

**A. Formative Discipline**

Every disciple (follower) of Christ must be under His discipline, instruction, and correction, which is administered to each one through the church (1Corinthians 12:12-27; 1Thessalonians 5:12-15; Hebrews. 3:12, 13; 10:24, 25). Mutual submission to one another (Ephesians. 5:21) and to the overseers whom the Lord has set over His church (1Peter 5:5) will result in the sanctification of each member individually and of the whole body of the church collectively. There are occasions, however, when one's failure to respond to this formative discipline makes the application of corrective discipline necessary.

**B. Corrective Discipline**

## 1. General Statement

- a. Corrective discipline becomes necessary when heretical doctrine or disorderly, immoral, or scandalous conduct appears among the members of the church. As a general rule and whenever feasible, an effort must be made to resolve difficulty, correct error, and remove offense through counsel and admonition before more drastic steps are taken (Galatians 6:1; James 5:19, 20). The principles given to us in Matthew 18:15-16, Romans 16:17-20, 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, 2Thessalonians 3:6-15, 1Timothy 5:19-20, and Titus 3:10 must be carefully followed and applied to each and every case of corrective discipline as appropriate. In some cases public admonition and/or public repentance may be warranted (Matthew 18:17; 1Timothy 5:20). In the most extreme cases excommunication from the membership of the church may be necessary (Matthew 18:17; Romans 16:17-20; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 1 Timothy 1:20; Titus 3:10). All the members of the church are obliged to submit to and enforce as appropriate the decision of the church in acts of corrective discipline.
- b. Since the church is a spiritual and religious institution, the punishments inflicted by the church in corrective discipline (2Corinthians 6:7) are also spiritual. They include public verbal reproof (Matthew 18:17; 1Timothy 5:20), social avoidance (Romans 16:17; 1Corinthians 5:9-11; 2Thessalonians 3:6, 14), suspension from the Lord's Supper (1Corinthians 5:11), and removal from the membership of the church (Matthew 18:17; 1Corinthians 5:13). They are intended to effect repentance through a sense of sorrow and shame (2Corinthians 2:7; 2Thessalonians 3:14). The church has no right, however, to confiscate goods, revoke conjugal rights, or inflict corporal punishment of any kind. Nevertheless, a member guilty of criminal actions may be delivered to the civil authorities according to the rule of Scripture (1Peter 4:15).
- c. The goals of corrective discipline are always the glory of God, the welfare and purity of the church (1Corinthians 5:6) and the restoration and spiritual growth of the offender (1Corinthians 5:5; 2Corinthians 2:5-8; 1Timothy 5:20).

## 2. Public Reproof or Censure

Public reproof consists of a pastoral effort, before the gathered church, to call an impenitent church member to repentance for sin too blatant to be dealt with in an exclusively private manner; or to deal with serious sin even where there may have been repentance. The elders may administer public censure whenever in their judgment either public misconduct (Galatians 2:11-14; 1Timothy 5:20), patterns of sin (Titus 1:12, 13), or serious doctrinal error (Titus 1:10-13) pose a significant threat to the godliness, unity or testimony of the congregation. Those who humbly receive the word of public reproof, own and confess their sin, and manifest a transformed life (Proverbs 28:13) shall afterward be publicly commended for their godly repentance (2Corinthians 7:7-11). If the reproof is not heeded, further discipline may be imposed.

## 3. Suspension

Some misconduct on the part of a member is so detrimental to the unity, holiness and testimony of the church that the Lord requires the suspension of some of the privileges of membership (Romans 16:17-20; 2Thessalonians 3:6-15). In all cases of suspension the offending person is still to be regarded as a brother in Christ and as a member of the church. Therefore, in accordance with the procedures outlined below for each of the five major categories of offenses, the elders shall at a business meeting of the church recommend that the offending member be suspended, specifying its grounds. To be valid, an act of suspension must have the approval of at least two-thirds of the members present and voting. In the interest of maintaining a climate of holiness and peace, the elders shall have the right, at their sole discretion, to impose a temporary suspension upon a member which will bar him from not more than one Lord's Table while they deliberate the most prudent course of action. The major categories of sin which require suspension are as follows:

