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# Biblical Principle of Church Discipline and Its Application

By

Kwang Ho Song

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

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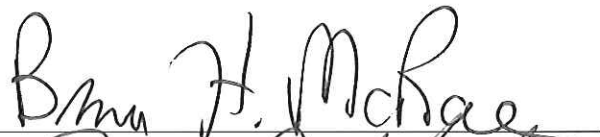
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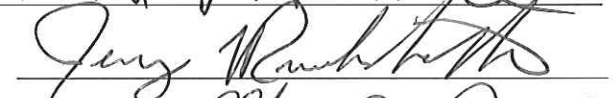
in Candidacy for the Degree of

Doctor of Ministry

By

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# Abstract

Church discipline is a mark of the true church, and pastors are called to understand and implement church discipline as an inherent aspect of pastoral ministry. However, few pastors seem to regard its importance enough to put it into practice, in spite of its clear benefits. Yet, through corrective church discipline, church unity is guarded, and the congregants can grow in faith.

Three research questions guided this study: (1) How do pastors understand the principle of church discipline given in Matthew 18:15-20? (2) How do pastors apply their understanding of the principle of church discipline given in Matthew 18:15-20 to their resolution of cases in need of disciplinary action? And, (3) How do pastors evaluate the effects of their application of church discipline upon their congregations? The study utilized a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews with six pastors with long and diverse pastoral ministry experience. The data was analyzed using the constant comparative method.

The study found that pastors' understanding of church discipline was thorough and deep, but many obstacles occurred in applying it.

The study concluded that, despite people's dislike or rejection of church discipline, a deeper understanding and faithfully implementation of discipline will promote church unity and success in pastoral ministry.

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I dedicate this dissertation
to my wife, Miyun,
and my children, Sieun and Youngwon,
through whom the Lord has enriched my life
and deepened my understanding of
His loving eternal relationship with His Church

# Contents

# Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Lord for his marvelous grace poured upon me in this study. To my dear wife, Miyun, for her smile of great encouragement not only during the writing of my Doctorate of Ministry dissertation but also all our lives together in the Lord. I thank her with all my love. She quietly yet firmly supported me in finishing this study. My two wonderful children, Sieun and Youngwon, are the delight of my eyes, and their support has also been an immeasurable help.

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# Abbreviations

PCA   Presbyterian Church of Australia

# Chapter One. Introduction

Church discipline is a function of the church commanded by God for

keeping it pure and reclaiming and regaining offending believers. John Calvin,

the prominent Protestant reformer of the sixteenth century, pointed out in his

book, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, the importance of the true church

disciplining her members.

> If no society, nay, no house with even a moderate family, can be kept in a
> right state without discipline, much more necessary is it in the Church,
> whose state ought to be the best ordered possible. Hence as the saving
> doctrine of Christ is the life of the Church, so discipline is, as it were, its
> sinews; for to it is owing that the members of the body adhere together,
> each in its own place.[1]

John Owen, Puritan theologian of the seventeenth century, echoes Calvin, calling

this important aspect of church her "natural equity," since all lawful societies in

the world engage their members with observing the rules and laws "without

which they can neither coalesce nor subsist."[2] Another illustration of this

necessity is the need for the believing parents to discipline their children, which

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[1] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1845), 4:248.

[2] John Owen, *Church Discipline* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, n.d.), Kindle e-book, Chapter 1, Location 131-134.

is not only relevant but also essential. As disciplining children is biblical and necessary for winning them their faith,[3] disciplining church members is important too as stated by many reformers, such as John Calvin,[4] and by The Belgic Confession, Article 29.

Having pointed out the gravity of church discipline, Calvin further notes that were there loss of discipline, the church would suffer "complete devastation" because allowing members to do anything they pleased would create disunity in faith, doctrine, and true fellowship among members of church.[5] In other words, neither keeping Christ's church pure nor regaining the brother found in sin would be possible without church discipline. Considering that the book, *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, was written primarily to the church of the sixteenth century reformation era, it is surprising to note that Calvin spoke prophetically to the church in the present day and its experience. After all, such a devastation always caused by loss of discipline is the end result of people's misunderstanding and misapplication of or apathy toward church discipline.[6]

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[3] See Proverbs 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15 and Hebrews 12:6-8.

[4] Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church: Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 101. Some see that John Calvin viewed two marks instead of three, excluding 'church discipline,' but theologians, such as Edmund Clowney, understood that Calvin "included discipline in the proper observance of the sacraments."

[5] Calvin, 4:248.

[6] Ibid.

It is undeniable that the same problem still exists within the churches of the twenty-first century, and many Christians suffer as a result. Indifference toward church discipline has allowed the acceptance of any preferred doctrinal view and, the resulting disunity deepens and widens the gaps among believers, creating anarchy both doctrinally and practically. Jay E. Adams, founder of The Institute for Nouthetic Studies and author of more than 100 books, explains that a church which considers discipline as "an outmoded relic of the Dark Ages" experiences such a doctrinal and practical anarchy, that it misses the blessing of the "healing, purifying balm of discipline."[7] R. Albert Mohler, Jr., former president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, describes the decline of church discipline as "perhaps [its] most visible failure."[8] Yet, Mohler's observation is not new; Calvin had warned five centuries earlier that those who "trust that churches can long stand without [the] bond of discipline" are mistaken. He suggested they consider the necessity of discipline as vital and its application as a remedy for sickening church.[9] His discernment lends a valuable insight for Christ's church of the twenty-first century.

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[7] Jay E. Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline: A Right and Privilege of Every Church Member* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1974), 9.

[8] R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "Church Discipline: The Missing Mark," http://www.the-highway.com/discipline_Hohler.html (accessed April 21, 2015), 1.

[9] Calvin, 4:250.

What is the current spiritual condition of the contemporary church in terms of church discipline? Adams draws attention to a stereotypic picture of the church:

> Mary has left Bill and announces to him she is going to divorce. … After a loud and protracted argument, Sally and Jane have declared that they do not care to speak to one another again; it has been four weeks since the fight and they refuse to reconcile. Peggy knows she is pregnant out of wedlock. Harry has discovered that the church organist is a homosexual.[10]

Mohler concludes his analysis by characterizing the contemporary church as "a voluntary association of autonomous members, with minimal moral accountability to God, much less to each other."[11] His summary conclusion draws an even starker image.

> The absence of church discipline is no longer remarkable – it is generally not even noticed. Regulative and restorative church discipline is, to many church members, no longer a meaningful category, or even a memory. The present generation of both pastors and church members is virtually without experience of biblical church discipline.[12]

If church discipline is a timeless imperative to God's church, why, then, is church's attitude toward discipline as well as her application of it so unbiblical? While postmodern syncretism and the influence of liberal theology are most

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[10] Adams, 9.

[11] Mohler, 1.

[12] Ibid.

often mentioned as the two greatest causes of the loss of church discipline,

Charles (Chuck) Lawless, former dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions

and Evangelism at the Southern Theological Seminary, lists others.

> 1. Pastors and church members do not know the Bible's teaching on discipline,
> 2. They have never seen it done before,
> 3. They do not want to appear judgmental,
> 4. The church has a wide-open front door,
> 5. They have had a bad experience with discipline in the past,
> 6. The church is afraid to open "Pandora's box,"
> 7. They have no guidelines for discipline,
> 8. They fear losing members (or dollars),
> 9. Their Christianity is individualistic or privatized,
> 10. They fear being "legalistic,"
> 11. They hope transfer growth will fix the problem, and
> 12. Leaders are sometimes dealing with their own sin.[13]

Most of these reasons explain the spiritual condition of most contemporary

churches. For evangelicals who believe the inerrancy of the Bible, such reasons as

the first and the seventh from the above list constitute an embarrassment, while

the second and the fifth reasons indicate a failure for those who exercise strong

leadership. The eighth reason seems to be, at a glance, the worries of churches

with small membership, but larger churches do not seem to be freed from this

'fear.' All of the above reasons for churches abandoning discipline suggest one

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[13] Chuck Lawless, "12 Reasons Churches Don't Practice Church Discipline," *The Christian Post*, May 20, 2015. http://www.christianpost.com/news/12-reasons-churches-dont-practice-church-discipline-138253/ (accessed September 7, 2016).

ultimate fact, namely, that pastors experience significant difficulties in implementing biblical church discipline.

Although some have written books introducing the biblical teaching of church discipline, few have touched the difficulties pastors experience or provided practical assistance. Consequently, they are less able to lead their congregations to grow in faith. Such help could deepen their knowledge of church discipline and prepare them for winning those found in sin back to Christ.

## Problem and Purpose Statements

Church discipline is one of the three marks of the true church, according to the Protestant reformers, along with the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments.[14] Yet, few know about it, let alone put it into practice. The most significant reason is wrong perceptions of both the clergy and the layperson. Marlin Jeschke, professor emeritus of philosophy and religion at Goshen College, describes the situation, "Today, church discipline is feared as the mark of a false church, bringing to mind images of witch trials, scarlet letters,

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[14] The Belgic Confession, Article 29. http://apostles-creed.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/belgic_confession.pdf (accessed March 21, 2016)

public humiliations, and damning excommunications."[15] Alfred Poirier,

chairman of the board for Peacemaker Ministries, points out people's general

perception of church discipline and comments, "*Mediation* sounds like

peacemaking, but *church discipline* sounds like punishment. *Reconciliation* is a

user-friendly term; *discipline* is not."[16]

Contrary to this misperception of many Christians, the purpose of church

discipline is to win offenders back to their faith in the Lord Jesus rather than

excluding them from the fellowship of church through excommunication. This

truth is clearly portrayed in the principle given in Matthew 18:15-20; the first two

out of three stages of implementing church discipline commanded by Jesus are

informal person-to-person interactions rather than formal proceeding in the

presence of whole congregation. Adams explains:

> The words "church discipline" usually suggest to people's minds that the
> church is officially taking action to remove someone. That is not the way
> that effective, regularly occurring discipline works; ordinarily, in a church
> that is comfortable with it, discipline achieves its objectives at the stage [of
> informal discipline].[17]

[15] Marlin Jeschke, "How Discipline Died: The Church Should Stop Taking Its Cues From the State," *Christianity Today*, 49, no. 8, 31.

[16] Alfred Poirier, *The Peace Making Pastor: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Church Conflict* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 220. Italics are in the original.

[17] Adams, 46.

Church discipline, therefore, is to be understood not as 'witch or heresy hunting' but as normal Christian life. As members assist one another in ordinary family circumstances, the members of a congregation provide mutual assistance. The same is true with church discipline.

Having said this, why do pastors who are responsible for introducing, promoting, implementing, and keeping the biblical mandate of church discipline not readily put it into practice? What factors hinder them from pursuing this biblical mandate, leaving their congregations in a "devastating" condition as Calvin wrote?[18] Only a handful of resources provide insightful answers for these pastoral questions.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore how pastors' understanding of the corrective church discipline principle given in Matthew 18:15-20 affects the resolution of cases requiring corrective church discipline and therefore the life of their congregations.

## Research Questions

The following questions will be used to guide this study:

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[18] Calvin, 4:248.

1. How do pastors understand the principle of church discipline given in Matthew 18:15-20?

2. How do pastors apply their understanding of the principle of church discipline given in Matthew 18:15-20 to their resolution of cases in need of disciplinary action?

3. How do pastors evaluate the effects of their application of church discipline principle upon their congregations?

## Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is in providing needed guidance to pastors in discerning church discipline as the mandate of church, rather than as a deferrable matter. In addition, this study can encourage pastors to lead their congregations in accordance with the will of God by reclaiming offenders through corrective discipline and keeping the whole congregation intact.

## Definition of Terms

In the context of this study, terms are defined as follows:

Discipline – A function of church commanded by God for keeping her pure and reclaiming and regaining offending believers.

Preventative discipline – The process of teaching Christians the word of God in order to promote their godliness to the point of being able to discern good from evil based on their understanding of God's truth.[19]

Corrective discipline – A discipline of "corrective" or "remedial" nature in the process of reclaiming a church member found in sin. Matthew 18:15-20 describes how corrective discipline should be implemented in the church. [20]

Pastor – A person engaged in the ordained pastoral ministry within the Presbyterian Church of Australia.

Presbyterian Church of Australia (PCA) – The federal body of Australian Presbyterian churches.

Presbyterian Church in Western Australia (PCWA)/Presbyterian Church of Queensland (PCQ) – State bodies of Australian Presbyterian churches in the state of Western Australia/Queensland under the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia.

Communicant member – A baptized person who associates regularly with the congregation in worship and who, on public profession of faith, has been

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[19] Adams, 22.

[20] Ibid., 24.

admitted by its session to participate in the Lord's Supper and thereby into full communion with the Presbyterian Church of Australia.[21]

Adherent member – A baptized person who makes such profession of faith as would entitle him to become a communicant member, but who chooses not to become a communicant member of the Presbyterian Church of Australia by virtue of membership of another Christian church, or by reasons of conscientious objection.[22]

Session – A court of the church, established by the presbytery of the bounds, consisting the minister or ministers and elders of a congregation.[23]

Church polity – The government and administration of the church, which in the context of this study, is the polity of the PCA.

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[21] Presbyterian Church in Western Australia, *The Code*, 2016, 96.

[22] Presbyterian Church of Queensland, *Standing Orders and Rules and Forms of Procedure*, 1.5. (a).

[23] Presbyterian Church in Western Australia, 158.

# Chapter Two. The Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors apply the corrective church discipline principle given in Matthew 18:15-20 to deal with and resolve church discipline cases. In order to understand how pastors lay the foundation of disciplinary action in terms of approach and restoration, four areas of literature were reviewed: (1) literature explaining theological doctrine on church discipline, (2) literature expositing the church discipline principle given in Matthew 18:15-20, (3) literature on accountability in relationships, and (4) literature on conflict resolution.

## Theological Doctrine on Church Discipline

### *Introduction*

Expounding the theological doctrine of church discipline was necessary for two reasons. First, church discipline is a mandate for Christ's church and, second, it is a complex challenge for pastors. Therefore, the researcher reviewed

literature in the following areas: an overview of church discipline and two main

areas of church discipline:  preventive discipline and corrective discipline.

## *An Overview of Church Discipline*

Church discipline refers to the process for training,[24] education,[25] reproof,[26]

correction,[27] warning,[28] chastening,[29] and punishment.[30] Bobby Jamieson,

affiliated lecturer in New Testament Greek at University of Cambridge,

translates this definition of church discipline into simple language: "everything

the church does to help its members pursue holiness and fight sin."[31] Jeschke

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[24] Ephesians 6:4.

[25] Deuteronomy 8:5.

[26] Proverbs 9:7.

[27] Zephaniah 3:2, 7.

[28] Isaiah 8:11.

[29] Proverbs 3:11.

[30] Hosea 10:10; T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Logos e-book, 448.

[31] Bobby Jamieson, *Guarding One Another: Church Discipline* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), Kindle e-book, chapter 1, location 216.

agrees and notes that church discipline is "the normal church life"[32] and Jonathan Leeman, editorial director for 9Marks, refers it as "loving."[33]

In a broad sense, church discipline is teaching, according to Jamieson.[34] The importance of "discipleship" in correcting sin is based on this truth, as both Adams and Leeman agree.[35]  It is, in other words, a "corporate form of care and supervision."[36] Jamieson also points out that God instructs his church to "exercise judgment within itself."[37] Daniel R. Hyde, author of *Welcome to a Reformed Church*, summarizes the discipleship benefits of such care.

> Discipline promotes God's holiness (Ezekiel 36:16-21; 1 Corinthians 5:1-5), protects the church from infection (1 Corinthians 5:6; Hebrews 12:15-16; 2 Timothy 2:14, 16-18), and restores the rebellious, making clear the seriousness of their resistance to Christ's Word and church (1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11; Hebrews 3:12-13; 10:24-25; 12:11-16).[38]

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[32] Marlin Jeschke, "*Toward an Evangelical Conception of Corrective Discipline*" (Ph. D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1972), 237.

[33] Jonathan Leeman, *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), Kindle e-book, 21.

[34] Jamieson, 133.

[35] Adams, 13; Leeman, 27.

[36] Samuel Southard, *Pastoral Authority in Personal Relationships* (Nashville & New York: Abingdon Press, 1969), 111.

[37] Jamieson, 168.

[38] Daniel R. Hyde, *Welcome to a Reformed Church: A Guide for Pilgrims* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2010), Kindle e-book, chapter 7, location 1161.

The mandate to the church received from the Lord God is to be holy as he is holy[39]. Lynn R. Buzzard and Thomas S. Brandon, Jr., coauthors of *Church Discipline and the Courts*, affirm that God's holiness is a "biblical presupposition for church discipline."[40] Calvin adds, "Those … who trust that churches can long stand without this bond of discipline are mistaken."[41] He advocates church discipline as a mark of the true church,  a view also contained in the Belgic Confession of Faith, in Article 29.[42] All these sources point to a true biblical church as an assembly of those called out of darkness and moved into Christ's marvelous light for proclamation of God's excellencies[43] with a functioning understanding of church discipline. Paul David Tripp, president of Paul Tripp Ministries, calls this ultimate foundation of church discipline an "incarnation" in light of calling and ministry.

> The revelation of God in his awesome glory is the only thing that exposes the utter emptiness of all the other glories we crave. If you understand the incarnation this way, you have already learned much about your calling. Personal ministry is not just about confronting people with principles,

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[39] Leviticus 19:2.

[40] Lynn R. Buzzard and Thomas S. Brandon, Jr., *Church Discipline and the Courts* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1987), 37.

[41] Calvin, 250.

[42] Clowney, 101; Donald J. MacNair and Esther L. Meek, *The Practices of a Healthy Church: Biblical Strategies for Vibrant Church Life and Ministry* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1999), Kindle e-book, chapter 2, location 682; Hyde, 1114; and Jamieson, 206; Jamieson comments church discipline as a "healthy" mark.

[43] 1 Peter 2:9

theology, or solutions. It confronts people with the God who is active and glorious in his grace and truth, and who has a rightful claim to our lives. Only as our hearts are transformed by this glory will the principles of Scripture make any sense to us.[44]

This line of thought raises another important aspect of church discipline, namely, the duty and privilege of church membership. Ephesians 4:1-3 portrays church members as "bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Such community creates the context for members to grow maturity in Christ through mutual spurring on and turning away from disobedience, as Jamieson notes.[45] Buzzard and Brandon, Jr. maintain that church growth without church discipline is impossible, noting that such a situation would be abnormal.[46] Adams elaborates this assertion:

> How can a student be expected to learn to observe Christ's commands in the midst of an undisciplined, disorderly, unstructured congregation? He can't. … It is time that we recognize the importance of discipline to good order and learning in the church. … church growth … is impossible in the lives of members apart from church discipline.[47]

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[44] Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2002), Kindle e-book, chapter 4, location 1683.

[45] Jamieson, 112.

[46] Buzzard and Brandon, Jr., 63.

[47] Adams, 17-18. Tense of the verb "realize" in this quote is altered from the original text which seems to have a typographic error as it says, "It is time that we *recognized* the importance of discipline …."

Emil Brunner, Swiss Protestant theologian, points out that church discipline and church membership, or growth, correspond to each other[48] and Tripp calls this dynamic a "redemptive relationship."[49] L. Gregory Jones, senior fellow for leadership education at Duke Divinity School, explains this aspect of church in terms of confession and responsibility.

