

Biblical Church Discipline

Ministering to Unrepentant Sinners in the Church

by Pastor Matt Postiff, Ph.D., Th.M.

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1. Introduction and Definitions

Church discipline is a process in which God uses a local church to address the sin of a professing believer who is unrepentant. God uses the process to chasten the individual, bring about repentance and restoration, and purify the church.

Excommunication refers to the removal of a member who is unrepentant and does not respond to the process of church discipline. *Ex* means “out” and *communication* refers to “communion” or “fellowship.” So excommunication means “putting someone out of fellowship with the church,” thus removing them from membership. (It does not mean to stop communicating=talking to the person.)

Repentance is a change of mind about sin accompanied by a change of direction with respect to that sin. Initially, repentance begins with admission of guilt and confession. It also includes “fruit,” in which the person ceases doing the sin and makes any necessary corrections and restitution (Luke 3:8, Acts 26:20). The person will submit to any consequences. The person will exhibit godly sorrow, which is also a fruit of true repentance.

2. Theological Foundations and Assumptions

2.A. The Holiness of God

We first have to understand the **holiness of God**. God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all (Lev. 11:44, 1 John 1:5). He is not stained by sin in any way, and sin causes a separation between God and his creatures (Isaiah 59:2).

Therefore, **communion with God requires holiness in our individual lives**. This is why God wants us to become more like Jesus Christ and be conformed to the holiness of God (1 Peter 1:15-16). This honors God. We do this by regularly carrying out the spiritual disciplines that God has given us, like Bible study, prayer, and church attendance.

Communion with God also requires holiness in the church, that is, our “corporate” existence as believers. This is accomplished by exhorting one another through preaching the Word of God in meetings (2 Timothy 3:14-4:2), teaching the Word individually to one another (Heb. 10:24-25), and helping members in sin to repent of that sin (Matthew 18:15-17). Doing these things honors God.

God's holiness implies that we must guard the holiness in Christ's body, the church.

1. Examples: The church in Ephesus did not tolerate those who were evil and falsely claimed to be apostles (Rev. 2:2). The church in Pergamos who permitted false doctrine of Balaam and Nicolaitans (including idolatry and sexual immorality). The church was told to repent, and this included removing offenders (Rev. 2:14-16). The church in Thyatira permitted Jezebel, a so-called prophetess, to teach idolatry and sexual immorality in the church. Not only did Jezebel not repent, but the church did not stop her (Rev. 2:20-23).
2. God is serious about the purity of the church. If anyone destroys the church, God will destroy that person (1 Cor. 3:17). A little leaven of sin not handled properly ruins the church (1 Cor. 5:6-7). The church is a holy temple (Eph. 2:21).

2.B. Church Membership

A church receives a believer into its fellowship and thus affirms that the person makes a credible profession of Christian faith, that he has been baptized, and is in agreement with sound Christian doctrine and practice. The person then becomes a "part" or "member" of the church and becomes involved in the church's worship, instruction, fellowship, and evangelism. A **church** is a group of believers joined together to carry out these functions. These ministries are intended to help the person make progress in sanctification and so to grow in holiness and to mortify the sin which easily besets us.

The NT has several verses which show that the church knows who is "in" and who is "out." For example: Acts 6:3, Matthew 18:15-17, 1 Cor. 14:23, 2 Thess. 3:6, 1 Timothy 5:9, and Hebrews 10:24-25. There is no other pattern for worship or service to God in this age. Therefore, "lone-ranger" or "isolationist" Christians are not acceptable. Church membership is assumed in the New Testament. A Christian who willfully refuses to worship and fellowship with other believers is a concept so foreign to NT thought that the apostles would have concluded such a person was not a genuine believer.

As a result, we believe very firmly that every Christian should be part of a New Testament church. They join the church by acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, by being baptized in water by immersion, by formally agreeing to join the membership and be bound by its doctrine and practice, and by living a life of holiness that agrees with the Scriptures. The exact form of the formal agreement can vary from church to church, but the basic idea has to be present for a church to be "in order."

The mutual, loving relationship between believers means that we cannot permit each other to remain in sin. To do so would be very *unloving*. If the church's pastor and leadership are not teaching how to correct our practice so that we don't sin, that is also *unloving*.

Note the parallels between joining church membership and being removed from it:

1. Join by new spiritual birth and baptism; leave by physical death.
2. Join by transfer; leave by transfer.

3. Join by restoration from discipline; leave by discipline.
4. Join by vote of membership in every case above; removal by vote of membership in every case (except physical death, which is an “automatic” removal).

2.C. God's Discipline and Chastening

1. God disciplines individuals, like the Bible explains in Hebrews 12:5-11, Revelation 3:19, 1 Cor. 11:30.
2. If believers discipline themselves, God need not do so, 1 Cor. 11:31-32.
3. God disciplines churches, Revelation 2:5, 16, even to the point of closing them.
4. God sometimes uses the human means of church discipline to discipline and chasten believers. Other times He disciplines more directly using various providential means.

2.D. Perseverance and Preservation

1. True believers show evidence of their belief, including regular and faithful church participation, and fighting against sin in their lives (1 John 3:6-10).
2. God preserves true believers through faith (1 Peter 1:5).
3. Corporate, church discipline is a means to help and strengthen this faithful perseverance.
4. Excommunication shows the church's estimation that the person is not persevering in the faith. The church is thus saying that the believer does not appear to be continuing in personal faith, sound doctrine, and good works. Such a statement is a heavy weight upon the sinning person who is not able to have true assurance of salvation if he is removed from a church and persists in unrepentance.

2.E. Eschatology

1. Although people and churches are not the final judges--God is--it has pleased God to commit to the church an important judgment function before the end-time judgment of an individual.
2. The church can make an official statements about whether sins are forgiven or not, based on the gospel of Jesus Christ. This comes from the delegated authority to "bind and loose" (atar/desatar) which is found in Matthew 18:18-20 and 16:19.
3. A church disciplinary action informs the professing believer = unrepentant sinner that the church no longer affirms his testimony and thus considers him to be an unbeliever.

3. Goals of and Approach to Church Discipline

3.A. For the church: Purity

1. Honor and obey to God.
2. Correct misbehavior of the church as a whole if it is not ministering to unrepentant members.
3. Purify the church (1 Cor. 5:7).
4. Maintain the testimony of the church both inside and outside.
5. Deter other members from sinning. Cause them to have a healthy fear of the Lord (Acts 5:11).
6. Unify the church. True unity requires truth and purity. You cannot be unified with someone who is walking in persistent sin (2 Cor. 6:14-17).

3.B. For the sinner: Repentance, restoration, reconciliation

1. Correct the sinner's sin.
2. Rescue the sinner from sin and final judgment.
3. Bring the sinner to repentance.
4. Restore the sinner to fellowship in the church.
5. The goal is not punitive.

3.C. Approach and Attitude

1. Patient, not hasty.
2. Clear sin and clear proof.
3. Church wide, not pastoral only.
4. Grief and mourning.
5. Loving and corrective.
6. Done spiritually (Gal. 6:1), with prayer, grief (1 Cor. 5:2), tears (James 4:9-10).
7. Humble.
8. No witch hunt.
9. Not vindictive or critical in spirit.
10. Not domineering.

3.D. Kinds of Sins

In general, many different sins can be the subject of church discipline—but only if it is a sin that a person doesn't repent over. In other words, the subject of church discipline has to do with UNREPENTANT SIN. Every Christian is a sinner. But it is unrepentant sin that we must root out.

The sin has to be CLEAR. This means that it must be obvious enough that the entire church will agree that it is a matter for discipline. If it is a doubtful/disputable matter like in Romans 14, then it cannot be a matter of church discipline.

Here are some categories and examples of sins that the church must address.¹ This list is not exhaustive:

1. Private and inter-personal offenses that violate Christian love.
 - a. Failure to reconcile, Philippians 4:2-3, including divorce, Matthew 19:3-9
 - b. Hatred, Galatians 5:20
 - c. Jealousy and envy, Galatians 5:20
 - d. Anger, Galatians 5:20
 - e. Lying, Ephesians 4:25
 - f. Gossip, 3 John 10
2. Division and factions destructive of Christian unity.
 - a. Slander (verbally abusive in some translations), 1 Corinthians 5:11
 - b. Selfish ambition, 3 John 9-10
 - c. General divisiveness, Titus 3:10
 - d. Failure to regularly assemble with other believers, Hebrews 10:24-25
3. Individual moral and ethical failures.
 - a. Drunkenness, Ephesians 5:18, 1 Corinthians 5:11
 - b. Idolatry, 1 Corinthians 5:11
 - c. Greed, 1 Corinthians 5:11
 - d. Sexual sin of all sorts, 1 Corinthians 5:1-5, 11; 6:9
 - e. Idleness, 2 Thessalonians 3:11-15
 - f. Thievery, 1 Corinthians 5:11

¹ See Steven Thomas, *Church Discipline: The Responsibility of Love*, available from http://ccggrockford.org/wp-content/uploads/11%20Thomas_Church_Discipline_Notes.pdf.

g. Unruly lifestyle, 1 Thessalonians 5:14

4. False doctrine.

- a. General doctrinal deviation, Romans 16:17
- b. False teaching about Christ, 1 John 4:1-3, 2 John 7-11
- c. False teaching about the Gospel, Galatians 1:6-9

4. Ministry to Unrepentant Members, 1 Corinthians 5²

Text: 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

Truth: Ministry to unrepentant members includes excommunication.

4.A. Introduction

The title says that such ministry “includes” excommunication because if the sinner does not repent during the process of confronting them and calling them to repentance, then they must be removed from the fellowship of the church.

