CHURCH DISCIPLINE

It's necessary in our hardened and apostate age for the church to be called back to the *New Testament* doctrine of *church discipline*. In our day, the church has become tolerant of sin even when it's found in her own people. This warrants the *wrath of God* upon the church's indifference to His holiness. Sadly, the modem church seems more willing to *ignore sin* than to *denounce it*, more grieved with the *exposure of sin* than *sin itself*, and more ready to *compromise God's law* than to *proclaim it*. It's a mournful fact that many churches refuse to take sin seriously. In today's Biblically illiterate and emotionally driven church-world, even in the most '*conservative*' churches, the idea of '*church discipline*' is willfully misunderstood and very unpopular. Even in the cases of undisputed and uncontested *sin*, many modern believers tend to recoil at the idea of a confrontational demand for repentance and if need be, a separating of the offending person from fellowship. For the carnal and spiritually immature, to '*put away from among yourselves*' (*1 Cor 5:13*) or excommunicate someone from the local church, to treat them as a '*heathen man and publican*' (*Matt 18:17*), to '*not company*' with them (*1 Cor 5:11*), to '*reject*' (*Tit 3:10*) and to '*avoid them*' (*Rom 16:17*) '*seems'* or '*feels'* contrary to what is assumed as *Christian love*. Yet, it's clear in the Scriptures that it can be necessary to *discipline* some and put them out of the *church*; not only to encourage repentance for the offending party, but for the church's testimony, unity. and overall spiritual well-being.

Today, the church faces a moral crisis within her own ranks. Her failure to take a strong stand against compromise and sin (*even in her own midst*) and her tendency to be more concerned about what is *perceived as loving* than what is *right*, have robbed the church of biblical authenticity, integrity, and power. As *Daniel E. Wray* in his treatise on *church discipline* commented…

> "It is ironic that this rejection is often justified in the name of *love*. When the *Apostle John* wrote that we should '*love one another*', he also wrote: '*And this is love, that we walk after his commandments'* (*2 John 1:5-6*). As we shall see, the exercise of *church discipline* is a command from the Lord of the church. When it is properly carried out, it is a profound display of Christian love. To put it another way, true Christian love dare not ignore the use of the various forms of discipline wherever they are applicable. Love necessarily challenges sin in ourselves and in our brethren. It is no more love for a Christian to watch a brother in Christ pursue a course of sin unchallenged than it is love for a parent to watch his child walk unhindered into disaster. If we look for God's blessing in our churches, it is essential that we conduct ourselves according to God's Word."[1]

In our apostate age, very few even understand the absolute need and the deeper implications of being joined to a *local church*. The Scriptures teach *all Christians* are to be planted in a *local*

[1] Daniel E. Way, *Biblical Church Discipline*.

church by God's direction for the necessity of *discipleship* (*1 Cor 12:18; Eph 4:11-15*). The *calling* to each member to associate with a particular *local church* should be the same. In other words, as the *pastoral leadership* and *elders* have been specifically led and called to serve that body, so should every member soberly sense such a calling. Christians don't *join* churches like they join a health club, they *submit* to them. Thus, being part of a *local church* is no mere loose affiliation, but rather, a sacred covenant relationship. Consequently, divine protocol, order, obedience, discipline (*both informal and formal*) and moral accountability are intrinsic to a genuine association with a *Christian Fellowship* (*Heb 13:17*). One of the primary purposes of the local church is to glorify God via *Biblical discipleship* (*Matt 28:19-20; Eph 4:11-15*). To be '*discipled*' is to come under the *discipline of Christ* and His *Word* thru God's representative and ordained human vessel, the church. The *local church's* ultimate purpose is not to make men feel '*welcomed*' and keep attendees happy, it is to *preach the Gospel*, *discipleship* by *perfecting the saints*, and accurately *represent God* a lost world in *purity* and *holiness*. This is impossible if she refuses the command of Christ to police herself. *Church discipline,* as clearly represented and commanded in the Scriptures, is merely one manifestation of true *Christian discipline*. Hence, any church that claims to practice *Biblical discipleship* but dishonors or rejects *Church discipline*, is proven deluded. The full scope of *Christian discipleship* must include *Church discipline*. *Jesus* declared of His church…

