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Restoring the Lost: A Renewed Call for Church Discipline

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RESTORING THE LOST: A RENEWED CALL FOR
CHURCH DISCIPLINE

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of
Western Evangelical Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
John S. Schneider

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

When should a church discipline its members? To even begin to formulate an answer to this question involves a further problem - how important are purity and unity to God? For God designed the church on the pattern of his own character.

What is the character of God? God is holy, righteous. God is one. God intends his church, therefore, to be pure, undefiled and united. When the church is unholy or disunited, it denies the character of God. And to the extent the church is wanting in God's character, it loses God's power in its performance.

Certainly, a bickering, disunited church projects an image of God that can be expected to turn people away. People believe in love, purity and unity when they see and experience it. When the church compromises and becomes hypocritical in either doctrine or life, its power is dissipated. Then the church's testimony to the world remains ineffective, and its purpose to provide a family circle (koinonia) in which members can grow into the maturity of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-16) is frustrated. When love or discipline is missing, the mission of the church is flawed at the core.

Here we come face to face with a basic problem. How can the church balance justice and mercy, discipline and loving acceptance? How can the church maintain unity and purity at the same time?

A key word is balance - not easy to achieve. It would seem

that we must continuously contend with the ardent unifiers on the one hand, and the professional purifiers on the other. The polarized human tendency is either to unite at all costs, no matter how delinquent the doctrine and/or conduct, or to proceed to separate the wheat from the tares now! (Some of this tendency may be seen in the Church Discipline Survey examined in Chapter 5.)

To be sure, separation to a degree is essential to holiness. There is, however, an unholy separation - a separation that neglects love and mercy, and that falls into judgmentalism and division. Likewise, unity is good - it is the fundamental character of the Godhead and must be mirrored in the life of the church. Yet, unholy unity appears when unity comes at the price of unfaithfulness, compromise and doctrinal defilement.

What a dilemma! Yet, there is a solution. It is the exercise of proper church discipline. The Bible clearly teaches church discipline (though, admittedly, the term, "discipline", is not found in the New Testament). Ultimately, church discipline separates people from church membership. The New Testament outlines a pattern for proper church discipline. No one less than the Lord made it clear who is to be disciplined, why he is to be disciplined, and how he is to be disciplined. A look at this pattern will enable us to avoid extremes and to achieve disciplinary balance.

Today, the church faces a moral crisis within her ranks. Her failure to take a strong stand against evil and her tendency to be more concerned about expediency than what is right has robbed the church of Biblical integrity and power. Granted that, historically, the church has sometimes erred in this matter of discipline, but today, the problem

is seemingly one of outright neglect. It would be difficult to show another area of Christian life which is more commonly ignored by the modern church ("mainline" and "evangelical") than church discipline.

It is ironic that this rejection is often justified in the name of love. When the apostle John wrote that we should "love one another", he also wrote, "And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands." ¹ As we will see, the exercise of church discipline is a command of the Lord for the church. When it is properly carried out, it is a profound display of Christian love. Love of necessity challenges sin in ourselves and in our brothers. If we look for God's blessing in our churches, it is essential that we conduct ourselves according to God's Word. We must not look to the world for such guidance. If we are to practice Christian love, we must practice church discipline. It would be foolish to suggest that church discipline is a cure-all for all the ills of the contemporary church. Rather, it is being advocated that this is a needed part of reform in the church today. The purpose of this study, then, is to call the church and its pastoral leadership back to the Biblical practice of church discipline.

The following outline will make our approach plain. Chapter 2 - "Who should be disciplined?"; This chapter will deal with the proper recipients of church discipline. Chapter 3 - "Why should the church discipline?"; This chapter will deal with the necessity and purpose of church discipline. Chapter 4 - "How is church discipline to be administered?"; This chapter will discuss the modes and methods of church discipline. Chapter 5 is an examination of a church discipline survey that was taken by 104 pastors from 32 different churches/denominations in which they responded to the "Who?", "Why?" and "How?" raised in Chapters

2 through 4. Chapter 6 includes answers to actual and anticipated objections to the practice of church discipline, while Chapter 7 will serve as a summary and final challenge to be about the task of proper church discipline. Included as well for further information and study is a selected bibliography and various appendixes on the history and present practice of church discipline, as well as an account of a personal case study.

