answer he.

“Not because you are?”

“I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger.”³²

Practically applying biblical counseling and church discipline means intentionally discipling one another to an ever-growing love and understanding of Christ.

³² C. S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian: The Return to Narnia*, *The Chronicles of Narnia Book 4* (New York: Scholastic, 1951), 141.

Church Discipline Provides Motivation for Biblical Counseling

As the church collectively pursues discipleship through discipline, the specific relationship between biblical counseling and church discipline becomes clearer. Church discipline practically and primarily affects biblical counseling by serving as the impetus for the counselee to continue fighting sin and growing in holiness. While biblical counseling points out another's sins, it does not have the ecclesiastical strength to apply discipline to a resistant counselee. Biblical counselors know that if a counselee rejects counsel and persists in sin, biblical counseling alone can only give warnings. Biblical counseling equips counselors to biblically inform and help counsees grow in Christ, but it is deficient and unable to enforce discipline. By itself, the greatest enforcement of biblical counseling is threatening to discontinue counseling until the counselee genuinely responds to sin in their heart and life.

However, when biblical counseling partners with the twin discipline ministry of church discipline, then spiritual enforcement becomes robust. When the biblical counselor shares with someone who has ecclesiastical authority over the counselee, full application of divine discipline can be applied through church discipline. Church discipline possesses the necessary mechanisms for responding to resistant counsees who have rejected repeated calls to repentance. Though the lines are blurred in the initial stages of biblical counseling and church discipline, the former heavily relies upon the latter to apply and enforce divine discipline within the church.

Biblical counseling specifically warns counsees that if sin persists, the only viable recourse is church discipline. In informal counseling (i.e., discipleship relationships in a Gospel community), gentle reminders should be given to the straying sinner that sin cannot be forgotten and swept under a rug. Particularly in formal biblical counseling, the counselors should initially make sure the counselee understands church discipline is the biblical enforcement for those who refuse to turn from sin. Biblical counselors are driven by their love for the counselee to use all biblical means necessary

to free the counselee from sin's enslavement. Jeremy Pierre and Deepak Reju argue that church discipline should be an ever-present awareness in the counselee's mind, saying, "In pastoral counseling, the threat of church discipline should quietly sit in the back of the counselee's mind, acting as a deterrent to unrepentant sin."³³ Counselees need to understand and never forget that continuing in sin is never permissible for a Christian. How a counselee responds to counseling determines the direction of counseling—whether to a conclusion (in formal counseling) or to an ecclesiastical application of discipline (in church discipline). Church discipline helps remind counselees of the gravity of their relationship with sin.

One of the most salient points of church discipline's enforcement of biblical counseling is rightly understanding a counselee's response to sin. Undoubtedly, every counselee struggles spiritually with sin to some degree. For counselees who labor against sin in their life, pursuing church discipline is both unwise and unbiblical. The issue of whether to utilize church discipline to enforce biblical counseling is measured by the counselee's heart. Understanding that counselees will inevitably struggle with sin, Pierre and Reju explain, "Counseling is therefore a safe place for those struggling against sin, even if they fall often in that struggle."³⁴ However, when the counselee's heart has grown cold to the commands of Scripture and it becomes clear that he has determined to persist in sin, church discipline should be enacted. As Pierre and Reju further warn, "But counseling is not a safe place for those who willfully continue patterns of clear and unrepentant sin...Because we don't have the immediate insight of the Holy Spirit, patient, hope-filled accountability with clear and reasonable standards is the best way to test the long-term trajectory of someone on the line."³⁵ Great sensitivity and discernment must

³³ Jeremy Pierre and Deepak Reju, *The Pastor and Counseling: The Basics of Shepherding Members in Need* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 109.

³⁴ Pierre and Reju, *The Pastor and Counseling*, 109.

³⁵ Pierre and Reju, *The Pastor and Counseling*, 109.

guide biblical counselors in determining whether church discipline should be applied to a counselee.

The principle of caution in discipline is given in 1 Thessalonians 5:14 when Paul postulates sundry responses that accord with people's different dispositions. Paul encourages the church to "admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone." Paul's instruction is for the entire church and differentiates the manner of response to different counsees.³⁶ Skill and discernment is required to know which response is appropriate to the specific counselee. Though biblical counseling admonishes, encourages, helps, and is longsuffering, church discipline alone can equally apply discipline, especially for the unruly.³⁷ Church discipline steps in and enforces admonishment where the counselee has spurned biblical counsel. The enforcement of biblical counseling is church discipline. Thus, church discipline is the necessary motivation for counsees to respond to biblical counseling; where the counselee fails to respond, church discipline supplants biblical counseling to enforce divine discipline.

Biblical Counseling Is the Modus Operandi for Church Discipline

While church discipline motivates and enforces biblical counseling, the reverse is equally true—biblical counseling provides the process for church discipline. Because the main goal of church discipline is to restore the wandering offender, every effort is

³⁶ Describing the broadness of Paul's intent, D. Michael Martin writes, "It is highly unlikely that v. 14 was addressed to leaders of the congregation (cf. v. 12) as the only ones responsible to warn, encourage, and help others. Throughout the letter 'brethren' refers to the entire church, and there is no indication that Paul used it more narrowly (i.e., meaning 'leaders') in this instance." D. Michael Martin, *1 Thessalonians*, New American Commentary, vol. 33 (Nashville: B&H, 1995), 177.

³⁷ Though not specifically naming church discipline in 1 Thess 5, Paul seems to be indicating that the church should pursue whatever means necessary for the good of all involved. A few verses later in 1 Thess 5:15, Paul writes, "See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people." Especially in the case of those who persist in being unruly, church discipline is a necessary step for the offender's own good.

made for restoration throughout the entire process. As those enforcing church discipline pursue restoration for the offending person, biblical counseling becomes the primary instrument for reconciliation and restoration.³⁸ Key attributes of biblical counseling such as skillful instruction, admonition, and rebuke are vital for helping a sinner turn from his wicked ways. Speaking biblical truth to the offender is essential for any hope of restoration. Biblical counseling thus serves as a valuable and key method for instructing and pleading biblical truth. As a case progresses through the stages of church discipline, the interaction with the offender is saturated with biblical counsel and instruction. Though increasingly distinct from each other through the latter stages, biblical counseling assists church discipline as the vital mechanism for restoring Christians who persist in sin.