"And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." —Matthew 16:19

> *"Jesus gave the local church the authority of the keys to officially affirm and oversee citizens of his kingdom. Churches do not make people Christians. The Spirit does that. But churches have the declarative authority and responsibility for making public statements before the nations about who is and isn't a Christian. A church's act of excommunication consists of the public statement that it can no longer vouch for an individual's citizenship in heaven. Excommunication is a church's declaration that it can no longer affirm that an individual is a Christian." —Jonathan Leeman*[2]

GOD INSTITUTED THE DISCIPLINE OF SIN

From *Genesis* to *Revelation,* we find the *confrontation* and *discipline of sin,* in many forms, commanded, instituted, and esteemed by *God Himself*:

- Throughout the Scriptures God exalts *chastening of sin* and associates it with love (*Lev 26:14-45; Deut 8:5, 28:15-68; Ps 94 10-12, 118:18, 119:75; Prov 3:11-2; Jn 15:1-6; 1 Cor 11:32; Heb 12:5-11; Rev 3:19*).
- Many Bible events demonstrate that God Himself punishes people who sin (*the flood in Noah's day, Sodom and Gomorrah, etc.*). However, there are plentiful examples where God punishes His own people who sinned (*Gen 3, 4, 19:17, 26, Lev 10:1-3; Num 11, 12, 14, 16, 20:1-13, 21:4-9, 25; 2 Sam 6:1-11; 1 Kings 13; Acts 5:1-11, etc.*) Many more examples besides these could be offered.
- God will punish men in eternity for sin (*Matt 25:41, 46; Lk 12:4-5; Rom 2:6-10; 2 Thess 1:8-9; Rev 20:11-15, etc.*).

[2] Jonathan Leeman, *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus.*

- God ordained discipline/chastisement/punishment for sin in Israel (*Ex 21:12-25, 22:16-20, 32:25-28; Lev 20:1-27, 24:10-16, 23, 24:15-23; Num 15:32-36; 25, 35:30-34, Deut 19:11-21, 13:1-18, 21:18-21, 22:13-27; Joshua 7:10-13, 24-26, etc.*).
- God ordained discipline/chastisement/punishment in *ALL* His institutions. In ***Civil Government*** (*1 Pet 2:13-14; Rom 13:1-6*). In the ***Home*** (*Prov 13:24; Eph 6:4; Heb 12:5-11*). In the ***Church*** (*Matt 18:15-18; 1 Cor 5:1-6, 9-11; Rom 16:16-17, and many more see below*).

Therefore, in every *age*, in every *God-ordained institution,* and under both *old* and *new covenants*, God has always *confronted*, *disciplined*, and if need be, separated from His people those who commit sin and refuse to repent.

WHY SHOULD WE PRACTICE CHURCH DISCIPLINE?

First, because...

- It's irrefutably commanded in the *Scriptures* (*Matt 18:15-20; Rom 16:17; 1 Cor 5:9-12*).
- It's an implication of the *Gospel* (*Matt 28:19-20*)
- It promotes the health of the church (*1 Cor 5:6*).
- It clarifies and protects the church's testimony before unbelievers (*Col 4:5; Tit 2:8*).
- By implication, it warns sinners of an even greater judgment to come (*1 Pet 4:17*).
- Most importantly, it protects the name and reputation of *Jesus Christ* on earth. (*Eph 4:1*)

Secondly, contrary to the popular but carnal mindset today, *Church discipline* is loving. It practically reveals…

- *Love* for the *wayward brother*, that he/she might be warned and brought to repentance.
- *Love* for the *church*, that the sheep might be protected.
- *Love* for the *watching world*, that it might see a consistent reality of *Christ's* transforming power and His hatred and disdain for sin.
- Finally, *love* for *Christ*, that churches might obey His Word and uphold his holy name.

