

**Principles of Discipline in Matthew 18:15-17
Part III: A Practical Study**

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Church discipline is sometimes attempted by those who have not taken the time to "read the instructions." The results are disastrous. Not only is the process made more lengthy and painful, but usually Biblical objectives are never realized. The wise course of action would be to follow the directions which Christ has provided in Matthew 18:15-17.

The purpose of this article is to consider the principles of Matthew 18:15-17, deal with questions relating to those principles, and discuss how those principles are to be practiced.

The Provocation of Discipline

What is it that sets the principles of discipline in motion? Jesus tells us in Matthew 18:15 that the provocation to discipline occurs "if your brother should sin against you . . ." The word for "sin" here is the basic New Testament word for sin, it is a general term which means "to miss the mark." The mark that men miss is God's righteous standard -- they violate His law. If sin is the provocation for discipline, the question must be asked, what constitutes a sin that needs discipline? All of them. That is perhaps why the text is general.

The Bible provides several lists of sins which serve as a starting point in dealing with this issue. Some believers might fear that such a list of offenses could send a church on a witch hunt. On the contrary, by following scriptural guidelines, those involved in church discipline will be encouraged to deal with specific issues, not merely personality differences.

In the context of church discipline, Paul writes to the Corinthian church, "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one, no, not to eat" (I Corinthians 5:11). A few verses later he mentions these again and adds more offenses to the list: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God" (I Corinthians 6:9-10). Such lifestyles characterize those who are saved. A professing believer involved in such activities needs confrontation and correction.

In Galatians 5:19-21 Paul provides a list of "works of the flesh" which evidence that a person is outside the faith and "they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (5:21). Included are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, disputes, dissensions, faction, envyings, drunkenness, and carousings. The fact that Paul adds ". . . and such like" indicates that the list is suggestive, rather than exhaustive. Therefore, such kinds of sins would provoke discipline.

A similar list is given by Jesus in discussing matters that issue from the heart and consequently defile a person (Mark 7:21-22). The list includes: evil thoughts and fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness.

In II Timothy 3:1-5 Paul writes of the kinds of people to avoid in the latter days. They include those who are: lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, and lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. In Titus 3:10 he mentions the heretic -- the divisive man -- as one who must be rejected if he refuses correction. In Romans 16:17, Paul names those who "cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned" as individuals to avoid.

Should such texts as these be used to formulate a list of offenses requiring discipline? Should discipline be applied to some of the offenses or all? Paul answers these questions in Galatians 6:1: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual,

restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." It should be noted that Paul says "a fault."¹ Paul does not say which sin or offense is involved. This also seems to be the attitude of Jesus in Matthew 5:23-24 where He admonishes His listeners to reconcile themselves with offended brothers before worshipping. He refers to the offense with a general term rather than precisely specifying it.

Galatians 6:1 and Matthew 5:23-24 appear to indicate that any and all sins are worthy of personal confrontation and correction. Daniel Wray writes: "All breaches of the biblical standards of doctrine and behavior require some form of discipline."² The corrective action taken will vary according to the reaction of the offender, but known sin requires a response.

It must be pointed out that the words "against you" in Matthew 18:15 may pose a potential problem. Some may conclude that the only person responsible to go and seek to restore the sinning brother is the one who was sinned against. However, a person can be sinned against directly or indirectly. In fact, any sin in the assembly of God's people is to some degree a sin against all of God's people because it stains all. When any one sins, they are in danger of being lost to the fellowship . . . a loss which would affect all (cf. I Corinthians 12:14-27). Furthermore, when anyone is living a disobedient life, they bring reproach on Christ and on His church. Consequently, it must be understood that any sin is a sin that affects the fellowship, whether it is direct or indirect, because, as Paul wrote in Galatians 5:9, "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (cf. I Corinthians 5:6). Paul's point is that sin in the church will influence everybody; you cannot isolate the effect of sin. As members of the same body, each member ought to recognize their family responsibility to lovingly challenge and correct one another. Therefore, if sin is known, it should provoke the process of discipline.

Sometimes the question is raised, "Should I go to my brother about every little offense, irritation, or personal rub?" The answer is "no." According to Proverbs 10:12, "love covers a multitude of sins." Proverbs 19:11b says that it is a glorious thing "to pass over a transgression" (i.e., overlook an offense). Jay Adams writes:

If we had to bring up every rub between us we'd probably spend all of our time doing so. No, any offense that doesn't get between

us and the one who committed it -- does not need to be raised. But anything that creates an unreconciled state between us and another must be brought up and dealt with. That is to say, any matter which . . . makes you feel different toward that person for more than a passing moment, any matter that throws love's covers off must be brought up.³

The sins which necessitate church discipline can be divided into four major categories: violations of Christian love, unity, law, and truth.⁴ Violations of love would include private offenses against a brother or sister (Matthew 5:23-24). Violations of Christian unity would be divisive actions which destroy the peace of the church (Romans 16:17; Titus 3:10). Violations of Christian law or morality would involve the breaking of such ethical codes and guidelines as set forth in the Old and New Testaments; the scriptural lists of offenses can help in identifying the unlawful actions or activities. Violations of Christian truth would involve the rejection of essential doctrines of the faith -- heresy (I Timothy 6:3-5; Titus 3:10; II John 7-11).

The key to effective relationships in the church (and in all of our relationships) is what David Augsburg labels as "care-fronting."⁵ This is confrontation that is provoked by the recognition of sin in a brother's life. Such confrontation is corrective, not vindictive or personal. It needs to occur as soon as possible so as to have the greatest influence on future behavior. Jeschke writes:

Where the signs of spiritual life are apparent, there is healthy Christian life. If these signs disappear, something is wrong. Then others in the church should come with help.⁶

According to the writer of Hebrews the church leaders will give an account before God for their watchcare over the souls of God's flock (Hebrews 13:17). This suggests that church leaders ought not to delay discipline until the sinner is in the last stages of spiritual abandonment. Don Bubna observes, "If we allow someone to grow distant from our fellowship without trying to find out why, there is little basis later for confrontation or healing."⁷ Loving confrontation and correction should be initiated when the signs of a faltering faith first appear.

The Persons in Discipline

"Now if your brother should sin against you . . ." (Matthew 18:15). Brother, of course, means brother or sister in Christ. The expression "against you" has been discussed⁸, and the conclusion reached that although the expression is missing in some early manuscripts, the fact is unimportant. Other passages urge us to go whether the sin is directed against us or not.

The next question is a thorny one. Does one have the right to say that someone else has sinned? Or even to think it? Does Jesus not warn us against judging others? "Judge not, that ye be not judged," Jesus commands in Matthew 7:1. And if we are commanded not to judge, then it would seem only reasonable that we do not have to talk to our fellow Christians about their sins. But Matthew 18:15 implies judgment. One cannot approach a brother about sin without having made at least a preliminary judgment of some kind.

