

EXPOSITORY ESSAY: **Philosophy of Church Discipline**

The following is a Biblically-based philosophy for implementing discipline of a member of a church. This paper is written in a format that can be inserted as a portion of the church's constitution, to specify the technical guidelines and procedures for bringing church discipline upon a church member (known here as the 'offender' or 'offending member').

DISCIPLINE OF A CHURCH MEMBER:

A. Purpose of discipline for:

1. the church is:
 - a. to prevent sin and rebellion from spreading and affecting the whole church (1 Corinthians 5:6-7);
 - b. to instill Biblical fear and respect for the Lord and His Body (the Church), and to warn believers about the consequences of intentional, defiant rebellion against God (1 Timothy 2:20);
 - c. to terminate or prevent attitudes of self-righteous pride and gossip (1 Corinthians 5:6);
 - d. to minimize the damage to the church's testimony to the community and the world;
 - e. to test the obedience of the church (2 Corinthians 2:9);
 - f. to prevent believers and the church from becoming victims of Satan's schemes (2 Corinthians 2:11).
2. the offender is to bring about repentance, reconciliation, and restoration with God (2 Corinthians 2:6).

B. Reasons for extreme discipline are:

1. to destroy and discipline the offender's sinful nature (1 Corinthians 5:5);
2. to strongly, firmly, and hastily foster repentance within the offender's life by bringing upon him (or her) revocation of church membership and congregational dis-fellowship.

[NOTE: Congregational dis-fellowship is defined here as the loss of church membership and Christian privileges, and the ceasing of all normal relations between the offender and the congregation in which the congregation is not to "closely and habitually" associate with the offending member in a way that encourages or comforts his (or her) behavior. THIS DOES NOT MEAN TO "COMPLETELY SHUN" HIM (OR HER) (1 Corinthians 5:9-11, *AMP*), but that the offender is to be treated as unsaved (a "pagan" or "tax-collector") (Matthew 18:17).]

C. Attitudes of those who exercise discipline should be:

1. a sense of mourning and loss for the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 5:2);
2. of solemn judgment (1 Corinthians 5:4);
3. of gently trying to instruct (Galatians 6:1; 2 Timothy 2:25);
4. of carry each other's burdens (Galatians 6:2);
5. of love (John 13:34) without judging with a condemning attitude (James 4:11);
6. with cautiousness towards believing the offender's empty words (Ephesians 5:6);

7. without encouraging quarreling, foolish controversies, or arguments (2 Timothy 2:14; Titus 3:9).

D. Sin that requires disciplinary action (possibly leading to dis-fellowship) is defined as any of the following in which the offending member is willfully engaged in, practicing, or promoting:

1. false teaching or doctrine (Romans 16:17-18);
2. sexual immorality, greediness, idolatry, slander, drunkenness, swindling, foul tongue, robbery, covetousness, revelry, immorality (1 Corinthians 5:11, *NAS, AMP*);
3. divisiveness (Titus 3:10) or causing divisions (Romans 16:17);
4. worshiping of angels or delighting in false humility (Colossians 2:18-19).

E. Biblical procedure for disciplining an offender:

1. A personal confrontation should be conducted by an elder who should (Luke 17:3-4):
 - a. first investigate to uncover the truth to see if there is sufficient evidence which is based on the accounts of 2 or 3 witnesses (1 Timothy 5:19) and not on rumors (James 4:11);
 - b. conduct a personal interview with the offender (Matthew 18:15):
 - (1.) to (lovingly) present the charges and evidence (Matthew 18:15);
 - (2.) to give the offender an opportunity to answer the charges;
 - (3.) to confront the offender's sinful practices with Biblical truth and Scripture verses;
 - (4.) to exhort the offender to repent and confess sinful practices to the Lord;
 - (5.) while writing down or documenting the offender's response for use in further disciplinary action, if needed.
2. If the offender sincerely repents, forgive him (or her) and cease any further disciplinary action (Luke 17:3-4).
3. If the offender says that he (or she) has sincerely repented, but in action and attitude has not, then continue disciplinary action as directed below (in section E,4).
4. Another personal confrontation should be conducted by 2 or 3 elders who should (Matthew 18:16):
 - a. repeat the disciplinary actions as directed in section E,1-3 and if necessary (according to section E,2-3), continue disciplinary action as directed below in section E,5.
5. The elder board should meet to pass (by a three quarters (3/4) majority vote) a motion that recommends to the congregation for the immediate revocation/cancellation of membership and the immediate dis-fellowship of the offending member from the church under the authority of Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5 and this constitutional article E,5.
 - a. An elder should personally hand-deliver a notice of the congregational confrontation/dis-fellowship meeting and a copy of the elder board's recommendation (as described above in section E,5) to the offending member at least 2 weeks in advance of the actual meeting date.
6. A congregational confrontation and dis-fellowship meeting should be conducted under the following guidelines (Matthew 18:17):
 - a. The Chairman of the elder board should present the charges, evidence, and disciplinary documentation during the congregational meeting.

- b. The meeting moderator should allow for a response from the offending member (if present).
- c. A motion by the elder board from their recommendation (as described in section E,5,) should be made to the congregation for a vote (while following normal Parliamentary procedures as described in the church's constitution) and which must pass by a three quarters (3/4) majority to become effective.

F. Procedures to receive an offending ex-member back into fellowship and membership:

- 1. When the elder board has determined that the offending ex-member has sincerely repented as evidenced in both action and attitude for a period of no less than 6 months, the elder board can pass a recommendation to the congregation for the reinstatement of membership and the re-fellowship of the repentant ex-member into the church. The elder board should follow the same procedures as described in section E,5-5a.
- 2. The church is to hold a reinstatement meeting under the following procedures:
 - a. The repentant ex-member should be required to give a personal testimony and public apology concerning his (or her) offensive actions (James 5:16).
 - b. A motion by the elder board from their recommendation (as described in section F,1) should be made to the congregation for a vote, while following the same procedures as described in section E,6,c. If the motion passes, the congregation is to forgive, reaffirm, and comfort the reinstated member immediately (2 Corinthians 2:7-8).

Works Cited:

Bible. *The Comparative Study Bible: A Parallel Bible Presenting New International Version, New American Standard Bible, Amplified Bible, King James Version.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984.

Bible. "The Holy Bible: New International Version." *The Bible Library CD-ROM.* Oklahoma City, OK: Ellis Enterprises, 1988.

Copyrights:

Scriptures taken from Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc®
Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Copyright © 2019 Mel W. Coddington, and permission is hereby granted that this document may be used, copied, and distributed non-commercially to non-profit organizations, individuals, churches, ministries, and schools worldwide, provided the copies are distributed at no charge and retain this sources documentation as supplied herein. This document is not for sale, resale, or for use as a gift or premium to be offered in connection with solicitations or contributions.

File name: PhilosophyOfChurchDiscipline-Essay.____ (.htm, .rtf, .doc, .pdf)
Translation used: NIV, quoted or referred to in various places within this document
Source: www.BelieverAssist.com