On the contrary, by abstaining from or rejecting *church discipline* (*as many do*) we unconsciously claim to be more loving than *God Himself*. We would do well to remember that *God*, after all…

"…chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." —Hebrews 12:6

For *God*, in His infinite wisdom, knows that true *Biblical discipline* (*regardless of what form or how it's perceived*), yields life, growth, and spiritual advancement if humbly received…

"…but he (God) for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness." —Hebrews 12:10

Many have been erroneously led to believe that wherever *Jesus* and *Christian love* reign, peace, tranquility, and harmony will *always* follow. The Bible teaches quite the contrary…

"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household." —Matthew 10:34-36
"So, there was a division among the people because of him." —John 7:43

SCRIPTURE VERSES RELATED TO CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Many are surprised when they truly see how many verses address, either explicitly or implicitly, *church discipline* in the *New Testament*. The following verses are associated with *church discipline* and related topics, expressing different types and levels of *discipline*…

"To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." —1 Corinthians 5:5

I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat." —1 Cor 5:9-11

"Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample." —Phil 3:17

- Mark: (*Greek*) σκοπέω—To look at or upon, to take aim at, to consider, observe, or identify.[3]

"And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." —2 Thess 3:14-15

"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us." —2 Thess 3:6

"If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself." —1 Timothy 3:3-5

"A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself." —Titus 3:10

[3] *Strong's* Hebrew & Greek Dictionary.

- Heretics: (*Greek*) αἱρετικός—A schismatic (*those who cause schisms*), factious, a follower of a false doctrine.

"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." —1 John 2:19

"If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." —2 John 1:10-11

The three primary passages that directly address *Church discipline* are as follows…

"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." —Matthew 18:15-18

Here, in *Matthew 18:15-18, Jesus* addresses the situation of interpersonal sin, where brother has directly sinned against brother. Resolution, according to *Jesus*, would first be addressed informally (*though the offended party might seek counsel from leadership*). The hope would be, that the situation could be resolved at the lowest level, between brother and brother. However, if no resolution can be achieved, the situation escalates, finally involving *church leadership* and the *entire church*. Should the offending brother refuse to repent, he would be discipline by *excommunication* and is to be viewed as obstinate, in rebellion to *God* and *His church*, and *lost*. According to differing views on *church polity*, interpretations and the practical applications of this passage vary. Suffice it to say, since *boards*, *congregational voting*, *etc.* are never mentioned in *New Testament* regarding church government, imposing such teaching into the text should be consider a mishandling of *God's Word* and dangerous.

"It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump…I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat."

—1 Corinthians 5:1-6, 9-11

Though the end of this Scriptural situation is the same, namely *excommunication*, this passage is different from *Matthew 18:15-18,* both in particulars and in methodology. Does this mean the *Apostle Paul's* instruction and actions contradict *Jesus*? Absolutely not, we are Bible-believers and hold to the interpretive presupposition that the infallible *Word of God* cannot be self-conflicting. There are no contradictions in the Scriptures, none—therefore, we utterly dismiss the idea that the *Bible* contradicts the *Bible*. Thus, we're left with the understanding that these two passages on *Church discipline* overlap. We are to conclude that both *Matthew 18* and *1 Corinthians 5* are both valid, but *1 Corinthians 5* elaborates upon and broadens the revelation provided in *Matthew 18*. What then, would be the practical implications of these distinctions in the various applications of these two passages?

1. All matters of *formal church discipline* should be submitted to the *leadership of the church* for godly guidance and counsel. If no repentance is forthcoming and excommunication is needed, the final decision and the details of that decision should be left to *Spiritual authority*.

2. If *interpersonal sin* is involved, the first two steps of *informal discipline*, which *Jesus* outlined in *Matthew 18: 15-17,* are to be followed…

   "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established."