> Confession is a discipline of community that, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, makes possible and contributes to our transformation into holy people. It does so as we learn to accept responsibility (a first person activity) for our own lives, pasts, and actions rather than always holding others responsible (a third person activity). Even more strongly, confession includes not only accepting responsibility for affirming our created goodness and receiving the forgiveness of sin, but also accepting responsibility for our part in the judgment under which the world stands and for the call to holy living in response.[50]

Another important reason for church discipline is the nature of church, especially as both the body of Christ and family of God. Having God as the Father, the members are the saints[51] and elect[52] in contrast to the unrighteous[53] who are excluded from church membership. Family loyalty toward the Father as

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[48] Emil Brunner, *The Divine Imperative* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1947), 559.

[49] Tripp, 1986.

[50] L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), Kindle e-book, chapter 5, location 2473.

[51] Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2.

[52] 2 Timothy 2:10; Titus 1:1.

[53] 1 Corinthians 6:1; 1 Peter 3:18.

well as toward each other is required for those who are brothers and sisters in

God's household.[54] The Apostle Paul emphasizes such oneness repeatedly in his

epistles[55]. After all, family members love and are gentle toward each other, even

in cases of ignorance, through teaching[56], admonishing,[57] or even

excommunication[58]. Focusing on this nature of church, Tommy South, lecturer on

New Testament at Virginia Commonwealth University, compares the necessity

of church discipline to that of "border security," and comments further, "the

boundary between the church and the world must be maintained, and discipline

is one of the God-ordained ways of doing so."[59]

In sum, church discipline is not a simple necessity but an essential

characteristic of Christ's church. Its meaning is comprehensive, covering training

and education, reproof and warning, as well as correction and punishment for

church members. Therefore, all church members should esteem church

discipline, rather than denounce it as a negative judgementalism or legalistic

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[54] Tommy South, *That We May Share His Holiness: A Fresh Approach to Church Discipline* (Abilene, TX: Bible Guides, 1997), 26.

[55] Romans 12:4, 5; 1 Corinthians 10:17; 12:12, 13, 20; Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:16; 4:4; Colossians 3:15.

[56] 1 Peter 3:15.

[57] Ephesians 4:15.

[58] 2 Thessalonians 3:13-15.

[59] South, 25.

authoritarianism, not only as God's command for the members of his church but also as the nature of church life established by the founder of church, that is, God.

Finally, although all modes of church discipline are interrelated and thus inseparable from each other, church discipline is usually divided into two areas, namely, "preventive" and "corrective" discipline. Adams describes these areas of church discipline as "a two-edged sword that has a preventive side and a corrective side."[60] Pastors are, in fact, called to "give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it."[61]

## *Preventive Discipline*

Preventive discipline is the process of teaching Christians the word of God in order to discern good from evil based on their understanding of God's truth.[62] According to Leeman, church discipline is a part of the discipleship process, thus, "to be discipled" is "to be disciplined" through instruction and correction.[63] Buzzard and Brandon Jr. support the oneness of these two, saying, "To separate

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[60] Adams, 22. Jamieson, 218, calls "preventive" as "formative" discipline.

[61] Titus 2:9.

[62] Adams, 22.

[63] Leeman, 27.

discipline from discipleship is not only to tear words from their etymological common roots, but from their organic relationship."[64] Although Leeman's term, "formative discipline," emphasizes the process of building up church members through education,[65] Adam's "preventive discipline" seems to better connect these two aspects of the discipline process.

The goal of preventive discipline is not merely concerned "with facts, but rather with facts transformed into life and ministry."[66] In a word, the emphasis lies on the promotional aspect rather than on the remedial side, that is, the transformation in the life of church members through discipleship.[67] Buzzard and Brandon Jr. describe such transformation as "enabling" church members to be obedient to the commands of God through education in the truth.[68] The Apostle Paul is certain that knowledge of truth accords with godliness.[69] Titus 1:9 plainly states that preventive discipline is a part of pastor's call, stating that a pastor is to give "instruction in sound doctrine" with the goal of preventing his congregants from contradicting it. Moreover, the purpose of assigning offices within the

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[64] Buzzard and Brandon, Jr., 65.

[65] Leeman, 17.

[66] Adams, 22.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Buzzard and Brandon, Jr., 65.

[69] Titus 1:1.

church, such as the apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers, is to

"equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" to

attain maturity in faith and life.[70] Adams summarizes the importance of this

mode of discipline. "When Christians are fed a regular diet of truth from the

Scriptures in such a way that they grow by it, there will be far less need for

remedial discipline in a church."[71] Noticing that "the growth of the church is …

the growth of the word,"[72] Edmund P. Clowney, former president of

Westminster Theological Seminary, states that "all other attributes of the church

derive from it."[73]

Recently, however, the importance of preventive discipline has faded

away in the minds and behavior of Christians. Instead, too much attention is

given to the remedial side, namely, corrective discipline. Adams diagnoses this

loss of interest in preventive discipline as a result of loss of "thought of good

order, good doctrine, and smoothly functioning church life."[74] David F. Wells,

distinguished senior research professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological

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[70] Ephesians 4:11-16.

[71] Adams, 22-23.

[72] Clowney, 102. Clowney refers to some Bible verses such as Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Adams, 23-24.

Seminary, describes such absence of good doctrine as "no Christian faith."[75] A

good illustration of this phenomenon is provided by Barna Group, an evangelical

Christian polling firm based in California, especially in its 2010 report describing

churches where "growing numbers of people are less interested in spiritual

principles and more desirous of learning pragmatic solutions for life," and more

specifically, a "relatively superficial approach to faith."[76]

Wells notes that belief as the preventive side of church discipline and

practice as its corrective side are inextricably related to each other, "the former

being the foundation of the latter and the latter being the evidence of the

working of the former."[77] In short, as much as repentance is the prerequisite of

saving faith, preventive discipline is the foundation of church discipline.

## Corrective Discipline

Corrective discipline begins when a sinful offence occurs. Therefore,

corrective discipline is remedial in its nature.[78] Being corrective, this discipline

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[75] David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 103.

[76] George Barna, "Six Megathemes Emerge from Barna Group Research in 2010," Barna.com, http:// www.barna.com/research/six-megathemes-emerge-from-barna-group-research-in-2010/ (accessed September 5, 2016).

[77] Wells, 103.

[78] Adams, 24.

confronts sin, aims to lead the church member to repentance, reclaims the repentant member, and establishes reconciliation in church. But, if the offender refuses to repent, corrective discipline must begin, as prescribed in Matthew 18:15-20, including excommunication of the impenitent believer as the last step of this disciplinary process. The main goal of this phase of corrective discipline, though, is to restore a church member through repentance and restore peace in the church. Leeman summarizes five purposes of corrective discipline: first, to expose sin, second, to warn the church, third, to save the offender,[79] fourth, to protect the innocent, and fifth, to present a good witness for Jesus.[80] Daniel E. Wray, pastor of Limington Congregations Church in Maine, adds a couple of particulars, namely, "to maintain the purity of the church" and "to prevent giving cause for God to set himself against a local church."[81] To attain this goal, admonition, reproof, and conviction can take place either privately or publicly.[82]

Wray notes four cases when corrective church discipline needs to be initiated and carried out.

1. Christian love is violated by serious private offences,

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[79] Daniel E. Wray, *Biblical Church Discipline* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), 3-4, says that it is to "reclaim" the brother in sin.

[80] Leeman, 33.

[81] Wray, 3, 4.

[82] This progression will be dealt with in the next section when the principle of Matthew 18:15-20 is discussed.

2. Christian unity is violated by those who form divisive factions which destroy the peace of the church,
3. Christian law is violated by those living scandalous lives, and
4. Christian truth is violated by those who reject essential doctrines of the faith.[83]

If a breach made is under any of these categories, corrective discipline must take place. Don Baker, author of *Beyond Forgiveness*, defines the nature of sin that must be under discipline.

> Corrective church discipline is designed for sins of such a nature that they obscure the truth of God, bring into question the character of God, or obstruct the purposes of God. Anything that endangers the purity, harmony, or efficiency of the church appears to be worthy of corrective discipline.[84]

The following are a few guidelines presented in the Bible for dealing with any such sin. First of all, the whole process must be regulated by its goal, that is, gentle restoration as the first half of Galatians 6:1 teaches. "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness." "Restoration," is from the Greek word κατάρτισις, a medical term which means restoring a dislocated bone[85] or a general word denoting

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[83] Wray, 8-10.

[84] Don Baker, *Beyond Forgiveness: The Healing Touch of Church Discipline* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1984), 43-44.

[85] John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians: Only One Way*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), 160.

repair of disorderly nets.[86] In this verse, καταρτίζετε is in the imperative tense to mean "should restore." It must be exercised if a believer finds a fellow believer in sin, either offending directly or sinning generally. But, an initiator of corrective discipline must be "spiritual," as John R. W. Stott, a leader of the worldwide evangelical movement, explains, "led by the Spirit and walk by the Spirit so that the fruit of the Spirit appears" in one's life.[87] Such a believer with a humble spirit toward his brother can proceed in a spirit of gentleness. Showing brotherly love is, as Tripp notes, "identifying with suffering," that is, identifying with each other as family members and as suffering from someone's sin, and "identifying with a purpose," meaning, "understanding of how [God] has called us to minister to others."[88] Such is, according to Robert D. Jones, associate professor of biblical counseling at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, a compassion that can break through the relational impasse.[89]

Second, those involved in corrective discipline process must keep watch themselves against being tempted by the same sin, as warned in the second half

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[86] Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians,* Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 41 (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 273.

[87] Stott, 161.

[88] Tripp, 2377 and 2404.

[89] Robert D. Jones, *Pursuing Peace: A Christian Guide to Handling Out Conflicts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), Kindle e-book, chapter 7, location 2199.

of Galatians 6:1. If those who are "spiritual" have an attitude of spiritual superiority over their fellow member, the temptations they can face will be backbiting, slander, or rejection.[90] Instead of being self-righteous, the one who seeks restoration of another church member must examine oneself, realizing one's own vulnerability to various spiritual temptations.

Third, restoration must be concluded with forgiveness in either private or public level depending on the seriousness of the sin violated and the truthfulness of repentance. The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 2:5-11, especially in verse 8, urges the church to not only forgive and comfort the penitent offender but also reaffirm their love for him. This verse emphasizes the ultimate goal of corrective discipline, that is, restoration. It also notes that forgiving the offender is not an easy thing to do and is often easily lost sight of in the process of discipline.[91] If forgiveness lapses away in the restoration process, at least three consequences can be expected.

1. The penitent sinner may be lost due to overwhelming guilt and grief,
2. The church could be guilty of disobedience, and
3. Satan could succeed in defrauding the church.[92]

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[90] 2 Corinthians 12:20

[91] South, 104.

[92] Ibid., 105-107.

Thus, restoration means a complete restoration of Christian fellowship between the offender and the offended individual(s) and the church.

And fourth, excommunication of the impenitent offender is the last step of keeping Christ's church pure and holy through corrective discipline. For any church member who "happily abides in known sin," as Leeman points out, excommunication – exclusion from the fellowship of the church – is the church's final conclusion.[93] But, to reach this point, there must be a legitimate process of corrective discipline as described in Matthew 18:15-20. Owen regards excommunication as an essential constituent part of "Gospel church" and its power toward its members.[94] Excommunication is a "spiritual punishment" for purity of church.[95] Because of its spiritual significance in church, Owen emphasizes that excommunication must be administered with prayer, lamentation, and a due sense of the future judgment of Christ.[96] The suggested procedure and discharge of excommunication will be covered in a later section.

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[93] Leeman, 49.

[94] Owen, 47.

[95] See The Westminster Confession of Faith, XXX, 3 & 4; The Cambridge Platform, XIV, 5 & 6, as quoted in Wray, 21.

[96] Owen, 464-497.

Corrective discipline is not welcomed by many pastors. These pastors seem to get "downright scary" with its concept and process[97] or, as Mark Dever, senior pastor of the Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington D.C., comments, think it "ridiculous."[98] Kenneth C. Haugk, founder and executive director of Stephen Ministries, comments on such reluctance in applying church discipline as "undoubtedly healthy" only if it is based on the warning of Jesus to examine oneself before judging others as in John 8:7; otherwise, such hesitance is unfortunate and inappropriate.[99] Haugk concludes:

> when specific disciplinary actions are called for, the leader's responsibility is not to equivocate or bend the regulations, but to carry them out. … there is no room for improvisation. … Otherwise the church forfeits the right to be considered an advocate of truth and justice.[100]

In sum, Jamieson draws some insightful reasons for practicing corrective church discipline as to show love for:

1. The good of the disciplined individual,
2. Other Christians as they see the danger of sin,
3. The health of the church as a whole,

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[97] Thomas W. Bear, *Bring My Sheep Back: Church Discipline, the Loving Way* (Amazon Digital Services LLC, 2011), Kindle e-book, Introduction, location 133.

[98] Mark Dever, "'Don't Do It!!' Why You Shouldn't Practice Church Discipline," 9Marks.org, http://9marks.org/article/dont-do-it-why-you-shouldnt-practice-church-discipline/ (accessed on August 2, 2015).

[99] Kenneth C. Haugk, *Antagonists in the Church: How to Identify and Deal with Destructive Conflict* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 155.

[100] Haugk, 156.

4. The corporate witness of the church and, therefore, non-Christians in the community, and
5. The glory of God.[101]

# Church Discipline Principle Given in Matthew 18:15-20

## *Introduction*

Matthew 18:15-20 presents corrective discipline in three steps. Step one, "go and tell" the offender in a private meeting between the two individuals; step two, if the offender does not listen, then "take one or two others along with you" as an informal dealing with the impenitent member; and step three, "tell it to the church," which involves the whole church in the process of confronting the impenitent member in a formal proceeding. If the second step does not produce repentance, and thus, no restoration or reconciliation, then the next step is to take the matter to the whole congregation. If all three steps fail, the final action warranted is excommunication of the impenitent believer, exclusion from the fellowship of church.

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[101] Jamieson, 199.

The principle given by the Lord Jesus is regarded as the standard

procedure for corrective discipline,[102] whereas the immediate excommunication

given in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 is for a scandalous sin known to the public.[103]

### *Step One: "Go and Tell Him"*

The first step of the standard procedure of Matthew 18:15-20 focuses on

the ultimate goal of the entire progression, that is, regaining a family member in

the Lord. Verse 15 talks about a one-on-one private dealing with a believer found

in sin. This meeting may include two believers' reconciliation of their impaired

relationship caused by the sin of the offender. This "sin" (ἁμαρτήσῃ) is a general

term for erring, thus, by being imprecise, indicates a "broad variety" of offenses

made to a person.[104] This situation may include any offense unintentionally done

but should be limited to "anything that creates an unreconciled state between"

two.[105] Calvin identifies sinning "against you" in Matthew 18:15 as a simple

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[102] South, 46, says that the principle given in Matthew 18 is the "most comprehensive of all New Testament texts on the subject" of discipline.

[103] South, 45, describes the gist of this standard procedure for corrective discipline with a paraphrased question of Cain found in Genesis 4:9, that is, "I Am My Brother's Keeper." Wayne A. Mack and Dave Swavely, *Life in the Father's House: A Member's Guide to the Local Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2006), 168-169, agree and add another term, "watchman," for this responsibility among believers in Christ's church.

[104] Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Inc., 1998), 531.

[105] Adams, 54-55.

distinction between secret and open sins.[106] If reconciliation between the offender

and the offended is sought, the latter approaches the former privately to talk

about the offence and show the former how an offense to God has been made.[107]

The private approach mentioned here implies an attitude of love and care,

rather than condemnation and gossip. Such an attitude ought to be the nature of

conversation, rather than doing nothing at all about the damaged relationship or

telling others about the sin of the offending brother.[108] Michael Green, author of

*The Message of Matthew* in *The Bible Speaks Today* commentary series, emphasizes

the timeless importance of having a personal face-to-face meeting.[109] Gentle

Christian confrontation is the first step in church discipline.

Keeping this first step of church discipline as private as possible, the two

parties may have an opportunity to experience genuine repentance for the

offender and forgiveness for the offended based on humble Christian love. In

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[106] John Calvin, "Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke," trans. William Pringle, Sacred-texts.com, http://sacred-texts.com/chr/calvin/cc32/cc32064.htm (accessed October 7, 2016).

[107] H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *St. Matthew*, The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 212. South, 54, points out the omission of "against you" in v. 15 in some important earlier New Testament manuscripts. It seems that omission of it adopted by New American Standard Bible, Jerusalem Bible, New English Bible, and Revised English Bible fits to the purpose of this general procedure for corrective discipline, denoting "sin" in general and the offense made to God rather than a man.

[108] South, 56.

[109] Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 194.

this process, the offended seeks to help the offender, wanting the latter to do the

same to the former if the situation were reversed.[110] Implicit in this teaching is the

principle taught in Matthew 5 as well, that is, not only the offended but also the

offender are commanded to go and establish peace and reconciliation through

repentance and forgiveness.[111] The goals are, first, to learn by experience Jesus'

teaching given in Matthew 18:22-23, namely, to forgive a brother as often as

necessary, and, second, to put God's command for "speaking the truth in love …

to … make the body [that is, church] grow so that it builds itself up in love" into

practice.[112]  Thomas W. Bear, author of *Bring My Sheep Back*, concludes this step

by pointing out the opportunity to make the name of Jesus "attractive by the

attitudes and behavior of His people."[113] Jones describes these attitudes and

behaviors as identifying sin which is the starting point of confession that leads to

restoring peace.[114] Jim Van Yperen, executive director of Metanoia Ministries,

warns that if a brother does not go to the offender directly but to another to talk

about the offender, the former commits sin against the latter in two ways: first,

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[110] Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 65.

[111] Jones, 599.

[112] Ephesians 4:15-16.

[113] Bear, 339.

[114] Jones, 1584.

sin of taking the opportunity to ask forgiveness and, second, sin of talking

behind someone's back.[115]

Jesus presents two possible results as the outcome of this step; first,

"listening" means repentance made by the offender, thus, reconciliation is

attained between two parties, or, second, "not listening" denotes the offender's

refusal to repent, causing dismissal of the reconciliation offer. If the latter were

the case, the subsequent disciplinary step should be followed.

## *Step Two: "Take One or Two Others"*

The second step requires one or two additional companions as witnesses

in making the same appeal to the offender. This step concurs with the Old

Testament command of Deuteronomy 19:15, in promoting justice of laying a

charge against anyone in a faith community. The required companions must be

aware of the offense, as in the case of Deuteronomy 19; otherwise, a fair and

effective intervention would not be possible.

At this stage, complete confidentiality is no longer required. But, as the

companions care for the offending member, confidentiality is beneficial so that

the process continues in love. Also, it is essential to remember that inclusion of

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[115] Jim Van Yperen, *Making Peace: A Guide to Overcoming Church Conflict* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2002), 165.

one or two additional people in this fairly early stage of church discipline

provides the offended an opportunity to have a balanced view expressed.[116]

The frequency of reconciliation attempts depends on the attitude of the

offender toward both repentance for the sin committed and reconciliation of the

impaired relationship with the offended.[117]

The one or two companions involved in this process will later become

witnesses to the church if this second step fails to attain its goal and the matter is

brought forward before church.[118] Preferably, elders, deacons, or even pastors are

the prime people to go together, but any believer who can offer wise counsel

with accountability will be appropriate. Pointing out the admonition of

Philippians 2:4, Bear suggests that any church members whom the offender may

respect and most likely listen to may be suitable for this task.[119] But those who are

"spiritual" should go as Galatians 6:1 points out: "Brothers, if anyone is caught in

any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of

gentleness."