The meaning of the word "judge" varies in different contexts. "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment," Jesus advises the Jews (John 7:24). The same word is used in Matthew 7:1. In John 7:24 Jesus taught that one must exercise discernment about the sin in a brother's life, and be cautious about jumping to hasty conclusions. Clearly this warning is important if the sin in question is against us. One might have misunderstood a remark or been offended because he misconstrued an innocent action. This is one reason why private sins and wrongs should be kept private and not made public. Obviously, then, it will be necessary to judge in the sense of assessing or weighing the actions of fellow Christians from time to time. But before doing so one must be careful to arrive at sound and accurate conclusions.

What Jesus condemned in Matthew 7:1-3 was an attitude of judgmental criticism. The Pharisees were noted for their criticism of others. The problem was that their own lives were not righteous (Matthew 23:13-36). Jesus was not suggesting that Christians ought not be discerning (cf. I Corinthians 14:19; I John 4:1). Nor was He suggesting here that one ought to ignore the sins of a brother (cf. Luke 17:3). Jesus does not condemn judgment in Matthew 7:1, but He does warn against a self-righteous, hypocritical attitude in judging others. To be discriminating is necessary; to be hypocritical is wrong.

Matthew 7:5 makes it clear that Jesus is not discouraging a proper evaluation of others. But He wants us to do so "with a clear eye." Understood in its context, Matthew 7:1 should not present a problem with the teaching of Jesus on approaching a brother. Before one can confront someone else about their sin, one must deal with sin in his own life.

The Purpose of Discipline

The purpose of discipline is restoration: "If he hears you, you have gained your brother" (Matthew 18:15b).

Many people fail to make a clear distinction between punishment and discipline, and there is a very significant difference between these two concepts. Punishment is designed to execute retribution for a wrong done. Discipline, on the other hand, is designed to encourage the restoration of one involved in wrongdoing. Punishment is designed primarily to avenge a wrong and assert justice. Discipline is designed primarily as a corrective for the one who has failed to live according to the standards of the church and/or society.

Biblical church discipline is not to be carried out in order to punish.⁹ The church has not been entrusted by God with the responsibility of executing judgment on errant saints. That is God's business. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Romans 12:19). But God has entrusted the church with the authority and responsibility to carry out discipline (cf. Matthew 18:18-20). As an essential aspect of discipleship, discipline's purpose is always to help, heal, and restore a wayward saint.¹⁰

To Gain a Brother -- Matthew 18:15b

The word "gained"¹¹ in Matthew 18:15b is from the Greek word that means "to procure gain, advantage, or profit," but more generally "to win something" or "to save oneself something."¹² It was a word from the commercial world and was used to speak of accumulating wealth in the sense of money or commodities. Used in this sense in 18:15 it pictures a sinning brother as a loss of a valuable treasure. This is, in fact, the heart of God as revealed in Matthew 18:12-14: God cannot let one soul go because each is to Him a treasure. And Jesus' desire, revealed in 18:15, is that believers have that same sense of concern. When a brother sins

there is a loss to us. There is a treasure that is gone from us. But when restoration takes place, that wealth is regained. Thus, an erring brother ought to be restored because they are valuable to God and to us.

To Restore to a Former Condition -- Galatians 6:1-2

Jesus' emphasis on restoration of the sinning brother is seen in the teaching of the Apostle Paul. Paul wrote to the Galatian churches, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ," (Galatians 6:1-2). Paul acknowledges in Galatians 6:1 that Christians may occasionally sin (see also I John 1:8, 10; 2:1). It is the responsibility of spiritual brethren to restore the erring one.

The object of restoration. A sinning brother is a believer who is "overtaken in a fault." The "fault" (*tini paraptomati*) is an actual trespass against God. "In essence, it is not a violation of a cultural or denominational code. It connotes a falling aside, a slip, or a lapse."¹³ The brother was "overtaken."¹⁴ There is much debate as to whether he was surprised in the midst of the transgression (i.e., caught "red handed")¹⁵ or overtaken and caught by the transgression (i.e., ensnared by the deceitfulness of sin).¹⁶ Gromacki suggests that the nature of the verb here hints at the idea that the brother was not involved in deliberate disobedience.¹⁷ Lenski suggests that Paul is excluding willful, deliberate sin and referring to those transgressions which rise from ignorance, weakness, the deceptive power of sin, and the persuasion and example of others.¹⁸ What the brother did was sin. This fact cannot be denied, but he was influenced by someone else to participate in the fault. The last phrase, "lest thou also be tempted," appears to suggest that Paul has in mind the kind of situation which may endanger even the most spiritual person.

What is to be done when one discovers that a Christian brother or sister has been ensnared in sin? Usually church members express shock ("I can't believe he would do something like that!") or dismay ("What is our church coming to?") and then members talk to one another ("Say, did you hear what happened to . . .?"). Such expressions of shock and dismay and gossip are often made under the guise of spirituality and concern. But that is not Paul's response.

Paul's response is "Ye which are spiritual, restore such an one . . ." Notice that Paul calls to action spiritual Christians (see Galatians 5:15, 22-24). Paul seems to be emphasizing that not all Christians, but Christians who are spiritually mature, should deal with sin in the lives of others. Those who are weak, easily tempted, or unable to forgive can pray (I John 5:16), but leave the task of correction to others.

The meaning of restoration. The "spiritual" have the responsibility of restoring the brother who has fallen into sin. Restoration is not a voluntary ministry: it is obligatory.¹⁹ This concept of restoration is the key to this passage in Galatians.

What does the word "restore"²⁰ mean? In classical Greek the verb *katartizo* had a wide variety of meanings which can be gathered under two headings: (1) "to adjust, to put in order, to restore"; (2) "to equip or fully furnish someone or something for a given purpose."²¹ In the New Testament the word is used thirteen times, twice in quotations from the Old Testament (Matthew 21:16; Hebrews 10:5). The basic meaning of the word is "to restore to its former condition."

Katartizo is used in Matthew 4:21 and Mark 1:19 with reference to James and John "mending" their fishing nets. It is used in Luke 6:40 in the sense of equipping someone for a purpose. There Jesus declares that a disciple will not be better-equipped than his teacher. In secular Greek the word is used to speak of outfitting a ship for a voyage. In the military context it is used of an army, fully armed, equipped and prepared for battle. As the disciple must be equipped for ministry, the ship for a voyage and the soldier for battle, so must a fallen Christian be reoutfitted, trained and equipped for dealing with the temptations he will certainly face.