   —Matthew 5:15-17

3. If the situation does not involve *interpersonal sin*, the first two steps, as evident in *1 Corinthians 5:1-6,* depending on the situation, can be fulfilled by church leadership or by-passed while implementing the remaining steps. The theme of *1 Corinthians 5* is not so much to provide a step-by-step model for *church discipline*, as it is to reveal that a congregation of believers who fail to self-govern are neither *humble* or *loving*, but *proud* ('*glorying*'). Of course, because *interpersonal sin* was not involved, *1 Corinthians 5* reveals a similar, but somewhat diverse process from *Matthew 18* in arriving at the same unfortunate end. We simply see the *Apostle Paul*, as the founder of the *Church at Corinth*, commanding the church, in and under his authority, to immediately confront the *fornicator*. The text indicates that it was reported that *fornication* was '*common*', meaning both *frequent* and perhaps *indiscreetly. Paul* also chided the *Corinthians* because they apparently knew of this sin but failed to appropriately address it (*1 Cor 5:2, 6*). This might explain the *Apostle's* haste in making the matter public (*because it probably was already widely known*). Moreover, it's apparent the *fornicator* refused to repent. We can only assume, had the *fornicator* repented, he would have been restored as he eventually was after expressing godly sorrow (*2 Cor 2:6-8*).

"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple." —Romans 16:17-18

- Mark: (*Greek*) σκοπέω—To look at or upon, to take aim at, to consider, observe, or identify.[4]
- Divisions: (*Greek*) διχοστασία—Disunion, dissension, sedition—the encouraging of rebellion against authority.[5]
- Offences: (*Greek*) *σκάνδαλον*—A thing that offends, a stumbling block, an occasion to fall.[6]

4. The final passage, *Romans 16:17-18*, focuses on the sins of *rebellion* and *divisiveness*. These sins, especially coupled together, are extremely dangerous and should be addressed swiftly and thoroughly lest the enemy use such malcontents to delude and sift immature believers. These instructions to *'avoid'* and to *'reject'* those who '*cause divisions'* and who are *'divisive'* are written in the imperative mood and are therefore commands of the Lord, not mere suggestions. Unfortunately, many, if not most Christians, will reject this command, not desiring to be excessively '*harsh*' or '*unloving*'. Unfortunately, this is exceptionally careless, as *Romans 16:18* warns that these men causing the divisions will use *'good words'* or *'fair speaking'*; meaning, they will be *smooth talkers* and *flatterers*. Those who fall prey to these divisive men are referred to as *simple* or *naive*, and the idea being conveyed by the *Greek* language is *'fearing no evil from others'* and '*distrusting no one'*. In other words, the victims of these men will often be those who *simply want to believe the best in everyone*, foolishly presuming, contrary to Scripture, this is the '*Christian thing to do*'. Nonetheless, no matter how innocent our motives in rejecting these instructions seem to be, we must note that they are a *command*, not mere suggestions and to reject them will be at our own peril and the peril of others. To be clear, if the '*divisive man*' repents, he must be forgiven and restored to fellowship. Yet, to reject this clear command apart from complete repentance of the perpetrator is to be disobedient to the Lord. Let us seek to obey the Lord in all things, including the commands to '*mark/note/watch out for*' those who '*cause divisions*' contrary to the doctrine you have been taught and to take care to '*avoid them*'. In such cases, considering both *Matthew 18* and *1 Corinthians 5*, implementing the appropriate steps would be in order.

FIVE PRINCIPLES GLEANED FROM SCRIPTURE

1. The process should involve as few people as possible.
2. Church leaders should lead the process.
3. The length of the process depends on how long it takes to establish the offender is obstinate and unrepentance.
4. Leaders should adequately instruct the congregation on church discipline.

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[4] *Strong's* Hebrew & Greek Dictionary.
[5] *Strong's* Hebrew & Greek Dictionary.
[6] *Strong's* Hebrew & Greek Dictionary.