Chapter 2

WHO SHOULD BE DISCIPLINED?

"Too often discipline is considered an assortment of rules and policies to be used for an assortment of moral contingencies - a scheme for 'codifying sins and tariffing sentences'." ²

The New Testament makes it clear that a person must be disciplined if he is guilty of unrepentant, overt moral delinquency. "Expel the wicked man from among you," ³ advised the apostle Paul. The apostles required the same stern treatment for one guilty of teaching heresy. "If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned." ⁴ John went so far as to say of promoters of heresy, "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work." ⁵

It should be noted that the discipline recommended on these two counts makes allowance for the one who fails in some sin of the spirit or who sins and repents (see I John 5:13-18). However, the strictest discipline is to be handed out to one who sins deliberately and continues unrepentantly in open violation of the law of God. It is also important to notice that discipline in matters of faith is not for one whose weakness is limited to personal questionings and doubts. Wrote Jude on this point, "Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them . . ." ⁶ But when personal doubts are nurtured and articulated to the point that teaching contrary to fundamentals of the gospel are

proclaimed, church discipline is indispensable.

John Wesley said:

I had been often told it was impossible for me to distinguish the precious from the vile, without the miraculous discernment of spirits. But I now saw, more clearly than ever, that this might be done, and without much difficulty, supposing only two things; first, courage and steadiness in the examiner; secondly, common sense and common honesty in the leader of each class . . . The question is not concerning the heart, but the life, and the general tenor of this I do not say cannot be known, but cannot be hid without a miracle.⁷

The rejoinder might still be well made that there is always a margin of church members over whom there is some question. Granted that there are those who show no fruit of the Spirit in their lives nor even show any marks of repentance while, on the other hand, there are those whose lives leave no doubt about their discipleship. But neither of these groups is a problem. The problem arises with those in the church who are somewhere in that gray area which lies in between.

What is sometimes not carefully noted is the fact that the exercise of discipline itself presupposes a margin at the boundary of the church over which there is a question. Regardless of how wide or narrow this margin is considered to be, there are always some individuals coming or going about whom there is question. Discipline, beginning with admonition of those who seem to be failing to manifest spiritual life, admits uncertainty over these people.

But the question is, "What should be done about the margin of professing church members in question?" Some say that we can and should do nothing because the church is invisible - therefore we can never judge, except for guesswork. The consequences of this is obviously a paralysis of discipline.

It would seem that the margin over which there is question - the hazy boundary between obvious saints and obvious sinners - is actually

an argument for discipline instead of against it. If faith ought to be openly confessed, and if there are some whose faith is in question, this situation calls for inquiry. That is people over whose status the church is in doubt are invited to make their commitment to discipleship clear and, if they do not, they must, in love, be warned that they are deceiving themselves about their salvation. If this is not done, those in the church who should know better are guilty of failing to define the meaning of discipleship and are reinforcing people's self-deception.

Discipleship begins with concern for people whose spiritual condition stands in uncertainty. It does not expect to finish its task so as to achieve once and for all an absolutely "pure church." A static church with a fixed and unchanging boundary would not be a living church. The healthy church is one that is faithful in disciplining people and, hopefully, expanding the boundaries of the church. Where the church is not faithful in working at the narrowing of the margin over which there is uncertainty, a backlog builds up and the margin grows. When this margin comes to make up the majority, the church is in a real plight. It then must return to the task of evangelism.

When the church fails to discipline in cases of unrepented, overt moral delinquency and the teaching of heresy, it becomes guilty of impurity and unholy unity, and stands under the judgment of God. On the other hand, when separation is decreed for reasons other than moral dereliction or the teaching of heresy, the church becomes guilty of unholy separation and the sin of division which, likewise, brings it under the judgment of God.

Perhaps the most difficult problem in this connection is to determine what constitutes disciplinable heresy. Biblical principles

indicate that disciplinable heresy concerns the fundamentals of the Christian faith, the cardinal doctrines of the church. Teaching beliefs contrary to such fundamentals, to the point of participating in divisive or disloyal opposition to the church, is heresy. A sure test of heresy would come in failure of a member to submit to the authority and discipline of the church.