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[116] Warren W. Wiersbe, *Bible Expository Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), Logos e-book, 65.

[117] Adams, 58-59.

[118] Wiersbe, 65-66; Adams, 60.

[119] Bear, 1257.

Up to this point, the main concern has been to involve as small a number of people as possible in order to keep the information in a closed environment to provide maximum opportunity for the offender to repent and be restored. Adams states the desired outcome toward reconciliation: "ordinarily, in a church that is comfortable with [how regularly occurring discipline works], discipline achieves its objectives at stages [one or two]."[120] Ted Kober, senior ambassador for Ambassadors of Reconciliation, notes great joy of achieving reconciliation: "Great joy and comfort flow from the words of absolution given by a Christian brother. Likewise, the Christian who shares God's forgiveness with a fellow believer also rejoices."[121]

Calvin adds that this step is necessary and useful for preventing the offender from evading the opportunity to reconcile.[122]

## Step Three: "Tell It to the Church"

When the second step fails to achieve the goal of corrective discipline, namely, restoration of the church member, the last step is to bring the offender

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[120] Adams, 46-47; according to Adams' steps, it is "stages 2 or 3" because Adams includes "self discipline" as the beginning stage of corrective discipline rather than "one-on-one" approach.

[121] Ted Kober, *Confession & Forgiveness: Professing Faith as Ambassadors of Reconciliation* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 144.

[122] Calvin, *"Commentary on a Harmony."*

and the offense before the church, as described in verse 17. The process is now a

public matter, fully opened to all church members. Some New Testament

passages, such as 1 Corinthians 5, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15, 2 Timothy 2:23-26, and

Titus 3:10, supplement the principle given in Matthew 18:17. The teaching of

these passages is that church should exercise discipline against sins that are

"outward, serious, and unrepentant."[123]

In defining the sphere of the church necessary in this step, John White and

Ken Blue, coauthors of *Healing the Wounded*, refer to "the particular subgroup

with which the offender associates most"[124] whereas H. D. M. Spence-Jones, an

Anglican dean, understands it as an "institution of ecclesiastical tribunals."[125]

Adams explains the process of telling to the church being telling the elders of the

local church through whom the matter may be brought to the general church

members.[126] Yet, the entire church means, according to Adams, only the members

or communicant members of the local church. Adams also suggests that when

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[123] Leeman, 54.

[124] John White and Ken Blue, *Healing the Wounded: The Costly Love of Church Discipline* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1985), 128.

[125] Spence-Jones, 212.

[126] Adams, 69.

the entire church is involved, a closed meeting of the congregation or a letter to be read and destroyed might be options.[127]

Bear disagrees with Adams in this, viewing "telling to the church" as the whole assembly of church. Elders' involvement in this last step is unwarranted, thus, unnecessary, according to Bear.[128] Instead, "each member must hear, not just a select group" in order for each member to speak in good conscience.[129] This view, however, underrates the importance of elder's office. The Westminster Confession of Faith states, "these church office-bearers … have power, as occasion requires, to declare sins forgiven or not; to shut the kingdom of heaven against the impenitent … and to open it to penitent sinners."[130] Therefore, leadership in church discipline is essential so that all things of church be done decently and in order.[131]

If the offender once again refuses to listen to the church's instruction, no further disciplinary action is suggested, but a decision to exclude the offender from the congregation, treating the impenitent as one outside the church, is

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[127] Ibid.

[128] Bear, 1319.

[129] Ibid., 1323.

[130] Rowland S. Ward, ed., *The Westminster Confession and Catechisms in Modern English: A Modernised Text Commemorating the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly, 1643-49*, 2nd ed. (Wantirna, VIC: New Melbourne Press, 2000), 59. Quoted from Chapter 30, Article 2.

[131] 1 Corinthians 14:40.

commanded. Treating the impenitent offender as a "Gentile" and a "tax

collector" is best understood by Craig Blomberg, distinguished professor of the

New Testament at Denver Seminary, who explains it as "twin themes."[132] The

first theme is excommunication, "not allowing someone to participate in public,

corporate fellowship with the church,"[133] which is in line with the Old Testament

practice.[134] The second theme Blomberg explains fits the New Testament teaching

of reaching out to the unbelievers and calling them to repentance.[135] Forbidding

individual Christians from maintaining friendship with the one

excommunicated, therefore, is unnecessary. Blomberg appeals to the teaching of

2 Thessalonians 3:14-15.

> If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that
> person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not
> regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

## The Church's Binding and Loosing

Jesus concludes his teaching in Matthew 18:15-20 with a warrant from

God for the church's decision in this process of corrective discipline. This

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[132] Craig Blomberg, *Matthew,* The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 279.

[133] Blomberg, 279. New Testament references for this are 1 Corinthians 5:9, 11; 10: 16-17; 1 Thessalonians 3:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 15.

[134] Numbers 19:20.

[135] Blomberg, 279-280.

promise states that whatever church binds or loses shall be bound or loosed in heaven too because, first, God the Father will do what is asked by two believers in agreement and, second, God the Son will be present where two or three are gathered in his name. Calvin explains that if the offender confesses sin and "entreats the Church to forgive him," the offender is forgiven not only by men, but by God himself; but, in the opposite case, the impenitent offender is not forgiven by church nor by God.[136]

Whereas a consensus among the literature reviewed exists on the object of church's binding and loosing, there seems to be a slight disagreement as to the authority responsible for such action. However, the majority understand that this authority is given to the disciples first, then, the whole church.[137] For Calvin, this authority lies with the elders and ministers of the word as "the lawful government of the church is committed" to them.[138]

Verses 19 and 20 present Jesus' promise and its foundation; the Lord Jesus' presence among two or three gathered together in his name establishes the

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[136] Calvin, *"Commentary on a Harmony."*

[137] John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), Logos e-book, 748; Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), Logos e-book, 280; Spence-Jones, Ibid., 212; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1998), Logos e-book, 532.

[138] Calvin, *"Commentary on a Harmony."*

validity of church's binding and loosing. Calvin insightfully comments on the

significance of the promise of Jesus' presence.

> Since it is an invaluable blessing to have Christ for our director in all our affairs, to bless our deliberations and their results; and since, on the other hand, nothing can be more miserable than to be deprived of his grace, this promise ought to add no small excitement to us to unite with each other in piety and holiness. For whoever either disregards the holy assemblies, or separates himself from brethren, and takes little interest in the cultivation of unity, by this alone makes it evident that he sets no value on the presence of Christ.[139]

## *Some Important Considerations*

Implicit in Matthew 18:15-20 is forgiveness as a means to restoration and

reconciliation. Forgiving the offender in the process of church discipline is every

believer's responsibility as described in Luke 17:3, "Pay attention to yourselves!

If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him." Bear

emphasizes the need for sincere forgiveness toward the penitent brother in order

that "there is no lingering anger or resentment toward him."[140] Michael T. Wilson

and Brad Hoffmann, cofounders of ShepherdCare, describe "grace" as a

foundation of confronting and resolving problems in church discipline, pointing

out, "The Bible does call the offender to confess; extending grace and mercy is

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[139] Ibid.

[140] Bear, 668.

the task of the offended."[141] In this sense, forgiveness from one's heart, as

Matthew 18:35 says, is the key to both true biblical restoration and individual

believer's life in the Lord because the Father forgives such a forgiver.[142]

In the process of church discipline, the rule "assume innocent until proven

guilty" should be applied to the accused believer. This assumption is in line with

the golden rule summing up "the Law and the Prophets" in Matthew 7:12,

commanding all believers to do "whatever you wish that others would do to

you." Bear explains that this rule is the basis of the first two steps in Matthew

18:15-20, protecting the person's reputation.[143] Not abiding by this rule means,

according to Bear, committing the sin of "having a hateful, condemning spirit

that itself is included in the sins listed in Galatians 5:19-21."[144]

Another wise recommendation by Bear is worth considering; in the

second step of church discipline, when the accused brother is visited by two or

three fellow believers, carefully documenting the conversation may increase

clarity, accuracy, and accountability in the process of discipline, especially if

those invited to visit the accused are to give testimonies before the church.

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[141] Michael Todd Wilson and Brad Hoffmann, *Preventing Ministry Failure* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2007), 22.

[142] Matthew 6:14.

[143] Bear, 965.

[144] Ibid., 967.

When any accusation made against a believer lacks sufficient evidence or has no more than one witness in the third step, corrective church discipline for the accused lapses and cannot proceed. The Bible in both the Old and the New Testaments speaks unequivocally on this matter.[145]

Finally, although repentance initiates reconciliation or restoration, some evidence may be required from the penitent believer in order to leave no lingering aftereffects with the offended or the church. Bear lists such evidence may include (1) gratefulness to the one who pursued loving confrontation, (2) genuine confession to God and others about sin and guilt, (3) a desire to make things right, and (4) intense desire to be free from the sin and heightened state of alert about the dangers of the sin.[146]

## Accountability in Relationships

### *Introduction*

All three stages of corrective church discipline explained in Matthew 18:15-20 imply that conflict in relationships requires accountability for its resolution and restoration. Ken Sande, founder of Peacemaker Ministries,

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[145] See Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; Matthew 18:16; 26:60; 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19; Hebrews 10:28; and Revelation 11:3.

[146] Bear, 492-537.

acknowledges conflict as "a difference in opinion or purpose that frustrates someone's goals or desires."[147] Patterson et al, coauthors of *Crucial Confrontations*, term this difference as a "gap" that needs to be confronted as "difference between what you expected and what actually happened"[148] and to confront is to "hold someone accountable."[149]

In the early stage of church discipline, for example, the offended is to approach the offender privately and confront the offender for resolution of the sin or offense made. The attitude asked of the offended toward the offender is based on Christian love and care for one another using proven relationship building skills to make the offender accountable once again. Regarding the need and effectiveness of such skills, Kerry Patterson et al state, "when confrontations are handled correctly, both parties talk openly and honestly. Both are candid and respectful. As a result, problems are resolved, and relationships benefit."[150]

To confront such a gap caused by the offender, the offended should start with safety, that is, maintaining mutual respect, and describe the existing gap to

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[147] Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 29.

[148] Kerry Patterson et al, *Crucial Confrontations: Tools for Resolving Broken Promises, Violated Expectations, and Bad Behavior* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 85.

[149] Ibid., 4.

[150] Patterson et al, 4-5.

remind the offender and to attain mutual purpose.[151] Specific skills such as

asking for permission, speaking in private, or even sharing a story of the

offended with the offender, as suggested by Patterson et al, can foster

accountability.[152]

In fact, accountability or integrity is a more crucial element than relational

skills in resolving any conflict. Having noted, "credibility is the foundation of

leadership," James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, coauthors of *The Leadership*

*Challenge*, emphasize that "[one's] ability to take strong stands, challenge the

status quo, and point to new directions depends on [one's] being highly

credible."[153] Thus, before considering the literature on conflict resolution, this

study examines literature on accountability.

## *Accountability*

While it is regarded as one of the essential characteristics of successful

leadership in the business world, accountability as taught in the Bible means

carrying each other's burdens as the people of God.[154] Tripp comments,

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[151] Ibid., 89-90.

[152] Ibid., 89-105.

[153] James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations*, 5th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), Kindle e-book, 37-38.

[154] Tripp, 4247.

"Accountability requires a willingness to roll up our sleeves and get alongside people as they fight the war between sin and righteousness."[155] In other words, accountability provides assistance so that believers may do what is right for the long run.[156] In a word, accountability is mutual answerability. Accountability provides six benefits to people, such as structure, guidance, assistance, and encouragement for someone who seeks to help others, as well as warning for both the helper and the receiver, and lastly, ongoing help to the person committed to change.[157]

On the other hand, in the business leadership literature, there is a wide spectrum of interpretation for accountability. Samuel A. Culbert and John B. Ullmen, coauthors of *Don't Kill the Bosses*, recognize accountability from the perspective of hierarchical relationship, and thus, they separate accountability into "one-sided," as typically found in hierarchical relationship, and "two-sided," as an unbiased and desirable alternative of the former.[158] Kevin P. Kearns, professor of Public and Nonprofit Management at University of Pittsburgh, in defining accountability from a public and nonprofit organizational perspective,

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[155] Ibid., 4250.

[156] Ibid., 4264.

[157] Ibid., 4278-4292.

[158] Samuel A. Culbert and John B. Ullmen, *Don't Kill the Bosses: Escaping the Hierarchy Trap* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2001), 6.

notes that the narrow interpretation of accountability "involves answering to a

higher authority in the bureaucratic or interorganizational chain of command"

whereas its general and popular view refers to "a wide spectrum of public

expectations dealing with organizational performance, responsiveness, and even

morality" of an organization.[159] Kearns also provides three core elements of

accountability:

> A higher authority vested with the power of oversight and supervision, a
> measure or criterion used by the higher authority to assess compliance or
> performance of mandated activities, and an explicit reporting mechanism
> for conveying information to the higher authority.[160]

Samuel Paul, former visiting professor at Harvard Business School and advisor

to the World Bank, adds another aspect, "performance measured as objectively

as possible."[161] Grover Starling, professor of Management and Public Policy at

the University of Houston, adds that accountability is "answerability"[162] whereas

Paul notes objectivity in performance as the important aspect of accountability.[163]

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[159] Kevin P. Kearns, *Managing for Accountability: Preserving the Public Trust in Public and Nonprofit Organizations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996), 7 and 9.

[160] Ibid., 36.

[161] Samuel Paul, "Strengthening Public Service Accountability: A Conceptual Framework," *Discussion Paper Series*, no. 136 (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1991), 2.

[162] Grover Starling, *Managing the Public Sector*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Dorsey Press, 1986), 123.

[163] Paul, 2.

Considering these diverse interpretations, it is best to define

accountability as "the obligation of an individual or organization to account for

its activities, accept responsibility for them, and to disclose the results in a

transparent manner."[164] This "transparent manner" is further explained by

Howard M. Guttman, founder of Guttman Development Strategies, with the

term, "a flat, horizontal organization," to emphasize a culture that promotes

mutual accountability among members of the organization.[165] This terminology

also corresponds with the biblical teaching on accountability as carrying each

other's burdens as the people of God.

## *Integrity*

The term "integrity" needs to be examined for two reasons; first, it is often

used interchangeably with accountability and, second, it clarifies the meaning of

accountability. The meanings of these two terms overlap. For example, John B.

Rawls, former member of Fulbright Fellowship at the University of Oxford,

defines integrity as "truthfulness and sincerity, lucidity and commitment, or …

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[164] "Accountability." BusinessDictionary.com. http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/accountability.html (accessed on September 23, 2016).

[165] Howard M. Guttman, "The Accountable Leader," Leader to Leader (Winter 2009): 48.

authenticity," which corresponds well with the attributes of accountability.[166]

Martin Benjamin, author of *Splitting the Difference*, sees integrity as almost

identical to accountability: "Individual integrity … requires that one's words and

deeds generally be true to a substantive, coherent, and relatively stable set of

values and principles to which one is genuinely and freely committed."[167] Larry

D. Watson and Richard A. Hoefer, coauthors of *Developing Nonprofit and Human

Service Leaders*, describe leaders with integrity as "[committed] to the core values

inherent in the [organization] in which [the leader] works."[168] Curt Richardson,

founder and CEO of OtterBox, observes that "there is a surprising lack of

accountability and integrity in the business world today."[169]

George G. Brenkert, professor in the McDonough School of Business

Faculty at Georgetown University, separates integrity into "four prominent

features," namely, its axiological, temporal, motivational, and social

dimensions.[170] With an axiological dimension, Brenkert highlights the value

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[166] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 519.

[167] Martin Benjamin, *Splitting the Difference: Compromise and Integrity in Ethics and Politics* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1990), 51.

[168] Larry D. Watson and Richard A. Hoefer, *Develoing Nonprofit and Human Service Leaders: Essential Knowledge and Skills* (Los Angeles: SAFE, 2014), 37.

[169] Curt Richardson, "Golden Rules of Business," INC.com. http://www.inc.com/curt-richardson/accountability-and-integrity-the-golden-rules-of-business.html (accessed on November 3, 2016).

[170] George G. Brenkert, "Integrity, Responsible Leaders and Accountability," in *Responsible Leadership*, ed. Thomas Maak and Nicola M. Pless (New York: Routledge, 2006), 99-101.

structure with which a person acts and lives. Some minimal aspect of morality

such as honesty and fairness is required, together with, first, distinction between

core and non-core values and, second, action meeting certain other minimal

moral standards.[171] By a temporal dimension, Brenkert means that "integrity is

not a momentary thing, but rather an ongoing cohesiveness regarding one's

values and actions over time."[172] Core values and actions evidenced for an

extended period of time constitute integrity. In addition, its motivational

dimension means being prepared "to speak truth to power."[173] This attribute is

seen when facing conflicts and threats. Finally, Brenkert explains the social

dimension as being known, tested, and manifested in social situations with

others.[174] Thus, Brenkert defines integrity as something "realized in relations

with others and not simply by oneself."[175]

   Benjamin states the importance of integrity in the organizational

environment as involving "a great deal of interdependence and requiring a high

degree of coordination among those who compose them."[176] Leaders must have

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[171] Brenkert, 99-100.

[172] Ibid., 100.

[173] Ibid.

[174] Ibid., 101.

[175] Ibid.

[176] Benjamin, 53.

integrity in order to create and promote a "climate that can strengthen the

relationships and reputations on which their [organization's] success

depends."[177]

## *Accountability/Integrity in the Bible*

Considering accountability among Christians, Christ's second command

to love one's neighbor as one's self[178] should be the foundation of all thoughts on

human relationships. As God's creatures, human beings must guard their

relationship with their Creator. Likewise, they must also guard their

relationships with those around them. Accountability toward others begins with

this understanding. Francis A. Schaeffer, founder of the L'Abri community,

asserts that demonstration of this accountability is a Christian's calling: "[we are]

to show that there is a reality in personal relationship, and not just words about

it."[179] Thus, mutual accountability reflects a healthy personal relationship.

Loss of this accountability between two fellow believers is, therefore,

abnormal and evidence of fallenness in sin. Seeing this abnormality in believers'

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[177] Lynn Sharp Paine, "Managing for Organizational Integrity," *Harvard Business Review*, 72:2 (March/April 94): 106.

[178] Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 19:19.

[179] Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality: How to Live for Jesus Moment by Moment* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2011), 135.

relationships, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, German Lutheran pastor and theologian, wonders:

> Why is it that it is often easier for us to confess our sins to God than to a brother? God is holy and sinless, He is a just judge of evil and the enemy of all disobedience. But a brother is sinful as we are. He knows from his own experience the dark night of secret sin. Why should we not find it easier to go to a brother than to the holy God?[180]

Bonhoeffer states that "only the brother under the Cross" can be accountable to another fellow believer because such a person who has realized "the dreadfulness of his sin that nailed Jesus to the Cross" understands his duty toward fellow believer.[181]

Accountability is, therefore, mutual responsibility or answerability. When the Apostle Paul entreats Euodia and Syntyche in Philippians 4, both are urged toward reconciliation in the Lord because each one is responsible for the other; the offender is responsible for repentance while the offended is responsible for initiation of reconciliation process with gentleness and love, then, for forgiveness.

In short, the core of biblical teaching on accountability is the fact that the Triune God stands in the center of all conflict and reconciliation. Christians must

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[180] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), 115.