Biblical counseling is imperative for every stage of church discipline. Church discipline can only conclude successfully when the offender acquiesces to the significance of his sin. Before church discipline can be taken to the next step, the offender must understand his transgression and Scripture's requirement to be right with God and man. Because biblical counseling is the skillful application of biblical truth, it is essential for the stages of church discipline. Biblical counseling is the primary method for the private teaching and instruction of biblical principles to a person's life.³⁹ Biblical counseling ensures not only that the offender understands the gravity of his sin, but also

³⁸ Paul describes the church's role in restoring a believer who had been excommunicated through church discipline in 2 Cor 2:6-8, saying, "Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him." Whereas the body of the church inflicted punishment through church discipline, Paul now calls the church to forgive, comfort, and love. The role of biblical counseling is present from beginning to end in church discipline.

³⁹ Paul's example in Ephesus was not only the public ministry of the Word, but also the private ministry as well. Acts 20:18-20, "And when they had come to him, he said to them, 'You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you *publicly* and from *house to house* [private ministry].'" (emphasis added)

the hope of the Gospel. Biblical counseling guards church discipline from becoming a cold, calloused process of cynically presuming other people's sin and moving too quickly. Instead, biblical counseling labors for the good of the offender at every stage of church discipline, pleading for repentance and constantly pointing towards biblical restoration. Particularly as an offending sinner rejects biblical calls to repentance, the primary method for restoring offenders in church discipline is through the ministry of biblical counseling.

One significant reason biblical counseling is imperative for every stage of church discipline is because of the unending emphasis on Jesus in biblical counseling. While both church discipline and biblical counseling focus on Jesus and his glory, the entire process of the latter is exclusively to make much of Christ. The hope in biblical counseling is Christ-centered and Christ-enabled. The thrust of one-another ministry is to push each other to Christ. Ken Sande sees this pattern evidenced first in Paul, who "always kept Jesus in the center of his instruction and correction."⁴⁰ So too does biblical counseling constantly focus and emphasize Christ in counseling. Church discipline is the process to protect the glory of God and holiness of Christ's bride; biblical counseling is the necessary means of making much of Christ to the one ensnared in sin.

The critical point of distinction between biblical counseling and church discipline is the crossroads of the offender's rejection of repentance and restoration throughout church discipline. The progressive rejection of biblical counsel decreases the necessity of biblical counseling and compels the need for church discipline. The unrepentant response of the counselee dictates a growing urgency for church discipline. Though the ministry of church discipline increases while biblical counseling decreases at this critical stage, both seek to restore the offender. The method of restoring the offender

⁴⁰ Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 164.

through counseling becomes insufficient to the recalcitrant offender. As biblical counseling renders ineffective for changing the offender's heart, the need for church discipline drastically increases. By the final stage of church discipline when the offender is brought before the church for excommunication, the process of biblical counseling has diminished, while the awareness of church discipline is elevated to the church. As more of the church become aware of a person's sin, the influence of biblical counseling decreases while the importance and awareness of church discipline dramatically increases. Rejection of biblical counseling makes church discipline more apparent and necessary (see figure 4).

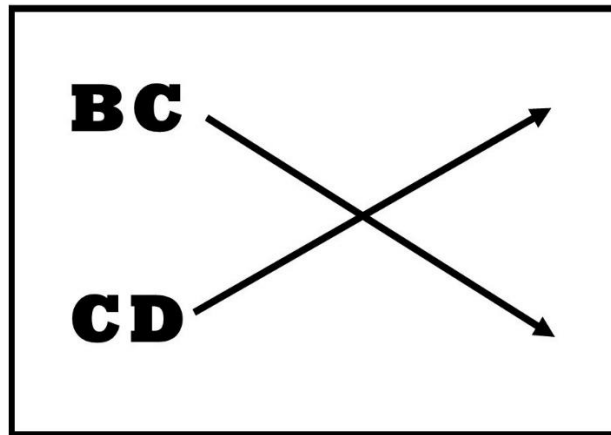


Figure 4: Intersecting Ministries of Biblical Counseling and Church Discipline

Finally, it bears mentioning that the process of church discipline is impossible without the aid of biblical instruction, seen primarily through biblical counseling. By seeking to restore the offending Christian, church discipline engages in various forms of biblical counseling. At this point, biblical counseling and church discipline are inseparable. Whether in the first stage of initial confrontation, in the second stage when incorporating witnesses, in the penultimate stage of elder involvement, or in the final

stage of bringing the offense before the congregation, church discipline is constantly employing biblical counseling measures and principles of biblical instruction for the restoration and good of the offender. Poirier identifies counseling as a vital part of the second stage when involving two or three witnesses. He writes, “We ought to assume that these one or two others taken along are speaking, counseling, exhorting, and rebuking—making every effort to compel their brother to listen—rather than merely stating the evidence for his offense.”⁴¹ Even as church discipline progresses, the process necessarily involves biblical counseling (hearkening back to the blurred lines of biblical counseling and church discipline). Faithful application of church discipline includes applying biblical counseling.

In the end, biblical counseling helps produce what is at the heart of church discipline—holiness in the body of Christ. Biblical counseling is the useful and necessary tool to build God’s kingdom that is protected and guarded by church discipline. Both biblical counseling and church discipline seek to watch over the souls of God’s people while biblically responding to sin. Biblical counseling is the avenue that implements church discipline and the valuable accord that offers wayward Christians a way back to God. Though the practical applications of divine discipline are admittedly painful in administering, the desired result is restoration and hopefulness. For a church to be healthy and vivacious in the Gospel, the dual ministries of biblical counseling and church discipline must be supported and enforced for the good of the people and the church. As Pierre and Reju implicate, “Church discipline is about more than its final expression of excommunication; it is part of the regular vigilance members have over one another’s souls.”⁴² The goal, motivation, and method for biblical counseling and church discipline culminate in God’s disciplinary efforts to restore his people to himself.

⁴¹ Poirier, *The Peacemaking Pastor*, 206.

⁴² Pierre and Reju, *The Pastor and Counseling*, 109.

Conclusion

The biblical ministries of practically applying God's discipline in the church are biblical counseling and church discipline. These interrelated ministries are often indistinguishable and necessarily need one another to complete their goals. Both ecclesiastical ministries are driven by the same model of divine discipline. Biblical counseling and church discipline share the same goals toward holiness and restoration; both ministries are motivated by the same example of divine discipline; both ministries rely upon one another to complete their purposes.