Let us emphasize the "who" of church discipline in the words of C. H. Dodd - "Church discipline shall not become world discipline. It must not be imposed by the church upon the world, and it must not be worldly in its nature. Expressed in positive terms, church discipline should be exercised only by the church, and only upon the church." ⁸

Chapter 3`

WHY SHOULD THE CHURCH DISCIPLINE?

I fear the church of Jesus Christ means too little to its members for it to discipline them - at least the church in modern North America. The chief reason for this devaluation is the individualism of most believers. Martin Marty once remarked that the chief rival to the church today is not secularism, but "do-it-yourself religion." This is religion in which the self becomes the measure of all things. It is a Jesus-and-me faith - heavy on the personal pronouns.

What would the people of our churches do if we tried to discipline them for some insistent and persistent sin? The reactions usually received to such a proposal fall into one of two categories. Some threaten to drop out of church altogether, a version of "you can't fire me - I quit!" Naturally, it carries the threat of withdrawing financial support from the church. Then there are others who would simply leave and go to another church. The church of Jesus Christ has been so splintered by sects and denominations that the situation is not unlike that of divorced parents, with the children playing one off against another. "So you won't let me do what I want? Then I'll just go and live with Daddy" i.e., another church.

Discipline is impossible when Christians adopt a consumer, filling station attitude toward the church. The church becomes to religion what a tennis pro is to tennis instruction or a gardener is to gardening. If you do not like one person's services, you can always hire

someone else. And today, it is a buyer's market. Is it ever realistically possible to discuss discipline in such an environment?

"The function of Church discipline has," according to Emil Brunner, "to a very great extent fallen into disuse . . . The Church ought to know, however, that this absence of any kind of Church discipline inevitably gives the impression that to belong or not belong to the Church comes to the same thing in the end and makes no difference in practical life . . ." ⁹

The nature of the church's authority in discipline may be summed up in the commentary of Max Thurian on John 20:23:

This ministry is an aspect of the power of the keys, which ought to be understood as including the whole of the Church's task of setting men free . . . It is not a question of the ministry of preaching only but of a word and an act which operate what they signify. . . We have here an example of a sacramental act . . . The Church believes that God acts conjointly and effectually in a sign which she addresses to the believers. (Sacrament implies) a particular act which entails the action of God himself. ¹⁰

Furthermore, there are those who seem bothered by the thought that the church would presume to exclude people from the Kingdom of God but quite untroubled by the thought that the church presumes to include - in baptism. It should not be overlooked that every act of inclusion itself already implies exclusion - the exclusion of those not included. Undoubtedly, we must follow some rough criteria in distinguishing among those who claim to be followers of Christ. Some would prefer to err on the side of recognizing some whom God does not recognize rather than excluding those whom he has accepted as his own. We could say just as logically, "Why not be strict and let God be gracious in the end, rather than pretending to be more charitable than He and offering false comfort in the process to those for whom this is of ultimate importance?"

Those who call upon the name of the Lord in faith, who are baptized in his name, have received the Spirit which he gives, and look forward to the consummation of his kingdom - these belong to his body

and are the people whom God has called for himself. Wherever the saving grace of God is found, there is the Church. The corollary is that where the saving grace of God is rejected by one still claiming membership in God's church, he is to be warned of the fact and, if he remains impenitent, excluded from the fellowship.

The primary purpose of discipline is to save or restore the person who has sinned. Discipline in the apostle Paul's day was "so that . . . his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord." ¹¹ Through discipline, men were to learn not to be blasphemous (See I Timothy 1:20).

To the church at Thessalonica, Paul wrote, "Brothers, never tire of doing what is right. If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet, do not regard him as any enemy, but warn him as a brother." ¹²

In short, church discipline is designed as a means of grace, not of destruction; as an evidence of love, not of hate or of fear.

A second motive in church discipline is to warn others. Discipline in this sense is a deterrent to sin. Paul says in I Timothy 5:20, "Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warnings." And as Leslie Newbigin notes, "The Church . . . has to take seriously the business of discipline . . . because without this, the Church's witness to the non-Christian becomes hopelessly compromised." ¹³

One can perceive in apostolic discipline a third legitimate motive - church discipline can be useful in protecting the reputation of Christ and of the church. The name of the church and the Christian deserve protection from public reproach. The church should be sensitive to this requirement. Protection likewise extends to the members of the

church. Defilement must not be given free course. Significantly, though, the protection motive is in the background of New Testament teaching. Protection is implied, but this apparently is not the primary motive in the apostle's mind. The name of Christ and the church are strong and quite able to survive human failures. So can the individual Christian who trusts the Lord. Could it be, too, that there was a fear that discipline, should protection become its primary motive in place of love for the sinner, could quickly degenerate into forms of inquisition?