If a person is initially unrepentant, but when confronted about his sin he repents, then excommunication is not done.

4.B. The starting point is a sound understanding of God and the church.

Remember the theological foundations that are mentioned above.

The church in Corinth had lost sight the holiness of God. Therefore, they were not operating as a God-honoring church. There was not only sin in an individual member in the church, but there the church as a whole also was sinning.

4.C. The sin must be a clear violation of Scripture (5:1)

Think about the Corinthian church and Paul’s first letter.

A. In the Corinthian church, there was a type of sexual immorality (*πορνεία*). The sin was that a man was having ongoing sexual relations with his step-mother, that is, his father’s wife (probably not his own biological mother, although the sin was just as bad).

This sin is a clear violation of God’s holiness, which permits sexual relations only between one man and one woman who are married. The sin is so clear that not even the sinful pagan Roman culture

² I am indebted to Pastor Scott Williquette for a sermon that was very helpful in construction of these notes. Some of my outline is very similar to his.

accepted that sin. The Old Testament prescribed death for this sin, and Roman law declared it to be illegal as well. There is no question.

B. The fact of the sin is proven. That must be done before anything else. The church's ministry to unrepentant sinners begins after the sin is proven and guilt is established. In Corinth, there was no question about the sin; in fact it was open and boasted about! But if there is not proof of the sin, then the church cannot proceed to call the person to repent or remove them from the church. The principle of the Old Testament has to be observed—that a sin/crime has to be established by more than just one person making an accusation (1 Timothy 5:19; Numbers 35:30; Hebrews 10:28). Otherwise, a false or frivolous accusation could become not only an embarrassment for the church, but also a sin.

C. Other examples of sin that require discipline are listed in Scripture, and some are listed later in this chapter (5:9-11): any sexual immorality, covetousness, extortion, idolatry, reviler, drunkenness.

4.D. The church must have a proper attitude toward sin (5:1-2)

A. Note in verse 1 that Paul says, “among you.” This shows how serious the sin is. It is not *just* that an individual member in the church was living in sin. The entire church was affected by this sin, just like the entire nation Israel was affected by the sin of one man, Achan (Joshua 7).

B. In Corinth, verse 2 says, the church was arrogant. Evidently the church was proud that they were tolerant of this kind of sin and allowed it, perhaps in the name of “love.” This itself is a sin and shows that the church was not prepared to properly respond to the man who was in sin.

C. They should have been humble and in mourning because of the sin. Their attitude needed to be like what the Bible says in James 4:7-10.

4.E. The church must remove the unrepentant member (5:3-5)

Since the sin was clearly established, there are no “hearings” or decision about it. There is simply a rebuke by the apostle Paul against the man. The judgment has already been made. The man has to be removed.

A. The removal of the member is done in the name of the Lord Jesus and with His power (5:4a, c). This reflects the authority that is over the church, and that the local church shares. Jesus commands the church to do this ministry to and for unrepentant sinners (Matthew 18:15-17). The church members are disciples of the One who has been given all authority (Matthew 28:18). When the church is gathered and makes a right and godly decision about discipline, that decision is accompanied by the authority and power of Jesus Christ. What the church decides, Jesus has decided with them (Matthew 18:18-20). He authorizes and blesses their decision (assuming, of course, that it is done properly).

B. The removal of the member must be done **corporately**. Discipline or excommunication is *not* the action of an individual or small group within the church. It is *not* an action of the church board or the

elders or the pastor. The text says, “when you are gathered together.” In Spanish, that is “reunidos vosotros.” The “you” refers to the church of God at Corinth, namely those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, and called to be saints (1:2). The entire church has to be together and take the action of rebuking the sinful member and removing him from their midst. Every member, as much as humanly possible, needs to be involved and know what is going on. In fact, each member should participate by voting to remove the errant brother or sister from the church. In this way, the weight of the entire body is given to the decision and this should help convince the unrepentant member to change his ways.

There are several reasons why it is advantageous for the entire church to be involved in removing an unrepentant member—instead of just the pastor.

1. Helps keep the pastor accountable so that he does not use his position of authority in a domineering or mean way. This is because he knows he will have to submit the case before the church and explain what he has done. In other words, it protects the pastor from becoming like Diotrephes (3 John 9-10).
2. Provides a guard rail for the process so that those involved in confronting the unrepentant brother will recognize that the sin they are confronting him about has to be clear and provable to the congregation. It cannot be a trivial matter.
3. Adds “weight” to the decision of removal, so that an unrepentant member cannot make a legitimate claim like, “It’s just the pastor doesn’t like me.” Instead, the sinner should recognize that the entire church is making a serious statement that this person does not belong with us.
4. Shares the burden of discipline so that it rests not only on the pastor, but is shared by the church.
5. Involves the entire church in praying for and trying to help the brother or sister to be restored.

C. The church also needs to be instructed as to their proper attitude and treatment of the unrepentant member. That will come later in the chapter. For now, what we will say is that the normal fellowship extended to believers must NOT be given to the brother removed from the church. Despite the idea that we are to “love the sinner and hate the sin,” it is impossible to separate the sin from the sinner. To remove the sin from the church, the unrepentant sinner must be removed.

4.F. Removal from membership puts a person in the realm of Satan (5:5)

A. Now we come to the question of the spiritual status of the unrepentant sinner. He or she was a member of the church (“among you,” v. 1, 2). That would indicate that the person made a profession of faith in Christ at one time, and may still make such a profession.

B. However, the blatant, arrogant, and unrepentant continuance in a gross sin that is recognized even by unbelievers to be wicked, indicates that the person’s profession of faith is called into serious question.

In fact, because the Scriptures teach that a true believer cannot long persist in sin without repenting (1 John 1:9, 3:6-10), we have to conclude that this person, though making a profession of faith, is likely not doing so genuinely. They are not showing the evidence of repentant faith which is the mark of every true believer.

C. Paul says that removing the person delivers him “to Satan for the destruction of the flesh” so that “his spirit may be saved.” The hope is that the person is a true believer and the end result will be his salvation. Taking these ideas together, we can understand the meaning of verse 5.

1. The unrepentant sinner is removed from the church. This means that they are no longer under the protection of the church, and no longer experience the blessing of God in the church.
2. Instead, the sinner is put out into the world where Satan is the prince of the power of the air. God’s protective hand is removed, and the person is subject to all the problems that come to worldly people.
3. The objective of this is that the person’s flesh will be destroyed. This does not mean that his body will be consumed, but that his sinful nature (= flesh) will be buffeted by the devil and the world, used by God as chastening agents, to get the person’s attention and hopefully bring them to repentance and restoration.
4. We see therefore that the goal of excommunication is not punitive, but rather its goal is restorative. We aim for reconciliation, restoration, and repentance. In the short term, we hope for the person to stop sinning. In the long run, we want them to be saved and back in fellowship with the church family.

4.G. The church will be ruined if it does not excommunicate unrepentant sinners (5:6-8)

A. Sin in the church permeates the entire church and makes it dirty (v. 6). It is like yeast/leaven that works its way through an entire batch of dough and works its effect on that dough. Sin works on the church and grows and multiplies. Suppose that Corinth continued in a lax attitude about the sin of this man. What would happen? Others would see that it is acceptable to give in to ungodly lusts, and they would do the same thing. Sin would multiply.

B. Sin must be removed so that the church can function as it was designed—as a pure body of believers (v. 7-8), the body of Christ. Christ is the pure Lamb of God, and He offered Himself for His body (= the church) so that it too would be spotless and without blemish (Ephesians 5:26-27). The body is supposed to be unleavened. It has been justified, washed from its sin judicially/positionally/forensically/by imputation. But it needs to be sanctified as well in its practice.

C. The apostle calls in verse 8 for sincerity and truth in our “feast keeping.” What that means is that our life and worship together as a church must be full of sincerity and truth, not sin and arrogance.

D. As an example of this, consider Revelation 2-3 where the Lord called the churches to repent because they had false teachers in their midst. They had to remove those false teachers quickly or else they would lose their lampstand (= Jesus would close the church). See Revelation 2:5, 2:14-16, 2:20-23.

4.H. The church must know how to relate to both unbelievers and those who are excommunicated (5:9-13)

A. Paul wrote a previous letter to the church (“0 Corinthians,” now lost, and not ever a part of Scripture). In it, Paul told the Corinthians that they must not keep company / associate with those who are sexually immoral.

B. This statement, unqualified as it was, caused some confusion among the believers in Corinth. They thought that meant that they could have no associations at all with unbelievers, who were quite often sexually immoral. That would make life pretty tough to live, unless you try to be a monk on a monastery or a nun in a convent and cut off all connection to the outside world.

C. So Paul clarified what he meant: he was referring to *professing* believers who were living in sin.

1. What he did NOT mean was that the church people had to dis-associate from all who are unsaved. Otherwise, they would have to leave the world, i.e. go to heaven. That’s not God’s plan for the believer—the plan rather is for the believer to reach the lost with the message of salvation. The point is that unbelievers do not and cannot live by Christian standards. They are unable to do so because they do not have the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:9b); they are not regenerated (Titus 3:5-6); they are dead in transgressions and sins (Eph. 2:1). Therefore we must not expect them to live like Christians.

2. What Paul DID mean was that we are not to mingle with anyone who professes to be a brother, yet lives like an unbeliever. So-called brothers who are guilty of any sexual immorality, covetousness, extortion, idolatry, reviling, or drunkenness are actually to be given less fellowship than unbelievers.