Though distinct in certain ways, both instruments of practical discipline are often indistinguishable from one another. The dual ministries frequently are synonymous with each other in the process of application. Where biblical counseling ends and church discipline begins is not always discernable. The former's emphasis on restoration through biblical ministry pairs with the latter's push towards holiness. In practicality, the first stage of church discipline is indistinguishable from the one-another ministry of biblical counseling. Even in the second stage of church discipline that includes multiple witnesses, the difference between the two ministries is not always apparent in application.

However, as the wayward sinner progresses in rejecting biblical calls to repentance, the distinction between biblical counseling and church discipline becomes discernable. As the counselee remains resolute in disregarding calls to repentance and sanctification, church discipline becomes enforced to the counselee. Church discipline provides the heavy lifting of enforcing divine discipline in ways that biblical counseling does not have (i.e., excommunication). Yet at the same time, biblical counseling is the valuable means and method for restoring sinners throughout every stage of church discipline. Church discipline requires biblical counseling principles and skills to appeal to the recalcitrant sinner's heart. In God's grand scheme of redeeming his people, the primary application and enforcement of divine discipline in the church are biblical counseling and church discipline. Applied together, biblical counseling and church

discipline are vital instruments to restore God's people to holiness in Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 5

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH

This thesis has argued that divine discipline is practically applied in the church through the shared ministries of biblical counseling and church discipline. One of the greatest temptations of a thesis like this is for the concepts and principles to remain cerebral rather than functional. Practical theology ought never be given mere mental assent—Christians must apply practical theology to the various issues of life. Therefore, this chapter will focus on the tangible applications of divine discipline in churches. Through case studies, answering objections, and offering final implications, the goal is to shine light into the opaque uncertainty of discipline for the purpose of gently assuaging common fears. Understanding the applications of divine discipline inevitably leads to a willingness and boldness to labor in discipline ministries. When it comes to biblical counseling and church discipline, the more we know the better we do. C. S. Lewis describes the application of theology: “Theology is like the map. Merely learning and thinking about the Christian doctrines, if you stop there, is less real and less exciting...In other words, Theology is practical: especially now.”¹ The theology of divine discipline ought to give churches confidence in seeking biblical faithfulness. Thus, biblically confident churches lead to faithful applications of discipline. The arguments presented in this thesis should lead to the inevitable conclusions of this chapter—churches ought to be sufficiently equipped in discipline ministries and responsibly apply God’s discipline.

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 1980), 154, 155.

Case Studies of Biblical Counseling and Church Discipline

To have confidence in personally applying the practical ministries of divine discipline, we will consider two case studies that demonstrate the intersecting relationship between biblical counseling and church discipline. Both case studies below are pseudonymous, composite cases that highlight either biblical counseling or church discipline. The first case study will consider a biblical counseling scenario where the counselee becomes derelict in following biblical instruction. The counselee's refusal to follow biblical counsel warrants the inclusion of church discipline. This first practical example will show the shift from biblical counseling to church discipline in a realistic context.

The second case study will demonstrate a church discipline process that requires the soul care of biblical counseling. Instead of pursuing solely judicial prosecution, the church disciplinarians employ biblical counselors to restore the offender. This second case exhibits the essential role of biblical counseling that comprehensively applies church discipline.

Both case studies practically demonstrate how biblical counseling and church discipline functionally work together in the church to produce the same results as divine discipline. The value of these case studies is the explicit connection between biblical counseling and church discipline, rather than the specifics of the case studies themselves. Through both cases, I hope the vital significance of biblical counseling and church discipline working in tandem becomes abundantly clear.

Case Study #1: Biblical Counseling Leading to Church Discipline

Ethan is a 32-year-old husband and father who initiated counseling because he confessed an ongoing struggle with pornography to his wife, Emma. Though he willingly confessed his sin to her, she suspected impropriety for some time based upon his attitude and unexplained time alone. Upon his confession of sin and at Emma's insistence, Ethan

willingly attended counseling. Presuming they could be more honest and upfront with someone who did not know them, the couple attended biblical counseling from a church that was not their home church. The first few sessions were auspicious and fruitful—both Ethan and Emma appeared to confront their own personal failures in the marriage. Ethan initially made intentional efforts to follow the counseling plan and apply the homework, but eventually his resolve waivered. The subsequent sessions focused on Ethan’s lack of interest in counseling and restoration.

As Ethan increasingly became disinterested in counseling, the biblical counselor worried that Ethan’s primary motivation was not to be reconciled to the Lord but to win back Emma’s affections. Ethan quickly became increasingly cynical and resistant to biblical admonishment and rebuke. Upon Emma’s subsequent discovery of pornography on his device, he again admitted to an ongoing habit of looking at pornography. Yet this time, Ethan argued that his pornography was “not too bad,” was not habitual, and was even healthy for a man, something the counselor showed him to be unbiblical. In what eventually became his final counseling session, Ethan maintained that he was not addicted to pornography and claimed to be an “overall good husband.” Before the next session, Emma called to inform the biblical counselor of Ethan’s refusal to continue counseling and insistence that periodic pornography was acceptable. After repeated unsuccessful attempts to meet with Ethan about his sin, the biblical counselor sent a letter to Ethan explaining the severity of his unresolved sin. Having not received any response from Ethan, the biblical counselor was obligated to contact Ethan’s elders and initiate the proceedings of the church discipline process. Upon receiving documented evidence of Ethan’s hardened heart, the elders subsequently made multiple attempts calling Ethan to repentance. Every elder effort was repeatedly spurred by Ethan. After expressing their intentions to bring the matter before the congregation if he was not willing to pursue repentance, the elders informed the church of Ethan’s recalcitrant heart and proceeded to remove him from church membership.

This case demonstrates the inherent inability of biblical counseling to ensure and enforce biblical instruction when the counselee becomes resistant to counsel. Though biblical counseling points out sin, it holds no ecclesiastical compulsion. The biblical counselor must give a counselee like Ethan every opportunity to turn from his sin. Once the biblical counselor ensured every measure had been taken to plead with Ethan about his sin, the loving next step is to inform those entrusted with shepherding Ethan's heart. Church discipline steps in as the administrator and enforcer for biblical instruction and restoration. Biblical counselors must be clear that the role of biblical counseling is leading people in godliness, not enforcing godliness. Biblical counselors apply divine discipline through helping Christians grow in righteousness, not through prosecuting ecclesiastical discipline. Biblical counselors must rightly understand their role in providing biblical instruction, while not hesitating to incorporate the ecclesiastical weight of church discipline to hardened counsees.