It must be noted that the purpose of church discipline never is to be punitive or retributive. God reserves retribution for himself. "My friends," wrote Paul to the Romans, "do not take revenge, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord." ¹⁴

In short, Biblical teaching excludes all legalism, vindictiveness, fear, pride or human presumption from the exercise of church discipline. In the church, only God can be the ultimate judge. We are a fellowship of mercy receivers.

Chapter 4

HOW IS CHURCH DISCIPLINE TO BE ADMINISTERED?

The first step in the exercise of discipline is prayer and self-examination. Said the Master, "' . . . first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.'" ¹⁵ Paul established ground rules that excluded conceit, rivalry, jealousy and wrongdoing. "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." ¹⁶

Not until we feel that we could sacrifice our own self-dignity, and even lay down our lives in order to save an erring brother, have we taken the plank out of our own eye so that we are prepared to help our brother. Then we can approach him and touch his heart. No one has ever been reclaimed from a wrong position by censure and reproach; but may have thus been driven from Christ and led to seal their hearts against conviction. A tender spirit, a gentle, winning deportment, may save the erring and hide a multitude of sins.

The person who has not carefully examined his own life is disqualified to be God's agent in discipline.

The Biblical pattern for church discipline is outlined by the Lord himself in Matthew 18:15-18.

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of

two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁷

The first step is to go to the brother in personal counsel (verse 15). Paul also emphasized the importance of this first step. For him, it was divisive and evil to go to anyone else first. Where one does speak to others first, he is guilty of the serious sin of gossip and unfavorable reports soon circulate through the church. One person is told, and then another and still another, until salvation of the sinner becomes well nigh impossible.

This personal confrontation may involve several kinds of communication techniques. It might require teaching if the brother is not aware of the wrongness of his action. Priscilla and Aquila did this with Apollos (in Acts 18).

It might require exhortation to those who have fallen into sins through discouragement and neglect. To rebuke a brother in spiritual depression will only drive him further into despair. He needs exhortation. He already knows he is not doing right. He needs hope that can only come through brotherly encouragement.

It might require reproving those who know better and are rebelling. One does not like to be negative, but rebuke is sometimes needed to bring the rebel to his senses (See I Timothy 5:20).

The second step, should the first prove ineffective, is to take other spiritual-minded members along to counsel the erring one. Apparently, Paul practiced this procedure when he required that "a divisive person should be warned once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is

warped and sinful; he is self-condemned." ¹⁸ Also, a charge was not to be entertained against an elder "unless it is brought by two or three witnesses." ¹⁹

If a sinning brother refuses to heed private confrontation and counsel, then witnesses are needed. The purpose is to have other testimony as to what actually took place (Deuteronomy 19:15). If a public accusation is brought against a man, it must be more than the word of one man against another. There need to be witnesses.

The purpose of witnesses is two-fold. First, it is to confirm what took place when the sinner was confronted by his sin. What was the accusation? What was the response? If it becomes necessary to bring it before the church, there needs to be reliable, confirmed information.

Secondly, it is to give more force to restoring a brother. A brother in sin might reject the admonition of one - it is not so easy before two or three. All of the love, influence and truth of the witnesses are added to that of the brother who originally confronted the erring brother.

Collective church discipline then follows as the third step (verse 17). If a brother does not repent in the presence of two or three witnesses, the issue can no longer be private. It is time for all of the loving power of the church to be brought to bear to bring him to repentance.

When the church is told, false rumors stop; frustrations of caring Christians can now be overcome because there can be a positive response from all the body. Everyone joins in to try and save the sinner. It becomes a function of body life.

It should also be noted in connection with this procedure that

church discipline is best carried out by disciplinarians who, in addition to spiritual preparation, can speak with authority for the church community. It is dangerous and often confusing to assume the responsibility of administering discipline independent of responsible relationship in the church.

