

**PURPOSE:** To outline The Chapel's policy regarding the church discipline process as administered by the pastoral staff.

**Defined:** Discipline is God's exercise of spiritual authority through a local church for the purpose of reclaiming an erring believer and to maintain the purity of the local church. (Sugden/Wiersbe)

## **RESPONSIBILITY FOR DISCIPLINE**

1. **Church Leadership** - is required to exercise the spiritual authority given by Christ to:

- a. Maintain sound doctrine (1 Timothy 4:16)
- b. Restore and preserve unity (Philippians 4:3)
- c. Watch over souls (Hebrews 13:17)
- d. Admonish in the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:12)

Undershepherds have been entrusted with spiritual authority for restoration and edification of the body—never to tear down (2 Corinthians 10:8, 13:10). As they equip the saints to do the work of the ministry, the undershepherds must use God's Word for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16-17). They will give an account to the Chief Shepherd for His flock (Hebrews 13:17).

2. **Individual Membership** - each is required to exercise self-discipline. This includes response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit to confess sin (1 John 1:8-10) and to examine oneself, especially before the mirror of the Holy Scriptures (James 1:22-25; 1 Corinthians 11:28 ff). To be in a position to help restore other believers, it is necessary to first judge oneself so there will be no hypocrisy (Matthew 7:1-5).

3. **Corporate Membership** - the Body of Christ is expected to judge those believers within the assembly (1 Corinthians 5:13; 1 Peter 4:17). It is recognized that all Christians are imperfect, seeking to grow in Christ by the power and direction of the Holy Spirit. Personal love, encouragement, avoidance and removal of offenses, and admonishment to build are the responsibility of all Christians (1 Thessalonians 5:14; Romans 13:8, 15:14; Colossians 3:13-14, 16).

## **BIBLICAL MOTIVATION FOR DISCIPLINE**

1. Church discipline must always be exercised out of **love**. Jesus Himself said, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten" (Revelation 3:19).

2. **Holiness** is the personal calling of each believer (Hebrews 12:10) as well as the corporate calling for Christ's bride (1 Thessalonians 4:7).

3. **Obedience** to the desire of Christ Jesus our Lord to have a virgin bride also requires that discipline be exercised (Ephesians 5:25-27).

4. Preserves church **unity** and personal **morality**:

### **Church Unity**

Doctrine

(division/disorder in major issues)

Romans 16:17; 2 Timothy 2:26; Titus 3:10

Attitude or spirit of divisiveness

Philippians 4:2; Proverbs 6:16-19

### **Personal Morality**

Immorality

Paul lists specific categories in 1 Corinthians 5:11 (cf. 6, 9, 14)

Unethical conduct

Involves a deliberate/decisive failure to obey direct commands or clear precepts of Scripture

### **STEPS TAKEN IN CHURCH DISCIPLINE PROCESS**

**Step 1:** Matthew 18:15 - Personal counsel and encouragement to morality or reconciliation to bring restoration, God's grace of forgiveness and unity. (The offended party must go and tell the fault privately. The purpose is not to justify or soothe emotional hurt, but to restore the brother or sister.)

**If he will not listen...**

**Step 2:** Matthew 18:16 - Personal counsel and encouragement to morality or reconciliation. This will include two or three people (including an official representative of pastoral staff and, when best, a deacon or ABF or care leader of the church). (1 Timothy 5:19; 2 Corinthians 13:1). There must be no question about the purpose of this meeting to restore the person related to the sin. At this step, a Chapel pastor can ask the offending party to remove himself or herself from all ministry here at The Chapel while the restoration process continues.

**If he will not listen...**

**Step 3:** Matthew 18:17a - Consideration by the pastoral leadership to seek spiritual remedy of the problem. When possible, this will include a meeting with pastors or a representative group of them, with an aim of restoration. Refusal to listen after careful attempts will result in a vote to remove from the church (excommunication from membership and refusal of official church fellowship, meaning there would be no ministry opportunity and no invitation to normal church fellowship). (Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 5:2, 7, 9, 11, 13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14; Titus 3:9-11). Non-member attenders will be removed and barred from ministry opportunity and all invitations to normal church fellowship.