[181] Ibid., 118.

realize that their Lord equips the members of his household by his Word and

Spirit and enables them to be mutually accountable.[182]

## *Promoting Accountability/Integrity*

Guttman points out that establishing and promoting mutual

accountability among members of an organization requires efforts and skills.[183]

Six specific actions are listed by Guttman; first, "show how it is done," that is,

walk the talk; second, "invite feedback"; third, "admit your mistakes"; fourth,

"learn to depersonalize," meaning that treating people's comments as

depersonalized ideas rather than as personal attacks; fifth, "get help if you need

it"; and sixth, "relax and learn" from other members.[184] Steven Kerr, author of

*Integrity in Effective Leadership*, derives "Ten Commandments of Executive

Integrity" for promotion of accountability/integrity within an organization,

focusing on a slightly different perspective than that of Guttman; (1) tell the

truth, (2) obey the law, (3) reduce ambiguity, (4) show concern for others, (5)

accept responsibility for the growth and nurturing of subordinates, (6) practice

participation, not paternalism, (7) provide freedom from corrupting influences,

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[182] Poirier, 186.

[183] Guttman, 48.

[184] Ibid., 48-51.

(8) always act, (9) provide consistency across cases, and (10) provide consistency between values and actions.[185]

Kearns' "core principles of strategic management" is another useful approach for promotion of accountability and integrity.[186] Kearns suggests four essential steps. First, "looking backward" as making continual reference to the organization's mandate; second, "looking forward" with the organization's mission and values; third, "looking outward and inward" through the results of SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis; and last, "think strategically" in consideration of the organization's goals and objectives.[187]

Brenkert points to the implications of accountability/integrity. Affirming that integrity can "serve as a guide in the same manner that repeated experience makes it easier," Brenkert emphasizes that accountability and integrity can be taught in learning, first, about "conflicts of interests," second, "about various subtle influences that may compromise a person," and last, "a salutary learning experience."[188]

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[185] Steven Kerr, "Integrity in Effective Leadership," in *Executive Integrity: The Search for High Human Values in Organizational Life,* ed. Suresh Srivastva (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1988), 126-127.

[186] Kearns, 48.

[187] Ibid., 48-66.

[188] Brenkert, 105.

In sum, accountability is being mutually answerable and responsible. Accountability or integrity as the foundation of personal relationship makes every effort to confront and resolve a difference (or conflict) existing between two parties valid as much as possible. Therefore, understanding and promoting accountability corresponds to success of both individual leader and organization, especially in building up and keeping the organizational unity.

## Conflict Resolution

### *Introduction*

Various types and levels of conflict exist almost constantly in churches, and the effect is one of the major threats to church unity and pastoral ministry. Gregg L. Carter and Joseph F. Brynes, coauthor of *How to Manage Conflict in the Organization*, defines conflict as "tension, frustration, verbal or physical abuse, disagreement, incompatibility, annoyance, interference, or rivalry."[189] Since conflict cuts such a wide path, understanding what constitutes conflict and how it can be managed and resolved is essential for answering the issues and questions raised in this research.

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[189] Gregg L. Carter and Joseph F. Brynes, *How to Manage Conflict in the Organization*, 2nd ed. (New York: American Management Association, 2006), 2.

## *Definition and Nature of Conflict*

The literature defined conflict as interdependency between parties involved, differences in their needs and interests, and interference in accomplishing their goals. William A. Donohue and Robert Kolt, coauthor of *Managing Interpersonal Conflict*, write: "conflict … [is] a situation in which interdependent people express (manifest or latent) differences in satisfying their individual needs and interests, and they experience interference from each other in accomplishing these goals."[190] The short definition made by William H. Willimon, Professor of the Practice of Christian Ministry at Duke Divinity School, agrees, "Whenever two or more persons go after goals that they perceive to be mutually exclusive, whenever one person's needs collide with another's, conflict results."[191] Susan Heitler, a Denver clinical psychologist, defines conflict as "a situation in which seemingly incompatible elements exert force in opposing or divergent directions."[192] Thus, three basic givens emerge, which Jones points out:

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[190] William A. Donohue and Robert Kolt, *Managing Interpersonal Conflict* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992), 11.

[191] William H. Willimon, *Preaching About Conflict in the Local Church* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987), 10.

[192] Susan Heitler, *From Conflict to Resolution: Skills and Strategies for Individual, Couple, and Family Therapy* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1990), 5.

conflicts are, first, inevitable, and thus, expected;  second, sinful, thus, needing

resolution, and third, opportunities, thus, leadership mandated.[193]

Conflict "evokes tension," according to Heitler, "but not necessarily

hostility or fighting … does not necessarily connote argument or battle … may be

silent and unexpressed."[194] Peg Pickering, author of *How to Manage Conflict*,

describes its potential for numerous benefits to the parties involved.[195] Haugk

points out that conflict can develop with either creative or destructive results.[196]

When conflict is "destructive," it causes stress, pain, and discomfort,[197] let alone

broken relationships. On the other hand, Stephen W. Littlejohn and Kathy

Domenici, coauthors of *Engaging Communication in Conflict*, highlight the creative

side, describing conflict as an "opportunity to build rather than destroy

relationship."[198] Willimon concurs with this understanding and adds conflict's

"positive role to play in the life of a congregation."[199] Willimon adds that a

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[193] Jones, 490-620.

[194] Heitler, 5.

[195] Peg Pickering, *How to Manage Conflict: Turn All Conflicts into Win-Win Outcomes*, 3rd ed. (Franklin Lakes, NJ: Career Press, 2000), 3.

[196] Haugk, 31.

[197] Stewart Levine, *Getting to Resolution: Turning Conflict into Collaboration* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2009), 9.

[198] Stephen W. Littlejohn and Kathy Domenici, *Engaging Communication in Conflict: Systemic Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2001), 12.

[199] Willimon, 15.

church "in which there is a healthy amount of tension and conflict is a church alive."[200] Ken Sande and Ted Kober, coauthors of *Guiding People Through Conflict*, stress that it is important to help people see this nature of conflict.[201] However, it is undeniable that conflict, as Yperen observes, "reveals our faith and character: our willingness or refusal to be the body of Christ."[202] Therefore, Yperen concludes, all conflict in church "is always theological, never merely interpersonal."[203]

Kenneth E. Boulding, a British economist, describes the process between the beginning and the end of each conflict as having a life cycle: "it is conceived and born, it flourishes for a while, and then certain processes that are probably inherent in its own dynamic system eventually bring it to an end."[204] Among various terms and explanations describing this life cycle of conflict, the three stages presented by Pickering provides a good summary: Stage one – everybody concerns and disputes, Stage two – more significant challenges, and Stage three –

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[200] Ibid.

[201] Ken Sande and Ted Kober, *Guiding People Through Conflict* (Billings, MT: Peacemaker Ministries, 1998), 10.

[202] Yperen, 21.

[203] Ibid., 24.

[204] Kenneth E. Boulding, *Conflict and Defense: A General Theory* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), 307.

overt battles.[205] Whereas Donohue and Kolt break down the beginning stage into

two levels as "No Conflict" and "Latent Conflict,"[206] Marlin E. Thomas,

consultant in conflict resolution in Colorado, and Haugk agree with Donohue

and Kolt in elaborating the last stage of conflict level into two: "Fight/Flight" and

"Intractable."[207]

While emphasizing that all of the energy consumed in conflict will never

be recovered,[208] Stewart Levine, founder of Resolution Works, summarizes the

cost of conflict as follows:

- Direct cost with fees of lawyers and other professionals,
- Productivity cost as value of lost time,
- Continuity cost for loss of ongoing relationships including the "community" they embody, and
- Emotional cost as the pain of focusing on and being held hostage by our emotions.[209]

In sum, conflict is dynamic and never static, as Kenneth O. Gangel and

Samuel A. Canine, coauthors of *Communication and Conflict Management*, state.[210]

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[205] Pickering, 21-22.

[206] Donohue and Kolt, 12-13.

[207] Marlin E. Thomas, *Resolving Disputes in Christian Groups* (Winnipeg, MB: Windflower Communications, 1994), 29-30. Haugk, 33. Haugk's last level is titled as "Intractable Situations."

[208] Levine, 23.

[209] Ibid., 16-17.

[210] Kenneth O. Gangel and Samuel A. Canine, *Communication and Conflict Management* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1992), 170.

Therefore, the value of conflict lies in the possibility of bringing a constructive result for the parties involved. H. Newton Malony, professor at the Fuller Seminary, puts it in a plain language: "It's not as much *what* happens to you, as it is *how* you react to it."[211]

## *Types of Conflict*

When conflicts are viewed from an organizational perspective, they can be identifiable as either "structural" or "interpersonal" conflicts.[212] Speed Leas and Paul Kittlaus, coauthor of *Church Fights*, agree with Willimon in differentiating intrapersonal, interpersonal, and substantive conflicts.[213] Willimon defines these types.

> Intrapersonal conflict: the contest one has when different parts of the self compete with one another,
> Interpersonal conflict: personality differences that are not related primarily to issues, and
> Substantive conflict: disputes over facts, values, goals, and beliefs.[214]

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[211], H. Newton Malony, *Win-Win Relationships: 9 Strategies for Settling Personal Conflicts Without Waging War* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 43. Italics are in the original.

[212] Carter and Brynes, 3.

[213] Speed Leas and Paul Kittlaus, *Church Fights: Managing Conflict in the Local Church* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1973), 29; Willimon, 10.

[214] William H. Willimon, "Crisis and Conflict," in *Leadership Handbook of Management and Administration*, ed. James D. Berkley (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), Kindle e-book, chapter 16, location 4220.

This literature review is limited to examining interpersonal conflicts over differences between people and substantive conflicts.[215]

Another way of classifying conflict is to recognize its nature. Donohue and Kolt follow this classification method and divide conflict into constructive and destructive categories.[216] Some characteristics of each conflict type can be summarized as below:

- Constructive conflicts: interest-centered, open discussion, capable of bolstering interdependence, focused on flexible means for solving the dispute, and committed to accomplishing mutual goals.
- Destructive conflicts: needs-centered, focused on personalities, involved in power preservation, aimed at compromising interdependence, concentrated on narrowly defined goals and short-cut problem solving, and frequented by extended, uncontrolled escalation or avoidance cycles.[217]

## Definition of Conflict Resolution

Levine states that conflict resolution take cares of conflict so that there are no lingering aftereffects.[218] Agreeing with Levine's definition, Heitler emphasizes the end result of conflict resolution by referring to "the attainment of a solution that satisfies the requirements of all of the seemingly conflicting forces and

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[215] Leas and Kittlaus, 30-31; Carter and Brynes, 3, include "communication styles" as a cause of interpersonal conflict.

[216] Donohue and Kolt, 9-10.

[217] Ibid.

[218] Levine, 12.

thereby produces a feeling of closure for all participants."[219] The process of resolution, according to Heitler, aims to reduce a complex notion to a simpler form, to pass from dissonance to consonance, to settle the complication, and to make things decided.[220]

Levine adds that the increasing need for conflict resolution is rooted in the fragmented family structures and religious institutions that are no longer able to provide "an education of core values."[221] Yperen presents reconciliation in churches as a way of life, which resonates this view too.[222]

## *Conflict Resolution Approaches*

Reflecting the biblical teaching on resolving conflicts in church, Yperen highlights honest acceptance, open confession, and intentional addressing of "the underlying causes of church conflict" as the condition for God's restoration within the church.[223] Therefore, addressing the underlying causes is essential for restoring personal relationships.[224]

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[219] Heitler, 5.

[220] Ibid., 6.

[221] Levine, 14.

[222] Yperen, 22.

[223] Ibid., 13.

[224] Ibid., 24.

To attain a solution, several conflict resolution approaches can be considered. While the majority of the literature categorizes these approaches similarly, Carter and Brynes' five conflict resolution approaches represent the consensus. These approaches are avoiding, accommodating, compromising, forcing, and collaborating via principled negotiation.[225]

Avoiding means ignoring the problem in conflict. This approach takes place in relatively lower levels of tension by either one or both sides withdrawing from or postponing the conflict.[226] Carter and Brynes view this approach as "lose-lose," meaning neither side in conflict achieves any of the intended interests.[227] Pickering warns that repeatedly avoiding conflict will make the issue more complicated.[228]

When the accommodating approach is used, one side in the conflict gives in to appease or "oblige," as Pickering terms, the other side. Carter and Brynes explain that this approach is more likely to be used when one or both sides in the conflict regard their relationship important.[229] Pickering elaborates further on its

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[225] Carter and Brynes, *How to Manage Conflict*, 4; Pickering, *How to Manage Conflict*, 35, for example, introduces five "styles" such as "avoiding concern for others, dominating, compromise, obliging, and collaborating."

[226] Carter and Brynes, 112.

[227] Ibid., 9.

[228] Pickering, 23.

[229] Carter and Brynes, 5.

usefulness when one side is "unsure of a position or fears a mistake has been made."[230] Together with avoiding approach, accommodating is considered as "passive management style."[231]

In the compromising approach, two sides in the conflict meet somewhere in the middle, and thus, mutuality increases, and the problem is minimized. On the other hand, when both sides are wrong, it fails.[232] When dealing with a complicated issue where both sides seek a quick solution, the compromising approach is even more ineffective. Pickering also points out that using a facilitator can be difficult, if that person can be accused of favoritism.[233] Carter and Brynes describe the difference between facilitation and mediation; while the focus of the former lies on communication and keeping the protocol for resolution, the latter concerns with the substance of the conflict for solving the conflict.[234]

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[230] Pickering, 37.

[231] Ibid., 56.

[232] Ibid., 40.

[233] Ibid., 41.

[234] Carter and Brynes, 18.

When forcing is used to end a conflict, one side in the conflict dominates the resolution process and demands the other side to give in. This approach is effective to draw a relatively quick solution and end the conflict.

The collaborating approach can make both sides in conflict "winners."[235] By collaborating, both sides focus on shared goals rather than problems through which all parties can meet their needs. This approach works effectively with complex issues but requires some creative problem-solving. Although Carter and Brynes recognize collaborating as the best approach whenever possible,[236] Pickering notes that collaborating usually becomes fruitless when people and problem are not clearly separated, and both sides want to fight.[237]

Carter and Brynes introduce principled negotiation as a method of collaborating which "requires that conflicts be resolved on the merits of the issues involved."[238] The simple format of principled negotiation begins with searching for and attaining mutual benefits but, in case of failure, moves on to the next step which is to follow "fair standards" in making decisions. To attain a

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[235] Ibid., 7.

[236] Ibid., 21.

[237] Pickering, 36.

[238] Carter and Brynes, 21.

"wise agreement," the goal of principled negotiation, some useful tactics are

introduced by Carter and Brynes as below:

> - Separating people from issues,
> - Focusing on interests, not positions,
> - Inventing options for mutual gain,
> - Using objective standards of fairness,
> - Having alternatives to a collaborative agreement,
> - Degree to which each party is knowledgeable, and
> - Willingness to communicate.[239]

In association with the above approaches, consideration of Tripp's four steps for

confronting process will maximize their effect; they are (1) consideration of the

fellow believer, (2) confession of one's sin, (3) consideration of the believer's

commitment to God, and (4) observance of change.[240]

It is important not to lose sight of the key elements for success, as Malony

explains, such as the collaborator's ability to "keep control of the process, clarity

as to where one is in the process, and the group's belief that the process will help

it accomplish its goals."[241]

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[239] Ibid., 22.

[240] Tripp, 3554-3698.

[241] Malony, 157.

*Developing and Managing Relationships in Conflict Resolution*

Since church conflicts are caused more by frayed personal relationships

than by insufficient structural issues, conflict resolution requires skills in

building and managing relationships. Building relationships is especially

important, according to Tripp, since every congregation is made up of forgiven

and renewed sinners. Tripp provides further background:

> The church is … a conversion, confession, repentance, reconciliation,
> forgiveness, and sanctification center, where flawed people place their
> trust in Christ, gather to know and love him better, and learn to love
> others as he has designed. The church is messy and inefficient, but it is
> God's wonderful mess – the place where he radically transforms hearts
> and lives.[242]

Gangel and Canine state the main problem in relationships.

> Whenever we reduce all options to a clear either-or outcome, a
> relationship runs a high risk of being broken. … Tragically, both [parties]
> continue to believe that "truth" resides with each of their personal
> positions. [Cases] like this can be multiplied over and over. The individual
> issues may change, but the process continues on.[243]

Wayne A. Mack and Dave Swavely, coauthors of *Life in the Father's House*, add

another cause of interpersonal problems by identifying three typical failures the

offended people usually show: retaliation, inaction, and unwise confrontation.[244]

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[242] Tripp, 116.

[243] Gangel and Canine, 148-149.

[244] Wayne A. Mack and Dave Swavely, *Life in the Father's House: A Member's Guide to the Local Church*, revised and expanded ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2006), 197-201.

To resolve such problems, the underlying causes, not the symptoms, need to be treated.[245]

As soon as the existence of a conflict is identified, at least three decisions need to be made. First, should the conflict be confronted? Pointing out that happily married couples tend to confront rather than avoid conflict, Donohue and Kolt state, "in general, confrontation works better than avoiding conflict."[246] However, confrontation should be weighed by the importance of relationship. Donohue and Kolt explain, "Confrontation will help the relationship if both people value it because the confrontation tends to clarify important feelings and issues dividing parties."[247] Some questions suggested by Donohue and Kolt help the confronter for this decision:

- Is the issue significant to you and worthy of confrontation?
- Do you feel the problem threatens your personal needs to some extent?
- Do you perceive that the other person will resist your attempts to discuss the problem or take it seriously?[248]

The next decision is when to confront the conflict. An effective plan includes wise timing, and emotions and time pressures are the two important

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[245] Yperen, 28.

[246] Donohue and Kolt, 27.

[247] Ibid.

[248] Ibid., 157-158.

timing considerations.[249] When the emotions of either side remains tense,

confronting would be less effective, if not counterproductive. Some helpful

questions are as follows:

- Do you want to preserve or strengthen the relationship with the other person?
- Can you avoid becoming verbally aggressive during conflict?
- Are you ready to listen to the other's position?
- Can both parties control their emotions well enough to listen to each other?
- Is the situation free from distractions so you can discuss important issues?[250]

The last decision addresses methodology. In addition to selecting effective

approach types, constructive management skills should be considered as well.

Such skills suggested by Pickering include encouraging equal participation,

listening actively, taking time to step back, differentiating fact from opinion, and

focusing on the problem rather than on people.[251] Therefore, while aiming to

increase ownership of the conflict by sharing responsibility between two parties,

the confronter actively listens to assure building relationship and searching for a

better solution. Taking time to step back usually separates fact from opinion, and

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[249] Ibid., 34-36.

[250] Ibid., 158-159.

[251] Pickering, 49-54.

thus, keeps the focus on the problem rather than on people. [252] Levine's "Attitude

of Curiosity and Discovery" points out some helpful relational skills.