The fourth and final step is public rejection by the church. When the brother cannot be restored by the other three steps, then this becomes necessary.

To be regarded as a pagan or tax collector does not mean one is past saving but that, because of obnoxious practices, one should not associate with him.

The sinful brother who refuses to listen to the church should be excluded from the fellowship. This means (1) not to associate with him (I Corinthians 5:9); (2) not to open your home to him or eat a meal with him (I Corinthians 5:11); (3) have no company with him (II Thessalonians 3).

The phrase used in I Corinthians 5 is, "hand this man over to Satan." This seems to refer to casting a person outside the protective fellowship of the church. To be left outside in the world is in a real sense to be alienated from God. It means the church has let him know that he is rebelling against Christ and cannot enjoy the tie that binds.

An overview of this subject prompts the following observations:

1. The secular world seems to grow more lax in moral matters and in the observance of God's commands. At such a time, the church must not compromise the absolutes set by God. Proper church discipline requires prompt, decisive action. On the other hand, there must be no substitution of private standards for those proclaimed in God's Word and

adopted by the church. No minister or individual church has the authority to establish tests of fellowship for the world church.

2. If erring members are to be separated from church fellowship, this should be accomplished as set forth in the Biblical pattern. There are many other ways besides this to break fellowship or to separate, hurt, discipline or punish the erring one. Critical talk, undue pressures from the pulpit or the pen, and other un-Biblical means are often used. The result is often division which God does not take lightly. Paul places discord, jealousy, dissensions, factions and divisions right along with other works of the flesh (See Galatians 5:19-21).

3. God's balance in righteousness, love and faithfulness is the way of the cross. It is quite possible, however, apart from Calvary, to have unfaithfulness masquerading as love and unlove masquerading as faithfulness.

So we return to our point of departure. God's character must find its reflection in his people today, for God designed the church on the pattern of his own character. Church discipline is the human instrument that God uses to achieve his design.

Chapter 5

CHURCH DISCIPLINE SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

Question 1 - "Do you believe there is a necessity for and/or purpose in exercising church discipline in any form?"

Yes - 102 (98%)

No - 2 (2%)

It can readily be seen from the responses that an overwhelming percentage of the pastors surveyed (98%) believe there is necessity for and/or purpose in church discipline.

The two negative responses (those seeing no purpose for church discipline) came from mainline denominational churches generally considered to be theologically "liberal."

There were several revealing comments made which seemed to sum up the thinking of the majority. One Evangelical pastor asked, "What would the effects be on church and community if we didn't discipline?" And a Free Methodist pastor emphasized again that any discipline "must be done in love."

Question 2 - "Of the following statements, which one(s) best describe what you believe to be the rationale behind the exercise of church discipline?"

A. 85 (82%)

E. 38 (37%)

B. 66 (63%)

F. 27 (26%)

C. 45 (43%)

G. 4 (4%)

D. 35 (34%)

H. 11 (11%)

The most widely accepted rationale for the exercise of church discipline among the respondents was "Obedience to God and His Word" (82%) with "To reclaim offenders" as the only other answer among the six stated answers to receive a majority (63%). I found several of the comments most interesting.

"Obedience to God and His Word is our stated purpose in all we do," stated one Evangelical Free Church pastor, and, indeed, this seemingly would be a somewhat blanket rationale not only for church discipline but for any action.

Another pastor felt very keenly about the restoration of offenders saying that, according to Matthew 18:15, "the purpose of discipline is to reclaim offenders."

One Free Methodist pastor took issue with letters "D" and "E" as being proper rationale for church discipline. "Christ needs no vindication," he wrote, "and we are to make an example of no one."

Letter "H" received the most comment and a wide variety of comment at that. "We must always be led by the Spirit, never the letter of the law," offered one Church of God pastor while other pastors made comments such as "Discipline is needed to preserve the peace, unity and purity of the church, Christ's body" (Presbyterian), or "Church discipline is necessary to preserve the unity of the Body" (Nazarene).

While these were concerned with unity and peace, others were concerned about the church as an institution. "Church discipline is needed to maintain the integrity of the vows of membership," explained a United Methodist pastor while another United Methodist man said, "Church discipline is needed to maintain and preserve the institution for carrying on the work of Christ."