Katartizo is used by secular Greek writers to denote joining together, or setting a fractured or dislocated bone. In the same vein, Paul may be employing this concept of "joining together" when he encouraged the Corinthians to make an adjustment so that divisions and factions be avoided in the church (I Corinthians 1:10).

What implications does the meaning of *katartizo* have for the study of church discipline? First, the discipline of a Christian is not designed to punish or destroy but rather to "mend" and "repair" someone who has been injured or damaged on the battlefield of life. Second, restoration involves equipping the Christian with the spiritual principles necessary to avoid further injury and to meet the

demands of the Christian life. Third, restoration is not just the expression of forgiveness toward the sinner, but is a process of restoring the sinner to his former condition.

Does this attitude match the way most Christians deal with those who sin? It ought to. However, John Yoder points out that there are several misunderstandings in the minds of many connected to the word discipline that prohibit restoration.²² He says that attention often focuses more on the punishment than reconciliation of the sinner; one seeks to inflict on the guilty party some suffering to compensate for the suffering he has caused, at least the suffering of public humiliation. Yoder points out a second misunderstanding whereby concern is more for the "standard" than for the offender. In other words, strict observance of the rules is thought of as necessary to reassure the church of its righteousness, or to teach other members the seriousness of the offense, or to testify to the surrounding world of the church's seriousness. In such a case the brother is less important to the church than its identity and reputation and standards, or even than the power of its leaders which is threatened by the offender's not conforming. Yoder discusses a third misunderstanding in relation to Galatians 6:1 and Matthew 18:15, that being responsibility which moves from the brother or sister to the "church disciplinarian"; the pastor or deacon is charged with the duty of reprimand. When such faulty thinking occurs: (1) this depersonalizes the entire process, for the official disciplinarian will be farther from the offense, and will be concerned to demonstrate his fairness by treating all cases alike; (2) this furthermore undermines the other ministries which that minister should be exercising in the church; and (3) such delegation of power by-passes the express instruction in Matthew 18:15 to the effect that the first approach made to the guilty one by anyone should be "between you and him alone." Daniel Wray points out that some Christians justify their failure to intervene in a brother's life due to their "love" or "acceptance" of him. He writes:

It is ironic that this . . . is often justified in the name of love . . . the exercise of church discipline is a command from the Lord of the church . . . Love necessarily challenges sin in ourselves and in our brethren. It is no more for a Christian to watch a brother in Christ pursue a course of sin unchallenged than it is love for a parent to watch his child walk unhindered into disaster.²³

The manner of restoration. Paul offers two guidelines in Galatians 6:1 for those spiritual Christians who would go to the aid of a wounded brother. First, in keeping with the spirit of humility as taught by Jesus in Matthew 18, the restoration ought to be done "in the spirit of meekness."

He must not manifest judgmental criticism. He must be firm, yet tender, showing compassion for the sinner. He must come as a forgiven sinner seeking to lead another sinner into forgiveness and restoration.²⁴

This meek, or gentle, Christian is neither shocked nor dismayed at the failures of others, for he is not occupied with making comparisons. But in his attempt at restoration the meek person will also be firm and uncompromising, and will never deny the awfulness of sin.

The second guideline is that he must restore in the spirit of self-protection: "considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." The participial phrase ("considering thyself") shows that the spiritual Christian must constantly scrutinize his own life at the time he is ministering to the sinning brother. The word "considering" is from the Greek word *skopeo* and is the word from which we derive our words "microscope" and "telescope." It suggests the idea of looking with contemplation and reflection. Paul indicates that the purpose for paying close attention to oneself is that even the spiritual Christian is capable of committing the same fault: "lest thou also be tempted." A. T. Robertson offers this warning: "Spiritual experts (preachers in particular) need this caution. Satan loves a shining mark."²⁵

Paul adds a further note to encourage mature Christians to share in the ministry of restoring a sinning brother. He says, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2). While this verse is often applied (and rightly so) to many different situations in which Christian love may be expressed, the application in this context concerns church discipline. The Galatians are exhorted to "keep on bearing one another's burdens." What burdens might Paul be speaking about? Perhaps the burdens might be thought of as shame, grief, depression, and remorse that result from the exposure of one's sin, perhaps even loss of position. Whatever the burden, Paul admonishes believers not to let the brother bear it

alone. Others need to come alongside and give help when it is needed.

It appears quite clear from the study of Matthew 18:15b and Galatians 6:1-2 that God designed church discipline to restore fallen saints. That objective ought to be preeminent in any disciplinary action within a church. Discipline ought to be done firmly, yet gently, and always out of love. Those who share in the process also share in the joy of seeing a saint restored. Does not the Father rejoice over the restoration of the one sheep more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray (Matthew 18:13)?

The Process of Discipline

Once it has been determined that a "disciplinable offense" has been committed, then what? Matthew 18:15-17 outlines the steps to follow: (1) private reproof, (2) private conference, (3) public announcement, and (4) public exclusion.

Private Reproof

"Now if your brother should sin against you, go and convince him between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained (the fellowship of) your brother" (Matthew 18:15).

In this verse Jesus deals with the situation in which one Christian ("your brother") has wronged another. In such a situation He (1) commands (2) the offended brother to (3) "go" and (4) speak with the brother (5) privately in such a way as (6) to convict him of his sin. If the brother "hears you" (i.e., if he confesses his sin and seeks forgiveness) reconciliation takes place, restoration is accomplished.

In the above summary of private reproof each of the essential elements involved has been numbered. The first element is that Jesus leaves no options whenever sin separates brothers; He commands discipline to bring about reconciliation. He further points out that it is the responsibility of the offended party to seek out the offender. In the present imperative, the verb used by Jesus conveys the idea that the offended one should go and pursue him without being distracted. Thus, whenever an unreconciled condition exists between two believers, there is no option left; discipline must be pursued.²⁶

Elements two, three, and four in the step of private reproof direct the offended brother to go to the offender. When Jesus spoke

earlier in Matthew 5:23-24 He required the offender to go immediately to any brother whom he may have offended and be reconciled to him -- even if it requires interrupting an act of worship (thus showing high priority Jesus places on proper relations between Christians). However, in Matthew 18:15 (just as it is also in Luke 17:3) the offended party is placed under the same obligation. "When discord between believers takes place, ideally they ought to meet each other on the way to one another's house to seek reconciliation."²⁷

It has been pointed out earlier that there has been a good deal of debate as to whether the words "against you" are part of the original Greek text. Whether the words "against you" are in the original text or not, it is clear from Galatians 6:1 (as it is also in James 5:19-20) that Christians have a responsibility to confront sin in general, not just when it is an offense against one's person. Both Jesus and Paul are commanding believers to involve themselves in the lives of others. They are charging believers to take loving action when a brother is on the road to spiritual disaster.