Specifically in a case like Ethan's, important steps should be taken in biblical counseling before including church discipline. First, the biblical counselor must verify sin is truly being committed by the counselee. Church discipline cannot be pursued unless there is definitive proof that sin has been committed. Church discipline must be pursued if sin has been committed and the offender has rejected clear calls to repentance. Second, the biblical counselor must take precautions to ensure he is thinking biblically. Biblical counselors must guard against any prejudice or inaccuracies that would affect their understanding of the situation. Biblical counselors guard against preconceived bias by regularly studying Scripture for themselves or including another biblical counselor. Third, the biblical counselor must make sure that the counselee understands the gravity of the sin committed. Church discipline should not be pursued until and unless the counselee accurately grasps the heinousness of the offense. Fourth, the biblical counselor should carefully explain the situation to the elders of the counselee and ensure the counselee understands the discipline process. Though there are situations where church discipline

should be initiated without the counselee's knowledge, the normative process of initiating church discipline should involve notifying the counselee.² Finally, the biblical counselor is obligated to render his services as a resource for the church discipline process. Though the elders officially become responsible for the process of church discipline, the biblical counselor is a resource and a witness to the offender's sin. When a counselee becomes unwilling and unresponsive to biblical instruction, biblical counselors must take necessary steps as the ministry shifts to church discipline.

Case Study #2: Church Discipline Leading to Biblical Counseling

Abigail was known around her friend circle as a gossip. Almost without fail, whenever trusted with sensitive information, details would inevitably leak to others. As her habit of idle talk increased, her friends and husband, Alan, grew increasingly more concerned. The *coup de grâce* of Abigail's sin was when she betrayed a friend's trust by making public a private conversation. Rather than prayerfully guarding her friend's trust, Abigail soon related her friend's story to others. Concerned with Abigail's spiritual condition, Alan took his concerns to a church elder. Upon receiving this report of sin, the church elders consulted Abigail's friends as witnesses to determine the veracity of the original report. After receiving validation of Abigail's gossip from multiple witnesses, the elders confronted Abigail about her sin. Though initially surprised by the confrontation, Abigail quickly defended herself that her gossip was not hurting anyone. She subsequently refused to repent of gossip and brushed off the confrontation. After repeated attempts to rebuke Abigail, the elders elected for one final effort of restoration through the process of biblical counseling. When faced with the gravity of her sin and the

² Exceptions to this principle would include situations such as physical and sexual abuse. In situations such as these, alerting the offender of church discipline could potentially place the abused in danger before church discipline can provide guardrails promoting safety. The basic principle of whether to notify the counselee before church discipline is to consider whether the action potentially places someone's safety in jeopardy. Regardless of an offender's standing in the church, if they at any point pose a direct threat to someone's safety and well-being, the appropriate authorities should be immediately notified.

potential threat of public excommunication, Abigail agreed to attend formal biblical counseling from a counselor in the church.

Over the course of eight sessions, the biblical counselor pursued Abigail's heart by helping her biblically understand the reason for her perpetual gossip. Though she had initially resisted calls to repentance, the biblical counselor helped Abigail through biblical introspection identify her heart's longings exposed through gossip. For the first time in her life, Abigail realized the culprit for her gossip was the sin of her heart, rather than just loose lips. Biblical counseling helped Abigail realize that her gossip was fueled by her craving for self-importance. She desired for others to see her as always in the know, never surprised by information regardless of how miniscule or insignificant it might seem. She had falsely inculcated the notion that being well-informed translated to self-worth. The biblical counselor helped Abigail understand that her value comes from the Lord rather than from being informed, resulting in Abigail's heart softening and changing. Abigail understood her sin of gossip as destructive and a failure to love the Lord and neighbor as she ought. Her biblical counselor helped her repent of her sinful heart desires and establish avenues to safeguard her from gossiping again. On her own initiative, Abigail went to those whom she sinned against and sought forgiveness. Throughout the process of biblical counseling, the biblical counselor maintained frequent communication with an appointed elder to remain apprised of Abigail's progress. When biblical counseling concluded and the final summary was given to the elders, they called a meeting with Abigail. As the biblical counselor and appointed elder bore witness to Abigail's spiritual growth, the elders helped establish a provisional plan of restoration. The elders formally concluded the issue without publicly bringing charges against Abigail.

Church discipline cases like Abigail's wisely include the ministry of biblical counseling for various reasons. First, biblical counseling provides a softer environment to help offenders understand and grapple with their sin. Church discipline has the potential

for intimidation, whereas biblical counseling provides a safe environment of vulnerability and openness. Second, the process of church discipline can tend towards formulaic rather than skillfully pursuing the offender's heart. Biblical counseling can serve as a valuable interlocutor between the elders and the offender as the unbiased mediator. Though church discipline ought always to gently seek restoration for the offender, biblical counseling operates in a relational atmosphere. The process of restoring an offender in biblical counseling is unique to the person and the situation, which gives lucidity to the offender's heart condition. Third, biblical counseling ensures every realistic measure has been taken to restore the offender before the sin is presented to the church. Biblical counseling ensures every effort has been made to relationally reach out to the offender. An important component of biblical counseling is allowing the offender to be heard and to speak from her perspective. By allowing the offender an opportunity to speak from their heart about the situation, biblical counselors can identify heart issues and pursue reconciliation. Finally, biblical counseling gets to the heart of the offender. Biblical counseling uses the sinful action of the offender to give clarity to her heart's desires. Most sinners do not fully understand the nature of their own sin. Biblical counseling guards against naivety in the offender's understanding of their own actions. Before the offender's sin is made public before the church, biblical counseling provides assurances that the offender sufficiently understands the sin of their heart. The process of church discipline requires the ministry of biblical counseling to illuminate the offender's heart and ascertain the wisest course forward toward restoration.

Answering Objections to Biblical Counseling and Church Discipline

Any time the topic of discipline arises, objections inevitably follow. Most churches are reticent to talk about discipline within the church, let alone attempt to apply it. While the topic of applying divine discipline is undoubtedly countercultural to a modern context, this thesis has attempted to demonstrate the purpose and blessing of

obeying biblical commands concerning discipline. We should anticipate that logical objections will arise and not be surprised by them; therefore, we will next consider and attempt to answer four common objections to applying divine discipline in the church. In responding to these objections, the goal is to remove uncertainty and fear in practical discipline and instead instill confidence in the Lord's ability to strengthen his Church for applying a discipline vision.