There is obviously a great deal of agreement among the pastors that the basic rationale for church discipline is obedience to God and His Word. Beyond that, however, there is mixed reaction that seems to follow after personal convictions rather than denominational lines.

I believe that perhaps summing up Question 2 best was an Orthodox Presbyterian pastor who wrote, "The rationale, reason and basis of discipline is the command of God in His Word. The purpose is threefold:

- a. To maintain the honor of Christ.
- b. To reclaim the offender.
- c. To preserve the purity of the church."

Question 3 - "In your ministry, have you ever been involved in a situation where you believe church discipline (mild or severe) was required?"

Yes - 92 (88%)

No - 12 (12%)

Again, a large majority of the responding pastors (88%) say they have been in situations where church discipline was required. The number, however, is somewhat less than the number who responded positively as to the need and purpose of church discipline in Question 1 (92 to 102). If 102 pastors see the need for the exercise of church discipline but only 92 say they have been in situations requiring it, what might we conclude? There are several options:

- a. Their congregations are already well-disciplined.
- b. They are avoiding the situations which may require disciplinary action.
- c. Some of the pastors are younger and, though seeing ideally the role of church discipline, have not yet encountered such a situation.

I have concluded from the returned survey that a proper answer to the question is a combination of b and c. There appear to be several pastors who, because of the potential confrontation and/or disruption which may come from discipline, have actively avoided it. Still others, young in the ministry, have not seemingly been faced with a situation requiring discipline. It would be well for our church leaders and seminaries to properly train pastors as to the Biblical function, necessity and manner of exercising church discipline.

Question 4 - "Which of the following types of discipline (if any) have you used?"

- A. 86 (83%)
- B. 72 (69%)
- C. 32 (31%)
- D. 10 (10%)
- E. 14 (13%)

With admonition (83%) and reproof/rebuke (69%) receiving substantial response, it would appear that these are the most widely used types of church discipline today. Roughly a third of the pastors stated that they have gone so far as to remove someone from the fellowship of the church.

Once more, the "other" responses were enlightening as to alternate forms of church discipline.. Several Lutheran pastors stated that they had disciplined members by asking them "not to participate in the Lord's Table", while a number of pastors indicated that they discipline by "removing them from any active participation for a time."

It would appear that we are open to use the "lesser" or "milder" forms of church discipline but hesitate to move to the point of actual

dismissal. Perhaps this is as it should be, or perhaps it indicates an unwillingness to really tackle the problem.

Question 5 - "Which of the following types of discipline (if any) would you use as circumstances warranted?"

A. 95 (91%)

B. 79 (76%)

C. 71 (68%)

D. 4 (4%)

E. 10 (10%)

Admonition (91%), reproof and rebuke (76%) are again the forms of discipline most widely favored. But, what is significant is this - While only 31% of the pastors responding said they had ever removed someone from membership for disciplinary reasons, 68% (more than double) said that they would do so should the circumstances dictate it. I see this as a dilemma which must be addressed. If, as these pastors seem to believe, excommunication is a valid type of church discipline, why is it so seldom used?

Perhaps some answers can be gleaned from the comments made. Seven pastors indicated that excommunication should be used only as "a last resort, when all else fails." Here we see further evidence, I believe, of the unwillingness of leadership to make the difficult decisions, to tackle the problem or to follow the Biblical directives concerning discipline.

Furthermore, one Evangelical pastor stated that his experience was that if there was no repentance after admonition and rebuke, that member "usually removed himself from the fellowship." This brings up another problem discussed more fully in Chapter 2 - "Why Should the

Church Discipline?" The problem is this: If indeed these unrepentant persons leave the congregation without full discipline procedure (i.e. excommunication), where do they go and what happens to them? They become the problem of another body, but as long as they are out of our hair, why should we care? Why? Because we must remember that our whole concern in church discipline is to bring about restoration and repentance of the individual. I believe that our discipline must continue until that goal is achieved.

Question 6 - Part I - "Do you believe there is ever cause to remove someone from the fellowship of the church?"

Yes - 95 (91%)

No - 9 (9%)

This question raises another interesting question. In Question 5, 71 pastors said they would use excommunication (removal from fellowship) as the circumstances warranted. But here in Question 6, 95 pastors say they believe there is cause to remove someone from the fellowship of the church. Why are there pastors who believe that there is just cause for a certain action, but refuse to take it? Could this not be an indication as to why so many of our congregations are powerless? As James 4:17 (NIV) exclaims, "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins." As pastors we must be willing to be obedient to the truth even when that may prove difficult or unpopular.

