

CHURCH DISCIPLINE:

A Church on the Rock Homer framework for understanding church discipline.

The Goals of Church Discipline: The moral restoration of the individual and the moral protection of the church body.

Moral Restoration: The primary goal of church discipline is to save the individual from the tragic consequences of willful immorality and unrepentance.

Moral Protection: The secondary goal of church discipline is to protect weak members of the body from the temptation to follow the example of those who normalize immorality.

The Means of Church Discipline: Church discipline is accomplished through the establishment of relational boundaries leading to the forfeiture of leadership and fellowship.

Relational Boundaries: The church will act to limit the exposure of members of the body to the individual who is persisting in immorality to prevent the slow acclimation to that immorality.

Forfeiture of Leadership and Fellowship: In order to limit exposure, the church must eventually and necessarily bar an unrepentant individual from corporate fellowship and influence.

The Manner of Church Discipline: The manner of discipline is impacted by the individual's level of church influence and the nature of the immorality.

Church Influence: The church will respond more quickly and more forcefully in instances where the person holds a high degree of either formal or organic influence over the church body.

Nature of the Immorality: The church will respond more quickly and more forcefully in instances where the immorality is of a grave nature including public sexual immorality, abuse & criminal actions.

The Message of Church Discipline: The message to the church body and to the individual must continually be the message of Truth and Grace.

Truth: The church will dilute its own testimony if we are unwilling to unwaveringly speak the truth and lead our people with the standard of truth.

Grace: The church will dilute its own testimony if we do not treat our people with mercy and compassion and offer the continually renewed invitation to fellowship through the pathway of repentance.

The Parties to Church Discipline: The church will always seek to limit the number of parties kept abreast of discipline decisions to the smallest audience possible.

Limit the Number of Parties: The church will never punitively or negligently air grievances in a way that is dishonoring to the individual.

Smallest Audience: The church will inform the least amount of people necessary to accomplishing the goals of church discipline while avoiding the unnecessary alienation of related parties.

The Byproducts of Church Discipline: The inevitable byproducts of church discipline will always be pain and grief.

Pain: The pain of church discipline is intended and necessary to the process of discipline and adds force toward the goals of church discipline.

Grief: To the degree that we love the individual there will be grief in the process of discipline, over loss of fellowship and out of concern for the unrepentant person's soul.

The Dangers of Church Discipline: Effective and godly church discipline must not contribute to an atmosphere of shame and judgment.

Shame: The church will not wield the power of public humiliation to force the decision of the unrepentant individual and to instill fear of the same in members of the church body.

Judgment: The church must judge words and behavior but must not pass judgment on the state of the person's soul or create an "us v. them" narrative toward the individual.

The Critiques of Church Discipline: The notable critiques of the church discipline process are usually related to unequal implementation and the hypocrisy of barring the individual from the very resources they need for growth.

Unequal Implementation: Due to the many variables impacting the time frame of action and the nature of that action, every situation will inevitably look different as the church responds to the real situation rather than referencing a universal protocol.

Barring the Individual: The church discipline process is not merely a response to sin, it is most forcefully a response to unrepentance to mitigate further damage. An unrepentant person will do more damage to the fellowship than they will receive good from it.

Scriptures relevant to the development of our framework for church discipline:

1 John 3:6-9 No one who remains in Him sins continually; no one who sins continually has seen Him or knows Him. 7 Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; 8 the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. 9 No one who has been born of God practices sin, because His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin continually, because he has been born of God.

Matthew 18:15-17 "Now if your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 "But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that ON THE TESTIMONY OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY MATTER MAY BE CONFIRMED. 17 "And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, he is to be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

1 Corinthians 5 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and sexual immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, namely, that someone has his father's wife. 2 You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst. 3 For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. 4 In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 I have decided to turn such a person over to Satan for the destruction of his body, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord. 6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? 7 Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. 8 Therefore let's celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people; 10 I did not at all mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the greedy and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to leave the world. 11 But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is a sexually immoral person, or a greedy person, or an idolater, or is verbally abusive, or habitually drunk, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a person. 12 For what business of mine is it to judge outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? 13 But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE EVIL PERSON FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.

Jude 1:20-23 But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in the love of God, looking forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. 22 And have mercy on some, who are doubting; 23 save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.

Revelation 2:19-23 'I know your deeds, and your love and faith, and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first. 20 'But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. 21 'I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her sexual immorality. 22 'Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. 23 'And I will kill her children with plague, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.

Hebrews 12:4-11 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; 5 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE PUNISHED BY HIM; 6 FOR WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE PUNISHES EVERY SON WHOM HE ACCEPTS." 7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. 11 For the moment, all discipline seems not to be pleasant, but painful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