Objection #1: Practical Applications of Divine Discipline Are Not Loving

Perhaps the most common objection for applying divine discipline is the concern of whether discipline is loving. After all, if God is a loving God, how can Christians judge one another and audaciously remove someone from church membership? As the objection goes, love covers a multitude of sin and longs for everyone to get along by not creating division. Following popular cliches of the day such as, "Live and let live" and "Who am I to judge?", churches are often reticent to apply discipline on any level. After all, confrontation and rebuke do not feel good, so how could it be loving? While refusing to confront others is certainly easier, is it more loving?

The first answer is a resounding, "No"—failing to biblically respond to sin is never the loving response. Scripture never equates love with neglect, but rather ties love with addressing sin. Peter's instruction to cover a multitude of sins through love in 1 Peter 4:8 is not for the purpose of pretending sin does not exist. Rather, Peter's calling for believers to not bitterly hold sin against the offender. Scripture is not contradictory—the commands to confront and rebuke do not conflict with instruction to cover sin. Instead, while some sins warrant immediate confrontation, other sins allow for immediate attitudinal forgiveness. Robert Jones explains the principal of covering sin, saying, "To overlook means recognizing that a sin has been committed but choosing to forgive that sin attitudinally and to absorb the consequence. To deny means refusing to even evaluate the other person's word or actions. When I overlook your sin, however, I conclude that

you have sinned, but I determine to treat you graciously anyway.”³ Love does not turn a blind eye to the struggles and failures of others but seeks to respond biblically.

The second answer to this objection is that discipline ultimately leads to the good of another. Love does whatever is necessary for the ultimate good and benefit of others. Loving another person through the practical application of discipline is akin to a parent forcefully removing his child from oncoming traffic to save his life. Though the removal from danger might initially feel painful and be misinterpreted as uncaring, the act is loving because of its lifesaving consequences. So too is the Christian who applies discipline—though discipline is admittedly painful, it nonetheless leads to lifesaving consequences. Love cannot be measured by emotion or intention, but by results. Love might hurt for the moment, but the results are eternal. In a similar way, love is analogous to a physician who opts for life-sustaining surgery rather than applying a momentary salve. While the patient might not initially understand the urgency of a painful surgery, the physician understands the benefits of surgery versus an ineffective salve. So too does practical discipline understand the lasting ramifications of neglecting to respond biblically to sin. Humans are not enigmatic but follow similar patterns of problems and answers. Man’s greatest problem is sin, and the ultimate answer is a relationship with Christ. Those who apply God’s discipline are acknowledging sin as the greatest problem and identifying Christ as the ultimate answer. Discipline produces the greatest good for another through spiritual growth in Christ.

The third answer is that practical applications of discipline increase the offender’s future effectiveness for Christ. Christians who have been spiritually trained through discipline are better equipped to faithfully serve Christ and articulate the Gospel. The Christian’s greatest satisfaction is effectively serving in Christ’s kingdom, yet

³ Robert Jones, *Pursuing Peace: A Christian Guide to Handling Our Conflicts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 153.

unrepentant sin impedes effectiveness. God will not use an actively sinning Christian in the same way he would the believer who is growing in holiness. Therefore, those who apply God's discipline to the offender increase future effectiveness for serving the Lord. Failing to address another Christian's sin is akin to unloving neglect for their Gospel effectiveness. Ultimately, Christians and churches alike ought to confidently apply God's discipline as a loving act in restoring a Christian to spiritual effectiveness.

The final answer to this objection is that discipline restores wayward Christians to Christ. Ultimately, mankind does not determine the definition of love—only God does. God defines his discipline as loving and identifies Christian love for one another as loving (Prov 19:8; 27:5; Heb 12:6; Rev 3:19). Human sensibilities never outweigh God's eternal vision of the ultimate good for his people (Rom 9:20). God determines what love is and how it is to be expressed. After all, God's definition of love often does not match humanity's definition. If God defines the greatest act of love as the ultimate historical injustice of his Son's death on the cross, then God's definition of love far surpasses the world's shallow understanding of love (Rom 5:8). Churches must confidently understand that love and its expressions are determined by God, not humans. Because discipline consistently pursues God's redemptive purposes, every faithful ecclesiastical ministry of discipline is an expression of God's love. Whatever God uses to restore Christians to himself is an act of love. The love of God manifests in the church's application of discipline in biblical counseling and church discipline.

Objection #2: Practical Applications of Divine Discipline Are Not Good for the Church

A second objection that could be raised in response to this thesis is one of pragmatism. According to this objection, anything that brings separation or division to the church must invariably be unhealthy for the church. Since God is a God of unity, he must only approve of that which fosters immediate unity within the church. Anything that

threatens disunity, potentially creates contention and division, or triggers wounded feelings must not be God's will. In its final summation, this objection credits strength to numbers and success to popularity. Anything that threatens attendance and a positive atmosphere must not be best for the church. Since practical applications of discipline frequently lead to contention and congregants leaving the church, is this objection valid? Is discipline worth it?

Once again, the unmistakable answer to whether discipline is worth it is a resounding, "Yes"! Success and effectiveness in the church is tied to holiness, not pragmatism. Christ has not called his church to gain people by any means necessary, but rather to win souls through believing and holding to biblical truth. By itself, separatism is not good for a church. However, separatism is necessary between sin and the church. The church is to be divided from the world by rejecting anything that threatens godliness and affirming anything that pursues holiness. Unity comes through godliness, not the absence of discord. Unity that permits sin is not biblical unity. Furthermore, those who truly seek Christ desire truth over sin. Christians and churches that love Christ pursue anything that makes much of Christ. The biblical church focuses more on obedience to God's commandments than becoming culturally popular and relevant (John 14:15). Therefore, though practical discipline divides those in the church who desire holiness and those who do not, it equally unifies all who seek to be biblically faithful.