D. At the end of verse 11, the Bible commands us not even to eat with a so-called brother.

1. What this means is that we are not permitted to share table fellowship with that person, and certainly not to share church meals or the Lord’s Supper with that person.³

3 There has been some debate about the kind of eating Paul refers to. Is it only the Lord’s Supper, or is it any meal? I take it to mean any table fellowship, not just the Lord’s Supper. This was the central issue in the split between the Mennonites and the Amish in the 1690s. The Mennonite leader Hans Reist taught that it was only the Lord’s Supper that must not be shared with a disciplined church member. Other table fellowship was fine, since, he said, “what goes into the mouth does not defile the person.” Jakob Amman argued that his use of Matthew 15:11 had no bearing on church discipline, and that it was professing believers that were to be refused all table fellowship, not those in the world, in agreement with the context of 1 Corinthians 5:9-13. Therefore, Reist and the larger Mennonite movement did not support “shunning,” but the Amish side of the split did. For more details, see Kirk R. MacGregor, “Biblical Inerrancy, Church Discipline, and the Mennonite-Amish Split,” JETS 60/3 (2017): 581-93.

2. This seems harsh to the culture today which values love over truth and tolerance over discipline. But what we must accept is that sin in the body of Christ is so serious and so dangerous that it has to be dealt with very sternly. Remember, our Lord said that if your hand offends you, cut it off (Matt. 5:30).

3. What about a family member that is disciplined by the church? It is my understanding, on the basis of other Biblical teaching, that if the family member is in your immediate family and lives in the same home, the normal familial activities should be continued. Eating meals together should continue. If the husband is under discipline, he is considered as an unbeliever. His wife should continue to dwell with him. She must then try to win him like 1 Peter 3:1-6 teaches. She cannot withhold from him normal marital rights. But if he is displeased to live with her, and he decides to depart, she must permit that to happen peaceably according to 1 Cor. 7:12-17.

4. We can talk to the person for purposes of restoration, but not social interaction.

E. In verses 12-13, Paul makes a distinction between those who are outside and those who are inside. Those on the “inside” are church members. We are supposed to know who they are. Those on the outside are non-believers.

1. We have no right to judge those who are outside the church, in the way that has been discussed in this chapter. They are not believers; they do not know the standards of Biblical conduct. God will judge them.

2. You might think that it is also God’s role to judge those who are inside. But no! Rather, those who are inside are to be judged by the church. If you are not convinced of this, note that v. 12b says, “Do you not judge those who are inside?” The understood answer to this rhetorical question is “Yes, you do judge those who are inside.” It is our God-given job to do that. God often disciplines people through other people. Note also that verse 13b commands the church, “put away from yourselves the evil person.” This is a quotation of Deut. 13:5, Deut. 17:7.

3. Please note carefully: Paul is using the Old Testament passage by way of analogy. He is not implying that we are to kill the unrepentant member. Our God-given authority only extends to putting that person outside of the church. Once we do that, there is no more we can do. We have turned the sinner over to Satan, and God will permit whatever He decides is right to happen to the unrepentant person. Those who are already outside of the church, and have never been inside, are in a similar situation. The church has no right to trouble them further by persecution or murder. The medieval Roman Catholic church that carried out Inquisitions,⁴ and the early Reformation church that advocated the killing of Jews⁵ and heretics⁶ are completely at odds

4 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inquisition>.

5 “...In his later career, Luther denounced Judaism and called for harsh persecution of its followers, so that they might not be allowed to teach. In a paragraph from his *On the Jews and Their Lies* he deplores Christendom's failure to expel them.” See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Luther_and_antisemitism.

6 Michael Servetus was burned in Geneva in 1553 for being anti-Trinitarian. Although some try to shift the blame for this away from John Calvin onto Geneva’s council or the pastors they consulted, even an article such as

with Biblical teaching. They thought they were doing God a service (John 16:2), but they were living deep in sin and had no right to claim the name of Christ.

4.I. Conclusion

Some key truths we have learned are as follows:

- A. Unrepentant patterns of sin have no place in the church.
- B. Sin is cleansed by removing the sinner who does the sin. An immoral person in the church has to be removed for sake of purity of the church and in order to help the man ultimately be saved.
- C. It is the role of the **church as a body** to put someone “under discipline” or to put them “out of the church.” It is **not** the role of the pastor or leadership board to do that. The leadership plays an important role, for sure, but they are not the final authorities.
- D. When the church decides to remove a member, it has the authority of Jesus to do so and to consider that person as an unbeliever. This is true even if that person claims still to be a believer.
- E. When the church removes a member, that member is put out into the world away from God’s protection and blessing, and is under the dominion of Satan. This may mean destruction for him in this life as he lives then outside the protective umbrella of the church and Satan can have his way with the person, but if it turns out for salvation, so much the better.
- F. The purpose of excommunication is for God to use the conditions of the world to chasten the person into right conduct. Perhaps after all they will be a true believer.
- G. A little sin in the church will spread and cause more sin.
- H. Christ wants a pure church (Ephesians 5:25-27). In other words, He wants a holy body for Himself and for the sake of the testimony of His name to the world. He commands us to use excommunication as part of a process of discipline to keep the church pure from sin.
- I. The church’s proper attitude toward sin is supposed to be humility and grief and not pride and toleration.
- J. Regarding the professing believer who is removed from the church, we will actually have more association with people of the world than we have with a Christian who is put out of the church. We could eat with an unbeliever, but not with an unrepentant brother who has been put out of the church! God will take care of those outside the church; but those inside, we are responsible to deal with.

5. Ministry to Unrepentant Members: Matthew 18

Text: Matthew 18:15-20

<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/justintaylor/2007/06/22/calvin-and-servetus/> admits that such heretics were killed in other places.

Truth: Sin between brothers has to be addressed in an orderly fashion.

5.A. Introduction

The context of Matthew 18 starting in verse 6 shows how seriously the Lord takes sin.

1. In verses 6-7, He teaches that if someone causes one of his believers to sin, it would be better for him to be drowned in the ocean than (a) what happened to the little one who stumbled; and (b) what will happen to the offender in the final judgment.
2. In verses 8-9, He says that sin in our own lives must be dealt with in a “radical” fashion. I take his statements about self-mutilation to refer metaphorically to dealing severely with sin. By saying that it is better to enter eternal life in a handicapped state than to be whole and cast into Hell, He is completely right. But the message is this: cut sin out of your life. Stop it. Get rid of it. Kill it. Cutting off a hand, foot, eye, or ear is not going to change your sin nature. You need to address the spiritual problem of sin with severe tactics.
3. In verses 12-14, Jesus reminds us that He doesn’t desire anyone to perish, so we should find the lost and sinning sheep and bring them into the sheepfold.

The message is that sin is very bad. So what happens if there is a sin between brothers? No doubt there will be such offenses. Jesus gives us an orderly, four-step procedure to address the problem.

5.B. Go Privately and Tell Him, 18:15

A. First, a proven sin has to happen. The nature of the sin has to be serious and, most likely, repetitive. It cannot be trivial. It must not be something at which you have merely taken offense. You have to be able to prove the sin beyond doubt. Wise counsel can help you to know if a situation warrants making something of it, or it should just be “covered” by love (Proverbs 10:12, 17:9; 1 Peter 4:8). In other words, there has to be a certain level of seriousness to the sin.

B. If you are the offended church member, you are directed to speak to the brother privately. This means that you do not gossip to other people. You don’t go to the pastor. You don’t run to the deacons or your mother! Every church member is responsible to carry out this kind of ministry.

1. “Privately” means that there is limited confidentiality at this stage. You want the situation to be resolved, and never to be known by others. This keeps sin at the level it should be at—not ignored, but not publicized either. You don’t want to disparage a brother by publishing his sins to others.
2. However, you cannot promise complete confidentiality because if he is not repentant, you will have to share the sin with other witnesses or even with the church. Also, if you uncover some illegal activity, that cannot be hidden under a “confidentiality agreement.”

C. This goal is for him to “hear” you. This means that he listens, understands, acknowledges his sin, and repents of it. He shows a penitent heart. But repentance also must be *shown*. This means that you may have to let some time pass for the repentance to be demonstrated. In other words, the orderly procedure is not completed immediately or overnight. It takes the passage of time. And this passage of time is completely acceptable, because our goal is to win a brother whose soul is important. We are not doing a fast-food operation here.

D. If he hears, you have gained your brother. What was “lost” has now been found. The relationship that was damaged before is now restored. Not only that, but also the brother’s relationship to God has been restored as well.

➔ Restoration is the goal of our ministry to sinning brothers. Punishment is not the goal. Humiliation and embarrassment are not the ultimate goals.⁷ Vengeance is not the goal.

E. If restoration occurs, the procedure is completed. Nothing more is done except to make sure the sinner and the offended person have restored fellowship.

F. If restoration does not occur, the process may pause at this step and another meeting may be held if it offers possible profit. If the sinning brother is hard and will not listen, then the next step can be started immediately.

G. Note on when the discipline process is “shortened.”

1. The process may be shortened so much that it disappears entirely. Love covers a multitude of sins. Many sins are not subject to discipline (Prov. 10:12, 17:9; 1 Peter 4:8). We must not "take offense" when none was intended. If a brother tends to take offense too easily, this itself must be confronted. The "two or three witnesses" help to avoid "frivolous" cases of church discipline.
2. The process is shortened whenever there is repentance. At that point, it immediately stops.
3. The process of discipline moves more quickly for public sins that are obvious to the entire body. However, do not jump to conclusions. Consider possibility of false information or unknown circumstances that change the situation.

