

STEP UP 2021 TO THE FUTURE

Doing things God's way in a changing world



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WHY WE NEED CHURCH DISCIPLINE

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DEFINITIONS

Church Discipline:

- Church discipline takes two forms: formational, or teaching biblical standards, and corrective, which involves challenging the sinful behaviour of professing Christians, including pastors, spouses, and assembly leaders.
- It is an act of confronting and correcting, in love, members of the body of Christ who knowingly or unknowingly walk in open, unrepentant sin.
- Additionally, church discipline functions as a critical element within the broader concept of discipleship.



DEFINITIONS

- **Discipline.** This project utilizes the word "discipline" to mean, "Training that corrects, forms or perfects the mental faculties or moral character." Within the present context, "discipline" has a purposeful, spiritual objective involving the protection and betterment of Christ-followers and those Christians within their sphere of influence.
- **Excommunication.** The word "excommunication" refers to the last phase of church discipline, as found in Matthew 18:17. It involves removing an unrepentant Christian from the body of Christ as a final, desperate attempt to bring them to repentance. Although severe, this action flows out of deep love and concern, risking the loss of temporal relationships in exchange for the rebellious Christian's possible restoration.



BIBLICAL BASIS OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

- A Study of the Biblical Word "Discipline".
- In the Old Testament, the Hebrew verb **Yasar** and **Yakach** are used for the word "discipline."
- **Yasar** means "[to] discipline, chasten, admonish ... instruct, or correct." It often speaks of God's corrective judgment upon His people. Leviticus and Deuteronomy see the use of yasar, with its emphasis on covenant renewal "instruction, correction, chastisement, discipline, punishment."



BIBLICAL BASIS OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

- **New Testament definition and terms:**
 - The Greek words **Paideuo** and **Paideia** also carry on the meaning of Yasar and Yakach in the New Testament. Paideuo occurs thirteen times in the New Testament, while Paideia occurs six times. As for Paideuo, "the underlying root of this word group is pais, child, boy ... thus Paideuo lit. Hence, it means to be together with a child to bring up, educate, instruct, teach.



OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES

Genesis 2:16-17

- The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."
- **This instruction was clear, understandable, and there was no confusion or misunderstanding about their responsibility.**



OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES

Genesis 3:1-7

- The serpent was more crafty than any other animals that the LORD God had made. He tried to sow doubt in the mind of the woman when he said: "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"
- The woman responded to the serpent when she said: "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die."
- Eve ate the fruit also gave some to her husband, who was with her and ate. By doing this, they violated the explicit, understandable instruction, as was explained to the serpent by Eve.
- Their eyes opened, and they knew that they were naked.
- They experienced guilt; they were conscience pricked.
- Both Adam and Eve had an opportunity to give their sides of what has led to the instruction's violation.



OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES

They realized that breaking the rule or violating the instruction of God had consequences.



OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES

1 Samuel 15: 1-23

The LORD said to Saul: “I had noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.”

The word of the LORD came to Samuel: "I regret that I have made Saul king, for

he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments.” The violation was a substantial deviation from the explicit, understandable instruction.

The instruction here was also evident, understandable, leaving no space for confusion and misunderstanding.



OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES

1 Samuel 15: 1-23

- Saul said to Samuel when on the road to Gilgal:
- "I have performed the commandment of the LORD." Samuel replied: "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?"
- Samuel said to Saul: "Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the LORD?"
- And Saul said to Samuel, "I have obeyed the voice of the LORD. I have gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me."
- Samuel said: "Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king."



NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLES

Matthew 18:15-20

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 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. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be

bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

In this text, certain principles are introduced that we will highlight.



NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLES

1 Corinthians 5:1-13

- “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you and a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his Father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.”
- “Disassociate yourself from a brother who is guilty of sexual

immorality, greed, or an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler. Don't even eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to believe? God judges those outsiders. Purge the evil person from among you.”



NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLES

Galatians 6:1-10

- “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.
- In this text, the Spirit of discipline is to assist a sinning fellow believer in a corrective manner, with a compassionate, gentle way. At the same time, the spiritually strong one will also look on themselves. These helpers are warned not to be arrogant and disrespectful towards the transgressing person.



NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLES

1 Timothy 1:5-11

- Our charge's aim is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience, and a sincere faith.
- In this text, according to Paul, church discipline must be exercised with pure and good intentions. It is not a time or a place to settle scores.
- Paul also highlights controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless and division in the church. Such people must be avoided after two warnings.



THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE APPLIED

The Roman Catholic Church and Discipline

- Before the Reformation, the name assigned to this discipline was "Canon Right" or "Canon Law." As a distinct science, this subject had its origin in the twelfth century. Pope Gratian gathered all the ecclesiastical legislation of councils and papal decretals together into a systematic and organized canon law body.
- As the papacy extended its authority over the civil realm, civil law was added to canon law.



THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE APPLIED

The Reformation and Discipline

- During and after the Reformation, various other names came into use. Later the term "Framework of the Church." "Church Government" in use.
- Some holding to the Presbyterian form of church government called the science "Presbyterianism". The most commonly used name, however, is "Church Polity".



THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE APPLIED

The Southern Baptist

- The Southern Baptists in the USA followed in the footsteps of the Reformation concerning church discipline. According to the Southern Baptist Church, as was the case in the Reformation church, discipline was essential to healthy church life. A famous and influential church manual in the nineteenth century gave three reasons for church discipline:
 1. The Glory of God.
 2. The Purity of the Churches.
 3. The Spiritual good of the disciplined.



THE THEOLOGICAL ETHICAL ASPECTS OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

- The aims and objectives of the law for Christian communities today are much the same today as in the early church days.
- Church Discipline was to regulate the functioning of the community of faith and its members' conduct by a combination of commands, prohibitions, and permissions. Such purpose is realized in several ways: by God through revelation, by the church through its internal mechanisms of government.
- An in-depth analysis reveals that it touches upon spiritual, theological, pastoral, and evangelistic concerns at the heart of the Christian faith. The law ought not to be viewed as a hostile and oppressive 'legalistic' instrument.



THE THEOLOGICAL ETHICAL ASPECTS OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

- However, any church's integrity, or any secular institution, depends upon certain beliefs and behaviour being common to all its members.
- Proper internal governance needs greater sophistication if a church has many members and is evangelical.
- Further, Christ himself instructed his apostles to 'bind' and 'loose', thereby commissioning them to make provision for what was acceptable and what was not.



THE THEOLOGICAL ETHICAL ASPECTS OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

For Church discipline to be appropriate, reasonable, and justifiable the following must be imbedded in it:

- It must establish a rule, instruction, law that places a duty on its members to fulfil. This rule, teaching, or regulation must be fair in substance and procedure.
- It must be clearly defined and explained; it must be doable, practical, and within the members' ability to comply.
- Members must be informed about the rules, instructions, and laws before applying to them.
- It must be used consistently, equal, without exceptions to all the members regardless of stature, position, origin, gender, race, and age.
- The purpose of discipline is not just punishment, but in the first place, corrective steps to assist a fellow believer who, in a moment of weakness, sinned. The penalty must be applied with compassion, not as retribution or vengeance.



MORALITY IN CHURCH DISCIPLINE

- When one talks about **morality**, it brings what is right and what is wrong into the picture? The right and wrong issues apply both ways to the one who commits an error, hurts and disadvantages others, and the emotional, psychological, and physical experiences of the aggrieved person or persons.
- Is it right to, disrespect, and disadvantage people, and when confronted with the matter, can the perpetrator simply say sorry and expect to be forgiven without any consequences on the harm they have inflicted on others?



MORALITY IN CHURCH DISCIPLINE

- Theological issues of confession, remorse, guilt, accountability, forgiveness, reconciliation, reparation, restitution, restoration and healing, and justice come into play. **In this regard, justice must be done and seen to be done.**



VARIOUS STAGES OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

From the Matthew narrative, there are various steps in the process of discipline:

- **Firstly**, talk to the person who has wronged you in an attempt to correct that person and win the person over to the right side of the law. If this attempt fails,
- **Secondly**, invite a fellow believer to accompany you to the person who has wronged you. This accompaniment of the fellow believer has the objective to correct and win the person back to Christ. It is not an attempt to overpower the other believer if this attempt fails.
- **Thirdly**, take the matter to the church (Governing Body in the case of members and to the NLF in the case of Ordained Pastors, and to the Regional Committee in the case of Pastors Spouses and Assembly Leaders), and if this attempt fails the last resort is to apply.
- **Finally**, according to the Matthew narrative, the last resort is to excommunicate the person from the fellowship of the believers.



PRINCIPLES OF NATURAL JUSTICE

- This principle hinges on two directions, and these are "**Nemo iudex in causa sua**" (no man a judge in his own cause) and the right to a fair hearing "**audi alteram partem**" (hear the other side).
- The **first** is about the **rule against bias** (the persons or tribunal that hears the matter must be impartial). There are various forms of prejudice, such as actual and imputed bias; and apparent bias.



PRINCIPLES OF NATURAL JUSTICE

- The **second** principle is a right to a **fair hearing** that entails the following:
 - The prior notice of the hearing.
 - An opportunity to be heard.
 - Conduct of the hearing.
 - The right to legal representation.
 - The decision and reasons for it.



CONCLUDING REMARKS

- The Biblical and historical developments confirm that **discipline** was part of believers' spiritual formation through the ages. It also confirmed that Church Discipline was exercised from the church's inception to the present as part of spiritual formation.
- The principle of establishing rules to guide the church's operations, with clear guidelines, has been at the order of the day then and now.
- The violations of the rules had detrimental consequences for the perpetrators. The issues of remorse, guilt, confession, forgiveness, reparation, restitution, and restoration played significant roles in applying church discipline.
- The **AFM of SA**, through history, developed rules, taken up in church history and policy. These rules in the **AFM Constitution** comply with morality, spirituality, pastoral care, and natural justice. If a member cannot find satisfaction after having exhausted all internal processes, such a person may approach a court of law to announce the issue of justice.