The fifth element in the matter of private reproof is just that: reproof is to be carried out privately. When a Christian perceives in his brother a wrong, demanding disciplinary measures, it is not right that he should publish the matter before others. He should neither speak of it privately to friends, nor should he proclaim it in a church meeting, nor should he require that it be investigated by a church committee or board. This is not what Jesus directs. It is not the way to reclaim a wandering brother. Says Warham Walker, "He who would raise a fallen brother, must not begin by reporting his wrong, either to the church or to the world."²⁸

"But perhaps I should ask someone's advice first?" No. That is to be avoided.²⁹ The beauty of Christ's instructions is that they avoid gossip. Publicity might hinder reconciliation. Suppose when one goes to his brother he discovers he was mistaken? Already he might have done his brother the injustice of spreading a wrong impression about him, a wrong impression that might remain in the memory of the person whose advice was sought even though the attempt was made to correct it later. Slander sticks in the memory more easily than the correction of slander.³⁰

"But shouldn't I pray about it with someone? Wouldn't it be good if I had some prayer backing?" John White points out that praying with others may lead to gossip. He writes:

Prayer can be a form of gossip. It can be a "spiritual" way of avoiding your duty to treat the matter with the utmost confidentiality. Any attempt not to keep the matter between you and your brother (or sister) alone is at once suspect. It is only too easy to deceive ourselves about our motives.³¹

Go to the person in private. Unless the sin is already public knowledge, one's first concern should be the reconciliation and restoration of the brother, and to guard his good name.

Jesus says in Matthew 18:15 that the brother is to be reprovved, "convinced" (this is the sixth element of private reproof). "Convince" is a strong word, which may mean "to bring to light, expose, convict, or convince someone of something." It conveys the idea of being convincing in getting the point across; it implies a rebuke that brings conviction.

Carl Laney advises that before this confrontation takes place, one ought to bring the matter before the Lord in personal prayer. "Bringing the matter before the Lord enables me to deal with any personal bitterness or resentment before the personal confrontation takes place."³²

Jay Adams offers additional advice on this element of the process by pointing to the similar passage in Luke 17:3:

According to Christ's words there (Luke 17:3), the offended brother does not convict the offender initially, making charges and calling for repentance. Rather he must first go to the offender and rebuke him in a tentative manner. (The word in Luke 17:3 is not *elengcho*, "convict," which is the term in Matthew 18:15ff., a less detailed passage, but *epitimaō*, which means "to rebuke tentatively.") That is to say, he first goes and explains the situation as he has perceived or experienced it, . . . The tentative rebuke allows for the statement and discussion of the facts . . . the tentative rebuke provides a fitting prelude to conviction. The attitude of the one offended is restrained thereby, and this may more likely lead to a quick and easier reconciliation . . .³³

Adams draws upon Luke 17:3 to allow for discussion of the facts in the event that misunderstandings can be cleared up and false accusations can be prevented.

But when an offense has been committed, nothing short of reproof and conviction, as spoken about in Matthew 18:15, will do. How is it done?

In performing this duty, the complainant should make a statement of the facts in the case, -- pointing out distinctly the offensive act, but not assuming to judge the offender's motive. He should invite the attention of the sinning brother to the law he has transgressed, explain its true spirit and meaning, and show wherein it has been violated; listen to any explanation, defence, or confession that may be offered; and strive, by reasoning the matter with him, to bring him to a proper sense of his wrong, and to induce him to make such reparation as the nature of the case may demand.³⁴

In the last portion of Matthew 18:15, Jesus reveals the potential results of caring confrontation. "If he hears you you have gained your brother." The word "hears" sometimes connotes more than the idea of merely hearing with the ear. It may take the stronger nuance, "to agree, follow, heed or obey" (John 5:25b; 9:27a; Acts 28:28).³⁵ That appears to be the sense of the word here and in verse 16. This seems to be supported by Jesus' instructions in Luke 17:3 -- "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him." If the one you have confronted heeds what you say to him and either clarifies the issue or recognizes the sin and repents of it, that person is "gained." To gain him is to achieve reconciliation with him (cf. Matthew 5:24). The word for reconciliation means to "exchange enmity for friendship."³⁶ But what does reconciliation involve?

Jesus does not say that the sinning brother is to "apologize" . . . Apologizing and forgiving are two different things . . . Saying "I'm sorry" only tells another how you feel; it asks him to do nothing about the offense. When you say, "I sinned against God and He has forgiven me; now I want to confess that I have also sinned against you; will you forgive me too?" You ask for a decision on his part.³⁷

There has been debate throughout church history as to whether there must be a public confession of a sin that has been dealt with privately. Marlin Jeschke argues that the church of the first few centuries consistently required persons under discipline to make a public confession.³⁸ But Matthew 18:15 does not suggest that this

is necessary. It appears from Matthew 18:15 that whether the confession will be made public or private depends upon the stage at which the person responds to admonition. The wise policy would be that sins which have been dealt with privately should not be made public. The only exception would be in the case of a sin which has public consequences.³⁹

Such matters which will inevitably become public should be revealed to the church family in such a way as to bring loving encouragement to those who have repented of their sins but now face the serious public consequences of their actions.⁴⁰

It should be pointed out that since reconciliation is a matter of restoring friendship, it is not enough to merely bury a matter; both parties must work toward a new and proper relationship for the future. This means that time, effort, and anything else deemed necessary should be given to assure that the relationship becomes stronger than it was before the break.⁴¹

Private Conference

Many personal offenses and issues of sin can be dealt with adequately at the private, personal level. But what if the brother is unwilling to listen? What if obvious sin is not acknowledged and confessed? If such cases arise, Jesus says, "But if he does not listen take along with you the next time one or two, in order that by mouth of two witnesses or three every word may be established" (Matthew 18:16).

How often should an offended person go to an erring brother before proceeding to this next step in the process of discipline? Is it a matter of the length of time or the number of times? Neither. The process of discipline moves to the next step only when it is clear that there is refusal on the part of the offender to be reconciled. The refusal must be a genuine one. This means that the brother will not listen to reason, he has dug in his heels. Adams writes:

Perhaps you will find it necessary to try several times . . . You may wish to vary your approach. You will want to be sure that you have gone in a spirit of meekness and that you have not alienated him . . . Moreover, you must distinguish carefully between unwillingness to listen and a failure to understand or to accept your viewpoint on the matter. If the brother or sister continues

to discuss the matter with you, asking for further evidence, saying that he understands the facts differently, etc., or if he believes that your interpretation of biblical verses that bear upon the case is wrong, surely you are obligated to consider these matters.⁴²

But when discussion ceases and the brother evidences an unwillingness to listen, it is time to move ahead. If you are convinced that your words are falling on deaf ears, the next step is to return with one or two others -- spiritually mature members of the church family.