H. A personal example of a victory. A young woman in our church had a brief immoral relationship with a boy which resulted in her becoming pregnant. I spoke with her and her parents about this and she seemed to be repentant. She continued to attend church services. There was therefore no disciplinary matter to bring before the church. However, because the sin would soon become public as her pregnancy became more obvious, the family agreed to meet with the church family. I explained to the church briefly what happened, explained that the girl was repentant, and how we should respond to her. The church welcomed her with open arms and rejoiced that she had repented. This removed all of

⁷ Later, we will see from 2 Thessalonians 3:14 that we are to distance ourselves from disobedient believers in order that they may be ashamed. Such shame is not what we are trying to accomplish in the end. Temporary shame can be used by the Lord to bring about the final goal of restoration and righteousness.

the awkwardness surrounding the situation. Since then, she had the child, is now married to a godly young man, and is expecting another child. Her life seems to be in proper order.

I. A personal example of a sad case. Another young woman in our church sought and obtained a divorce from her husband. The divorce was actually completed before I knew anything about it, because the husband was trying to keep it private as long as possible in order to try to achieve reconciliation. They had been married only about five years and had been helpers in our youth group ministry. The divorce had no grounds that could be considered Biblical by any true Christian—there was no adultery, no abuse, no abandonment, or anything of that sort. She simply wanted to go in a different direction. I wrote to her about this matter, and she refused to repent. She also had refused to repent when confronted by her husband and other family members. The matter was complicated when she wrote to our church youth group that “relationships sometimes don’t work out,” and excusing her conduct in the matter. After working through this in our church board, we brought the situation to the church and instructed them that we would be voting to remove this young woman from our membership rolls. After a number of weeks, we carried out this sad step. Our church still is grieving over this, months later. It feels almost like someone has died. We still hope and pray for her repentance.

5.C. Go with Two or Three Others and Tell Him, 18:16

A. “If he will not hear” means that he is impenitent. He may disagree with the charge made against him, or he may agree that he is doing the sin and he is just hard hearted and does not want to change his course of action. (The latter is often the case with people involved in marital or sexual sin, or many addicting kinds of behavior.)

B. The next meeting is still private, but two or three more “witnesses” are in attendance. There is a question about what these witnesses “saw.”

1. The first suggestion is that they saw or can confirm the initial offense. That may be true, but I don’t believe it is absolutely necessary. What must be true is that the sin is well-established, whether by these same witnesses or other witnesses. It must not be founded upon rumor or innuendo or merely a “he said, she said” kind of situation.

2. The second suggestion is that the witnesses are to observe and participate in the second meeting so they can validate that the sinning brother is unrepentant. This information will need to be shared with the church at the next step of the process.

C. The witnesses help to confirm the need for repentance, trying to persuade the brother how important it is that he repent and start again on a proper course in his life.

D. Although it is not explicitly stated in the text, the obvious goal of this second step is the same as the first, and if the sinner acknowledges his error and demonstrates penitence, then the process is stopped. It is possible that this step may take more than one meeting. It can do so, but when the offender indicates that he is impenitent, the process continues to the next step.

5.D. Tell the church, 18:17a

A. “If he refuses to hear them” means that he is still impenitent. The process must move on to the next step.

B. This level is no longer confidential in the sense that the entire church learns of the matter and becomes involved in the efforts to restore him. It is still private in another sense, however: namely, only the church is told about the situation. Jesus does not say to announce the sin to the world. That’s not their business to know. It is an in-house matter. That is, unless there is a criminal activity, at which point then it is the business of the secular state (because we must obey every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake).

C. Here is an example of how this step could work:

1. The brother who was offended, and the two or three witnesses inform the leadership of the church of the problem. I believe it is important that this happens because the pastors⁸ and deacons are the “gatekeepers” to make sure the church is operated decently and in order. This matter should not just be suddenly presented in a public meeting with no prior vetting by the church leadership. They will ensure that it is not a frivolous matter, and that it is indeed a true charge against the unrepentant sinner. Assuming all that is proper, then move ahead.
2. The church family is told by the pastor about the sinning brother, and his account is verified by the two or three witnesses and the original complainant.
3. The church is instructed by the pastor (either before or after the announcement in #2) as to what its role is in dealing with unrepentant sinners, and how it should interact with this brother now that a disciplinary matter is before the church family.
4. The church is then asked to pray for the brother for a certain amount of time, say two or three weeks.
5. The entire church family is also asked to reach out to him by letter to exhort him to repent.
6. The church leadership gives advice to the unrepentant brother and offers counseling.
7. Nothing in the text permits the offending brother to “make a defense” of himself before the church. His guilt has already been established, and he is not in a place to try to convince the church of the righteousness of his ways.

D. If after a pre-determined amount of time the brother has not repented, then the next step will be carried out.

8 UCB churches have pastors and elders. I believe the pastors, elders, and overseers=bishops are different terms referring to the same office with the same qualifications. This is demonstrated in 1 Timothy 3:1 (bishop/overseer and deacons are the only two offices listed), and Acts 20:17 (elders) who are called overseers and who are told to shepherd (pastor) the church of God (Acts 20:28). In other words, elders, overseers, and pastors are terms that refer to the different functions of the same group of people in the church.

E. There is a question as to how the church should treat the brother during this time. I believe 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 gives insight into this question. Briefly, I understand it to say that the church should continue to regard the unrepentant sinner as a brother for the present, but not fellowship with him or share the Lord's Table with him.

5.E. Put the sinner out of the church, 18:17b

A. "If he refuses even to hear the church" means that he remains impenitent. This is now the third person or group of people that he refused to hear. That is enough proof that he has understood what is going on, what he is being asked to do, and he refuses three times. This is like another kind of "three witnesses." There is no question that he is hardened in his sin. Furthermore, not only is he hardened in his sin, he is repulsing the counsel and authority of his church leadership and church family, who are the God-ordained instruments to bring him back to holiness and to whom he pledged accountability when he joined the church.

B. There is no more that the church can do except one thing: Jesus commands the church to regard the man as a Gentile/heathen and tax collector. This means they no longer regard him as a believer.

1. He *may* still be a believer, but this conclusion is seriously questioned on the basis of his behavior. See passages like James 2:14, 17 and 1 John 3:6-10.

2. Whether he truly is a believer is up to God at this point. The church can no longer have any confidence in his profession of faith. Practically speaking, the church must treat him like an unbeliever.

3. Actually, recall that 1 Corinthians 5:11 requires us to be even more strict against this man because he is basically an apostate. He once professed the faith, but has now turned against it. We are not even to eat with that person. It is more dangerous to minister to him than to an unbeliever, with whom we are still allowed to share a meal (1 Cor. 10:27).

5.F. What authority does the church have to do this? 18:18-20

A. Today, people complain that the church family cannot do such a thing as treat a member like this because doing so is not loving, and the church doesn't have dominion over any individual's faith.

B. Such a thought is simply not true. The final three verses of the section address this issue with the language of binding and loosing.

C. Binding and loosing has to do with the decision that the church makes about the unrepentant sinner. By exercising its ministry toward the unrepentant sinner, it has made what we can say is a binding decision. The church has pronounced that it cannot vouch for the faith-profession of the person. It also says that because the person is unrepentant, their sins remain unforgiven by God. On the basis of this text, we know that Jesus agrees with the church's decision and proclamation.

D. If, on the other hand, the church agrees that a person is repentant and brings them back into the fellowship, it is saying that once again they can vouch for the person's testimony of salvation and that their sins have been forgiven. They have "loosed" the person from their guilt.

E. Every believer has this kind of authority *in the sense that* we can speak to any sinner, under the authority given to us by God in the gospel, and tell them that if they repent, their sins will be forgiven. If they do not, their sins will be retained. (See Matthew 16:18-19). It is not our own inherent authority that binds or looses. Nor is it the church's authority *per se*. It is the derivative authority we have through the gospel message God has delivered to us and commanded us to tell others. If we cannot have this kind of authoritative message, then we could not preach like Jesus did, "If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins" (John 8:24). If we cannot preach like that, then all we have is a "maybe true and authoritative" message! But we have a "for sure true and authoritative" message.

F. What we are saying is that the church has a derivative authority in this matter of proclaiming sins to be forgiven or not, and thus proclaiming whether the person's profession of faith is credible or not. But what are the limits on such authority? Some institutions have taken such authority to wild extremes, claiming the authority to create new doctrines and dogmas. The Roman Catholic church claims, in essence, that its authority is greater than that of Scripture, because the "Church gave us the Bible" and it can make new authoritative pronouncements to its members. So, how is the legitimate authority of the church in binding and loosing limited?

1. Limited to issues in the context of the passage, namely proclamations about sin forgiven or retained and the status of an unrepentant sinner.
2. Limited to the level of local church. You see no authority granted to a hierarchy in the Bible but you do see it given to a local body of believers.
3. Limited to the kinds of things what Jesus or apostles taught us in Scripture. Example...not state functions which Jesus reserves to the state in Matthew 22:21.
4. Limited by the spirit of Paul when he said that we do not lord it over your faith in 2 Cor 1:24. We do not look to micro manage or own every area of a person's life. We are not the judge of other people in every matter...their service is to another (God).
5. Limited by the explicit teaching of Scripture that we cannot add to the revelation of God (Revelation 22:18-19). Therefore the authority of the church is limited in that it cannot create new doctrines or dogmas. Similarly that the church cannot take away doctrines that are written in Scripture. The Church did not give us the Bible. Instead, God gave us the Bible, through the prophets and apostles. And the Bible directs the proper operation of the church. So, the Bible is "over" the church, and not the other way around. The Scriptures are the church's sole rule of faith and practice.

