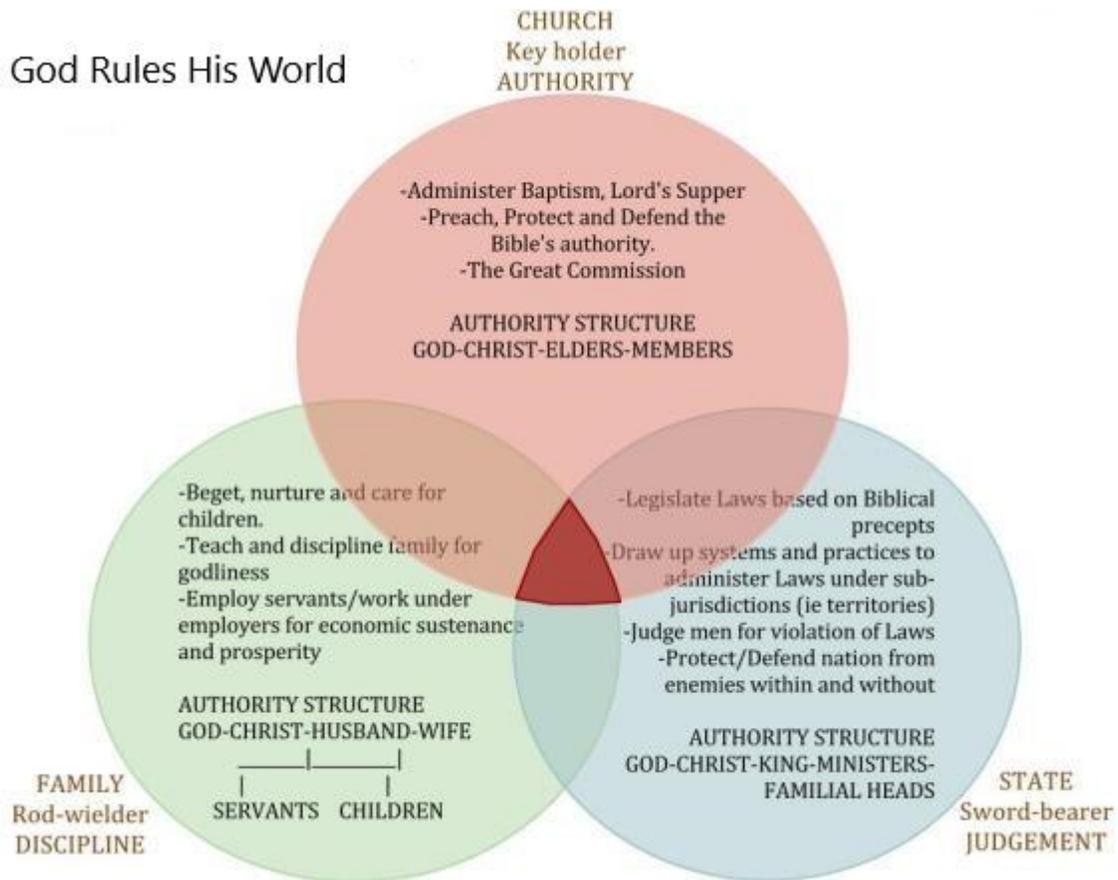


Discipline in Christ's Church

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Church Power

1. The power which Christ has committed to his church is given to the whole body, not just the leaders. All believers are baptized with the Spirit and called by Christ to join in the worship and witness of the church. All believers are gifted by the Spirit for the building and expansion of the Church of Christ.

It is the duty of the whole church to exercise discipline: “For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” 1 Corinthians 5.3-5

2. All church power is only ministerial and declarative, for Scripture is the only infallible rule of faith and practice. Church leaders may not bind the conscience by making laws on the basis of their own authority; all their decisions must be founded upon the Word of God which is open and interpretable by all members. God alone is Lord of the conscience.

(See a very different perspective on church power “Catechism of the Catholic Church” – pt 1, sect 2, ch 3, article 9 ‘I Believe in the Holy Catholic Church’ www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p123a9p4.htm)

Magisterial Authority	Ministerial Authority
Entered by Citizenship	Entered by Covenant
Judges Words and Deeds	Judges Thoughts, Words, Deeds
Until Citizenship/Life Ends	Eternal Destiny
Ever-Expanding Realm of Control	Realm of Control Defined by Scripture
Over All Areas of Life	Only What Scripture Teaches/Applies
Speaks whatever they Choose	Speaks when Scripture speaks, Silent where Scripture is Silent

3. All church power is wholly moral or spiritual. Church officers have no civil authority and may not inflict any civil penalties or seek the aid of the civil power in the exercise of their ministry, unless it is necessary for civil protection and security. For example, church leaders calling civil authorities to restrain a disobedient member who is causing physical harm to others.

4. Christ disciplines His Church through the careful and faithful application of His Word by His messengers. It is the responsibility of church elders to insure Christ’s Word is ‘rightly handled’ for the edification of the church and evangelization of the world. All members are to ‘examine the Scriptures daily’ to see if church teaching is faithful.

5. Christ has ordered His Church to be led by qualified (1 Timothy 3, and other texts) leaders who serve under the authority of His Word. When those leaders are serving faithfully under the authority of Christ, they should be obeyed. “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you” (Hebrews 13.17).