Who are these witnesses? What purpose do they serve? Laney argues that they are witnesses to the offense committed.⁴³ However, this writer believes there are several reasons why such an interpretation is not the case. If witnesses are brought on the scene only after a private confrontation is held, then the matter was not private to begin with -- there had been witnesses. The idea of keeping the matter private between the only two who knew about it does not allow for witnesses to have seen the offense. Also the wording of the text does not support the view of Laney. The words "if he ignores them" (Matthew 18:17) indicate that they are actively participating in the restoration process. They are first counselors who seek to reunite the two estranged parties. What these witnesses attest to and confirm is "every word." That is, they are not witnesses to "events" in the offense, but rather they are able to witness to the words that were spoken by themselves, to the words of the brother trying to bring about the reconciliation, and to the words of refusal by the one who stubbornly ignored them. Jay Adams adds:

Moreover, in the first instance they are not called "witnesses" but "one or two others." They turn into witnesses only upon the refusal of one or more of the parties to repent and be reconciled. They are witnesses to this discussion . . . not about the sin . . .⁴⁴

What is the duty of the witnesses? How are they to assist in the restoration process?⁴⁵ The importance of the questions under consideration warrant a rather extended quotation. Warham Walker writes:

The duty of the complainant, with one or two more, is essentially the same that he had previously performed alone. The assistant brethren should patiently hear both the complaint and the defence; carefully investigate the whole matter; and in the fear of God,

judge between their brethren. If they find the accusation unsustainable, they should advise that it be withdrawn. If they perceive, in either of the parties, an unchristian temper, a disposition to cast injurious reflections, or to engage in angry disputation, they should promptly rebuke it. They should permit themselves to be swayed by no prejudice, or party feeling; but act impartially, for God, and the right. It becomes their duty to aid the aggrieved party in his efforts to convince and reclaim the offender; and if the latter persist in his wrong, to appear as witnesses against him in the ultimate appeal of the church.⁴⁶

Who should these counselor/witnesses be? The words of Jesus do not specify anyone in particular other than to say "one or two others." This means that any two brethren -- they should be members of the same church with the offender -- may be called upon to help. In light of Galatians 6:1 such individuals ought to be spiritually mature members of the church that are capable of providing wise counsel and whose words of testimony, if needed, would be respected by the congregation. Generally these may be pastors, deacons or other respected spiritual guides.

When seeking someone to serve as a counselor/witness care should be exercised to protect the offender. To assure privacy, the offender's name should not be revealed until the counselor has agreed to participate. It would seem that, in light of Galatians 6:1, only for the gravest reasons should one ever refuse to serve in this capacity when asked.

Bringing a matter of sin to a brother's attention in the presence of witnesses may seem a threatening or intimidating scene. Yet the purpose is not to threaten or intimidate the sinner into repentance. The intent is to cause the offender to realize the seriousness of the situation.⁴⁷

Public Announcement

The third step in the process of discipline, as set forth by Jesus, is revealed in verse 17: "But if he ignores them, report to the church." The refusal of the sinning brother to acknowledge his sin and repent requires that the matter be made public by bringing it before the church. Up to this point the disciplinary procedure has taken place in private. But an unresponsive Christian requires stronger action. After one or two or three people fail, the entire church is to use its united endeavors to gain the brother.⁴⁸

The word "church" refers here to the local body of believers gathered in assembly. It should be noted that Jesus does not say, "Tell it to pope, priest, bishop, synod, or some church board." He says, "Tell it to the congregation."⁴⁹ The congregation is the final court of appeal in such matters.⁵⁰

This is not to say that the church leaders (i.e., pastoral staff, or deacons) should not be informed of the action being taken. Indeed, they are probably the most likely ones to serve as witnesses in the second step of discipline -- the private conference. But the principle that seems to underlie Jesus' command is that believers are members of one body (I Corinthians 12:14-20), and have a responsibility to care for one another (I Corinthians 12:25). That care for one another must sometimes take the form of discipline.⁵¹

It must be understood that this third step is a valid step for reconciliation between two believers. This step should never be reserved exclusively for cases in which the church is widely affected. Offense between two believers is the issue. The church is now the vehicle through which the reconciliation attempt is being made.⁵²

At this time the offended brother and witness(es) report the incident and previous attempts at reconciliation. This step now absolves the offended of further responsibility should this third attempt at reconciliation fail. He can rest assured he has exhausted his resources and has acted responsibly, albeit without results.

How should the matter of an offending (sinning) brother be presented to the church? It must be noted that Jesus does not give specific instructions regarding how the matter is to be brought before the church. Since Jesus did not give a detailed statement about how to carry out this step, men have often exercised flexibility here. It is here that the abuses come in.

In some churches in Manitoba, Canada, young couples who have engaged in sexual relations before marriage are required to stand before the congregation and confess their sin before the church will proceed with their marriage or accept them back into fellowship.⁵³ However well-intentioned this type of procedure is, it has no biblical warrant and is contrary to the whole spirit of church discipline. Instead of bringing about restoration such a procedure often spreads unnecessary shame and embarrassment, and contributes to self-righteous gossip. Usually, the idea behind this kind of system is that the sinner has wronged the church by his sin and must apologize.⁵⁴ But this idea is not found in Jesus' teaching.

It is at this stage in the discipline process that the church leadership plays an important role. They are responsible not primarily for the offending brother but for the congregation as a whole. John White writes:

There can be no greater test of pastoral gifts than for the leaders to direct matters in such a way that the church is awakened to righteousness, to godly grief and to repentance, while at the same time the sinner is given a further opportunity to repent.⁵⁵

The reason why the congregation is told is so that, as a whole, they may have an opportunity to help the offending, willful brother come to repentance and restoration. The members will need instruction. There are intricate measures to be taken carefully, and it is important at every point in the process that the pastor be in charge, guiding and taking care that nothing goes wrong; but that everything be done lovingly and decently and in good order.

What should the congregation be told about their responsibilities to the brother who is undergoing discipline?⁵⁶ Jay Adams points out three things that are essential.⁵⁷ First, that brother or sister so-and-so is under discipline for a particular problem. Adams advocates that the offender be identified. However, the congregation does not need to be told the details of the offense, only the nature of the problem if they are to confront and seek to counsel the brother in a meaningful way. Second, the congregation should be instructed that they may no longer fellowship with the sinning brother as though nothing were wrong (I Corinthians 5:9, 11; II Thessalonians 3:6, 14). The congregation is to regard the so-called brother (I Corinthians 5:11) "as a brother" (II Thessalonians 3:15), but as one whose status is in question. Third, they must "counsel" him (Galatians 6:1-2; II Thessalonians 3:15) and pray for him.