G. The famous passage in 18:19-20 about "two or three" being gathered is often applied to prayer, with the meaning that having more people agree together gives more "strength" to their prayers and

guarantees Jesus' presence among them. Though this idea is not absent from the passage, it is a faulty understanding on several grounds:

1. Jesus is always everywhere present, and never leaves the individual believer alone.
2. An individual believer can pray with utter confidence that God will hear and answer prayers that are in agreement with His will (1 John 5:14-15, James 5:15-18, John 14:13-14).
3. Multiple people can agree on something that is not in agreement with God's will, and their agreement together and two or three or more will not override that error in their thinking.
4. The context of this passage is not a church gathering for prayer meeting, but rather a church gathering to consider the removal of an unrepentant member. When the church does this kind of ministry, then the Lord promises His presence and guidance for the work. 1 Corinthians 5:4 connects to this in that the work is done in the name of the Lord Jesus and according to His power.

5.G. How to Restore a Brother

Bringing the brother back after removal is not mentioned by the Lord here. Perhaps that is because it does not happen frequently. But there is an example in 2 Cor. 2:6-11 where the church is instructed to bring back into its fellowship a repentant man.

Here are several suggestions as to how this might be done. (This is something that you might have in a "policy document," but I don't think it should be written in a constitution or by-law since it is not found in Scripture.)

1. Inform the church of the brother or sister's repentance.
2. Have the brother write a statement as to his repentance and sign it and present it to the church.
3. Learn about the evidence of his repentance, and assure the church that the repentance is real.
4. Have the church vote to receive the sinner back into the membership, and welcome him, with praise to God.

5.H. Conclusion

A. The Bible does not permit sin to go on unchecked in the church or in the lives of believers. God hates sin, and we need to deal radically with it in our own lives. Also, we must seek those who are lost in sin, and if someone in the church offends you, that too needs to be straightened out. Jesus instructs us here as to the orderly procedure we should follow in the case that there is interpersonal sin between believers.

B. The condition that activates each step of the process is the sinner's refusal to hear, repent and make it right. In the end, if he refuses to hear the church's admonition to turn from his way, then the church makes a decision to remove him. At any point, repentance of the offender cuts short the process and restoration occurs. This is what we hope for and work toward.

C. Apart from restoration, the church decides and pronounces that the man is acting like an unbeliever, so he must be treated as such. Someone will undoubtedly cry "foul!" at this point and say that we are not the judges of who is in and who is out. True enough. God is the judge. However, when someone gives enough evidence to convict them of being "out," we don't have any choice but to agree with the evidence. Actions speak louder than words, and often more accurately too! The red herring of "judge not lest ye be judged" is so misused today that it is sad. The way it is used basically means, "Don't ever judge my actions to be wrong, or I will judge you to be a bad Christian!" The real meaning intended by the Lord is, "Don't be a hyper-critical condemnatory judge." Scripture directs us to make Bible-based decisions about a sinner's behavior.

D. This is a weighty matter for the church to consider. We will judge the world and angels (1 Cor. 6:2-3), so such work in the church is kind of a warm-up. In addition, verses 18-20 indicate that the corporate delegated authority of the church is significant. What the church says "goes." Obviously it can be wrong, but when acting within the bounds of Scripture, when it pronounces someone is acting like an unbeliever, that is a serious thing. Many tend to treat such a proclamation lightly, but Jesus doesn't.

6. Ministry to Unrepentant Members: 2 Thessalonians

Text: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

Truth: The church must separate from disorderly people, and the disorderly must avoid that shameful outcome by stopping their bad behavior.

6.A. Outline

- I. The Command to Separate from the Disorderly, v. 6-9
- II. The Command to Work Diligently, v. 10-12
- III. The Command to Keep Doing Good, v. 13
- IV. The Command to Separate from Disobedient Christians, v. 14-15

6.B. Background: Disorder in the Church

A. The subject matter of the middle segment of chapter 3 has to do with disorderly conduct in general, and more specifically with laziness in work habits, and what must be done to handle those problems.

B. Two key sections of Paul’s prior letter must be read before getting into 2 Thessalonians chapter 3. Those are 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 and 5:14. These might be gentle reminders of good Christian conduct, or perhaps they are “early warnings” designed to head off the need for further action. Unfortunately, more was needed and God has Paul address it in his second letter, not only for the young Thessalonian church to stay on the right track, but also for the benefit of Christians forever after.

C. We must consider the potential effect of the false teaching they received about the day of the Lord already being present. Some speculate that this may have made some Thessalonians like a modern doomsday cult situation in which followers of the cult stop living a normal life, sell their possessions, and then wait for whatever is supposed to happen on the predicted date. This is never the right approach to the coming of the Lord Jesus, if for no other reason than we cannot know the date of the rapture or second coming or any of the associated events. God calls us to daily faithfulness whether today is the day of the rapture or not!

D. Finally, we must consider the general effects of the Fall (Genesis 3) on man’s work and orderly conduct. The sin nature has a propensity to laziness. If someone else will do the work, or will give me money for doing nothing, why not take advantage of that? The sin nature definitely has a tendency toward disobeying authority—particularly divine authority. So disorderly conduct and lazy living was becoming a way of life for some people associated with the church. How to deal with that? Paul tells us.

E. The apostle has prepared the church, by what he has written in 3:1-5, for this very difficult exhortation. What we have upcoming is kind of one side of the “family meeting” that had to happen to get things straightened out in the church.

6.C. The Command to Separate from the Disorderly, v. 6-9

A. The Command, v . 6a

1. Paul announced something that must be done. The *we command* refers to “orders from headquarters.” Paul is confident the believers will be obedient (2 Thess. 3:4).

When the thing to be done is difficult and relates to other people with whom we may have a close relationship that can cloud our judgment, it is actually helpful to have a clear command from God that tells us what to do. Not only do we not have an excuse if we don’t follow it, but we do have an objective basis of behavior by which we can simply tell people that it’s nothing personal and we are doing what God has told us to do. The person we separate from is not someone we hate: we are rather expressing our love for God and truth and righteousness—and for the person who is disorderly, because we want what is best for them!

2. Paul attaches to the command the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that it carries the full authority of God. What Paul wrote is precisely what God wanted written to the church at Thessalonica, and so this is the Word of GOD. It is the final word.

3. He says we must **separate** or **keep away** from every brother—a believer—who is acting out of line. We'll see just how they are acting out of line next. It means to keep at arm's length, keep a distance, stand aloof, or avoid.

The nature of the avoidance is not total shunning as practiced by some religious groups. But it is still severe. Some in the church may in fact have no further contact with the person.

Those who are leaders and “spiritual” in the church can work with the person to restore them (Galatians 6:1). When they meet, there is not eating (1 Cor. 5:11) nor a lot of chit-chat and other social interaction.

The purpose of working with the offender is to restore them to full fellowship. This may entail exhortation, teaching, persuasion, etc.

If there is not a good response to this encouragement, then the time will come remove the person from the church and move ministry effort in another direction. Periodic re-evaluation and contact is appropriate.

4. To carry this out, what is required?

- a. We must know enough of the Bible to know what disorderly conduct is and to know the command to keep away from such.
- b. We must be discerning enough to actually see the disorderly conduct and recognize that something must be done about it.
- c. Of course we have to be aware enough of the person's life to know their general pattern of conduct. People are adept at hiding things that are inappropriate. Such hiding is itself a problem, indicating a gnawing conscience and willingness to deceive and play the hypocrite. The church doesn't need more of that influence!
- d. We must be decisive enough to take what Paul has written, combine it with the situation, and actually do something about it.
- e. We must be tough enough to follow through and deal with the consequences, whether those have to do with the person we are avoiding, or people around who don't “get” why this is necessary.

Transition: So far, we've only studied the command in verse 6a. Sometimes, unpleasantly, such keeping at arm's length is necessary. What about sin in your own life—do you push it away, avoid it, shun it? Being diligent about that will ensure that the church need not get involved in handling any unrepentant sin in your life.

B. Description of the Culprits, v. 6b

1. They live in a disorderly fashion. They live out of step with Biblical norms and go their own way. And since the instructions that pertain to their lifestyle were clear from what Paul taught before (see next), they are also insubordinate.
2. They do not live in agreement with the content of prior instruction from Paul and his missionary team. Recall that not only did Paul visit Thessalonica, but he sent Timothy back there (1 Thess. 3:2, 6) as well as writing to the church. So there were several points of contact and thus teaching that the church received. They were not in the dark about how they should conduct themselves. They were to love one another, work hard, be comforted about those who die, recognize their spiritual leaders, not take revenge, pursue good, pray constantly, and abstain from all kinds of evil, etc. (1 Thess. 5:14-22).
3. This combination of disorder and insubordination is dangerous to the church, because the way someone lives becomes an example for other members (and especially the youth) in the church. Their sinful attitude is somewhat catching and can spread throughout the whole church like leaven in a batch of dough (1 Cor. 5:6). And by the way, we are not talking about how the pastor tells you to live—we are talking about how the BIBLE tells you to live. Opposition to *that* chops at the very foundation of the church as a people of the Book!

C. The Good Example of the Missionary Team, v. 7-9

1. Paul left a good example for the people, a model for them to emulate.
2. He was not disorderly. He acted in a very appropriate fashion in accord with Biblical order.
3. He did not take food from people without paying for it.
4. He worked “with labor and toil” meaning “hard.” He probably worked “two shifts” and then slept one shift and repeated the cycle. On Saturdays he would take time to teach in the synagogue.
5. He did that in order to avoid being a burden to any person in the church. What a drag it would be to have someone come to your city and all of a sudden expect you to support them without doing anything in return.
6. Paul did have a God-ordained right to financial support for his ministry (1 Cor. 9:4-14) but he did not make use of that right so he could present the gospel free of charge to all his hearers (9:18) and win more of them because he avoided any potential offense over money (9:19). He also did not use his right so that he could be an example to other people, and not give them the wrong idea that all you do is sit around and talk theology all the time.