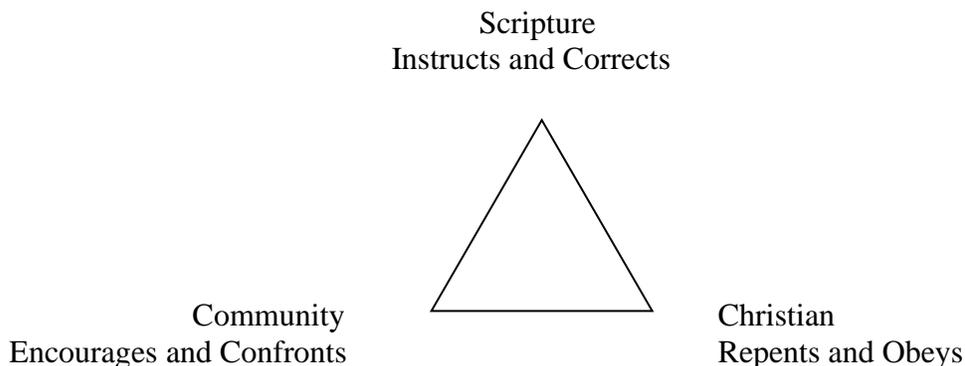
Church Discipline

If we take discipleship (following Jesus) seriously, then discipline (correcting followers of Jesus) must be taken seriously.

As all the leaders and members of any church are sinners being sanctified, dealing with sin, individually and corporately, must be a normal part of church life.

As the Scriptures (the exclusive, authoritative standard of the church) have a corrective function, when the Scriptures are read and applied, sinners will be disciplined.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3.16,17



Purpose of Discipline

1. Restore a sinning believer.

“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.” Matthew 18.15

“you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord”
1 Corinthians 5.5

“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.” Galatians 6.1

“among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme”
1 Timothy 1.20

“let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins”
James 5.20

Discipline aims but to turn the offender away from his sins, to bring about repentance, not merely to punish. It is for *his* sake. So, church discipline is not a cruel thing but a loving thing.

2. Deter such sins by others, to instruct the congregation as to what is and is not acceptable

“See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled”
Hebrews 12.15

“And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you...Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.” 1 Corinthians 5.2, 6-7

“As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.”
1 Timothy 5.20

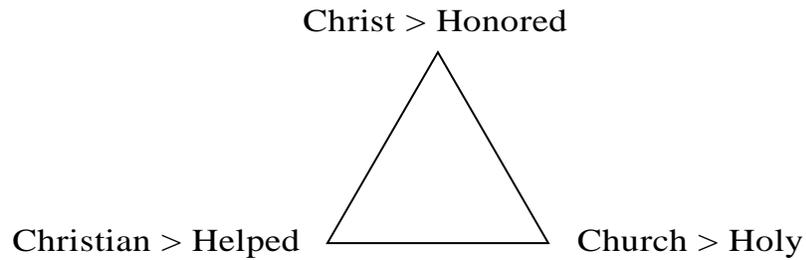
3. Promote the honor of Christ and His Church.

For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”
Romans 2.24

“but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers?” 1 Corinthians 6.6

“so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”
Ephesians 5.27

When churches ignore sin, the world despises them and the reputation of Jesus Christ himself is dragged through the mud.



Practice of Discipline

1. **Communication of the Word.** The church must make clear what behavior is acceptable to God by many forms of faithful Bible teaching. And it must present the gospel in such a way as to motivate obedience. People are motivated by the love of Jesus for them and the joy of living a godly life, not by denunciations and scolding.

2. **Conversation.** We should have Christ-centered friendships and conversations where we normally and regularly share our efforts to live out the Lordship of Jesus in every sphere of life.

“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.”
Hebrews 3.12-14

3. **Confrontation.** The local church should be characterized by love, patience, and acceptance

“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13.34

“Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” Romans 15.7

1 Corinthians 8 and Romans 14 encourage brothers with different opinions on secondary matters to live together fellowship.

“Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”
James 1.19,20

“Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.” 1 Peter 4.8

So, we need to be very prayerful and reflective before we ‘discipline’ a brother or sister. Is it truly a Scriptural offense or just a personal peeve or a cultural misunderstanding?

But, sadly, there will be times when corrective steps must be taken for restoration for the good of the body. Jesus anticipated this situation and outlined the steps which are most beneficial for restoration.

When you consider how to help a fellow sinner in their struggles, keep these two Scripture passages in mind...

The Goal – Restoration

“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are 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 fulfill the law of Christ.”
Galatians 6.1,2

Our goal is to see our brother or sister restored. This word means ‘return to its former condition’ – like setting a broken or dislocated bone. And we must realize that we are no better than they are – we too may be tempted! So we must examine ourselves before we exhort others. Perhaps there is a log in our own eye, and just a speck in theirs! (Matthew 7.3). And our manner must be gentle, like our Savior who is ever gentle and gracious with us.

The Guidelines – Respect

“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.”
Matthew 18.15-17

Jesus outlines three simple steps we must follow as we seek to restore others...

- 1) Talk to the individual first and try to win him over.
- 2) Take one or two others with you and try to win him over.
- 3) Take the matter to one of the church leaders.

Out of respect for our struggling friend, we maintain loving confidentiality. Your aim is always to win them over (to see them stop sinning) without seeing the sin, or the knowledge of the sin spread to others. This passage encourages us to keep the issue on a ‘need to know’ basis. When you hear X complain about the sin in Y, ask X whether they have spoke to Y about this sin. One of the best protections for the holiness of your group is your resolve to live a holy life.

4. Excommunication

Not all sins should be the subject of formal church discipline, most of them cannot be. We all sin too often in thought, word, and deed! The sins to be disciplined formally are sins against individual brothers in the church, as in Matthew 18, and outward, scandalous sins, like the man sleeping with his father's wife in 1 Corinth 5.

Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses. Proverbs 10.12