John Armstrong offers his advice on the matter by writing:

It has been my experience that offending parties will usually not attend the public meeting if the earlier steps have been properly followed. But in most cases they should be allowed to be present if they wish. After the church has heard the charges, and some time has elapsed, and the accused has still not repented, then and only then should he or she be treated as an outsider. In all cases, the church should seek unanimity of spirit and pray fervently.⁵⁸

Public Exclusion

There is one final step, given by Jesus, in the discipline of an impenitent sinner: "But if he ignores the church, he shall be with you precisely like the heathen and the tax collector" (Matthew 18:17b).

The word in verse 17 translated "ignores" means "to pay no attention to." Sometimes an offender will refuse to come before the church to face the charges against him. In that case the church discipline must proceed in his absence. In other cases, the public rebuke, exhortation, or warning is "heard" but goes unheeded. In either case, after the church leaders and congregation have made every effort to bring the sinner to repentance but are still unsuccessful, they must ostracize the offender from church fellowship.

The reference by Jesus to "heathen and tax collectors" is illuminated by the Jewish cultural setting of Jesus' day. According to the popular religious opinions of the day, Gentiles (i.e., heathens) were considered as outsiders with regard to the divine blessings promised Israel. A Gentile was not permitted to pass beyond the outer court of the temple into the sanctuary. The penalty for doing so, and thus violating the sanctity of the temple, was death. Tax collectors were Jews who collected revenue for the Roman government. They were regarded as traitors because they served Rome at the expense of their countrymen. Often they overcharged people and kept for themselves the surplus. They represented foreign domination and corruption. Their job made them the outcasts of Jewish society (cf. Matthew 9:10; 21:31).

What is Jesus saying, then, about unrepentant sinners? He is simply instructing the disciples that they ostracize the impenitent as is the custom with heathen and tax collectors. In ecclesiastical terms this is referred to as "excommunication." The word is derived from the Latin *ex* ("out") and *communico* ("share, communicate"). It refers to the cutting off of a person from the church membership, fellowship, or communion. No longer may that person share in the activities and privileges of church membership.⁵⁹ Don Bubna offers a practical description of what this means:

This means that you are to treat the person as a non-believer, because he is no longer walking as a believer. It means to keep loving him as Jesus loved the publicans and sinners. It means to

reach out to him in witness but not to relate to him as a member of the body of Christ.⁶⁰

As strong as this disciplinary step is, it too, is intended to bring about repentance. It must be noted that even though the break in fellowship may be complete, the spirit of the Jews toward tax collectors is alien to all that Jesus desires of His followers. Christ died for the ungodly. The heart of God still reaches out to rebels and sinners, and to those who are under discipline. One must be careful then that the words tax collector and heathen do not cause him to adopt those judgmental and superior attitudes Christ so clearly warned against.⁶¹ Jay Adams writes:

This means that, while making no final judgment about his actual heart condition, the church is to treat him as if he were an unbeliever. . . . The church does not judge his words and actions. By word and action he has acted "as a heathen and tax collector" does and must be treated as one. The judgment is a functional one, that is to say, the church in all her relationships to him functions as it does toward an unregenerate person. It is possible that the individual whom you remove, being a believer in rebellion, will repent and return.⁶²

There are several terms and expressions in the New Testament which describe the actions that terminate one's membership: put him out of the fellowship (I Corinthians 5:2); get rid of the leaven (I Corinthians 5:7); expel him from the church (I Corinthians 5:13); deliver him over to Satan (I Corinthians 5:5; I Timothy 1:20); and, treat him as a heathen and tax collector (Matthew 18:17). Three actions appear to be found in these expressions: (1) removing, getting rid, or expelling him from the congregation; (2) handing him over to Satan; and (3) treating him as a heathen -- each of which seems to emphasize a distinct fact about his termination. The first action shows the imperative for getting him out of the congregation (there the emphasis appears to be on the welfare of the congregation and the honor of God's name). The second action shows concern for the one who is removed; he is to be handed over to Satan to be "taught" and "for the destruction of the flesh so that the spirit might be saved." The third action speaks of the manner in which the members of the congregation are to treat him -- the same way they treat unbelievers.⁶³ Much more could be discussed

about these actions and the scriptures related to them but it is not within the range of this study to do so.

Since this portion is emphasizing the practice of discipline, several matters of practical importance must be noted. First, some think that since the unrepentant sinner is to be "removed from the midst" and treated as a "heathen and tax collector" that he is not to be allowed to attend the worship services of the church. That is not the intent of Paul's teaching in I Corinthians 5, nor Jesus' teaching in Matthew 18:17. What is meant is that the sinner is removed from the care and discipline of the church; he is no longer to be considered a member of the organized church. "In the midst" (I Corinthians 5:2, 13) means among believers, as one of them. But since he is to be treated as a heathen (Matthew 18:17), and heathen were permitted to attend the church services (I Corinthians 14:23-25), unless he is disrupting the services or acting divisely he should be allowed to hear the preaching of the Word of God and should be witnessed to by the members, treating him just like they would any unbeliever who enters. It may be that under the preaching of the Word he would repent.⁶⁴

A second matter of practical importance concerns the matter of legality. In dealing with matters between brethren, Paul found it necessary to address the issue of going to law (I Corinthians 6). In this day when people are suing the church for obeying God, it is especially important that a church be able to substantiate the fact that it has followed the Biblical procedures, and done so decently and in order, with regard to matters of discipline.⁶⁵ When it comes to the practice of public exclusion, attorney Ken Sande of the Christian Conciliation Service of Montana offers twelve legal precautions.⁶⁶

First, specifically and completely state in the church constitution or bylaws the policy and procedures regarding church discipline and its scriptural basis (cf. Matthew 18:15-20; I Corinthians 5:1-13; Galatians 6:1; II Thessalonians 3:14-15; I Timothy 5:19-21).

Second, specify in the constitution or bylaws that members of the church have entered into a covenant to minister to one another's spiritual needs, and since this relationship is entered by mutual consent with the church leaders and congregation, it also ends only by mutual consent. This statement will help deter (1) resignation from membership as a means to avoid discipline, and (2) lawsuits for administering discipline after resignation.

Third, include a statement in the constitution or bylaws such as, "In obedience to I Corinthians 6:1-8, we, the members of this church, will not pursue legal actions against or sue the pastors, deacons, or church staff in connection with the performance of their official church duties."

Fourth, acquaint those seeking membership with the constitution or bylaws, including the steps for dealing with sinning saints. Inform them that, as members, they will be expected to abide by these principles. Keep a record of when and by whom each prospective member was informed of these policies.