Ultimately, the fundamental issue of this objection is the purpose of the church. The church's purpose is to magnify Christ, which can only occur in the context of pursuing personal and corporate Christlikeness. The purpose of the church is not pragmatism, but Christ-centeredness ("who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in his mouth", 1 Pet 2:21-22). The church's unity must only come from a unified commitment to Christ's commandments. Unity in Christ must be zealously defended; unity in anything else must be zealously rejected. Mark Dever helpfully describes the purpose of the church as pursuing holiness:

A healthy church is not a church that's perfect and without sin. It has not figured everything out. Rather, it's a church that continually strives to take God's side in the battle against the ungodly desires and deceits of the world, our flesh, and the devil. It's a church that continually seeks to conform itself to God's Word...*A healthy church is a congregation that increasingly reflects God's character as his character has been revealed in his Word.*⁴

Thus, the church who pursues peace and unity at all costs inevitably gains neither. While this objection might genuinely desire the good of the church, in reality God always accomplishes the greatest good through spiritually growing his people. God cannot bless those who approve sin either through commission or omission. The greatest good for any church is to become more like Christ, which requires practical expressions of discipline. Because sin still exists in the church, so too must discipline serve as the instrument to confront, rebuke, and correct Christians. Until discipline progressively reforms people's hearts, God will not bless his people. J. I. Packer describes the ultimate good of the church as seeking to please God in holiness. "There would be a love of holiness, growing out a deep conviction of sin, deep repentance, deep gratitude for forgiveness and cleansing through the blood of Jesus Christ, and with that a deep desire to please God."⁵ The greatest good for Christians and churches is to grow in the Lord regardless of the cost. By biblically pursuing the goal of pleasing and proclaiming Christ, the church faithfully applying discipline will grow in spiritual health and blessing.

Objection #3: Practical Applications of Divine Discipline Are Unrealistic

The next objection to consider is a utilitarian one—discipline is simply impractical. Though mentally and theologically assenting to the biblical basis for discipline, this objection ultimately renders discipline as quixotic for the modern church. Though the first century church was able to attend to discipline, the 21st century church is too differently configured. Whereas once there was only one church available, people

⁴ Mark Dever, *What Is a Healthy Church?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 40.

⁵ J. I. Packer, *God's Plans for You* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 215.

now have a myriad of options to run to when discipline hurts. As one pastor lamented, “But in every situation I have been personally acquainted with, the discipline drove the person out of the church and into the arms of another church with unbiblical teaching where he or she was accepted by everyone.”⁶ Applying discipline is seen as callous and will likely lead to congregants simply running to another church. The preponderance of modern culture has no interest in receiving discipline, being held or holding others accountable, or helping one another grow as a spiritual family. As a result, any steps towards practical discipline will inaugurate an exodus by the modern Christian. As the objection goes, though discipline was once necessary and a blessing, it is simply too impractical and unrealistic for the modern church.

The answer to this objection is the immutability of God and his Word. Though cultures indeed change, biblical mandates do not. Biblical faithfulness is not determined by its receptiveness. Discipline is applied in churches because it always produces God’s purposes, not because it is well received in a modern context. While it is true that society has drastically changed from the first century to the twenty-first century, God’s commands continue in perpetuity. Biblical truth applies the same way regardless of century or culture. Though some might leave the church that practices discipline, they will never be able to silence their conscience that reminds them of their spiritual wrongdoing. Christians and churches are called to be obedient to Christ, regardless of how its members receive faithful application of discipline.

The root of this objection stems from a lack of confidence in God and his Word. Churches should be wise when implementing discipline, specifically as a corrective measure. Without prior biblical understanding, many congregants could be disturbed by the language and implications of discipline. However, biblical teaching and

⁶ Jonathan Leeman, “Let’s Just Admit It: Church Discipline Is a Tough Subject,” last modified February 26, 2010, <https://www.9marks.org/article/lets-just-admit-it-church-discipline-tough-subject/>.

training can sufficiently prepare a church for implementation of discipline. Corporate confidence comes from understanding the purpose of discipline and believing in what it accomplishes. The more the intent and the results of discipline are understood, the more we will willingly pursue its application. In the final analysis, confidence to apply discipline derives from a biblical passion for Christ's church to be pure.

At the outset of every biblical command is the fear of impracticality. Yet, every seemingly impractical command becomes increasingly more practical with biblical understanding. The question of practicality becomes more certain with widespread comprehension of the blessings of discipline. As the church wholistically understands the benefits and blessings of discipline, so too will the implementation of discipline become more practical.

Objection #4: Practical Applications of Divine Discipline Are Abuses of Power

The final objection is a sobering reminder and reality of sin's effects, even at the highest echelons of ecclesiastic authority. This final objection is that the potential for abuse in discipline should negate the attempt to institute discipline.⁷ Since ecclesiastical abuse of power is often detrimental to the offended's faith, the price is too great to pursue practical discipline. Because elders could hypothetically abuse the application of discipline, churches should refrain from applying any discipline that even remotely offers the potential for abusive power.

The answer to this objection begins by affirming the potential for abusing discipline. It is true that wherever power is attainable, so too is the possibility for abuse of power. It is also true that the dynamics of abuse involving power is nuanced and requires

⁷ Abuses of power are manifold—heavy-handedness, vindictiveness, presumption, assumption, or both adding to or not fully following the steps of God's discipline (primarily in church discipline). Abuses of power in ecclesiastical discipline are reprehensible because they undermine not only a person's faith in the church, but also their faith in God.

careful biblical thoughtfulness. However, the potential profligacy of a leader's power should never impede faithful application of God's commands. Potential sin affects the way we apply God's commands, not whether we decide to apply it or not. Failing to do what God commands is always sin. Failure to apply God's discipline is analogous to elders abusing their power—both fall short of God's commands. Churches who only apply biblical commands that are safe from human perversion will quickly find themselves abandoning virtually all of Scripture's teachings.

The answer to elders abusing power is to approach biblical instruction with humility and complete trust in the Lord (Jas 4:10). Elders are sinners too and must always be reticent to hastily make decisions or incite condemnation. Yet, God also promises the presence of his Holy Spirit when the church applies discipline (specifically church discipline, Matt 18:20). The Lord's commands for applying discipline are not opaque, though the specific manner of application might appear uncertain. Elders are wise to not exceed biblical commands by definitively ensuring sin has been committed and restoration has been honestly pursued. Equally, the elders particularly must guard against any personal vendetta or subjective influence that might unduly affect the disciplinary process. The discipline must cautiously focus on the facts of the case and the clear truths of Scripture. When elders are solely committed to the Word of God and the betterment of God's people, then the church will wholistically receive blessing through the various applications of God's discipline.