6.D. The Command to Work Diligently, v. 10-12

- A. The background of what is written in verses 6-9 is given in verse 10.

1. Paul previously told them what to do about the matter of disorderly people. And now the nature of their disorderliness is made explicit—they are not working and using their idle time to be busybodies!

2. The command was this: people who WILL not work SHALL not eat! It is that simple. A divinely-ordained consequence of laziness is hunger. It is surprising how people can find a will to work if they will go hungry otherwise!

3. We can immediately dismiss the argument against this passage that goes like this: “Have compassion on the guy that cannot work!” That is obvious. Truly un-able people are completely excluded from what Paul is talking about here. If you CANNOT work, that’s different than if you *will not* work. Note the passage says “will not work.” The Christian understands the difference between “will not” and “cannot.” The issue in this passage is *willful unemployment*.

Unfortunately, some in our world have neither compassion, nor a high view of life, and they talk of people who are useless to society and who, they believe, should be killed by way of euthanasia. Their belief is, “if anyone *cannot* work, let him die.” The Christian view is, “if anyone *will not* work, let him go hungry for a while. He’ll figure out that working is better than starving!”

4. Even so, the definition of “unable” has to be examined. Some people on disability could be doing some kind of work. For example, if they have hurt a part of their body, perhaps a desk job would be appropriate. Some people on disability are just lazy. Some walk into the government office every week or month and get their money and walk to Walmart and fill up their cart with stuff and take it home. Some of these folks don’t look or act very disabled. Rather, disability has become a way of life and career for them.

B. Paul heard news of disorderly, lazy, busy-bodies in the church.

1. This sounds like the character of Cretans mentioned in Titus 1:12-13.

2. Three descriptions are used: first is **disorderly**, which is the same word as in verse 7. NIV translates well as “idle and disruptive” which does a good job to include the contextual ideas of the passage. Second is **not working**, which is more clear than the “not busy” of the NIV. Third is **busybodies**, which means intrusive as a meddler. There is a play on words here: they are not working, but they are working at meddling!

C. The apostle commands all to work and provide for themselves. Here is the so-called Protestant work ethic in a single verse (12). Hard work is the antidote to the problems in the Thessalonian church. It will allow the believers to support their families. (Note 1 Timothy 5:8, which should be high on our priority list, especially those of us who are heads of house.)

Note also about hard work: it keeps you from doing other things that you might do if you have idle time (sin). There is virtue in hard work just because of this, in addition to what Paul is saying. The same

principle of hard work is taught in Ephesians 6:6-8, Col. 3:23, 1 Timothy 6:2 (there, in the context of servants and masters, but with an application to our work).

6.E. The Command to Continue Doing Good, v. 13

A. In the seemingly endless cycle of life, it is easy to wear down while trying to do the right thing. Keep up the good work! To work hard and support your family is one of your God-given responsibilities. Work not only to support your family, but to honor God and give others an example of how to live.

B. Even though some people are lazy, don't follow their example! There will be some unfairness in life, and these can wear you down to the point you might feel like throwing in the towel, but don't do it!

6.F. The Command to Separate from Disobedient Christians, v. 14-15

A. Note the person. This means to take special notice of the person.

1. The person Paul speaks about is not just a lazy person. Now, he says that we must separate from someone who is disobedient to apostolic teaching. Before, it was someone who was disorderly and lazy. Now, it is anyone who does not obey the larger body of instruction given in 2 Thessalonians, which includes the instructions about disorderly and lazy conduct, but also includes instructions about true doctrine and not being deceived or troubled but standing fast in Christian teaching. Let me give a for instance. If someone comes along and teaches that we are presently in the tribulation before the rapture of the church, that person is to be noted.

2. We interpret this directive to refer to directly the teaching in 2 Thessalonians. However, it is legitimate to apply this command to all the New Testament epistles and gospels, the teaching of the apostles, because any one of them is just as authoritative as the others.

B. Do not keep company. With those who are noted for their disobedience, you must avoid them. This means do not mingle or associate with them.

C. The goal of disassociation is shame.

1. Once again, this is not shunning for the sake of shunning, or the silent treatment to "get even." The purpose of separation is to shame the professing brother. Marginalizing him should get him to realize that he is off base and needs to amend his ways.

2. One problem today is that there are so many churches with different beliefs about Bible doctrine that someone who is separated from church A simply goes to church B.

3. Perhaps even worse, the disobedient one just sits at home without feeling shame at all. A society with no shame is a degraded society. He or she may even feel self-justified and smug that they don't need such-and-such church because they have advanced beyond church.

D. The church does not treat the disobedient as an enemy combatant, but rather as a brother who needs admonition. A tendency that is easy to fall into is to mistreat a (former) church member who has taken up a false doctrine or practice. We can get so engrossed in the issue and situation that we begin to get things out of proportion. Sometimes a person who is truly wrong on some doctrine or practice is treated worse than an unbeliever. Those in the body of Christ should not be treated as enemies.

E. There are evidently levels of separation—two of them. There is this first level—where the person is not treated as an enemy but rather as a brother. Then there is a second level of separation where a person is removed entirely from the church and treated as an unbeliever (Gentile and tax collector). The difference is that in 2 Thessalonians the person is regarded as a brother-out-of-order. This can go on for some period of time while the church admonishes and then observes to see if the person will straighten out his behavior. If not, the person must then be treated like the sinner in Matthew 18:15-17 who refuses to repent. He is regarded as an unbeliever because he is acting like one. He is a target of evangelism whereas the disobedient brother in 2 Thess. 3 is a target for admonishment and instruction.

It takes great discernment and wisdom to know how to carry out the procedure of the ministry to unrepentant brothers.

F. In discussions of separation, at least among so-called fundamentalists, you will hear about *primary* and *secondary* separation.

1. As I understand the issue of **primary separation**, it means that for the sake of holiness and the gospel, believers are to separate from unbelievers and those believers living out of accord with the gospel and apostolic instruction. Matthew 18, 1 Cor. 5, and 2 Thess 3. All fit into this first category.

2. **Secondary separation** has to do with separating from believers who do not practice the first kind of separation. In other words, if a brother fellowships with and gives Christian recognition to a person who clearly should be the subject of separation, then do we treat that brother as “disobedient enough” to warrant separating from him at some level? After all, separating is itself a Christian teaching by the apostle Paul, and disobedience to that is out of order.

3. Some Christians reject the second kind of separation; some even reject the first kind. Many are inconsistent and have not thought through the issue very carefully.

6.G. Conclusion

I believe that this passage “fills out” some of the details of Matthew 18:17 where “tell it to the church” and “if he refuses to hear the church” leaves some room for time to pass between the two events. Paul fills in details as to what is to be done between these two events.

7. Other Passages about Ministry to Unrepentant Members

7.A. Primary Passages about Ministry to Unrepentant Members

A. Matthew 18:15-20.

B. 1 Corinthians 5:1-13.

C. 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15.

These have been addressed above. Here are some other passage regarding church discipline.

7.B. Spiritual Believers Must Restore Sinners: Galatians 6:1

This section gives us the condition of the man caught, the condition of those who help, the goal of the work, the manner of those who help, and the caution to those who help.

A. His condition: found out to be in sin.

B. The helpers: spiritual people. They are mature, not novices, not prideful, not sin-hunters, etc.

C. The goal: restoration, to bring the person to a fixed state so they can be fully in fellowship in the church and ministry if possible as well.

D. The manner of the helpers: one of gentleness, not harsh criticality.

E. The caution to those who help: that they not fall into the same temptation, whether by association with the person they are helping, or that they get a big head about being spiritual and thus “pride comes before the fall” (Prov. 16:18).

7.C. Sinning Elders (= Pastors) Must be Disciplined: 1 Timothy 5:20

A. The pastor is not “above the law.” He too can fall into sin and require correction.

B. An ever present danger is that of the wayward woman. This, joined to the man’s wayward heart, can cause a pastor to fall into sin with a woman who is not his wife. Take every precaution to make sure this doesn’t happen to your mind, heart, and body.

C. The text says that if a charge is raised against an elder, it has to be with the corroboration of two or three witnesses, like the Law of Moses required (Deut. 17:6).

D. If the pastor is proven to be in the wrong, then the pastor is to be rebuked in front of the church congregation so that the remainder of the church may fear. This will be a deterrent from sin.

E. The pastor is a member of the local assembly of which he is a part. He worships with them, supports the ministry, leads it, agrees to its doctrine and practice, etc. It is therefore the responsibility of the church, gathered as Paul instructs in 1 Cor. 5, to discipline its pastor. The church calls the pastor; the church is responsible to remove the pastor if he is sinning.

F. Note that the text does not speak about whether the pastor is removed from ministry only, or from the church entirely.

1. If he is unrepentant about his sin, he must be removed from the church entirely, which means he cannot be pastor anymore.

2. If he is repentant, the church will have to decide if he is qualified for ministry again in accordance with the Biblical qualifications listed in passages such as 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. If he is repentant, he must not be removed from the church's membership. The pastor is just like any other member of the church. If repentant, he will be rebuked; he may lose his ministry; but he must not lose his membership.

7.D. Reject Divisive Persons: Titus 3:10-11

A. A man who is sowing discord (Prov. 6:14, 19) in the church must be given two admonitions to stop doing so. But if he persists, then he must be removed from the church.

B. We know something about such a person: namely, they are warped (morally perverted), sinning, and self-condemned.

C. The church that puts out a divisive, schismatic person is not itself divisive or unloving. The divisive one is the person who started the problem. It is he who is unloving.