Fifth, encourage a formal commitment to membership in the church. The most difficult discipline problems arise among people who have been floating along the periphery of a church for years, enjoying its benefits without accepting the corresponding responsibilities.

Sixth, if the congregation has never been exposed to biblical principles of church discipline, provide them with this important information through careful preaching and teaching. It is also helpful to periodically review these principles, noting that discipline is an important privilege and blessing of the Christian life (Hebrews 12:7-12).

Seventh, when discipline becomes necessary, follow the constitution or bylaws strictly. This will deter charges of partiality, prejudice, and intentional infliction of emotional distress.

Eighth, if a member under discipline resigns from the church, act promptly to complete the discipline process. The longer a person has been disassociated from the church, the weaker the argument is that his conduct has an impact on the congregation.

Ninth, if information has been disclosed to church leaders in confidence, it should not be reported to others unless absolutely necessary.⁶⁷ Report only to those persons who clearly have a responsibility in the matter, and avoid disclosing details of privileged conversations. If public disclosure becomes necessary, word the announcement as generally as possible (i.e., "Mary is being disfellowshipped as a result of her persistent refusal to listen to the church officers' admonition to repent of an acknowledged sin.").

Tenth, avoid any appearance that the discipline is designed to harass or cause emotional distress. Constantly emphasize to the person under discipline and to those involved that the goal of the process is to restore him lovingly to a right relationship with God.

Eleventh, do not publicize the action outside the church family unless (1) another church requests a transfer of membership for that person, (2) that person seeks to join another church without a request for transfer, or (3) a minister's ordination has been revoked. In the first two situations, all that needs to be said is that, "John Doe did not leave our church in good standing. We cannot recommend him for membership in your church. If you can persuade John to do so, we would be happy to work with you in resolving the problems that led to his discipline." (In the second situation, where you have to take the initiative to alert the other church of the problem, your exposure to charges of invasion of privacy increases.) In the third situation, where ordination has been revoked, it is usually not necessary to announce the discipline outside of the denomination.

Twelfth, if a lawsuit is filed, seek to resolve the matter within the body of Christ, with the help of a legal service if necessary.

The matter of public exclusion is the most severe step in the process of church discipline. It, too, ought to encourage repentance and restoration. Public exclusion should communicate the message, "We find your present conduct unacceptable to God and this congregation. Our love and concern for you demands that we take action which, though painful, we hope by God's grace will result in your repentance and restoration to us." This step of discipline acknowledges that the sin is unacceptable, but restoration acknowledges that the sinner is.

When a sinner repents, what are some practical ways in which a church can aid in the restoration and show love toward that individual? Since discipline exposes a very private and hidden aspect of a believer's life, Christians ought not pry into personal details that have already been considered by those administering discipline. Sin which has been confessed, forgiven, and dealt with by God and the church should be put behind everyone. There is no reason to give the matter further consideration. Christians should be careful to avoid flippant or insensitive remarks about what has taken place in the life of the offender. Christians who have undergone discipline and have repented need the reassurance and acceptance of the church family. This prepares the way to spiritual healing and restoration to a fruitful ministry again.

Summary

In this article, the provocation of discipline, the persons of discipline, the purpose of discipline, and the process of discipline were considered.

It was seen that the principles of discipline were set in motion over sin in the life of a brother. The question whether a brother should be confronted only when his offense is "against you" was dealt with and it was shown that any sin in the life of a brother demands confrontation and correction. Several representative lists of sins in the New Testament were looked at and it was seen that sins which necessitate church discipline fall into four major categories: violations of Christian love, unity, law, and truth.

The persons of discipline were discussed and it was seen that Jesus' teaching in Matthew 18:15-17 deals with the relation between brothers and sisters in Christ. The question of judging another (Matthew 7:1) was posed. It was shown that one cannot approach a brother about sin without having made at least a preliminary judgment of some kind. Jesus is encouraging His disciples to confront a brother about his sin, but when doing so one must have dealt with sin in his own life beforehand.

The purpose of discipline was discussed at length. It was shown that biblical church discipline is not to be carried out to punish, but to restore the sinner through repentance and reconciliation. Both Matthew 18:15b and Galatians 6:1-2 were discussed in this regard. It was seen that Jesus taught His disciples to confront a sinning brother in order to gain him, while Paul added that confrontation is for the purpose of restoring him to a former condition of spirituality. Several questions relative to the meaning and manner of restoration were also discussed.

The four-step process of discipline was also studied in this article. The matter of private reproof was broken down into five elements, each being discussed separately. It was seen that unless the sin is already public knowledge, one's first concern ought to be the reconciliation and restoration of the brother, and to guard his good name. If properly reproofed it is entirely possible that the brother will be gained. Since reconciliation is a matter of restoring friendship, it is not enough to merely bury a matter; both parties must work toward a new and proper relationship in the future.

Should the offending brother not repent, the matter of a private conference was dealt with. Practical questions such as, Who are

these witnesses? What purpose do they serve? How are they to assist in the restoration process? were discussed.

The third step in the discipline process dealt with the public announcement to the church that a brother is in sin, that he has been confronted repeatedly, and he is unwilling to acknowledge his wrongdoing. It was shown that the congregation is told of the matter in order that as a whole they may have opportunity to pray and to help the offending brother to repentance and restoration. The questions of what the congregation should be told and what their responsibilities are in the matter were also discussed.

A rather extensive discussion on the fourth step of discipline, public exclusion was presented. The discussion dealt with the purpose of disfellowshipping an impenitent brother and what it means to regard him as a "heathen and tax collector." In this portion of the article the issue of church discipline and the courts was addressed. Guidelines toward proper legal procedures were presented. This section closed with discussion about the treatment of a brother who repents and how the congregation can assist in the restoration and healing process.

Notes

¹ "fault" -- *paraptoma*, which has to do with the results of stepping aside, hence: a trespass, a stumbling, blunder, or fall.

² Daniel E Wray, *Biblical Church Discipline* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1978) 8

³ Jay Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) 54

⁴ Wray, *Biblical Church Discipline*, 8-9

⁵ David Augsburger, *Caring Enough to Confront* (Glendale, CA.: Regal Books Division, G/L Publications, 1973)

⁶ Marlin Jeschke, *Discipling the Brother* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1972) 187

⁷ Don Bubna, "Redemptive Love," *Leadership* 2 (Summer, 1981), 80

⁸ Refer to "Principles of Discipline in Matthew 18:15-17 Part II: An Exegetical Study," *CBTJ* (Spring 1989) 3.