Though various objections have been considered (and many more could undoubtedly be imagined), the importance of the church faithfully participating in applying God's discipline ultimately derives from the church's understanding of its purpose. The church and its elders who focus singularly on Christ will reflect him in pursuing Christlikeness among Christians. The motivation, method, and outcome are all Christ-centered. Problems and fears inevitably arise when the church looks to man instead of Christ for guidance. The objections stated above are motivated by the fear of

how people will respond or perceive discipline. The church of Jesus Christ must never operate based upon people's perceptions but from Christ's clear commands. Though the church should humbly listen to congregants when grievances arise, the elders are tasked with gently and lovingly applying God's discipline to those whom he loves. The more the church loves the Lord, the more they will lovingly pursue practical applications of God's discipline in their midst.

Final Implications of Biblical Counseling and Church Discipline

Let us consider some closing practical lessons concerning application.

Theology should always motivate action. The temptation for a thesis like this is to give mental assent to theological assertions without making practical efforts to apply the principles. Practical application of God's discipline is meant to be a frequently shared reality for the people of God. Understanding biblical truth should always be followed by an explanation for applying those truths. For Christians, elders, and churches who are convinced of divine discipline and seek to apply it through the ministries of biblical counseling and church discipline, this final section offers helpful encouragements to make these ministries a reality.

Therefore, we will close with practical implications for preparing and assimilating the theology of discipline into application. The goal is to leave churches with practical confidence to take the initial steps of participating in God's discipline. Since God's discipline informs the process and methodology of biblical counseling and church discipline, we will consider the cautious confidence that is necessary for implementing discipline. Since biblical counseling and church discipline parallel one another, the final implication will consider the importance of utilizing both ministries. Christians and churches can participate in practically applying God's discipline for the good of the church through intentionally pursuing initial implementation.

Implication #1: Be Cautious but Confident

Regardless of ecclesiastical circumstances or individual personality, attempting to implement discipline is difficult in any context. Many churches balk at the mention of discipline, let alone the instruction and implementation of it. For many pastors and elders, applying discipline is an uphill battle. In an age of general biblical illiteracy, elders should not be surprised to find this particular road less traveled and filled with potential pitfalls. Especially considering the sensitive nature of the topic, elders and churches would be wise to exercise great caution before attempting to enforce discipline.

Because discipline evokes various emotional responses, elders and churches must be profoundly cautious when initially implementing discipline. Though the proclivity for some might be to impetuously implement discipline, the wiser route is one of patience and loving biblical instruction. Not only is clear biblical instruction necessary for the congregants to learn and familiarize themselves with discipline, but also elders need clear, biblical certainty to protect against imprudent implementation. Headstrong elders who have not cautiously learned the nuances of God's discipline could greatly harm the Gospel. Similarly, irresponsible implementation quickly repels congregants from the blessings of God's discipline. Because much is at stake when implementing discipline, all involved must be overly cautious.

Caution when implementing discipline will vary according to circumstances, but it will invariably include intentionality. The first sense of intentionality must be among the elders. The elder board (or pastoral leadership team) must be unanimous in its agreement of the purpose, importance, and enforcement of discipline.⁸ A divided elder board on the issue of discipline will do more harm than good for the overall church body. Once the elders are unanimous on implementation, the second cautious action is to

⁸ Though this thesis assumes the polity of an elder board as tasked with applying discipline, the same responsibility would apply for other forms of church polity, such as single pastors, pastoral leadership teams, deacon-led leadership, or committee-led leadership.

intentionally teach the people. Bible studies, Sunday School lessons, special training sessions, and sermon series are all important avenues to help the congregation wrestle with the biblical description of God's discipline. Of vital significance is to base all teaching and instruction on Scripture. Practical discipline in the church is God's idea, not man's idea. The congregation must definitively know that the Bible calls every church to practice discipline. The final caution is to intentionally listen to the concerns of the people and gently walk them through those concerns. Elders and church leaders must be gentle and understanding at this junction. Change is hard, and for most people, the issue of discipline might seem personally distressing. After all, the ministries of discipline often lead to hard conversations and difficult decisions. Elders must be gentle with their people's concerns and remember that change often does not occur overnight. The godly elder remembers that he is called to shepherd the flock of Christ by gently leading from the front of the sheep, not prodding from the back. Shepherding requires gentleness, patience, compassion, and genuine love for the spiritual growth and well-being of the sheep (1 Pet 5:1-4).

Yet amid caution, the elders should also be confident. The elders understand that discipline is an ultimate good for the people of God resulting in effective sanctification. Elders should confidently trust God's Word to not return void and that with time and biblical instruction, God's people will eventually see the good of discipline (Isa 55:11). The elder's confidence is first in what God has promised about faithful proclamation and implementation of his Word. But elders are secondly able to express confidence that they are equipped to help those entrusted to their care. One of the greatest joys of practical discipline in the church is the certainty that hope is available and attainable to anyone through Christ. Elders can confidently cling to the hope of Christ expressed in biblical counseling and church discipline. Finally, elders should confidently teach and demonstrate the blessings of discipline. The elders can confidently proclaim with the psalmist that unrepentant sin results in depression, but confession leads to

vitality and restoration (Ps 32:3-5). The elders have the wonderful task of helping the congregation tangibly experience the blessings of discipline by pointing to the loving God who uses painful rebuke to produce holiness within his people. When initially implementing discipline, elders and churches would be wise to exercise intentional caution, yet confidently trust God to lead his people through faithful application of biblical discipline.

Implication #2: Importance of Teaching and Training the Church

The final practical implication of discipline is to teach and train the church. As mentioned above, teaching and training should operate across various ministries within the church. Though a sermon series on biblical counseling and church discipline is a good starting point, much more is needed to help develop and grow the church towards sufficiently implementing discipline. If the church rushes implementation without sufficiently teaching the church, then the church will likely experience contention and division. Hurried implementation often results in the people insufficiently understanding, which produces rejection and ineffective application. Thus, it is wise to intentionally pursue the following steps to teach and train the congregation about God's discipline.