7.E. Avoid Those with Bad Doctrine: Romans 16:17-18

A. We have to watch out for people with bad doctrine.

B. In addition, we have to turn away from them. It is not sufficient to only "know" that they have bad doctrine. We have to turn away from them so that we are not negatively affected by them, like leaven in 1 Cor. 5.

C. These people do not serve Christ, but rather they serve their own desires. They deceive others, particularly people who are devoid of understanding.

7.F. Restore the Penitent: 2 Corinthians 2:6-11

A. A man who was unrepentant earlier was removed from the church. Now, evidently, he wants to be restored and is showing signs of true repentance.

B. Paul instructs the church to **forgive** and **comfort** the man. He should be received back into their fellowship so that he will not be overwhelmed with sorrow. He needs to be encouraged now, and not have a permanent consequence for his earlier disobedience.

C. The church also must reaffirm their **love** for the repentant sinner (v. 8).

D. To not do these things properly will give Satan a foothold in the church. He will try to cause more division. That is a strategy which he loves to use (Eph. 6:11).

7.G. God's chastening: Acts 5:1-5, 1 Cor. 11:28-32, Hebrews 12:5-15

A. The events recorded in Acts and 1 Corinthians show us that God sometimes removes believers from this life—by means of death—because of their sinful behavior. God does chasten people that way, but not all death is a result of chastening of that sort. Most death is simply the result of sin taking its course (Rom. 5:12).

B. In Hebrews, the text of Scripture speaks about God's chastening, how it is unpleasant, but in the end it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness. This is what we want, even though we don't like the chastening. My point in bringing up this verse here is to say this: God will often use other people, including the ministry of a local church, to carry out his chastening work. He works through human means instead of directly through miracles or other forms of divine providence. Therefore, if the church is disciplining you, it is something you should take as from the hand of God.

7.H. Saving a Soul from Death: James 5:19-20

A. James teaches that an individual Christian may persuade an errant brother to come back to the true faith and holy living.

B. I believe this applies to the entire church trying to bring back an unrepentant member. One or more of the church members may reach out in love to the sinning brother and God may use them to convince him of his wrong ways.

C. This activity is a *ministry* because it serves the good of the brother's soul. If church discipline succeeds, it will result in the salvation of a soul from death and keep him from committing more and more sins. We are hoping that the unrepentant sinner will become repentant and will be saved in the end (1 Cor. 5:5).

7.I. Conclusion

All of these texts must be understood together for a proper and complete understanding of church discipline (or, as we have been calling it, ministry to unrepentant brothers).

This part of church life cannot be swept under the rug. It is based on many texts of Scripture, and also upon sound theological foundations found throughout the New and Old Testaments.

8. Other Issues

1. What about members who are struggling with sin but are not at the point of requiring discipline? Say they are repentant and trying, but not having success? It is appropriate to place ministry restrictions on them in order to encourage them to focus on the problem, and protect ministry from harm. This is a wisdom issue based on various scriptures. To guard yourself against acting inappropriately, check with other leading men in the church to get their advice.
2. Can we say that members who are removed are apostates? Unrepentant sinners who are misbehaving or teaching false doctrine may fall into category of 1 John 2:19 (they left us because they were not of us). We cannot be sure—only God knows for sure.
3. What about sin between believers who are members of different churches? That kind of situation will ideally be handled by both churches, with one or the other, or both, exercising discipline as the situation warrants. Leaders from both churches should consult about the matter.
4. What about someone who is disciplined out of one church going to another church? If a person has been removed from one church for unrepentant sin, the second church should *not* accept that person into membership. (Theoretically, if they did, they would have to immediately remove him again!)
5. Can the discipline process include significant time? Yes, time and patience are involved. Wisdom is required to know how long to work with a sinner. The general rule is this: if the sinner is listening and working with those trying to help him, then continue at that step in the process. As soon as he refuses to repent, the process must move to the next step. It is my understanding that time is on the order of weeks, not many months, and certainly not a year or more.
6. What if the unrepentant sinner “resigns” membership, and then claims, “you can’t do anything to me, and you can’t tell the church because it is my private business!”? The Lord is not interested in technicalities to cover up sin (Psalm 51:17, Prov. 28:13, Isaiah 66:2). Someone cannot resign at the last minute to avoid church discipline. The text in Matthew 18 says nothing about such a thing. The sinning brother does not get to “pick and choose” the terms and conditions under which he is disciplined! His only appropriate action is to repent of his sin.
7. A thorny problem is legal issues. I already mentioned a potential for legal involvement if the unrepentant sinner is involved in an illegal behavior. Incest (like the case of 1 Corinthians 5) or pedophilia, *require* that those who gain knowledge of the sin report it to the governing authorities, at

least in America. That should be the case in every culture. Even if it is not a legal requirement, the pastor who gains knowledge of illegal sins *should* report them to the authorities.

Another problem that can occur is the unrepentant member may take the church to court because of invasion of privacy or defamation of character or slander or libel. If the member has been informed of the membership requirements and consented to abide by them—and particularly if he has signed a statement to that effect—and if the pastor has led the church to follow the correct discipline procedure, then the sinner should not be able to win his lawsuit. Still, this will be a huge trial for the church.

8. We need to understand the Biblical idea of forgiveness. There must be a readiness to forgive the offender, but the sinner must be repentant for the forgiveness to be complete. Forgiveness is a transaction: the sinner repents and apologizes, the offended person is ready and willing to forgive, and they communicate with one another to complete the transaction.

9. Another thing we should be careful to understand is that discipline is not exactly the same as consequences that may come for a sin. For example, a person who sins in the church by deliberately mishandling money may repent of that sin. In such a case, he or she is not removed from the church. However, a *consequence* of his behavior should be that he will not be handling money any longer.

10. I have heard this statement several times: “My church is not prepared to do discipline this way. They are not mature enough...” It is our job as pastors to make sure the church is prepared to handle the sin of unrepentant members. If they are not ready, we must make them ready. If they are not mature enough as a body, we must make sure that they are mature enough.

11. Another question that comes up is this: can a person who is disciplined out of the church attend worship services of the church? Sometimes I would say yes, and sometimes I would say no. Just like an unbeliever can visit the church, an unrepentant sinner who has been removed from the fellowship could attend services. In fact, it would be good for them to hear more of God’s word when it is preached. But I think the church leadership may sometimes have to tell the person they are not welcome back at all until their sin is fixed. Most times, however, a person who is disciplined will not desire to come to the church.

12. A question arises about “clergy privilege.” In the United States, if a crime is made known to a pastor, he is obligated to tell the police. In Chile, this may not be the case. In other words, pastors may have legal privileges in Chile that we do not have in the United States. However, in many cases it will not be wise or righteous to use those privileges. In effect, to do that could be to hide a crime, and then other people in the community or in the church itself may become offended that the leadership of the church is covering up sin. This is what happened in the United States with the Catholic church with the priests abusing young boys: the church covered it up. This greatly damaged the reputation of the church among all the residents of our country.

13. There are a number of objections that people have raised against doing church discipline. These are described in a helpful blog article by 9Marks ministry.⁹

9. Outline of the Procedure for Church Discipline

Based on the above passages, I have constructed an outline for the process of church discipline.

9.A. Minister in Such a Way that Sin is Reduced

Avoid the need for discipline by having a church ministry that is focused on holiness of the church members.

1. Personally, by being self disciplined. Galatians 5:23 (self-control), Prov. 16:32 (control of spirit), 17:27 (control of words), 19:11 (control of anger), Matthew 5:23-24 (going on your own to reconcile).
2. Corporately, the pastor/church leadership must teach sound doctrine, using the Word of God as it is designed to be used (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

9.B. Meet one-to-one to confront and seek repentance

1. Every church member is called to do this as it becomes necessary in our personal lives. It is not just pastors or deacons that are to do this.
2. Genuine repentance anywhere in this process stops the process but ongoing assistance/counsel may be required for the sinner.
3. No promise of complete confidentiality.¹⁰ You may end up having to tell the church. If an act is illegal, then you must report it to the authorities.
4. Process: Obey Jesus's command to go, speak to him about his fault convincingly, privately, and with a rebuke if needed, and beforehand you must pray that he will listen and repent.
5. Be prepared to receive a request for forgiveness, and to grant that request (Luke 17:3-4, parable starting at Matthew 18:21). Or, be prepared to find out that you are wrong or have a misunderstanding about the situation. Prov. 18:13, 17.
6. Mere "I'm sorry" is not sufficient. "I apologize for ____ (fill in the blank) and ask you to forgive me" is appropriate.

⁹ <https://www.9marks.org/article/4-reasons-churches-dont-practice-church-discipline/>

¹⁰ See Jay Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, p. 30-33.

9.C. Bring several witnesses to confront and seek repentance

1. These are not necessarily witnesses to the initial offense. If they were, the offense would be public and the disciplinary steps should be fast-forwarded. However, it is necessary that the offense be proven, and that does require appropriate witnesses.
2. These are witnesses to the request for repentance and to the refusal to repent. They witness the matter from that point forward.
3. They also serve as a check and balance against a person making frivolous claims.
4. A discipline case can be moved forward only if the sinner continues to be unrepentant.

9.D. Tell it to the church to confront and seek repentance

1. The church leadership should be informed first. They are authorized representatives of the church and make sure everything is done decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40). Some or all of the leadership may have been involved in the prior step.
2. They inform the members of the church. Not all details are necessary, but enough must be given so that it is clear what the issue is.
3. Clarity on the issue of the sin and the lack of repentance. *Sinners* are not removed from the church. It is *unrepentant sinners* that are removed.
4. A careful record should be established in writing.