1. Respect for everyone and his or her viewpoint,
2. Sincerity and open-mindedness in listening,
3. Integrity – trustworthiness and fairness,
4. Dignity and clarity that you will do well for everyone,
5. Authenticity and candor in communication,
6. Knowing you have a path to an answer, not the answer,
7. Confidence that the resolution will be discovered,
8. Centeredness when others lose their control, and
9. Humor and tranquility. [253]

If a sense of relational distance or unsolved matter in conflict remains,

Jones suggests seeking third-party counsel. [254] In this way, a church that knows

the nature of conflict and how to respond to problems in a biblical and faithful

manner, according to Sande and Kober, will benefit substantially because:

- The witness of the church is preserved,
- Erring believers are restored to fellowship and usefulness,
- Families are strengthened and protected from [problems],
- Members and staff enjoy better relationships and more productive activities,
- Ministry resources (time, energy and money) are protected from waste, and
- God is glorified as people witness his power and love in concrete ways. [255]

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[252] Ibid., 52-53.

[253] Levine, 110.

[254] Jones, 1799.

[255] Sande and Kober, 44.

## *The Importance of Communication in Conflict Resolution*

The literature agrees that communication is a critical element in conflict resolution. Explaining the interpersonal communication gap caused by poor communication, Pickering notes that "communication can be a major problem," and "many issues could be resolved if only communication was improved."[256] To Littlejohn and Domenici, communication is "more than a tool" as it "constitutes the environment in which all human action takes place."[257] Donohue and Kolt say that "communication skill differences become a real problem when parties try to confront their conflicts constructively"; therefore, it is essential for people "to listen to others, develop proposals, and bargain about interests."[258] Pickering agrees and states that communication failure is the cause of every conflict.[259]

Littlejohn and Domenici present "dialogue" as a way to honor "relationship above individual perspectives, positions, and interests."[260] Aiming to promote mutual understanding on perspectives and experiences, dialogue

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[256] Pickering, 63. Pickering explains that 93 percent of communication is nonverbal and only 7 percent is verbal which could work negatively toward reducing any interpersonal gap in communication.

[257] Littlejohn and Domenici, 15.

[258] Donohue and Kolt, 29.

[259] Pickering, 63.

[260] Littlejohn and Domenici, 26.

explores the rules of communication and then changes them according to

contextual needs. For example, instead of employing a common rule in

communication, an alternative rule can be selected and used. In this process,

meaning in context can be shared with others or a new context can be explored to

create a positive result. Also, differences and common ground between the two

parties can be explored through dialogue.

However, dialogue inheres some safety risks such as unfamiliar forms of

communication and self-disclosure.[261] Shifting from familiar defensive

mechanisms in communication such as blaming and persuasion to a

collaborative problem-solving setting may be difficult.

Some suggestions made by Littlejohn and Domenici help establish a safe

environment for people to easily transition into and benefit from dialogue.

- Think consciously about time and place,
- Provide a structure [that is, game rules] that feels safe,
- Solicit agreements on the discussion ground rules,
- Promote good facework [that is, one's feeling of being honored and respected],
- Respond to willingness and felt need,
- Find a shared level of comfort,
- Leave an out [that is, having a right to pass without answering],
- Use a facilitator [that is, a third party's involvement on tough issues], and
- Maintain impartiality.[262]

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[261] Ibid., 28-29.

[262] Ibid., 29-39. The words in brackets are supplied by the researcher to clarify the originals.

Often asking good questions can be overlooked but, when employed, learning

the person and the problem in conflict will be enhanced.[263] Littlejohn and

Domenici also say, suggest "appreciative questions" as a powerful tool for

identifying the positive energy driving a negative situation:

> When people tell us that they were insulted, we might ask them to tell us
> how they would like to be treated. … We like to think that there is always
> a "wisdom in the whining." When people are being very negative, they
> are really telling you something quite positive. You have to listen carefully
> and bring it to the surface with a good, well-timed appreciative
> question.[264]

Carter and Brynes suggest seven recommendations for becoming a better

communicator.

1. Empathize: you must be able to put yourself in the other party's shoes,
2. Be slow to interrupt: you must know when it is appropriate and how
   to avoid it when it's not,
3. Avoid loaded questions: especially those that make value judgments,
   assume too much, or are based on stereotypes,
4. Be credible,
5. Control your body and your body language,
6. Control the interaction space, and
7. Control your clothes.[265]

The literature agrees that every word employed in communication should

aim to achieve a constructive result. Tripp provides some good biblical

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[263] Ibid., 38.

[264] Ibid., 42.

[265] Carter and Brynes, 26-27.

guidelines; first, the destructive power of words needs to be recognized;[266]

second, speaking words should serve others in love;[267] and third, speaking

words should aim to restore.[268]

## Summary of Literature Review

This chapter has reviewed literature that explores how pastors may apply

the corrective church discipline principle as given in Matthew 18:15-20. The

literature areas reviewed were (1) theological doctrine on church discipline, (2)

church discipline principle given in Matthew 18:15-20, (3) accountability in

relationships, and (4) conflict resolution.

Literature on theological doctrine on church discipline examined the

foundational understanding of church discipline through exploring both

preventive and corrective discipline.

Literature on the church discipline principle given in Matthew 18:15-20

examined the corrective side of church discipline. The section studied steps one

to three, followed by another section on the, "church's binding and loosing."

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[266] Galatians 5:15.

[267] Galatians 5: 13-14.

[268] Galatians 6: 1-2; David Paul Tripp, *War of Words: Getting to the Heart of Your Communication Struggles* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2000), 201-213.

The next literature review area was accountability in relationships, and relationship skills were examined. Successful implementation of all steps in corrective church discipline was found to be closely related to accountability.

The final area of literature review covered conflict resolution. Defining what constitutes conflict and how it needs to be managed and resolved in order to achieve restoration of disrupted church unity was evaluated.

However, this literature review could not cover material in which pastors combined and applied all the above, especially in the process of church disciplinary actions. A qualitative research would be needed for such an expanded topic.

# Chapter Three. Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors' understanding of the corrective church discipline principle given in Matthew 18:15-20 shapes their actions. The study assumed that learning takes place in the context of ministry. Therefore, a qualitative study was proposed to encompass several points of view of those with years of experiences handling cases of church discipline, especially cases for corrective discipline.

## Design of the Study

The research design of this study followed a qualitative approach. Sharan B. Merriam, a professor at the University of Georgia, in her popular text, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, defines a qualitative method as an understanding of "the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the

world."[269] She also writes, "the focus is on process, understanding, and meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive."[270] In this study, then, utilizing the qualitative method provided the researcher the opportunity to learn from these pastors and their experiences as pastors in the Australian Presbyterian Church.

## Participant Sample Selection

In selection of six interview participants, the following criteria were applied, utilizing "purposive sampling" [271] ; first, ordained pastors of the Presbyterian Church of Australia (PCA), who are knowledgeable of the Scriptures; second, who have a minimum of seventeen years' experience in pastoral ministry; third, who are currently engaged in ministerial duties that include preaching and teaching along with counseling and pastoral visitation; and lastly, who have experienced multiple disciplinary cases during the period of their ordained

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[269] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 13.

[270] Ibid., 14.

[271] Ibid., 77.

pastoral ministry. These participants were interviewed following the interview protocol listed below.

## Data Collection

Data was collected using interviews based on the critical incidents method. The interviews were conducted in person and recorded with a digital recorder. A semi-structured interview protocol was used. A set of predetermined questions was utilized, but in real interviews much freedom was allowed in questioning and answering to promote a natural environment for the interviewees to share their experiences.

The following questions will serve as the interview protocol:

1. Tell me about how you understand the principle of church discipline presented in Matthew 18:15-20.

2. What discrepancy do you see, if there is any, between the principle you understand from Matthew 18:15-20 and the reality in ministry?

3. Which stage among the three stages Matthew 18:15-20 presents was the most rewarding or challenging in your experience and why is that so?

4. To what extent did you apply the biblical principle of corrective discipline to the disciplinary cases you experienced?

5. Tell me about a time when you felt you had reached an impasse in your dealing with disciplinary cases.

6. Tell me about how you overcame such difficult moments and challenges.

7. Tell me about how you evaluate the effects of your dealing with disciplinary cases on your congregation.

8. What advice would you give to the less experienced pastors seeking to be effective in dealing with disciplinary cases?

Finally, soon after each interview was completed, a careful transcription was completed.

## Data Analysis

The researcher studied and interpreted the data using the constant comparative method, which Merriam explains as "comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences." [272] The constant comparative method, therefore, helped the researcher analyze each segment of interviews, compare it with others to identify patterns constituting the conclusions reached.

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[272] Ibid., 30.

## Researcher Position

By nature of qualitative research, the researcher was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. This agency means that an end result of a study could have been influenced by the perspective, bias, and assumptions of the researcher. Thus, it was important to employ "critical self-reflection by the researcher regarding assumptions, worldview, biases, theoretical orientation, and relationship to the study that may affect the investigation."[273]

## Study Limitations

Due to limited resources and time, the research was done by interviewing six pastors engaged in pastoral ministry within the bounds of the Presbyterian Church of Australia. The interview group analysis was, therefore, not necessarily universally applicable to all times and situations.

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[273] Ibid., 229.

# Chapter Four.  Data Report and Analysis

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors' understanding of the corrective church discipline principle given in Matthew 18:15-20 shaped their actions. It was important to learn about the participants in the study and the experience in their ministry. Accordingly, the three research questions were framed to guide the study:

1.  How do pastors understand the principle of church discipline given in Matthew 18:15-20?

2.  How do pastors apply their understanding of the principle of church discipline given in Matthew 18:15-20 to their resolution cases in need of disciplinary action?

3.  How do pastors evaluate the effects of their application of church discipline principle upon their congregations?

In this chapter, the six participants of the study are introduced and their insights concerning the study questions are explored. In addition, some

recommendations made by these participants for young and inexperienced pastors are summarized.

## Introductions to Participants

For this study, six pastors who have been serving in pastoral ministry for more than seventeen years were interviewed. Although all participants serve in the Presbyterian Church of Australia, they had various pastoral experiences. Some have ministered to churches in different countries, and others have pastored in more than two denominations in Australia or in different types of ministries when serving only in the Presbyterian Church of Australia (PCA). The names of the participants have been changed in order to protect their identities.

These participants will be introduced in alphabetical order.

Alex has the most diverse experience in pastoral ministry, with over twenty-six years as the senior pastor in local pastoral charges and, in at other times, as a pastor visiting several churches and people in a regional pastoral area, in addition to serving in two reformed denominations in two countries.

Barry has served in two Presbyterian denominations over his twenty-six-years in ministry, and his position has expanded from serving as a pastor in local churches to denominational office bearer, counselling, and chaplaincy.

Colin has also ministered to two reformed denominations in two countries with experiences in teaching at Bible seminaries, preaching at local

congregations, and various positions in committees in his twenty years in ministry.

Dave has served in pastoral ministry for seventeen years at several local churches of two reformed denominations in two countries.

For over eighteen years in ministry, Evan has served in the PCA as the senior pastor for several congregations in a relatively smaller region compared to other pastors interviewed. But his ministry experience includes multicultural ministries alongside ministering to English-speaking congregations.

Frank has served the PCA for twenty-eight years as the senior pastor of several local congregations in rural to urban centers, in church planting, and in established churches. He has taught at Bible colleges and supervised a federal denominational body of the PCA for many years.

Each of these participants has contributed their wisdom in addition to their deep understanding of the Scriptures. Also, each participant has shared with the researcher their invaluable insight into the subject of this study based on their different, if not unique, ministerial backgrounds ranging over four Reformed/Presbyterian denominations in three different countries.

## Understanding of Church Discipline Principle

The first research question investigated how pastors understand the principle of church discipline given in Matthew 18:15-20. The participants' responses fell into six areas according to the given text: definition and purpose of church discipline, preventive and corrective discipline as two natures of discipline, three disciplinary steps presented in the given text, and church's binding and loosing.

### *Definition and Purpose of Church Discipline*

When asked to identify how the participants understand the definition and the purpose of church discipline, most of the participants showed a thorough comprehension of the subject. One participant explained church discipline as a consistent command of God for his church in both testaments. Looking at the teaching of Matthew 18:15-20, Barry acknowledged, "The Lord is building on an Old Testament principle which is Leviticus 19:17 which says, 'You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him.'" Three pastors concurred when they emphasized the need to view and interpret the given text of Matthew 18:15-20 in the context of the whole chapter of Matthew 18 where Jesus taught his disciples about humility in verses 1-6, faith against temptations in verses 7-9, the Father's

will for saving a lost sheep in verses 10-14, the frequency to forgive a brother in

verses 21-22, and the closing parable of the unforgiving servant in verses 23-35.

Dave noted:

> Obviously, it is in the context of Jesus talking about community. . . what the church community supposed to be about. Talking about humility, you have to come in with faith like child. So, we need to have a sensitivity in how we deal with each other. He is talking about offenses, talking about warning offenses. He is saying in the context here how serious sin is. And sin has to be dealt with in the church community. Then he talks about the lost sheep which I think is very important in the context what this Matthew 18 and church discipline is all about.

Church discipline is, according to these pastors, about how to maintain

community. Evan, whose ministry has been multicultural, commented that

Matthew 18 was about love for fellow church members. Dave pointed out that

church discipline was for "sheep within the fold." Alex agreed and added, "I see

church discipline as God's remedy for his church" against temptations and sins.

Alex asserted that church discipline was "logical to settling matters and designed

for heavy issues such as sin against God than trivial things." He added,

"Discipline is, therefore, something anyone would and can only prayerfully

approach." Dave concluded, "We think 'problem,' but God's plan through

church discipline is 'unity of his church.'"

One pastor, however, expressed that he had not thought about the

seamless teaching of the Bible on the subject of church discipline. Although he

interpreted church discipline principle in the New Testament as a substitute for the Old Testament "civil law," the main permeating principle in two "rules" was one, that is, keeping God's church pure before God.

All participants identified one chief purpose of church discipline, namely, to win a brother found in sin back to Christ through repentance. Two aspects of this chief purpose were specified by five participants, but the one who did not directly mention these aspects implied the same in his further comments. The two aspects, or "double purpose" as described by two participants, of church discipline are, first, protection and guidance for the flock and, second, purging evil from the church. Frank, whose ministry experience ranges from church planting to supervising a federal body of the PCA, described these aspects as "showing a better way and restraining/containing evil."

Identifying the roles of pastors, all participants agreed that pastors were "under-shepherds" called to carry out discipline among God's flock under their care. Dave commented:

> It is about us being given the job from the Chief Shepherd Jesus to go as under-shepherds to care about the flock as best we can. Also, most of all, pursue people that have been hurt by sin. We have to keep the foundation when it comes to church discipline.

In short, all the participants clearly and thoroughly comprehended the definition and the purpose of church discipline. All agreed that church discipline

is a weighty command of God for his church and that pastors are called to carry

it out.

*Preventive and Corrective Church Discipline*

Although all of the pastors interviewed identified the two goals of church

discipline as explained earlier, protection and guidance for the flock and purging

evil from the church, not all seemed to identify church discipline's two functions,

preventive and corrective discipline.

Colin, substituted "positive" for preventive and "negative" for corrective

discipline, and explained both areas extensively. Regarding positive discipline,

he said:

> Some discipline is positive. Prayer is positive discipline; we commit
> certain times of day. Reading the Scriptures each day is positive discipline;
> even preparing sermon is positive discipline for us. So, they are positive
> discipline. Discipline is simply something that we order in our lives, and it
> may be fruitful.

Dave agreed in his understanding of the preventive side of discipline with Colin

when he elaborated, "As the Lord leads his people, discipline takes place and

corrects them by his word. Then, that is being disciplined by God privately."

Alex described preventive discipline as something that used to be an

important part of "traditional" understanding of church discipline. Traditionally,

church discipline started, as Alex continued, from preaching of the word. Colin

admitted the same, saying:

> Sometimes we hear the sermon, and it convicts us. Sometimes I preach the sermon, and I am convinced. That conviction can come not because of someone's accusation; it can certainly does come by the power of the Holy Spirit anyway.

Alex further explained how preventive side of discipline interrelated with

corrective discipline through initiating and influencing the latter.

> The sinner that we know will be exposed to the word of God in the first incident. The preaching of the word itself is a form of discipline which is public. Then, it goes into interpersonal. That "sin against" in Matthew 18:15 is probably with your knowledge of the word. Your brother sins against you is not just he made you feel bad. When he sins against me is when I know that he is up on with doing things that are against the word. It is not against my person, but God. So, goes the offended to the offender based on God's word.

Flowing seamlessly from the preventive side of discipline, the

foundational principle for corrective discipline is Matthew 18:15-20, as

recognized by all participants. Along with this, four participants raised some

other sections of the Bible that taught corrective side of discipline, that is, 1

Corinthians 5 and Galatians 2:11-14 where Paul the Apostle corrected, first, the

Corinthian church for their wrongdoing with a church member who had

committed a sin of incest and, second, Peter the Apostle for his wrong actions

toward Gentiles in public. All four of the pastors pointed out these occasions as clear examples of corrective discipline commanded to God's church.

Colin laid out the foundational basis of "no evidence, no discipline." Neither "policing," Colin continued, or an act of active and willing search for a believer's sin, is itself another sin. Frank reminded the researcher of the mandate given in both testaments for the validity of any accusation, namely, evidence of two or three witnesses.[274] Another insight made by Evan was about the need for "checks and balances." He called attention to human fallibility as the reason for multiple checks.

All of the participants were aware of the significance of the procedural requirements of Matthew 18:15-20. Colin described the principle of making the circle of people involved as small as possible as the "overriding" principle of church discipline. Dave reckoned this principle as a result of the confidentiality implied in the context of Matthew 18 and other parts of the Bible, for example, 2 Corinthians 12:19-20, which commands abstinence from gossiping. Therefore, Dave pointed out that this "overriding" principle of church discipline needed to be upheld as long as possible.

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[274] Note Numbers 35:30 and Hebrews 10:28.

In sum, although most participants did not clearly identify the two functions of church discipline with the terms "preventive" and "corrective" discipline, their understanding of these concepts was biblical and mostly accurate.

## *Step One: "Go and Tell Him"*

Obviously, all participants started with the importance of the step one, "Go and tell your brother," based on two facts they observed and concluded over their long experience in pastoral ministry. First, most of the troubles, if not all, in any local congregation could be resolved if the principle of the first step as presented in Matthew 18:16 were followed; second, most church members have either misunderstood or denied the effectiveness of the principle of the first step, and thus, have missed its benefit. Dave explained how a faithful execution of going and telling a fellow church member deals with the root of the problem.

> The first step goes both ways. It could be just a brother sins against you, and you have not realized too that you have sinned against him. But the point is overall being sensitive to the fact that sin causes a problem between me and my brother. So, instead of being in denial about the problem or going to other people to talk about it, which is gossip, simply take courage and carry this out. The first step would preclude a lot of other problems if people actually followed the Bible.

Barry saw this as a repetition of the Old Testament command of Leviticus 19:17, "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him."

Four participants emphasized that it was the responsibility of neither pastors nor anyone other than the offended church member to go to talk to the fellow believer who had offended him. The rest of the participants simply noted this responsibility as fact. When asked, Evan replied that, if he were asked by a church member to carry out the step one in church discipline on that member's behalf, he would, first, advise the member to carry out the responsibility and, second, help examine whether the same sin was present in the offended party.

Barry commented that prayer is an important preparation the offended should consider before meeting the offender in sin to resolve the problem. The offended should seek especially the Lord's intervention for the right circumstances and a receptive heart for the offender. Then, the actual meeting must be a face-to-face meeting. Barry dissuaded any telephone calls, email contact, or use of any social network service because neither is a face-to-face encounter and is also potentially dangerous for resolving the problem. The attitude of the accuser toward the accused must not be judgmental or seen as right but should aim for restoration of the impaired relationship. On this point, Colin noted, "The accuser is an instrument of the Spirit to bring conviction for

the purpose of repentance." Therefore, as Barry pointed out, the accuser must go to the offender in a loving manner as stated in Proverbs 27:6, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." The question of timing was also raised by Barry. He emphasized that leaving the matter too long would change the whole aspect of restoration because of natural forgetfulness and the unavailability of the accused.