One of the most fundamental implications is to teach the principles of discipline across various spectrums and forums. Churches with a variety of church ministries possess a plethora of opportunities to teach and train members about discipline. Assuming all church leaders are unanimous on the importance of growing in the ministries of discipline, one might begin with a sermon series that explains the discipline vision. The sermon series not only can explain the principles of divine discipline, biblical counseling, and church discipline, but also can set the tone for future ministries to address the subject. While a sermon series alone is insufficient, it is a vital first step to signal the direction being taken. Additional ministries should then commit to localized studies on the ministries of biblical counseling and church discipline, including but not limited to

Sunday School classes, Men's Ministries, Women's Ministries, and new members classes.⁹ The ambitious elders could facilitate a local conference about practical applications of discipline, complete with break-out sessions geared to specifically train attendees in one of the disciplines. Living in a virtual age, the church would also be wise to communicate the discipline vision via various platforms, such as online videos or podcasts. The goal should be unanimous agreement across all church ministries which ensures that all members are hearing the same vision and are given a context where the vision can be discussed. It is vital for the congregation to make the discipline vision their own.

A second essential area of discipline implementation is fostering a community that majors in discipling and holding one another accountable. Cultivating a discipling community that welcomes and practices discipline is often a long and arduous task. Especially in a culture that prioritizes individuality, elders ought to be cautious and understanding that changing a church culture takes time. Though some elders and congregants will need to be trained for specifically applying discipline, the entire church is tasked with holding one another accountable. For a vision to be successful in a church, all members must equally share it. When congregants take ownership of helping one another practically grow in the Lord, formal disciplinary measures inevitably follow. Though an intentional community of discipleship is only possible through the Holy Spirit's empowerment, elders and churches can use various avenues to facilitate building community. Churches should encourage relationship building among congregants that fosters a culture of focusing on people rather than public perception. Ministries such as small groups, church picnics, and fellowships help intentionally build relationships. The elders and leadership team can tangibly foster a community of discipleship by being open

⁹ One of the best ways to teach discipline is to give a realistic expectation from the beginning of church membership. Building instruction of discipline into the church's membership process helps ensure right expectations from the outset of a person's involvement with the church.

with the Lord's work in their lives. The more Christians are open with one another about God's active work in their lives, the more other believers will genuinely grow together.

A third area of teaching and training in the church is to identify a group of congregants who exhibit a deep passion for Christ. These selected Christians should be chosen based upon their demonstrated potential for skillfully applying God's discipline to one another. God has uniquely gifted individuals with skills that naturally correspond either to biblical counseling or church discipline. This selected group should be heavily invested in either biblical counseling or church discipline through church-based instruction or outsourced training. Upon completion of their training, churches should publicly identify those who are trained for the practical ministries of discipline. When trained counselors are known to the church, not only will congregants better understand the comprehensiveness of the discipline vision, but also will more likely seek out those who are trained when spiritual problems arise. Specialized training in addition to an increased awareness of a discipleship community will normalize relationship building, spiritual vulnerability, and genuine communication with one another. Teaching and training those skilled for biblical counseling and church discipline places the church in a prime position to biblically respond whenever the need for discipline arises.

Finally, the most important implication for implementation is to not wait to teach and train the church. The discipline vision must be communicated and initiated before the need to apply discipline arises, not after. Every church should immediately prepare itself for helping one another biblically respond to sin. Those who procrastinate are inevitably unprepared when sinful situations force a response. Sinful situations requiring a biblical response are inevitable for every church. Starting immediately with a discipline vision antedates the avalanche and signals to the church the importance of sharing God's holiness and rejecting sin. Elders should prayerfully examine themselves, ensuring their hearts are right before the Lord before taking any disciplinary steps. After prayerfully evaluating their hearts, the elders should craft an aggregate discipline vision

to be presented to the church. As the elders and church leaders implement the vision across various ministries, the congregation will wholistically wrestle with biblical truth until the vision becomes their own. As the spiritually gifted are trained for formal discipline ministries, the church will find itself prepared whenever the need for discipline inevitably arises. The entire discipline process requires the initial prayerful step of not waiting but actively implementing discipline in the church.

Conclusion

The discipline of God is intensely practical. In his grand design, God chose discipline as the effective instrument to restore his people in holiness. Divine discipline is evidence of belonging to God's family, an assurance of salvation, and an expression of God's love for his chosen children. A relationship with the Lord inevitably includes the disciplinary process of growing in holiness. God's work of discipline always pursues his own glory, the betterment of his church, and the good of the believer.

While divine discipline is eternally determined, the method of applying discipline is always in the context of the church. God generally applies discipline through the ministries of biblical counseling and church discipline, which are modeled after divine discipline. Both biblical counseling and church discipline contain elements of divine discipline by leading in holiness, loving through rebuke, and reconciling through restoration. By reflecting divine discipline, both biblical counseling and church discipline work in tandem to accomplish God's purposes. At certain stages, the ministries of biblical counseling and divine discipline are indistinguishable from one another due to shared goals and common method. However, these practical ministries of discipline uniquely apply discipline in complementary manners. Whereas biblical counseling relies upon church discipline to enforce biblical instruction, church discipline relies upon biblical counseling to elucidate a person's heart. While both ministries of discipline pursue the goals of holiness and restoration, they accomplish these ends from different

perspectives. To successfully apply one ministry of discipline, the other must necessarily be equally applied. Faithful application of God's discipline requires the co-ministries of biblical counseling and church discipline. When the church has a biblical discipline vision with an intentional eye towards implementation, the church *en masse* experiences the blessings of biblical growth in holiness.

In the final analysis, this thesis has endeavored to explain discipline for the purpose of practical implementation within the church. While we considered the explicit relationship between biblical counseling and church discipline in applying divine discipline, further work is needed in the practical outworking of these parallel ministries. We have labored to show that the relationship necessarily exists, but further studies could evaluate the precise applications between the ministries. The final chapter of this thesis is intended to be a preliminary step for further analysis of considering best practices in implementing biblical counseling and church discipline. As the church develops its understanding and application of God's discipline, God's people will inevitably result in increased holiness and the rich blessing of restoration.

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ABSTRACT

GODLY DISCIPLINE: BIBLICAL COUNSELING AND CHURCH DISCIPLINE MODELED AFTER GOD'S RESTORATIVE DISCIPLINE

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This thesis argues biblical counseling and church discipline model God's restorative discipline in the church. The first chapter is an introduction and overview to the issues, related resources, and current gaps in the research. The second chapter examines God's nature that produces divine discipline, particularly relating to church discipline. The third chapter focuses on God's restorative discipline pertaining to the work and purpose of biblical counseling. The fourth chapter connects the ministries of biblical counseling and church discipline in conjunction with one another in the practical application of divine discipline. The fifth chapter concludes with case studies, answered objections, and implications for the church regarding God's discipline.

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