## a. A Stubborn Private Offender (Matthew 18:15-17)

When a private offense remains unresolved even after the method prescribed by our Lord in Matthew 18:15, 16 has been graciously and prayerfully followed, it is considered an aggravated offense. The brethren involved shall bring the matter to the elders who, if they judge the matter to be serious and cannot persuade the brother to repent, shall report the situation to the church, and recommend that the stubborn brother be suspended (Matthew 18:17a). If, even after a period of suspension, the person remains adamant in his sin, excommunication shall be enacted according to the procedure outlined in Paragraph B, 4, b of this Article (Matthew 18:17b).

b. Divisive Teachings or Behavior (Romans 16:17-20; Titus 3:10)

When after admonition a member persists in the propagation of serious doctrinal error contrary to the Scripture and our Confessions of Faith, or attempts to sow discord among the membership contrary to the Scripture and this Constitution, he may be suspended as a factious man. Since every member is responsible to help preserve the unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:1f.), no member is to conceal such flagrantly divisive behavior, but rather to reprove it, and disclose it to the elders (Deuteronomy 13:6f.; 1Corinthians 1:10, 11). Whenever the elders become aware of such divisive behavior, they are to confront it meekly and patiently according to the Word of God (1Corinthians 1:10-4:21; Titus 3:10). If, even after receiving repeated admonition from the elders, a member persists in such behavior, the elders shall report the situation to the church and recommend that the divisive brother be suspended. If, even after a period of suspension, the person remains impenitent, excommunication shall be enacted according to the procedure outlined in Paragraph B, 4, b of this Article.

c. Disorderly Behavior (2Thessalonians 3:6-15)

When a member deliberately persists in conduct which displays a flagrant or public disregard for obedience to the Word of God or for the order established by Christ for His church in Scripture (1Corinthians 11:17-34; 14:37-40; 1Timothy 3:14, 15) and adapted to our church in this Constitution, he may be suspended as a disorderly man (2Thessalonians 3:6). Whenever the elders become aware that, in spite of the admonitions of formative discipline (1Thessalonians 5:14), a member is behaving disorderly, they are to confront him meekly and patiently according to the Word of God (2Thessalonians 3:14, 15). If, even after receiving such admonition from the elders, a member persists in this behavior, the elders shall report the situation to the church and recommend that the disorderly brother be suspended (2Thessalonians 3:14, 15). If, even after the period of suspension, the person remains impenitent, excommunication shall be enacted according to the procedure outlined in Paragraph B, 4, b of this Article.

d. A Scandalous Sin

If a member has sinned scandalously but shows hopeful signs of repentance, including submission to the elders, it may still be prudent to suspend him for a time so that he may clearly manifest repentance (Matthew 3:8), so that reproach not be brought upon the Name of Christ and the church (2Samuel 12:14; Romans 2:24), and so that others may not be emboldened to sin (1Timothy 5:20). If fruits worthy of repentance are not forthcoming, the elders may recommend to the church at a later date that this person be excommunicated according to the procedure outlined in Paragraph B, 4, b of this Article.

e. Contempt of Church Discipline

If a person is accused or suspected of a sin requiring corrective discipline, yet absents himself from the meetings of the church, or refuses to meet with the elders so that the matter may be investigated, such a person may be suspended (Matthew 18:17; Numbers 16:12, 20, 23-27). The elders may recommend to the church at a later date that this person be excommunicated according to the procedure outlined in Paragraph B, 4, b of this Article.

I. 4. Excommunication

a. Some kinds of conduct and doctrine are not merely disorderly, but are actually traitorous to the cause of Christ (Matthew 18:15-17; Romans 16:17, 18; 1Corinthians 5:1-13; 1Corinthians 6:9, 10; 1Timothy 1:19, 20; 2Timothy 2:16-18; Titus 3:10; Rev. 2:2, 14-6, 20). A member guilty of such conduct or doctrine must be cut off from the fellowship of the church (Matthew 18:17; 1Corinthians 5:3-5, 13). Before such action is taken, earnest efforts must be made to bring the offender to repentance (Matthew 18:15-17; Titus 3:10). If these efforts fail, this offender is to be excommunicated, at a congregational meeting, by the church. To be valid, an act of excommunication must have the approval of a 3/4 majority of the members present (2Corinthians 2:6).

b. A suspended member shall be excommunicated if he continues impenitent.

**C. Restoration**

The purposes of church discipline are to restore a fallen brother or sister and to keep the church pure. Therefore, it is the duty of the church to forgive and to restore to full membership a suspended or excommunicated member who gives satisfactory evidence of his repentance (2Corinthians 2:6-8). This shall be done in a duly convened business meeting of the church by a 3/4 majority of the members present.