All of the six pastors agreed and emphasized that having a private meeting would give a maximum opportunity to the offender to repent and be restored since a private meeting often made such confession much easier and safer. Then Barry noted that, according to the teaching of James 5:19-20, once the problem was resolved, the concerned parties are never to reopen it with anyone as "covering a multitude of sins"[275] of the repentant believer.

The participants observed some problems in application of this step. The most significant problem was people's wrong attitude toward the first step of church discipline. Dave observed people's unnecessary fear toward problems:

> Sometimes we think that we are going to cause more problems if we open it up and start talking to the one who sinned against us about it. But in the Apostle Paul's case of confronting another apostle, that is, Peter, unity came out of it. And a lot of times, we tend to think that "I do not want to do this, let everybody know and pray for him."

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[275] 1 Peter 4:8.

Alongside the unnecessary fear, Evan recognized that some people's

misunderstanding of the meaning of "loving sinners" hindered people from

going to their brothers in sin. Explaining the absolute need for confronting sin

and the brother in sin, Evan remarked:

> I often hear people say, "We have to love the sinner and hate the sin." But
> if you follow the Old Testament and what is coming at the judgment, God
> actually hates the sinner. In that sense, the psalmist grieves and hates
> those people who grieve God.

Dave added people's pride as another wrong attitude toward the need for

confrontation. Warning people for their "rationalizing" God's command, Dave

explained clearly what they were doing.

> I wonder whether there is a lot of pride there too. But God said, "You two
> come together and I am going to be there with you." He means that two of
> you gather and pray and you can work this problem out. People just do
> not trust God to ask, "Help us work this out." We would rather get
> somebody in our corner than to believe that God has saved this brother
> and he saved me and we actually have unity. I think we do not trust in
> that, thinking, "No, no, it is just not going to work out."

Because of this, Dave continued, some people, including even those who were

willing to carry out church discipline, tried to skip the first step of Matthew

18:15-20 and go directly to the second step.

In sum, all participants had a good grasp of the first step of church

discipline given in Matthew 18:15. A number of insightful observations emerged

from the participants' extended ministry experience.

*Step Two: "Take One or Two Others"*

Whereas a consensus was found in the participants' comprehension of the general matters of the second step of church discipline, some slightly different views on some details of this process existed among pastors. Therefore, their general understanding of the second step will be explored first, and then, some differences with the details of taking one or two witnesses will be introduced.

The nature of step two, "take one or two others along with you," means, according to Dave, that the problem could not be resolved between two brothers. Instead of withdrawing from this difficulty, and thus giving up solving problem, advancing to the next step is necessary to deal with "a real sin," as Dave recognized. Evan asserted that avoiding and not dealing with the matter was not helping the brother in sin in his life in the Lord.

With the question of who may be qualified for "one or two witnesses," all of six pastors agreed to inclusion of elders for this role. Four participants reflected Galatians 6:1 as this view's scriptural basis: "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness." Barry viewed Matthew 18:18 as meaning elders, whereas Dave thought that while elders should be involved, the text was unclear about elder's involvement in this step. Alex factored in effectiveness, commenting that elders' involvement would "promote the benefit of the whole process."

Yet, all five of the interviewees consented that non-elders could also be asked to go together with the accuser for resolution of any problem if they satisfied this qualification of "more spiritual." Alex qualified his understanding as meaning any non-elder be involved in this process should be "trustful" and "against whom nothing was said or done with the person who is wrong." Colin's understanding of these witnesses' qualification was based on "familiar" relationship with the accuser only as he saw their relationship with the accused was not "particularly noteworthy."

The researcher asked the participants where the witnesses could be drawn from. In reply, Colin commented that the Scripture was not clear on that matter. Having said, Colin suggested, instead of normal witnesses, occasional introduction of conciliators or facilitators in this step or possibly as an "intermediate step" between steps two and three might be helpful. Although Barry interpreted the text as elders for witnesses, he had a similar view to Colin in terms of having some "outsiders" with "professional ability" to deal with difficult and delicate problems in both pastoral and legal senses.

As for the function of the witnesses, Evan saw it as "two-sided," meaning, first, to provide "objectivity" to both the accuser and the accused along with "accountability" to the outcome of the meeting and, second, to provide protection to the accuser by checking the validity of his accusation against a

brother. Barry recalled the Old Testament principle reapplied here, namely, Proverbs 11:14 and 24:6, on the benefit of an abundance of counsellors.

All of the pastors agreed that if the accused realized his fault and repented, the relationship would be restored and the matter stopped there or "capped in private," as Evan remarked. Once again, confidentiality must be maintained throughout and after the close of a disciplinary process, and thus, all people involved should not reopen the matter with anyone. Otherwise, any person who reopens the matter, as affirmed by Alex, commits a sin of gossiping.

However, Evan shared that the end of step two did not always end with repentance and restoration of the relationship; rather, it usually ended with the accused deciding to no longer associate with the church. This unfortunate ending will be further discussed later under the section, "Discrepancies Between Teaching and Application."

During the interview, Barry raised an interesting point, that is, the possibility of dealing with an unbeliever in the process of church discipline. This possibility may take place in the previous step of one-on-one confrontation or in step two going with one or two others as witnesses. Barry's explanation of "encountering an unbeliever" noted the possible existence of a loophole if a church had granted membership to a person without proving his faith in the

Lord. Dealing with such an unbeliever who holds a full church membership

would require a different approach to the person. Barry observed:

> Dealing with an unbeliever, before coming to the public stage, if we feel
> that the person is unregenerate, I think, we would have to change the tact.
> If you are on one-on-one and the subject of salvation comes up, then, we
> have to urge that person to believe and be saved first and foremost to the
> Lord. How can you correct a person biblically … when they are not saved?

In short, all participants' understanding of the second step of

church discipline given in Matthew 18:16 was sound and their insightful

observation on such a matter as the scope of witnesses depending on the need of

each disciplinary case added practicality, reflecting their rich ministerial

experience.

## *Step Three: "Tell It to the Church"*

The most outstanding feature of this third step was the change of

discipline mode from sitting in a private room to standing at a public forum.

Evan reckoned this step as very difficult in both principle and practice. Dave

highlighted reluctance, since human nature which would automatically create

more problems and "antis," as he put, among the congregants. However, all

pastors acknowledged that this process had to be taken for the benefit of the

church and the impenitent brother.

Three participants commented on the necessity that sin be brought before the church, and some commented on the nature of sin. Dave asserted that a sin that had been an offense against another believer up to the end of step two turned into a "public sin" as the offender refused to repent. Unlike Dave, Alex categorized some sins as "grievous sins" and "hardened sins," which required public discipline. This "hardened sin" means a sin with "a pattern of no repentance" which corresponds to Dave's description of a sin once private, but then, through unrepentance of the offender, ended up as a public sin. Alex explained further, "This sin has been substantiated, and there is a disturbance in the unity of the body of Christ. It is only then you move on, and that is the procedure we have always tried to implement." Evan included any sin committed publicly by a church leader, for example, teaching a wrong doctrine in public, and asserted that such a sin would have to be confronted publicly rather than seeking to resolve it privately.

Dave emphasized that the nature of the goal was now changed from restoration of individual brother in sin to bringing the entire church back to Christ through leading them, first, to see their sin (or fallibility), second, to see the cross of Christ, and third, to realize their need to come back to Christ. Dave affirmed, "That is the goal of the coming before the public church. I do not take it

as the church making decision on what happened. It is about the entire church

coming back to Christ."

Being asked about their understanding of the entrusted body responsible

for examining and making a decision in the final step of church discipline, all

participants agreed and identified that the right and responsibility for this step

fell on the collective body of elders of the church, or session, which was

responsible for the spiritual matters of the local church. So, the elders would

make a decision and bring it to the church. Evan said that session's decision

communicated to the church could be a warning for everyone. Alex presented a

threefold function of elders in this regard: (1) to pick up the sinner, (2) to

acknowledge sin, and (3) to expose the hardness of heart. Pointing out 1

Corinthians 5 as the scriptural basis for this understanding, Evan stated:

> I can refer it to Paul when he talks about the son having his father's wife. Paul does not actually let them [the congregation of the Corinthian church] decide; he is actually telling them what to do. He leaves it up to them to do and, in that sense, that is how we would do it in the church.

Explaining the biblical teaching on vesting the elders with the right and

responsibility over church discipline matter on behalf of the congregation, Dave

proposed the most probable outcome if such right were given to a congregation.

> You cannot just let it be opened to whatever the congregation wants because if you bring the matter to the congregation and say what you want to do, then you are going to have people on sides. You are going to have them on one side or the other.

The researcher asked the pastors interviewed about the makeup of the congregation when the time came for the session, the body of elders, to inform the congregation of its final decision on a disciplinary case. Two participants expressed their understanding of "members only" in such a case. While Barry and Colin affirmed that the foundational principle of church discipline was to bring back an offender, the other four pastors simply implied this as they touched various areas of discipline during the interview. However, Barry pointed out that two reformed denominations in which he served used different applications of this principle; the previous denomination strictly observed "members only" principle whereas the present one allowed "adherents" alongside communicant members to be present and informed of the session's decision.

About the session's informing the congregation of its decision, two probable results were mentioned. On the one hand, the congregation enjoyed peace, joy, and spiritual growth over the restoration of relationship, but, on the other hand, there was a danger of opposition due to the congregation's lack of understanding of church discipline or poor communication between the session and the congregation. While the former case was praised by all participants, the danger of the latter was warned against, and four pastors suggested some considerations for such a case. Dave and Barry indicated the importance of the

timing in making an announcement and seeking the congregation's

understanding of the seriousness of the matter and willing submission to the

session's decision. Dave stated:

> Taking the brother in sin through this final step of church discipline could
> be taking place over a period of months. And you are increasing the
> "anti." You are going to make any necessary disciplinary actions upon
> him, say, rebuke or suspension from the communion table, and so on.
> Now, there is going to be a moment when people will have to know. And
> if you do not tell them; they will realize and say, "What is going on here?"
> Whatever it is, then, you just start up a lot of gossip and talk if you do not
> come out and let it out and let people know.

Both Evan and Alex suggested some ideas for how to let the congregation know

about the sin and the decision of the session. Both marked a "general approach"

as the nature of the announcement, giving only sufficient details of the matter,

yet, describing the seriousness of the sin and its effects. The second consideration

was the pastoral concern for the congregants, sharing gently yet humbly with

them the sadness of the situation and the sorrow elders had had for the

unrepentant brother. Alex specified that a thorough explanation of how much

prayer and effort the elders had made for the restoration of the brother would be

necessary and helpful for the situation. Evan added an interesting element, that

is, teaching of God's word.

> It really has to be done as a humble teaching of the word all the way
> through, teaching them that it is not what we [elders] want. So, do we
> want to just follow the way of this world or do we want to glorify God by
> obeying His command? So, to me, that is the beauty of the Scriptures; it is

not my personal view. I cannot say you are wrong because I personally believe it. If I can show you from the Scriptures that that is not God's way, then the problem is between you and God.

Two of the participants noticed the existence and role of the presbytery in the process of church discipline. Whether this denominational body, which is a higher church court to a local church session, could be regarded as a part of "the church" specified in Matthew 18:17, none of these participants were sure. Barry regarded the involvement of the presbytery in the disciplinary process as necessary, especially with some specific matters of a criminal nature, such as child abuse. Colin admitted its need in accordance with Presbyterian church polity that, when an accusation was made to a pastor, who was responsible to the presbytery rather than the session of the congregation he served, the matter was to be brought to the presbytery rather than the local session. With this distinction in mind, Colin concluded that Presbyterianism followed the basic ideas of Matthew 18:17 but in a slightly modified version.

Although not much was said when it came to treating the impenitent one as "a Gentile and a tax collector," all participants repeatedly affirmed one principle, namely, the aim of treating such a person was to bring him back to repentance, thus, to restoration. Therefore, the attendance of someone, who has previously been excommunicated, in various church activities as a non-member was regarded as something positive and encouraging.

In general, all participants were fully aware of the heaviness of the matter in the final step of church discipline especially for elders and pastors. The interviewees noted the importance of pastor's spiritual sensitivity throughout this step and emphasized the need for much prayer and working together with fellow elders on the session. Yet, the most important thing for the pastor always is, as Alex pointed out, the ultimate goal of all, namely, bringing the name of God his due glory through restoration of the believer in sin.

## *The Church's Binding and Loosing*

Only Dave made any clear comment on the teaching that the Lord's statement and promise for church's binding and loosing on earth will be the same in heaven and his sure presence in the midst of two or three gathered in the name of the Lord. The researcher acknowledged that absence of comments on this part of the church discipline as a sign of unclear understanding of the participants on this specific statement and promise. Dave briefly stated what this section means.

> The church does the whole thing of Matthew 18 with whatever you bind and whatever you loose, it will be bound and loosed in heaven also. A lot of times, we are taking that verse out of the context; but it is saying that, when you pray about restoration of the church community, there is God who works powerfully in that. So, we cannot leave out the importance of that part of prayer.

The participants' understanding of the principle of church discipline is generally thorough, although, with some details, some were unsure with an unclear part of the Bible text while others gave slightly different views. But the differences among the pastors were minimal, comparing to their good grasp of the three steps of corrective discipline.

## Application of Church Discipline Principle

The second research question asked how pastors applied their understanding of the principle of church discipline given in Matthew 18:15-20 to their resolution of church disciplinary cases. The participants' responses were summarized in three areas: benefits and problems of church discipline, discrepancies between teaching and application, and rewarding and challenging experience in application.

### *Benefits and Problems with Church Discipline*

Besides the ultimate benefit, namely, bring to the name of God his due glory, Alex stated that church discipline was good for the church and the sinner. For both, the realization of sin and its seriousness was counted as the most important benefit; then, having an opportunity for spiritual growth and mutual

edification was the second benefit mentioned by Alex. He also included the

benefit to pastors, as "shepherds" of God's flock.

> Where there is a people who might with stubbornness in their hearts end up in hell and you stand right there giving them a hand of rescue in the name of the Lord Jesus, I think it helps you [pastors] for your growth in leadership. When the shepherds understand what it means to see a sheep going astray, they can act out of love, out of concern, and, of course, of the love for the Lord and for his glory.

Regarding the problems in church discipline, all the pastors considered

people's reluctance as the biggest obstacle. Affirming that reluctance to cause

tension is human nature, Evan asserted that reluctance and avoidance of

confronting problems would result in more harm than the effect of the initial

offense. "Such is another sin," Evan added. Barry agreed with Evan and gave a

further explanation of why reluctance and avoidance were to be regarded as sins.

> If you leave a brother in sin, problem unresolved, your avoidance is going to affect in some ways the whole ministry because if our Lord is looking down here and he sees people at worship and he has got this sort of everyone has got a point on them. And there is this one against that one and that one against this one and everyone is against the pastor. How can you reasonably say that, when they start one-on-one conflict which may be exacerbated by the congregation, how can you say that there is going to be worship that is going to be spiritual and pleasing to God?

In sum, the benefits and problems of church discipline result from the

degree of obedience to God's command to go and begin talking to a brother in

sin. From this single obedience, conflict could be either blessing or curse.

*Discrepancies Between Teaching and Application*

In asking for any discrepancies, the researcher explored whether pastors had observed any gaps between their understanding of the church discipline principle and its reality in pastoral ministry. Six areas emerged from the replies: ignorance, lack of pastoral activities, disobedience, abuse of church discipline, a long process, and today's individualism.

First, all participants counted ignorance of church discipline principle as the first discrepancy. This problem included people's lack of understanding as well as their apathy toward the subject. Frank noted, "No matter how often you teach them, some people simply do not want to change their view and do not like the idea of making someone embarrassed or kicked out of church." Colin added people's misunderstanding of individual's responsibility as described in the step one and trying to hand their responsibility over to their pastors as a form of repeated ignorance.

Of course, any form of ignorance is a result of insufficient or ineffective pastoral activities in both teaching/preaching and pastoral care. Dave commented, "People do not really know the biblical steps. I think we preachers have failed on this sense or maybe not teaching people about church discipline enough." Frank questioned how much time and how often pastors taught this subject. On the other hand, Dave acknowledged the problem was caused by

insufficient pastoral care. "As elders, we're sometimes not aware of what is going on in people's lives. So, we do not do anything about it or people do not know us enough to be aware when they come to us. Sadly, this is what is going on."

The third discrepancy is people's disobedience, as Dave and Evan noted. Dave said that some elders seemed to content to act on their own understanding rather than follow God's principle, while many church members simply refused to obey the Lord, and thus, do not go to a church member in sin. He reckoned that human pride played an important role in people's disobedience, and thus, they lacked trust in God's promise. Not notifying a believer in disobedience often was caused by people's lack of commitment. Alex recalled his professor's comment, "In many cases, people are not walking away; they are already away." They move away from the church in any phase of church discipline – before, most likely, during, and, occasionally, after the process. Evan described it as "low view of church membership," which was a form of disobedience. Frank noted that due to people's lack of commitment, the session did not have enough opportunity to promote and reap the fruit of faithful implementation of biblical church discipline. Often, walking away from a disciplinary process, people disassociate from their original church and join another one.

Abuse of church discipline is another issue, according to three interviewees. Some elders abuse the principle as a form of "lording over" people

or a means of removing a personal enemy from the church. Abuse is not exclusively done by some in church leadership; any church member could abuse the system by trying to accuse another believer falsely and baselessly, according to Colin. Alex observed, "Because of their experience of abuse, some people just say, 'Let's not go there.'" In full agreement with Alex's view, Dave further elaborated people's response: "then people go to the other extreme. They just let people in and out and they can come and they can go – no discipline, having a 'mind your own business' mindset." While passive observance is a reaction to abuse of church discipline, antipathy toward ecclesiastical authority is a harmful reaction to abuse. Alex shared his experience of those who likely undermined authority by not submitting to the session and their elders' spiritual guidance.

Barry interestingly raised the long duration of church discipline process as a noticeable problem. Pointing out the importance of timing for visitation and meeting between the accuser and the accused or with one or two witnesses, he said that if the process were too long, the goal of restoration, along with the desire all parties began with, might dissipate. Occasionally, Barry claimed, Presbyterianism's high view on sufficient checks and balances may work against the effective carrying out of church discipline.

The last discrepancy raised is today's individualism. Frank commented on the attitude, effect, and result of individualism in people's life.

Due to today's individualism, people can be very prickly, and if there is any kind of guidance or correction given, often what they do is they just move on and leave the church. So, there is not enough opportunity. Often there is so little discipline and order in lifestyle in the Western context today. Individualism means that people just go and walk out. Often, it is disappointing. If you try and talk to people, they just revolt.

Barry tried to explain individualism with differences in views and opinions on various matters, but, most importantly, on sin. He described that if one person's view of sin varied greatly from another's, everything in the process would become difficult from the very beginning.

You are going as a brother to the one who has sinned against you, so, you have a fairly clear view on, as far as you are concerned, that it is a sin. However, that is your view and the discrepancy is that more likely they are going to say that is not the case. I have not sinned against you; it is such and such. The discrepancy is that it is not always a clear-cut case.