⁹ Edward Hiscox, *The New Directory for Baptist Churches* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1954), 168

¹⁰ Jeschke, *Disciplining the Brother*, 38-39 asserts that discipline is an essential aspect of discipleship, hence the title of his book on discipline. He writes: ". . . perhaps it is time to see discipline at the center of the Christian faith. Church discipline is part of the gospel. It is an inescapable consequence of the discipling process we call the proclamation of the good news of the kingdom of God. Church discipline is the act of attempting to disciple a brother who is in danger of abandoning the faith through any particular act or attitude. Such an act of discipling is the corollary of evangelism, which is the initial act of discipling."

¹¹ "you have gained" *hekerdesas* (2nd per sing aor act ind of *kepdaino*, to gain).

¹² H Schlier, "*kerdaino*," *TDNT*, ed Gerhard Friedrich, transl Geoffrey W Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967) 3:672-673.

¹³ Robert G. Gromacki, *Stand Fast in Liberty: An Exposition of Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) 177

¹⁴ *prolemphte* (3rd per sing aor pass subj of *prolambano* to overtake by surprise, to overpower before one can escape).

¹⁵ J B Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957) 215

¹⁶ James Montgomery Boice, "Galatians," *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed Frank E Gabelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 10:502

¹⁷ Gromacki, *Stand Fast*, 177

¹⁸ R C H Lenski, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961) 297

¹⁹ Gromacki, *Stand Fast*, 297

²⁰ *katartizete* (2nd per pl act imp of *katartizo* to restore, to correct).

²¹ William Barclay, *New Testament Words* (London: SCM Press, 1964) 168-169

²² John Yoder, "Binding and Loosing," *Concern: A Pamphlet Series for Questions of Christian Renewal*, No 14, 15

²³ Wray, *Biblical Church Discipline*, 1-2

²⁴ *Ibid*, 2

²⁵ A T Robertson, *The Epistles of Paul in Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1931) 2:315

²⁶ Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, 47

²⁷ *Ibid*, 48

²⁸ Warham Walker, *Harmony in the Church: Church Discipline* (Rochester, NY: Backus Book Publishers, reprint 1981) 129

²⁹ For further discussion about making a private matter public see Hiscox, *New Directory for Baptist Churches*, 178

³⁰ John White and Ken Blue, *Healing the Wounded* (Downer's Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 1985) 90

³¹ *Ibid*, 90

³² J Carl Laney, *A Guide to Church Discipline* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1985) 50

³³ Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, 50-51

³⁴ Warham Walker, *Harmony in the Church: Church Discipline* (Rochester, NY: Backus Book, 1981) 130

³⁵ Laney, *Guide to Church Discipline*, 51

- 36 W E Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, reprint 1966) 260
- 37 Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, 53
- 38 Jeschke, *Discipling the Brother*, 92
- 39 Hiscox, *New Directory for Baptist Churches*, 173, 180-190
- 40 Laney, *Guide to Church Discipline*, 52
- 41 Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, 54
- 42 Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, 58
- 43 Laney, *Guide to Church Discipline*, 53-54
- 44 Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, 60
- 45 For an in depth discussion concerning how these counselor/witnesses are to carry out their responsibilities consult Jay Adams' *Handbook to Church Discipline*, 61-65.
- 46 Walker, *Harmony In the Church*, 132
- 47 Laney, *Guide to Church Discipline*, 53-54
- 48 Lenski, *Interpretation of St Matthew's Gospel*, 701
- 49 This writer disagrees with the position of Jay Adams (*Handbook of Church Discipline*, 69) who writes that the meaning here is "telling the elders in their capacity as representatives of the church."
- 50 Hiscox, *New Directory for Baptist Churches*, 176-177
- 51 Laney, *A Guide to Church Discipline*, 54
- 52 Ken and Joy Gage, *Restoring Fellowship: Judgment and Church Discipline* (Chicago: Moody, 1984) 53
- 53 White, *Healing the Wounded*, 95
- 54 *Ibid*, 96
- 55 *Ibid*
- 56 It should be pointed out that the command is to tell the church. At this point the world has no right to know about the matter. The church alone must hear. Since the church will be hearing privileged information, belonging to the members of the congregation alone, it is wise to ask all non-members to leave before the matter is presented to the congregation. This is emphasized by Lynn Buzzard and Laurence Eck in *Tell it to the Church*; and by Lynn Buzzard and Thomas Brandon in *Church Discipline and the Courts*.
- 57 Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, 72-75
- 58 John Armstrong, "Involve Yourself With Great Care and Much Prayer," *The Standard* (May, 1987) 22-23
- 59 Jay Adams says excommunication is a more appropriate designation for Matthew 18:17a, dealing with the public announcement. He advocates complete disfellowship when the church is told. Ref *Handbook of Church Discipline*, 82. This writer disagrees. Of course the scriptures teach that we are not to fellowship with a sinning brother as though nothing is wrong between us, but complete disfellowship does not take place until after the sinner displays his refusal to listen to the church (Matthew 18:17b). Adams has failed to take into account the complete definition and understanding of excommunication.
- 60 Bubna, "Redemptive Love," 82
- 61 White, *Healing the Wounded*, 97
- 62 Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, 80-81
- 63 *Ibid*, 83
- 64 *Ibid*

⁶⁵ It is imperative in our day that every pastor and church become familiar with the legalities surrounding church discipline. To dismiss such familiarization as worldly thinking or unnecessary is to invite legal action of the gravest consequence against a church and its leadership. The following books are recommended for this purpose: Malony, Necham, and Southard, *Clergy Malpractice*; Buzzard and Eck, *Tell it to the Church*; Buzzard and Brandon, *Church Discipline and the Courts*.

⁶⁶ Ken Sande, "Legal Considerations for Church Discipline," *Inter-Mountain Baptist Bulletin* (1986) 28:4-6

⁶⁷ The implication of Jesus' requirements in Matthew 18:16 and 18:17 to seek additional help in order to reclaim an offender and, if necessary, tell the church, is that Christians must never promise absolute confidentiality to any person. Frequently it is the practice of believers to give assurances of absolute confidentiality, but it is unbiblical and contrary to scripture. Absolute confidentiality prohibits the proper exercise of church discipline. Swearing to confidentiality requires one to make a hasty vow. One must never put himself in a position where he finds it impossible to obey a biblical commandment because of a vow he has made. No vow must ever involve possible disobedience to God; the vow of absolute confidentiality always does. It is better to say when asked to keep a matter in confidence, "I am glad to keep confidence in the way that the Bible instructs me. That means of course, I shall never involve others unless God requires me to do so." In other words, one must not promise "absolute" confidentiality, but rather, confidentiality that is consistent with Biblical requirements. For further discussion, see Jay Adams' *Handbook of Church Discipline*, 30-33.