*A 2/3 vote of the Constitution Committee is required for this action to be ratified. The Constitution Committee is described in The Chapel's Constitution.*

*If the vote prevails and refusal persists, pastoral leadership will notify the main boards of the church.*

**Step 4:** Matthew 18:17b - The members will be notified (with charges stated generally and review of discipline steps taken). The breadth of notification will be related to the circle of knowledge and influence in the church. Removal from the church is in effect at this point, and when the offending member or attender seeks restoration, the church will work to develop a thorough, individual plan for restoration. If he will not listen... "let him be to you like a pagan or tax collector."

**Step 5:** Galatians 6:1, 2; 2 Corinthians 5 - Restoration to official church membership and forgiveness will be given and announced by pastoral leadership as widely as the offense was announced by the church, when the person has repented and fulfilled any conditions of restitution or reconciliation established on a case-by-case basis by the Constitution Committee. This is the goal of these steps. Full involvement in certain teaching or public ministries may be reserved for a prescribed probationary period so that the restored one can major on personal or family graces and growth. Full restoration does not always imply a return to teaching or public ministries.

### **CAUTIONS**

1. The church is not to extend discipline beyond its intended purpose (2 Corinthians 2:3).
2. Failure to forgive may result in:
  - a. the believer being swallowed up by too much sorrow (2 Corinthians 2:7)
  - b. Satan taking opportunity and advantage (2 Corinthians 2:11)
3. When exercising discipline, we must treat as a family member, not an enemy (2 Thessalonians 3:15).
4. Discipline must be exercised with impartiality (members and leaders, etc.).
5. God will bless the efforts of the church when we follow biblical steps with the proper attitude.
6. All steps are to be made only with a desire to restoration and healing (Galatians 6:1-4). Nothing is ever to be done with punishment or revenge in mind; that is at God's discretion.
7. Restoration to public ministries should only be after a prescribed program of revived spiritual health and readiness to serve and be accepted as a leader and minister.

### **BENEFITS DERIVED FROM DISCIPLINE**

1. **For the offender:** restoration and to avoid:
  - suffering harm (2 Corinthians 7:8-13; 1 Corinthians 5:5)
  - suffering death (James 5:19)
  - being condemned with the world (1 Corinthians 11:32)
2. **For the church:** for purity of Christ's bride (Ephesians 5:25 ff)
3. **For the community:** for a proper identification
  - (to distinguish genuine believers) (1 Corinthians 5:1; Acts 5:11)
  - for a proper association
    - (to fear improper relationships) (Acts 5:13)

### **RESULTS FROM FAILURE TO DISCIPLINE**

Failure to discipline greatly hinders the testimony of the local church, particularly its influence and power for good. It is a curse and results in a process of corruption and spiritual decay. Within the sphere of grace there must operate standards for faith and conduct.

### **PROCESS OF DISCIPLINE**

The church is to expect the discipline process to be a grievous one. Discipline is never pleasant when administered, and the church must anticipate it to be **painful** at the time of its implementation (Hebrews 12).

### **PRODUCT OF DISCIPLINE**

The end result of that painful process can be very profitable (when it produces the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it) (Hebrews 12).

#### **Proper Response**

Submission  
Reverence

#### **Improper Response**

Despising  
Fainting (losing heart)

### **THE EXERCISE OF DISCIPLINE**

When a Christian is “trapped in some sin,” spiritual people must seek to restore with gentleness and bear his burdens (Galatians 6:1-2) with an attitude of grief mixed with fear (looking to oneself lest he also be tempted). Compassion, pity and forgiveness are tempered with the need for genuine repentance (2 Corinthians 2:4). Discipline is always exercised in love for our good to promote healing (not hurting). The exercise of discipline involves humility, honesty, obedience to God’s Word, prayer and a forgiving spirit.

### **CATEGORIES OF DISCIPLINE**

Paul’s use of the term leaven in 1 Corinthians 5 and Galatians 5 provides two general categories for church discipline (immoral behavior/false teaching). Paul says, “a little leaven leavens a whole lump” and to “purge out the old leaven” (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).