Although the discrepancies explored above sound much like problems, these are deviations that are relatively consistent and almost implicit in most disciplinary cases, rather than temporal or occasional problems. All participants showed their clear awareness of the dangers of such disparity between the teaching of the Bible and the actual disciplinary situation in pastoral ministry and advised much prayer and seeking wisdom from all possible sources.

*Rewarding and Challenging Experience in Application*

In asking the pastors for their most rewarding and challenging experiences, it was surprising to find that they barely had any rewarding experiences, but their challenging experiences were plenty.

Four participants shared their rewarding experiences whereas one participant remembered no occasion, and the other omitted mentioning anything about such a memory at all. Among four pastors who remembered their rewarding experiences, two described that it was in step one, "go and tell him," and one of these pastors went to a brother found in sin as his pastor carrying out his pastoral duty. Another participant, whose case was also in step one, went to confront a brother of his as the offended by this brother, rather than as a mediator intending to solve someone else's problem. These two interviewees experienced joy through their brothers' repentance, thus, restoration. Barry described his rewarding moment:

> The person in this particular case admitted the offense and was willing to apologize. It was rewarding, and rewarding in a sense that when I heard "I am sorry," all of a sudden, the barriers went down, and I no longer had any hard feeling about him.

The rewarding experience of the third participant took place in step two, "take one or two others." The pastor accompanied by an elder visited a brother in sin and experienced a rewarding moment of repentance and joy of restoration of an

impaired relationship. Then, the last of the four pastors introduced his case which had taken place with preaching of the word. Colin commented:

> The most rewarding experience was positive [that is, preventive] in nature because as I have spoken on Matthew 18, before when I speak to that in the church, there probably have been incidences where someone has gone to somebody about such thing. And I never knew it. It was truly rewarding.

Therefore, none of the participants seemed to have any rewarding experience of church discipline in step three, "tell it to the church." It was not surprising for the researcher to remember how all participants had described the final step of public forum as the most difficult process in church discipline.

About their most challenging experience, another surprising finding was drawn from the participants' answers. To summarize, three pastors – Barry, Colin, and Dave – experienced their most challenging moments when they faced individuals while two – Alex and Evan – pointed out step three and one participant – Frank – an "inter-congregational" situation.

Barry's challenge came from a church member who could be categorized as an antagonist with a history of dividing a few churches previously. This person avoided for an extended period Barry's various attempts through phone calls and letters to arrange a meeting with him. The matter remained unresolved, and the person left the church to join a different denomination.

Colin described his going privately or "once the wheels start rolling," as his most challenging experience. He was referring to the beginning of every step one discipline case. Overcoming natural reluctance to put someone on the spot was the hardest challenge he always felt. Once the private one-on-one meeting started, the rest would flow relatively easily for him.

Dave also experienced dealing with a brother found in sin as the most challenging moment in his pastoral years. But, unlike the previous two cases, Dave confronted a sin of criminal nature. Although he repented and showed the genuineness of his repentance by trying to apologize all offended by his act, he was taken under the civil authority and left the church.

Alex and Evan were those who experienced their most challenging moments in the final step of church discipline. Evan's test was with dealing the congregation composed of people with various levels of doctrinal comprehension and spiritual depth in order to lead them spiritually and guide pastorally through the church disciplinary process. Risk of "hurting some of those immature in their faith who can't quite handle the discipline" was Evan's greatest challenge. On the other hand, Alex's challenge was with dealing with a smaller group of ecclesiastical leaders, namely, elders. After Alex confronted a church member for his prolonged indifference to the life of the church, an elder objected to Alex in a session meeting and accused him of his harsh way of

dealing with people and specifically the one who had not been at any activity of the church for several years. Having half or no support of elders was a challenging experience beyond compare to Alex.

Lastly, Frank was challenged with his involvement in a what could be called "broadly church discipline." Confrontation of the brother in sin did not take place, due to his repentance and resignation from church membership. However, because of the nature of the occasion – Frank was coming from another congregation as a facilitator – it was not an easy case to begin with.

## Effects of Church Discipline

The third research question explored in this study was to find out how pastors evaluate the effects of church discipline. The participants' replies showed that, when church discipline was carried out in accordance with the Scriptural principle, there was a unique effect on their congregations, namely, joy and peace. Four participants commented on the effects, and three of them specifically said joy and peace had uplifted their congregations while another implied the same.

To measure the effect of church discipline upon congregations, the above three interviewees pointed out joy and peace as their main focus. To be more specific, one of them indicated their church members' coming closer to Christ

and showing their growth and spiritual maturity as an important part of his

evaluation while another participant described people's continuing participation

in prayer as sure evidence of positive effect on his congregation. Dave's focused

on measuring long-term effects rather than any immediate evaluation. In this

sense, his point was slightly different but seemed to complementary to the

others' evaluation. He noted:

> We have to just follow what Christ calls us to do. I think when we
> challenge people and when we try to handle it the right way, they might
> try to reject that. So, you cannot evaluate the effect based on a pragmatic
> standard; it is not pragmatism. We do not decide whether we are doing
> the right thing based on whether people like it. Certainly, God is going to
> work in it.

Concerning the effects the participants experienced in their churches, each

one's evaluation was virtually identical. Dave shared that the case he was

involved was "mishandled" because of avoidance. By the decision of the elders,

the disciplinary case was never brought to the church, and the congregation

missed a chance to grow through dealing with the matter. Dave finally

commented that Christians follow the Lord rather than the law of the world.

Alex remarked on a successful disciplinary action which strengthened both the

congregation and the ones excommunicated. When the pastor announced the

session's decision on the excommunication of a couple, the congregation

remained in "dead silence," being struck by the weight of the word of God

applied onto the life of the congregation. "The effect is," Alex commented, "it was shocking, but, everyone understood that there was a rule and boundary which is God's word. The church is not a benevolence organization; it is the body of Christ that honors the name of the Lord." Later, the excommunicated repented and came back to the church and were accepted back with a fully restored fellowship with others. Evan noted that the congregation's realization of the need for educating younger ones of the congregation was a positive effect of the disciplinary action against some congregants who held a false doctrinal position and stirred up some people.

Barry made a couple of insightful recommendations for evaluation of the aftereffects of church discipline: evaluating first, whether there is congregational peace and, second, whether people are getting along well with each other. If they do, then, see whether it takes place only on Sundays or is extended to weekdays. Finding both or at least one of these in evidence shows a positive effect of church discipline, while the lack of such peace proves the opposite.

In sum, the findings of this third area of study revisited the most important nature of Christ's church, namely, the body of Christ that all members should pay their concerted efforts to keep its unity under Christ.

## Some Recommendations for Inexperienced Pastors

While interviewed, the participants shared experiences especially helpful for young and inexperienced pastors. Seven recommendations fall into two areas: advice for personal readiness and for working with others.

The advice for personal readiness includes, first, "be prepared beforehand" and know what church discipline is through studying the Bible. Dave asserted, "Do not get blindsided! Learn about it more and learn ahead of time. Make sure that you are clear on it before you get into the middle of the current."

Second, "personal discipline" with being more enduring, humble, and living a godly life. Reading good books and studying practical courses were recommended by three participants.

Third, "know your own duty and limitations" means that pastors do not have to answer for everything, thus, cannot solve everyone's problems. They can know also their responsibility to teach and guide others to carry out their duties and responsibilities. Colin included a warning against becoming condemnatory.

And fourth, "keep the principle of Matthew 18:15-20." Keeping the circle of involved people as small as possible was especially emphasized by three participants.

The participants made three recommendations for working with others;

first, "make your congregation ready" by teaching biblical guidance on church

discipline. By helping them to understand the subject, pastors help the

congregation grasp the purpose of discipline, namely, to restore a fellow member

in sin to the Lord. "Stress unity and harmony in the congregation. It is

important," Colin stated. Dave shared his experience in this area, "Teach people

about it beforehand and help them understand this subject. So, when something

happens, you do not only have your elders on board but also the congregation

which has better grasp of this."

The second piece of advice was, "seek help from others." Four

participants emphasized this. Reach out to another pastor, presbytery, or some

professionals, depending on the situation, while keeping the required

confidentiality and accountability. They cautioned against dealing with a

complicated case and instead recommended finding a mentor. Dave once again

explained its importance:

> I should have done that when I was in my situation and tried to get some
> guidance on it more than I did from another pastor. I did not have that, and
> I think that was because I did not have much of grasp of Matthew 18 and
> everything as I needed to.

And the last recommendation stressed that pastors "work together with

elders." Barry stated firmly not to start any authoritative measure without the

session's help, remembering that each pastor is a part of a "team." Evan

suggested studying with elders to grow in faith and knowledge for being

equipped with the wisdom of the Lord.

In short, the most outstanding recommendations were "be prepared

beforehand" and "seek help from others." Shared experience is what an

inexperienced pastor needs most.

## Summary of Findings

This chapter has been a summary report and analysis of interviews with

six pastors using specific study questions. In addition, their recommendations for

young and inexperienced pastors were shared.

The participants' understanding of the biblical principle was deep and

thorough. Yet, their applications varied, because of such factors as inexperience

in their earlier years, and people's ignorance or rejection of church discipline

associated with today's individualism. All pastors interviewed had memories of

difficult times implementing biblical church discipline because they were, like all

other pastors, standing "on this side of resurrection," as Frank commented.

Existence of gaps between theory and practice in reality seemed to be great

obstacles for all the participants and most likely in the years ahead. However, the

rewarding experiences would last even till the end of this age.

It should be noted that, as all six participants were interviewed, all of them repeatedly expressed their deep gratitude for the Holy Spirit who powerfully kept them safe and focused in the midst of difficult moments in church disciplinary process. There was one unified theme, namely, to serve their Lord more faithfully, thus, his church with more fervor and joy.

# Chapter Five. Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors' understanding of the corrective church discipline principle given in Matthew 18:15-20 shapes their actions for resolution of cases for corrective church discipline and effects the life of their congregations.

This study was guided by the following three questions:

1. How do pastors understand the principle of church discipline given in Matthew 18:15-20?

2. How do pastors apply their understanding of the principle of church discipline given in Matthew 18:15-20 to their resolution of cases in need of disciplinary action?

3. How do pastors evaluate the effects of their application of church discipline principle upon their congregations?

In this chapter, summary of the study and findings will be presented and conclude with discussion findings, followed by recommendations for practice and recommendations for further research.

## Summary of the Study and Findings

This study reviewed relevant literature in four areas and analyzed interview data from six pastors. The literature review focused on the areas of theological doctrine on church discipline, the church discipline principle given in Matthew 18:15-20, accountability in relationships, and conflict resolution. With literature on theological doctrine on church discipline, the foundational understanding of church discipline was examined through exploring the two main areas of discipline, namely, preventive and corrective discipline. Literature on the church discipline principle given in Matthew 18:15-20 focused more narrowly on the corrective side of church discipline. Literature on accountability in relationships examined relationship skills and structures necessary for the successful implementation of corrective church discipline. The final area of literature review covered conflict resolution through understanding of conflict, its effective management, and resolution.

The interview data report and analysis has shown the participants' understanding of the church discipline principle in two areas, their experience of

applying church discipline and their analysis of the effects upon their congregations. In addition, participants' recommendations for young and inexperienced pastors were shared. This chapter will synthesize the data collected in the study and discuss findings and recommendations for practice.

## Discussion of Findings

In this section, the data from the literature review and participants' interviews will help identify findings that encourage pastors and elders as well as individual church members to better understand the biblical teaching on church discipline. The findings will be discussed accordingly in the areas of understanding both the general principle of church discipline and corrective discipline, followed by its application and effects upon church.

### *Understanding of Church Discipline*

Church discipline is, in a word, everything Christ's church does. Jamieson defines church discipline as "everything the church does to help its members pursue holiness and fight sin."[276] In this sense, Jeschke refers to discipline as "the

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[276] Jamieson, 216.

normal church life."[277] It means training,[278] education,[279] reproof,[280] correction,[281]

warning,[282] chastening,[283] and punishment.[284] This is the foundational belief of

the Protestant reformers when they included the faithful exercise of church

discipline as one of the three essential marks of the true church alongside

preaching of the gospel and administration of the sacraments. These three marks

are, in fact, one. If church discipline is everything church does, the scope of the

other two marks of the church must be a part of discipline and vice versa. Both

preaching of the gospel and administration of the sacraments are discipline in the

sense of the word of God being "breathed out by God and profitable for

teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,"[285]

baptism enabling "those who believed in God may be careful to devote

themselves to good works,"[286] and the Lord's Supper leading each believer to

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[277] Jeschke, 237.

[278] Ephesians 6:4

[279] Deuteronomy 8:5.

[280] Proverbs 9:7.

[281] Zephaniah 3:2, 7.

[282] Isaiah 8:11.

[283] Proverbs 3:11

[284] Hosea 10:10. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, 448.

[285] 2 Timothy 3:16.

[286] Titus 3:8.

"examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup."[287]  Tripp

remarks on the inseparable oneness among the three marks.

> Personal ministry is not just about confronting people with principles,
> theology, or solutions. It confronts people with the God who is active and
> glorious in his grace and truth, and who has a rightful claim to our lives.
> Only as our hearts are transformed by this glory will the principles of
> Scripture make any sense to us.[288]

Clowney insightfully adds, "All other attributes of the church derive from it [that

is, church discipline]."[289]  Therefore, faithful exercise of church discipline is as

much essential as preaching of the gospel and administration of the sacraments

are to the true church of the Lord Jesus.

Moreover, church discipline is the church's mandate to be holy as he is

holy.[290] As the assembly of people who are called out of darkness and moved into

Christ's marvelous light for proclamation of God's excellencies,[291]  the church

functions through understanding and implementing church discipline.

Unfortunately, however, as reflected in the interviews of the pastors

introduced in the previous chapter of this study, many Christians do not fully

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[287] 1 Corinthians 11:28.

[288] Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2002), Kindle e-book, chapter 4, location 1683.

[289] Clowney, 102.

[290] Leviticus 19:2, 1 Peter 1:15-16.

[291] 1 Peter 2:9.

understand this definition and nature of church discipline. Although lack of teaching on this subject in churches may have contributed to this present situation, people willingly reject church discipline in principle. Frank noted, "No matter how often you teach them, some people simply do not want to change their view and do not like the idea of making someone embarrassed or kicked out of church." Nevertheless, everyone who understands the importance of the other two marks of the true church must also realize the necessity of church discipline. John Calvin wrote, "Those … who trust that churches can long stand without this bond of discipline are mistaken."[292]

Church discipline can be divided into two areas, namely, preventive discipline and corrective discipline. Preventive discipline is the process of preparing Christians beforehand through teaching them the word of God in order to promote their godliness to the point of being able to discern good from evil,[293] whereas corrective discipline is remedial in nature and confrontational in practice, and thus, aims to restore any believer who is found in sin. Because corrective discipline will be explained further later, the preventive side of discipline will be the focus in this section.

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[292] Calvin, *Institutes*, 250.

[293] Adams, 22.

Preventive discipline aims to enable Christians to be obedient to the commands of God through education.[294] Pastors are called to give "instruction in sound doctrine"[295] in the sense of preventing their congregants from contradicting God's word, thus, promoting them to attain maturity in faith and life.[296] However, not all pastors interviewed seemed to factor in preventive discipline or recognize their pastoral work as preventive discipline. Although an interviewee referred preventive discipline as "positive" discipline, the implication of his term did not properly explain the focus of preventive discipline. The researcher interprets this as a sign of recent decline of awareness of the importance of preventive discipline.

Therefore, an effort to better understand, first, the nature and importance of preventive discipline and, second, its cause-effect link with corrective discipline needs to be made by pastors and all church members. Wells points out such a need: "faith [as 'preventive discipline'] being the foundation of the latter [that is, 'practice,' as 'corrective discipline'] and the [corrective discipline is] … the evidence of the working of the [preventive discipline]."[297] The more we

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[294] Buzzard and Brandon, Jr., 65.

[295] Titus 1:9.

[296] Ephesians 4:11-16.

[297] Wells, 103.

emphasize and implement preventive discipline in the life of the church, the less should we see problems and conflicts in the church.

*Understanding of Corrective Church Discipline*

Corrective discipline begins when a sinful offence is made and proceeds toward restoration. Therefore, it is remedial in nature.[298] As a disciplinary action, this phase of discipline confronts sin, aims to lead a brother in sin to repentance, reclaims the repentant, and establishes restoration in church. But, if the offender refuses to repent, corrective discipline must follow the steps in Matthew 18:15-20, with excommunication of an impenitent believer as the last step of this disciplinary process.

The main goal of corrective discipline is to restore a brother in sin through repentance, and thus, restore peace in the church. Leeman's summary of five purposes of corrective discipline depicts the scope of this discipline: first, to expose sin, second, to warn the church, third, to save or reclaim the offender,[299] fourth, to protect the innocent, and fifth, to present a good witness for Jesus.[300] The interview participants' comprehension of the definition and nature of

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[298] Adams, 24.

[299] Wray, 3-4, says that it is to "reclaim" the brother in sin.

[300] Leeman, 33.

corrective discipline was excellent, and their experience over many years in

pastoral ministry added deep insights. For example, Evan pointed out human

fallibility as the reason for the need of "checks and balances" by others in the

church, and corrective discipline was a useful means of implementing it.

Regarding the subject of corrective discipline, Wray notes four cases when

corrective discipline needs to be initiated and carried out.

1. Christian love is violated by serious private offences,
2. Christian unity is violated by those who form divisive factions which destroy the peace of the church,
3. Christian law is violated by those living scandalous lives, and
4. Christian truth is violated by those who reject essential doctrines of the faith.[301]

Alex, one of the interviewees, insightfully defined the nature of sin that required

a corrective disciplinary action: "Your brother sins against you is not just he

made you feel bad. When he sins against me is when I know that he is up on

with doing things that are against the word. It is not against my person, but

God."

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[301] Wray, 8-10.

**Step One: "Go and Tell Him"**

When such a sin is found in a brother, the first of three corrective

discipline steps begins, and the offended goes to the offender to "tell him his

fault"[302]  in private. Barry saw this as a repetition of the Old Testament command

of Leviticus 19:17, "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall

reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him." Private

confrontation may provide the best opportunity for obedience to this command,

for genuine repentance, and for willing forgiveness based on humble Christian

love toward each other. All interviewees recognized that repentance in such an

environment would be easier and safer. Barry again noted that when repentance

restored the impaired relationship between two brothers, the offended should

never reopen that matter with anyone because the restoration was a "covering a

multitude of sins"[303] of the repentant brother.  Otherwise, as Alex pointed out, he

commits a sin of gossiping.

**Step Two: "Take One or Two Others"**

If the offended refuses to "listen" to his brother, or refuses to repent, the

second step of corrective discipline is required. Now, the offended revisits his

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[302] Matthew 18:15.

[303] 1 Peter 4:8.

brother in sin accompanied by one or two others as witnesses of the disciplinary action. Four interview participants recognized elders as the suitable "spiritual" witnesses for this step, quoting Galatians 6:1. Bear suggests that any church members whom the offender may respect and most likely listen to may be suitable for this task as well.[304]

Although the literature reviewed on this second disciplinary step did not specifically mention it, the pastors generally agreed that churches were to draw witnesses from the same congregation. However, two interview participants said that, for a special case, "outsiders" with specific qualifications could assist. Witnesses provide, first, objectivity to both the accuser and the accused, along with accountability to the outcome of the meeting and, second, protection to the accuser by checking the validity of his accusation against a brother. Calvin adds another important role of witnesses as to prevent the offender from evading the opportunity of reconciliation.[305]

Up to the step two, confidentiality must be kept in protection of the offender. When the offender repents, the disciplinary process stops and the case closed, "capped in private" as Evan remarked. However, when restoration

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[304] Bear, 1257.