5. Finally, those being excommunicated should be identified to the congregation, sharing only what is necessary and instructions given on how believers should respond to those under discipline.

SHOULD THOSE EXCOMMUNICATED BE RECEIVED BY OTHER CHURCHES?

All over the *New Testament*, the inspired writers, publicly exposed and by name, those who had been disciplined for *false teaching*, *heresy*, *division*, and *sin (Demas, Hymenaeus, Philetus, Alexander the Coopersmith, Diotrephes, etc.)*. In doing this, the *Apostles* effectively informed the local churches that existed at the time, but also every valid church of every age via Scripture. Surely, any believer or church who received this news would immediately align with the judgment of the *Apostles* and respond Scripturally to those who were exposed or discipline by name. Likewise, it would seem logical that *valid local churches* and *believers* will *always* stand with other *valid churches* and *believers* in the discipline of their members.

"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." —1 Corinthians 1:10

Many *immature*, *biblically-illiterate*, *emotionally-driven*, and *carnal believers* have done much harm by assuming they are more merciful than God by refusing to confront those who have been *excommunicated,* calling them to repentance. Even more damage has been done by accepting such individuals into *fellowship*. Such brazen unscriptural behavior is anything but *loving*. In fact, it is *unloving* in the extreme—*unloving* to those under *church discipline* who are on dangerous spiritual ground and need sober warning and *unloving* to God and His church for refusing to believe and act on His *Word*. God's ministry to such backsliders/sinners is that *valid local churches* would stand unified with other *valid local church* that administered discipline. Moreover, avoiding these wayward men, yet, in love calling them to repentance. So often, men who have been disciplined in one local church find false solace and affirmation because of the silence of well-meaning, but extra-Biblically motivated believers. So many are far more worried about their relationships with people than God's will and His kingdom. Many are even ignorant of the purpose of the local church. The church is not a social network so we can have friends, but a God-ordained, God-called assembly of fully sanctified believers who come together according to the Scriptures for God's glory. Indeed, apostasy abounds.

As an example—the *open-air preacher*, practicing *Biblical evangelism*, who stands in the public arena calling sinners to *repentance*, is often opposed by perhaps well-meaning, but *Biblically-illiterate professing Christians*. These *emotionally driven, religious simpletons*, assuming that warning of *hell-fire* and calling men to *repent* is '*unloving*', will often intervene telling the sinners, '*Don't listen to this angry man, he does not represent Jesus, God loves you!*' Such undermining of the *Gospel* does great

harm to sinners and represents anything but true, *Biblical love*. This is very much like *unlearned* and *immature believers* assuming *church discipline* is unloving and sympathizing with those who have been lawfully put-out of the *local church*. Such willful ignorance of the Scriptures both casts a shadow upon the church and hinders *God's Spirit* in His efforts to bring the *disciplined* to repentance.

MAY WE ONCE AGAIN PRACTICE CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Throughout church history, when *revival fires* were rekindled, the doctrine of *church discipline* was always restored and practiced. Church fathers, reformers, and revivalists alike, give testimony to the need for *church discipline*…

"Thus the apostle, in his solicitude for us, discriminates in the case of entertainments, saying, that '*If any one called a brother be found a fornicator, or an adulterer, or an idolater, with such an one not to eat*'; neither in discourse or food are we to join, looking with suspicion on the pollution thence proceeding, as on the tables of the demons." —Clement of Alexandria, c. A.D. 190[7]

"The marks by which the *true Church* is known are these: if the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as administered by Christ; if *church discipline* is exercised in punishing of sin." —Belgic Confession 1561[8]

"The principal use of this *public discipline* is not for the offender himself, but for the Church. It exceedingly tends to deter others from the like crimes, and so to keep the congregation and their worship pure. Seneca could say, '*He who excuses present evils transmits them to posterity'*. And elsewhere, '*He who spares the guilty harms the good*'." —Richard Baxter[9]

"The way to preserve the peace of the church is to preserve the purity of it." —Matthew Henry[10]

"We read not that *Christ* ever exercised force but once, and that was to drive profane ones out of His Temple…" —John Milton[11]

"There is no purpose in having a basis or a confession of faith unless it is applied. So, we must assert the element of *discipline* as being essential to the true life of the church. And what calls itself a church which does not believe in *discipline*, and does not use it and apply it, is therefore not a true church."