9.E. Give reasonable time for repentance

1. If the sin is of such a nature that it can be halted immediately and it is not halted, then the procedure moves forward to the next step (the situation in 1 Cor. 5).
2. On the other hand, if some time is needed to correct the issue, then that time should be granted. For example, the teaching of 2 Thess. 3:6-9 indicates that after the church is told, there is a time where the sinner is allowed to make changes and show that he or she has "heard" the church. In that passage, if a job needs to be procured, that may take a bit of time.
3. But this is also a time when the church is to cut off normal fellowship from the disobedient brother, including the Lord's Table. This shows them the seriousness of their sin.
4. Up to this point in the process, the disobedient is still regarded as a brother.
5. The avoidance of regular fellowship is to take place until repentance happens, or it will continue after the next step.

9.F. Remove unrepentant sinner by vote of the entire church

1. The meaning of removal is extremely serious. The church effectively says that it cannot any longer affirm the Christian testimony of the person.
2. The vote should be basically unanimous. It is not an option. It puts the weight of the entire church family behind the decision to remove the person.
3. This is mostly judicial and punitive, and secondarily it is remedial.
4. Note the divinely-granted authority to the church in Matthew 18:18-20, and 16:19.
5. This places the sinner in the realm of Satan for the destruction of the flesh.

9.G. How to treat the unrepentant sinner

1. The sinner should be devastated at the news that he has been removed from the church. Unfortunately, the sinner often does not care, and continues in his sinful ways. They may try to "resign" their membership before discipline takes place. But it is too late for that.
2. The church family must be informed how to handle contact with the person. At this stage, they are to be treated as unbelievers.
3. Note the spiritual status of the disobedient person. The church has no other recourse but to treat the person as the kind of person they are behaving like: an unbeliever. This does not say *for sure* that the person is an unbeliever. It only says that they are acting like one and in fact may be unsaved. They are treated as unbelievers, evangelized, and should know that they are not "OK" or that their unrepentant sin will be swept under the rug and forgotten.
4. Contact is not supposed to be the same as it was before. In fact, Paul instructs that it is to be even more restricted than with normal unbelievers because of the presumably false profession of faith (1 Cor. 5:9-13). There is to be no table or mealtime fellowship, or sharing around the Lord's Table (1 Cor. 5:11).
5. Contact should be limited except for immediate family members (2 Thess. 3:6, 14). Extended family members who do not live in the same household should be treated, as much as possible, in the way Paul prescribes.
6. In casual contacts, the removed member is to be the subject of evangelism like every other unbeliever.
7. The realm of the unrepentant sinner is a dangerous one. He is no longer under the protection of the church. Rather, he is in the realm of Satan. The purpose of this is for the destruction of sinful desires and learning not to blaspheme God (1 Cor. 5:5 and 1 Timothy 1:20).

8. What if this person seeks membership in another church? That church should be told about the disciplinary action against the person so that they do not welcome the person into membership.

9.H. Restore a repentant sinner

If the sinner shows repentance at any time during the process or after removal, the ultimate goal for the sinner has been achieved!

1. For the church and its leadership, it is important to determine if the repentance is real.
2. For the church, complete forgiveness must be extended. Love must be exercised.
3. For the sinner, there must be training to avoid sin in the future, by coming back to the issue of self-discipline.
4. For the church, there should be rejoicing that “the lost has been found.”

10. English Resources

Adams, Jay E. *Handbook of Church Discipline: A Right and Privilege of Every Church Member*. Zondervan, 1986. 120 pages. (The copyright says 1974, but it was actually 1986.)

This was probably the most helpful book on the subject that I read. He also sees a church in the Old Testament, and this makes it confusing reading for those of us who are dispensational, since the church did not begin until Acts 2.

Chapter one defines church discipline and emphasizes that one of its purposes is to promote an atmosphere of righteousness, which produces peace. This maximizes the effectiveness of Christian discipleship because discipleship is like education: it needs an orderly atmosphere in which to work properly. In chapters 2 and 4, he makes an important and needed point about preventive discipline as “stage 1” in the process. He then advocates four more steps of discipline including the one-on-one meeting, one or two witnesses, telling it to the church, and removal from the midst of the church. He makes a very confusing difference between excommunication and “removing from the midst” which I still do not fully understand or believe. After discipline is carried out, hopefully the step of restoration will occur, and Adams emphasizes forgiveness and then assisting the sinner to continue on the right path. He spends a chapter speaking about how to discipline between churches, and then encourages us to the task. He sees it as a non-negotiable, which if not done, makes a church not a real church.

I noted the importance of teaching the entire church how to handle a disciplinary matter, how to treat an offender, and how to receive him or her back into the fellowship.

Compton, R. Bruce. "Church Discipline: The Correction of a Believer or the Excommunicaiton of an Unbeliever? Harmonizing Matthew 18:15-17, 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, and 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15," in *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 20 (2015): 21-43.

Dr. Compton's article shows how 2 Thessalonians 3 fits into the discipline process that is outlined in the other two primary passages. It is an exegetical and theological treatment of the issues, particularly regarding the spiritual status of the disobedient and the nature and purpose of discipline.

Kimble, Jeremy M. *40 Questions About Church Membership and Discipline*. Kregel, 2017. 272 pages.

I skimmed the section on membership, having some familiarity with the subject already. The material on discipline was generally very helpful both in theology and practical application. He deals with all the major passages, and makes a helpful emphasis on the benefits of discipline for the sinner and for the church body.

There was one interesting weakness in his approach to discipline, namely that he spends an entire chapter on church discipline in the Old Testament. There was no church in the Old Testament—it started in Acts 2. Furthermore, the discipline that was practiced there was capital discipline, that is, killing the offender to put away the evil from Israel. There is no parallel to this in the church age because the church only has power to remove a person from its fellowship, and no authority beyond that. If a professing Christian is to be killed because of heresy of doctrine or practice, God has to do that directly, as indicated in 1 Corinthians 11:30 and Revelation 2:23, and perhaps 1 John 5:16.

Leeman, Jonathan. *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline*. 9Marks and Crossway, 2010. 375 pages.

Leeman, Jonathan. *Understanding Church Discipline*. 9Marks and Broadman & Holman, 2016, 68 pages.

Leeman emphasizes the need to do church discipline, and what needs to be done to prepare for it. He offers some interesting points about the timing of discipline and the important step of assessing the repentance of the offender. He also appeals to church not to abuse discipline.

MacGregor, Kirk R. "Biblical Inerrancy, Church Discipline, and the Mennonite-Amish Split," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 60/3 (2017): 581-93.

MacGregor gives a brief explanation of the Mennonite-Amish split which concerned the issue of whether to shun a disciplined professing believer or not. Jakob Amman believed in shunning, including all table fellowship, while Reist and his party, Anabaptists who later merged with the Mennonites, believed that the prohibition against "eating with" someone in 1 Corinthians 5:11 only referred to the Lord's Supper. MacGregor then compares the hermeneutical approaches of the two men that led them to their conclusions. It is clear to me that Amman had the superior

approach in terms of hermeneutics, because he was more more cautious about determining the meaning of a passage in its context rather than, as Reist did, apart from its context.

Owen, John. *Church Discipline*. Chapel Library, Kindle ed.

Owen confuses the church and state as well as Israel with the church. This is due to his reformed theology. A lack of clear distinctions between these entities causes unclear, confused, or plain wrong understandings early in the book. The later parts of the book are helpful. He argues that it is a natural right for any society to be able to accept and remove members. Excommunication is an act of the entire church. It cannot be avoided simply because there may be some danger to the church. The church should not accept the voluntary departure of a person who is under discipline as the completion of the process. A person who is truly repentant should not be removed from the church, even if their sin is scandalous.

Thomas, Steven. *Church Discipline: The Responsibility of Love*. Available from http://ccggrockford.org/wp-content/uploads/11%20Thomas_Church_Discipline_Notes.pdf, and also audio at <http://ccggrockford.org/church-discipline-the-responsibility-of-love-steve-thomas>.

Pastor Thomas is a fundamental, conservative Baptist pastor of Huron Baptist Church, about an hour from where I live in Michigan, near Detroit. He speaks from years of pastoral experience, and the personal experience of having to place his own daughter under church discipline. Some years later she repented and was welcomed back into the church.

11. Spanish Resources

Leeman, Jonathan. *La Disciplina en la Iglesia*. 9Marks, 2016. 176 pages.

Leeman, Jonathan. *La Membresía de la Iglesia*. 9Marks, 2016. 178 pages.

12. Questions for Further Study

- 1) Are the two or three witnesses of Matthew 18:16 ones who saw the actual offense, or do they only observe the second step when the sinner is confronted?
- 2) How many people in the church are involved in the process of church discipline? When a member persists in unrepentance and the church must remove that member, does the whole church have to vote to do so?
- 3) Suppose a church is not associated with a pastoral association. According to the Biblical texts, is that church authorized to discipline its pastor for wrong doctrine or immorality?
- 4) Should a church welcome a new member who has an unresolved discipline situation at another church?
- 5) What are the goals of church discipline?

- 6) Is church discipline only a bad or negative thing? In what ways is it positive or helpful?
- 7) What are the theological foundations of church discipline?
- 8) What are ways that we can prevent the need for discipline in our own lives? In our churches?
- 9) Does a local church possess authority to declare sins to be forgiven or not forgiven?
- 10) What exactly is the church saying when it removes an unrepentant person from the membership?
- 11) Is it right to keep a person "under discipline" if he has repented of the sin that brought up the issue? If a person is no longer qualified for a ministry, or needs to focus on personal spiritual growth, is it right to prohibit them from certain ministries?

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