[305] Calvin, *"Commentary on a Harmony."*

through repentance is not gained, the next and final step in corrective discipline

needs to be followed.

**Step Three: "Tell It to the Church"**

In this last step, the process changes from private reconciliation to public

dealing with the sin. It is important to remember that this is the process of

purifying both the offender and the church. Some New Testament passages, such

as 1 Corinthians 5, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-16, 2 Timothy 2:23-26, and Titus 3:10,

supplement the principle presented in Matthew 18:17. The teaching of the

passages mentioned above is that church should exercise discipline against sins

that are "outward, serious, and unrepentant."[306] Alex categorized such sins as

"grievous sins" and "hardened sins," that is, a sin with "a pattern of no

repentance," which must be dealt with in public. Dave noted the nature of such a

sin from a slightly different angle and explained; a sin which had been an offense

against another believer up to the end of step two turned into a "public sin" in

step three as the offender repeatedly refused to repent.

Commenting on the purpose of the final step of church discipline, Dave

emphasized that the nature of the goal was now changed from restoration of an

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[306] Leeman, 54.

individual to bringing the entire church back to Christ through leading them, first, to see their sin or fallibility, second, to see the cross of Christ, and third, to realize their need to come back to Christ. Dave affirmed, "That is the goal of the coming before the public church. I do not take it as the church making decision on what happened. It is about the entire church coming back to Christ."

The body entrusted with the responsibility and right to examine the matter and to make decision in this step is the body of elders or session. Adams and all the research participants agreed and said that the elders must then bring their decision to the congregation. Bear argues in his book, *Bring My Sheep Back*, that "the church" in Matthew 18:17 means the whole assembly rather than a small select group.[307] However, his interpretation is unconvincing because the biblical role and responsibility of elders are to "declare sins forgiven or not; to shut the kingdom of heaven against the impenitent … and to open it to penitent sinners."[308] Therefore, elders taking leadership in church discipline is essential because all things of church ought to be done decently and in order.[309]

In terms of the composition of "the church," Adams suggested only the members, or communicant members, of the local church. Two interview

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[307] Bear, 1319.

[308] Ward, 59. Quoted from Chapter 30, Article 2.

[309] 1 Corinthians 14:40.

participants agreed with Adams and one of them, Barry, noted that, introducing

the practice of the PCA to include adherent members, seemed to depend on each

denomination's view. The researcher takes the view of "members only" based on

the understanding of the word, "brother," used in the text of Matthew 18:15-20.

In the given context, "brother" should be understood as a fellow member of a

local congregation rather than any undefined Christian. Therefore, neither can an

unbeliever nor anyone whose membership is with another congregation come

under this category of "brother," and thus, cannot take part in step three. In the

case of an adherent member in the PCA, the latter case should be applied

because adherents are those who "choose not to become Communicants by

virtue of membership of another Christian Church, or by reasons of

conscientious objection" to any doctrine upheld by the PCA.[310]

As for the role of the presbytery as a church court in the Presbyterian

polity, the literature reviewed remained silent, and the text of Matthew 18:17

seems unclear in its description of "the church." But, all interview participants

recognized the necessity of a presbytery's involvement in the process. Barry

emphatically supported this view especially whenever any case with criminal

nature is under scrutiny. Colin's admission to the necessity of  a presbytery's

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[310] Presbyterian Church of Queensland, 1.5. (a).

involvement was due to Presbyterian polity, that is, when a pastor, who was responsible to the presbytery rather than the session of the congregation he served, was accused, the matter was to be brought to the presbytery rather than the local session. Therefore, the involvement of the presbytery is not a breach of the biblical principle of the step three, but a "slightly modified version," as Colin concluded, of the biblical principle of Matthew 18:17.

If the offender still refuses to repent, no further disciplinary action is suggested, but a conclusion to exclude the offender from the congregation, treating the impenitent as one outside the church, is commanded. Treating the impenitent offender as a "Gentile" and a "tax collector" is best understood by Blomberg who explains it as "twin themes."[311] According to Blomberg, the first theme is excommunication, "not allowing someone to participate in public, corporate fellowship with the church,"[312] which is in line with the Old Testament practice;[313] the second theme fits to the New Testament teaching of reaching out to the unbelievers and calling them to repentance.[314]

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[311] Blomberg, 279.

[312] Ibid. New Testament references for this are 1 Corinthians 5:9, 11; 10: 16-17; 1 Thessalonians 3:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 15.

[313] Numbers 19:20.

[314] Blomberg, 279-280.

**Church's Binding and Loosing**

Jesus concludes his teaching of Matthew 18:15-20 with a promise concerning the decision of the church at the end of corrective discipline process. This promise says that whatever the church binds or loses shall be bound or loosed in heaven too because, first, God the Father will do what is asked by two believers in agreement and, second, God the Son will present where two or three are gathered in his name. Calvin explains this as true because, if the offender confesses sin and "entreats the Church to forgive him," the offender is forgiven not only by men, but by God himself. But, if it is the opposite, the impenitent offender is forgiven neither by the church nor by God.[315]

Verses 19 and 20 present Jesus' promise and its foundation; the Lord Jesus' presence among two or three gathered together in his name establishes the validity of church's binding and loosing. Calvin insightfully comments on the significance of the promise of Jesus' presence.

> Since it is an invaluable blessing to have Christ for our director in all our affairs, to bless our deliberations and their results; and since, on the other hand, nothing can be more miserable than to be deprived of his grace, this promise ought to add no small excitement to us to unite with each other in piety and holiness. For whoever either disregards the holy assemblies, or separates himself from brethren, and takes little interest in the cultivation of unity, by this alone makes it evident that he sets no value on the presence of Christ.[316]

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[315] Calvin, *"Commentary on a Harmony."*

[316] Ibid.

None of the interviewees, except Dave, made any clear comment on the teaching of church's binding and loosing explained in Matthew 18:18-20. The researcher acknowledged the absence of comment from the pastors on this part of the church discipline as a sign of their unclear understanding on the content or spiritual significance of the promise made by the Lord Jesus.

In short, the weight of this promise for corrective discipline is something all Christians should regard highly in their private and corporate Christian life although the time they live in advocates the opposite.

## *Application of Corrective Church Discipline*

Applying the corrective discipline will surely result in God's peace and joy in the life of the church when God's command is carried out faithfully.

In this section, some applications of the three corrective disciplinary steps will be introduced based on the application shared by the interview participants with suggestions drawn from the data findings of the four literature review areas.

**Preparatory Stage**

It is imperative for pastors to consider three preparatory works before engaging in any corrective church disciplinary case: first, the pastor's preparation; second, the congregation's readiness; and, third, the relationship between the pastor and his congregation.

First, pastors need to prepare themselves with clear and thorough understanding of the biblical teaching of church discipline. Any unprepared pastor will most likely experience an unpleasant and undesirable outcome when he faces a serious disciplinary case. Even with a case of confronting any private sin in the first step of corrective discipline, a pastor without a thorough preparation may handle the matter superficially or arbitrarily rather than biblically. An experienced pastor warns, "Be prepared beforehand; do not get blindsided!"

Second, pastors must teach their congregations biblical church discipline, covering its purpose and aim alongside its practical guidance as given in Matthew 18:15-20 together with 1 Corinthians 5, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15, 2 Timothy 2:23-26, and Titus 3:10 as a supplementary guideline. Dave's comment explains its full benefit: "Teach people about it beforehand and help them understand this subject. So, when something happens, you do not only have

your elders on board, but also the congregation which has better grasp of this

[corrective discipline]."

And, third, pastors should make their best effort in building up their

relationship with the people of their churches. In other words, they are to

promote accountability, including, mutual responsibility or answerability.  In

any difficult disciplinary case, accountability will make matters easier by

separating fact from opinion, and thus, keeping the focus on the problem rather

than on the people, as Pickering remarks.[317] Guttman's six specific actions for

promoting accountability are noteworthy. First, "show how it is done," that is,

walk the talk; second, "invite feedback"; third, "admit your mistakes"; fourth,

"learn to depersonalize," meaning that treating people's comments as

depersonalized ideas rather than leaving them as personal attacks; fifth, "get

help if you need it"; and sixth, "relax and learn" from other members.[318]

**Going Through Three Steps of Corrective Discipline**

Once the corrective discipline process begins, biblical guidelines must be

followed. First of all, the whole process must be regulated by its goal, that is,

gentle restoration, as the first half of Galatians 6:1 teaches: "Brothers, if anyone is

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[317] Pickering, 52-53.

[318] Ibid., 48-51.

caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit

of gentleness." A believer with a humble spirit toward an offender is able to

carry this out in a spirit of gentleness. Showing brotherly love is, as Tripp notes,

"identifying with suffering," in other words, identifying with each other as

family members, suffering from someone's sin, and "identifying with a

purpose," meaning, "understanding how [God] has called us to minister to

others."[319] Such love is, according to Jones, a compassion that can break through

the relational impasse.[320]

Second, those involved in the corrective discipline process must watch

themselves so as to not be tempted by the same sin, as mentioned in the second

half of Galatians 6:1. If those who regard themselves as "spiritual" have an

attitude of spiritual superiority over an offender, the probable temptations they

face will be backbiting, slander, or rejection.[321] Instead of being self-righteous, the

one who seeks restoration of another brother must examine oneself, realizing

one's own vulnerability to various spiritual temptations.

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[319] Tripp, 2377 and 2404.

[320] Robert D. Jones, *Pursuing Peace: A Christian Guide to Handling Out Conflicts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), Kindle e-book, chapter 7, location 2199.

[321] 2 Corinthians 12:20.

Third, restoration must be concluded with forgiveness of sin at either the

private or public level, depending on the seriousness of the sin and the

truthfulness of repentance. Paul in 2 Corinthians 2:5-11, especially in verse 8,

urges his brothers in faith to not only forgive and comfort the penitent offender

but also reaffirm their love for him. This command emphasizes the ultimate goal

of corrective discipline, namely, restoration. It also notes that forgiving the

offender is not an easy thing to do, and Christians often easily lose sight of this

goal in the process of discipline.[322] If forgiveness lapses away in the restoration

process, at least three consequences can be expected.

1. The penitent sinner may be lost due to overwhelming guilt and grief,
2. The church is guilty of disobedience, and
3. Satan succeeds in defrauding the church.[323]

Thus, restoration means a complete restoration of Christian fellowship between

the offender and the offended individual(s) and the church.

And fourth, excommunication of the impenitent offender is the last step of

keeping Christ's church pure and holy through corrective discipline. For any

church member who "happily abides in known sin," as Leeman points out,

excommunication, or, exclusion from the fellowship of the church, is the church's

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[322] South, 104.

[323] Ibid., 105-107.

final conclusion.[324] But, to reach this end, a legitimate process of corrective

discipline must be followed as described in Matthew 18:15-20. Owen regards

excommunication as an essential constituent of "Gospel church" and its power

toward its members.[325] Excommunication is a "spiritual punishment" for purity

of church.[326] Because of its spiritual significance in church, Owen emphasizes that

excommunication must be administered with prayer, lamentation, and a due

sense of the future judgment of Christ.[327] However, although excommunication

separates the impenitent from the fellowship of the church, he should be

regarded not as an enemy but as a brother who requires warning.[328]

The confidentiality required in steps one and two provides a safer

environment to achieve this goal, making it easier for the offender to repent and

the offended to forgive. Importantly, prayer is essential for the Lord's

intervention regarding circumstances and a receptive heart, according to Barry.

Among the three steps of corrective discipline, the first step is the most

important, although it seems to be the easiest and quickest way to resolve any

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[324] Leeman, 49.

[325] Owen, 47.

[326] See The Westminster Confession of Faith, XXX, 3 & 4; The Cambridge Platform, XIV, 5 & 6, as quoted in Wray, 21.

[327] Owen, 464-497.

[328] 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15.

problem between two believers. It requires only one person, the offended, to prepare, initiate, and, then, work together with the brother to close the case permanently, if restoration is attained. However, the first corrective discipline step plays the key role in corrective discipline because, when this step is kept faithfully, diligently, and humbly as commanded by the word of God, most of the troubles, if not all, any local congregation experiences could be resolved.

The genius of this process is its reciprocal nature in strengthening both parties involved in at least three senses. First, the offended may also find his unrecognized fault during the meeting with his "offender," and thus, the outcome could easily be mutual forgiveness and repentance, which will deepen their relationship as believers in the Lord. Second, by faithfully implementing this corrective disciplinary step, the offended will learn the two greatest commands Jesus pointed out in Matthew 22:37-39, namely, loving the Lord and loving our neighbor, which together are, in fact, a summary of the entire Bible. Following the Lord's command to go and tell the offender his fault requires faith and courage, as Dave shared his experience during the interview. During the confrontation, on the one hand, the offended, who seeks God's guidance, will depend on the Lord's promise to be in the midst of the meeting to resolve the matter. On the other hand, as the offender repents, the offended will face another challenge from the Lord, namely, the need for forgiveness toward his penitent

fellow believer. Again, this is the matter of faith, obedience, self-examination, and experiencing God's grace for both the offended and the offender. And third, from a faithful implementation of this step, not only the two believers under this step, but also the entire congregation may experience a domino effect of resolving problems and conflicts among church members and see much fruit of repentance and forgiveness. In other words, the unity of the church could be attained and kept by its members' faithful, diligent, and humble implementation of the step one corrective discipline. After all, such is the gist of the Old Testament command of Leviticus 19:17 and the New Testament principle given in Matthew 18:15-20 and Galatians 6:1.

The final issue that needs to be discussed is the evidence of repentance. Although repentance initiates reconciliation and restoration, some evidence may be required from the penitent brother in order to leave no lingering aftereffects with the offended or the church. Bear says such evidence may include (1) gratefulness to the one who confronted him about his sin, (2) genuine confession to God and man about his sin and guilt, (3) a desire to make things right, and (4) the intense desire to be free from the sin and a heightened state of alert about the dangers of the sin.[329]

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[329] Bear, 492-537.

In sum, Christian's brotherly love is the core of application of corrective discipline, and God's glory is its desired outcome through restored relationship among the members of God's household. The Apostle Paul speaks to the church not only at Philippi but also every corner of God's kingdom on earth in Philippians 4:9: "What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me – practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."

## *Effects of Corrective Church Discipline*

The first effect of corrective discipline is its benefit for church membership. Ephesians 4:1-3 teaches us that church members are called to bear "with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." This verse means, as Jamieson comments, that Christians are to grow in maturity in Christ through mutual spurring on and turning from the wrong direction.[330] Brunner points out that church discipline and church membership correspond to each other,[331] and Tripp construes this relationship as "redemptive relationship."[332] In a word, church discipline is the life in God's family. Having

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[330] Jamieson, 112.

[331] Brunner, 559.

[332] Tripp, 1986.

God as the Father, the members are the saints[333] and elect,[334] in contrast to the unrighteous[335] who are excluded from church membership. Family unity and loyalty toward the Father are required of these children as well as toward each other as brothers and sisters in God's household.[336] The Apostle Paul emphasizes such oneness in church repeatedly in his epistles.[337] After all, family members love and are gentle toward each other even in cases of addressing spiritual ignorance through teaching,[338] admonishing,[339] or even excommunication.[340] Church discipline, especially corrective discipline, is like the heartbeat of a family. Willimon insightfully states that a church "in which there is a healthy amount of tension and conflict is a church alive."[341]

The next effect of corrective discipline upon the church takes place in the following areas, as listed by Hyde.

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[333] See Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2.

[334] See 2 Timothy 2:10; Titus 1:1.

[335] See 1 Corinthians 6:1; 1 Peter 3:18.

[336] South, 26.

[337] See Romans 12:4, 5; 1 Corinthians 10:17; 12:12, 13, 20; Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:16; 4:4; Colossians 3:15.

[338] 1 Peter 3:15.

[339] Ephesians 4:15.

[340] 2 Thessalonians 3:13-15.

[341] Willimon, 15.

Discipline promotes God's holiness (Ezekiel 36:16-21; 1 Corinthians 5:1-5), protects the church from infection (1 Corinthians 5:6; Hebrews 12:15-16; 2 Timothy 2:14, 16-18), and restores the rebellious, making clear the seriousness of their resistance to Christ's Word and church (1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11; Hebrews 3:12-13; 10:24-25; 12:11-16).[342]

Regarding the way to measure these effects, three interviewees pointed out how joy and peace were restored in the congregation. More specifically, Barry made a couple of insightful recommendations for evaluation of aftereffects of church discipline: first, whether there is congregational peace and, second, whether people are getting along well with each other. If they do, then, see whether it takes place only on Sundays or is extended to weekdays. Finding both or at least one of these proves a positive result, while their absence means the opposite.

In sum, any effect of corrective church discipline simply depends on one condition, that is, obedience to God's command to go and talk to a fellow believer in sin. From this simple obedience, conflict could be either blessing or curse to the church.

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[342] Hyde, 1161.

*Summary of Discussion of Findings*

In this section, correlation of the data from the literature reviewed and participants' interviews are summarized as findings that encourage pastors and elders as well as individual church members to better understand the biblical teaching on church discipline. The purpose is to enjoy the promised benefits in the life of both individual believers and the corporate body of Christ. Once faith finds its way to love the Lord and fellow members of Christ's church, corrective discipline comes naturally into the life of the church. The faithful exercise of church discipline must be thus recognized and implemented as an essential mark of the true church.

## Recommendations for Practice

The results of the study point to the following recommendations. First, pastors need to reaffirm their call to pastoral ministry by reexamining their role and responsibility in the area of church discipline. Pastors are under-shepherds called to carry out both preventive and corrective discipline among God's flock, as Titus 1:9 clearly states: "give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it." Therefore, they are thus preparing their congregants for dealing with problems and sins faithfully and wisely in the private steps, and, when it comes to the final step in public forum, their congregants can realize the

need for prayer and love for one another to bring glory to God. Repeating the urging of the word of God in Philippians 4:9 here is not redundant but all the more beneficial for this purpose: "What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me – practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."

Second, pastors and elders as the leaders of God's household, to whom the invaluable responsibility over the flock is entrusted, need to work together to promote biblical implementation of church discipline in the life of their congregations. Such is their call and "building up the body of Christ" described in Ephesians 4:11-13.

Third, pastors are encouraged to grasp some relationship skills in order to confront, manage, and resolve conflicts and problems that may take place among their congregants. At the same time, work prayerfully to promote accountability among church members.

Finally, pastors along with elders and all church members need to persevere through all accompanying hardships in the process of church discipline, looking to the blessing of the Lord, even in the case of failure and excommunication of the unrepentant.

## Recommendations for Further Research

Having come to the end of this study, the researcher has envisioned two further research areas. First, it would be interesting to learn more about how pastors can effectively teach their congregations the church discipline principle and practice it with fellow church members.

And second, although pastors can access to literature about principles and practical recommendations for church discipline, it is not easy for them to find helpful data that describes the cause-effect relationship between disciplinary types and churches' reactions and efforts to resolve them, with analyses of the outcomes. Therefore, it would be interesting to learn more about the findings from actual case studies with examination of their aftereffects in churches.

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