—Martyn Lloyd-Jones[12]

John Wesley put his conviction that *church discipline* is essential to real Christianity into practice as he directed the *Methodist* movement. He exercised it himself and gave his followers instruction in how to carry it out. Reading certain sections of his journal gives the impression

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[7] Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor II:1*.
[8] The *Belgic Confession* in 1561.
[9] Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*.
[10] Matthew Henry *Commentary*.
[11] John Milton, *A Puritan Golden Treasury*.
[12] Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *What is an Evangelical?*

that he spent as much time throwing people out of the *Methodist* societies as he did to persuade them to come in. Early in his ministry he returned to *Bristol* to find that things were not going well. He reported…

> "*God* humbled us in the evening by the loss of more than thirty of our little company whom I was obliged to exclude, as no longer adorning the gospel of *Christ*. I believed it best openly to declare both their names and the reasons why they were excluded. We then all cried to *God*, that this might be for their edification, and not for destruction."[13]

Three weeks later he was in *London* where things were not much better:

"After diligent inquiry made, I removed all those from the congregation of the faithful whose behavior or spirit was not agreeable to the gospel of *Christ*: openly declaring the objections I had to each, that others might fear, and cry to *God* for them."[14]

Later visits to *Bristol* showed the situation had improved, but seven years later he again was forced to sift the grain, this time putting out almost 300 of the society. He recorded what he had to do:

> "I examined the society the following week, leaving out every careless person, and everyone who willfully and obstinately refused to meet his brethren weekly. By this means their number was reduced from nine hundred to about seven hundred and thirty. Evil men were detected, and reproved. They were borne with a season. If they forsook their sins, we received them gladly; if they obstinately persisted therein, it was openly declared that they were not of us. The rest mourned and prayed for them, and yet rejoiced, that, as far as in us lay, the scandal was rolled away from the society. "[15]

Like *Mr. Wesley*, may we once again zealously follow the full counsel of God.

For a clear example of how far the modern church has apostatized in the practice of *Biblical church discipline*, consider the ecclesiastical records of the *Southern Baptist churches* (*a denomination we would consider greatly compromised*) in *Georgia* in the late 1800's. The records indicate that *church discipline* was frequently practiced. Some of the more prevalent infractions catalogued from 1865–1920 include: *non-attendance, intemperance, adultery, fornication, profanity, dancing, disputes, fighting, drunkenness, breaking civil laws, breaking church rules, etc*. Of the total membership in those churches, 29.3% had been charged with an offense at some point and 8.6% had been excommunicated. It is estimated that by the time of the Civil War, 40,000 people had been excommunicated by Baptist churches in *Georgia* alone. Logic would suggest that such rigid discipline would impede the growth of these churches, but surprisingly, as *Southern Baptist*

[13] Wesley's Journal.
[14] Wesley's Journal.
[15] Wesley's Journal.

churches excommunicated 2% of their congregations annually, the church grew at an even faster rate. By 1906, 25% of all *Georgians* were *Baptist*.[16]

WHAT WE DO AT *CONSUMING FIRE FELLOWSHIP*

All members of *Consuming Fire Fellowship* have agreed to a *Covenant Membership* and have done so with their consent and personal signature on a *'Church Affiliation'* form that is summarized below (*Patriarchs signed for their families*). We haven't always had an '*official membership*' but developed this form and practice after the *U.S. Supreme Court's* 2015 decision legalizing homosexual marriage, which according to the Christian law firms we support (*CRE, Liberty Counsel*), made churches vulnerable to lawsuits and civil judgments. We were counseled, as thousands of other churches were, to add specific amendments/statements in our *Bylaws/Statement of Faith* that condemned *homosexuality* and clarify grounds for *church discipline*, establish an official membership, and require all members to agree, with signature, to the church's official doctrines and practice.

As demonstrated below, those former members of *CFF* who have disagreed with the discipline of particular individuals have not only boldly attacked the *Biblical leadership* of this local church, but they also violated their own covenant agreement (*which they signed*), which included the church's clear stance on *discipline,* it's practice and methodology.

All members are required to read the ***CFF Articles of the Faith*** as well as statements ***B & C*** and sign in agreement.

A. CFF Statement of Faith (*Contained in the Official Bylaws of CFF and posted on this website under* 'WHAT WE BELIEVE').
B. CFF Statement on Church Discipline (*elaborated on below and contained in the official Bylaws of CFF*).

The threefold purpose of church discipline is to glorify God by maintaining purity in the local church (*Matt 18:15-18; 1 Cor 5:6*), to edify believers by deterring sin and promoting purity (*1 Tim 5:20)*, and to promote the spiritual welfare of the offending believer by calling him or her to return to the Biblical standard of doctrine and conduct (*Gal 6:1*). The *Lord Jesus Christ* has entrusted the local church with the authority and responsibility to discipline members for unfaithfulness, flagrant sin, or serious doctrinal error, with the goal of the restoration of the offender. This discipline is entrusted to the Pastor and leadership and is to follow the Biblical pattern as set forth in *Matt 18:15-20; 1 Cor 5; 2 Cor 2:7-8; Gal 6:1; 2 Thess 3:6; Tit 3:10-11; and 2 John 1:7-11*. Any member of this church who practices or affirms a doctrine or conduct that, in the judgment of the *Pastor* and/or leadership is opposed to the teaching of the *Word of God*,

[16] Jim West, *Nineteenth-Century Baptists and Church Discipline: Case Studies from Georgia*.

or is threatening to the testimony of this church, or is divisive to the body, shall be subject to church discipline. Discipline may involve exclusion from participation in ministry and communion, and dismissal from the fellowship of the church. An individual may be disciplined by the Pastor and leadership short of dismissal from the fellowship, as deemed appropriate for the specific circumstance (*for example, an individual may remain in certain circumstances a member of this church but be denied the privilege of serving in a particular ministry*). The Pastor and leadership, as is required by Scripture, may report to the congregation the names of those who have lost membership by reason of church discipline, and the reason for that discipline as described in *Matthew 18:15-20*.

C. CFF Statement on Biblical Authority (*elaborated on below but also contained in the CFF Articles of the Faith*).

The *CFF Articles of the Faith* do not exhaust the extent of our faith or doctrinal views. The Scriptures themselves (*the King James Bible, AV 1611*), as the inspired and infallible *Word of God*, that speaks with final authority concerning truth, morality, and the proper conduct of mankind, is the sole and final source of all that we believe. However, for the purposes of *church doctrine*, *practice*, *policy*, and ***church discipline***, our elders, namely, *Pastor Britt Williams, Associate Pastor Charlie Kennon, Jr.*, and *Elder Bob Brumfield*, are the church's final interpretive authority on the Bible's practical application at *Consuming Fire Fellowship*.

***CFF Bylaw* on *Church Discipline* found in 'Article IV—MEMBERSHIP—Discipline':**

4.04 Members of Church may become proper subjects for discipline in the following ways:

1. Absence without good cause from the services of the Church.
2. Promotion of discord, or lack of harmony with the teachings and ministries of the church.
3. Fall into sinful and worldly practices.

In such cases, the *Pastor* or the *Elders* shall visit such members to ascertain the facts of the case. Determination of discipline and action of the Official Board (*Pastor Britt Williams*, *Associate Pastor Charlie Kennon*, and *Elder Bob Brumfield*, is final.

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers (covenant-breakers), false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away." —2 Timothy 3:1-4

—B.W.

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