Question 6 - Part II - "If you answered yes, is that action irreversible?"

Yes - 19 (20%)

No - 76 (80%)

I have to admit bewilderment as to why 19 pastors (out of 95) would

believe that repentance would not bring about forgiveness and full restoration within the body (II Cor. 2:5-11).

"If God forgives, we must forgive also," said a Free Methodist minister while a Friends pastor stated it well in commenting, "Repentance is always respected."

Question 7 - "Which of the following, if any, would be a proper recipient of some type of church discipline?"

- A. 57 (55%)
- B. 86 (83%)
- C. 84 (81%)
- D. 57 (55%)
- E. 2 (2%)
- F. 5 (5%)

The responding pastors seemed to have a fairly good grasp of the nature of disciplinable actions. Where Biblical principles were being violated and the unity of the body threatened, over 80% felt that that individual should be disciplined. On the other hand, where private offenses were involved, there was less support, sensing perhaps the need for confidentiality as well as the difficulty in determining the nature of the private offense and its effect on the church as a whole. Likewise, there was question as to who or what determined the "essential" in doctrine and what rejection of essential doctrine involved. "Some would regard a person's doubt or questioning concerning essential doctrines as rejection," said one Baptist pastor. "That person should not be disciplined," he continued, "but disciplined."

Another Friends pastor summed up his answer after having checked "A" through "E" with this - "The church cannot grow if pastoral leader-

ship can't handle impurities. We can't tolerate but must learn how to deal with it."

Question 8 - "Do you believe, in general, that the church has been

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------|
| A. too harsh | - 2 (2%) |
| B. too lenient | - 82 (79%) |
| C. consistently faithful | - 7 (7%) |
| D. inconsistent | - 13 (13%) |

in dealing with situations which may have required church discipline?"

The majority definitely feel that the church has been lenient in confronting disciplinary matters. "Our lenience has shown us to be unloving," stated one Baptist pastor. "Discipline needs very loving leaders who care enough to lovingly reprove and rebuke." "Today," added an Evangelical pastor, "the church is powerless, indecisive and afraid."

Even among those who saw the church to be too lenient in dealing with possible discipline situations a great deal of inconsistency was also seen. In the words of one frustrated Evangelical pastor, "In my own ministry, I believe we are consistent with some types of problems, too lenient or too harsh with others."

What conclusions may be reached from such a survey?

1. Church discipline has a definite purpose and place in the life of the church.
2. Though the value of church discipline is seen, pastors, in general, have difficulty knowing exactly who to discipline, how to discipline or why we should discipline at all.
3. There is a great need for the recovery of this "lost"

evangelism tool in our churches.

4. Our seminaries, Bible schools and denominations must take the lead in educating pastors and laity as to the who, how and why of church discipline.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE SURVEY
(104 Pastors Responding)

27

1. Do you believe there is a necessity for and/or purpose in exercising church discipline in any form?

Yes 102 No 2

2. Of the following statements, which one(s) best describes what you believe to be the rationale behind the exercise of church discipline?

- 85 A. Obedience to God and His Word.
66 B. To reclaim offenders.
45 C. To maintain church purity
35 D. To vindicate the integrity and honor of Christ.
38 E. To deter others from sin.
27 F. To avoid the judgment of God upon the local church.
4 G. None of the above.
11 H. Other (Please state briefly).

3. In your ministry, have you ever been involved in a situation where you believe church discipline (mild or severe) was required?

Yes 92 No 12

4. Which of the following types of discipline (if any) have you used?

- 86 A. Admonition
72 B. Reproof, rebuke
32 C. Excommunication (removal from fellowship)
10 D. None of the above.
14 E. Other (Please list).

5. Which of the following types of discipline (if any) would you use as the circumstances warranted?

- 95 A. Admonition
80 B. Reproof, rebuke
71 C. Excommunication (removal from fellowship)
4 D. None of the above.
10 E. Other (Please list).

6. Do you believe there is ever cause to remove someone from the fellowship of the church?

Yes 95 No 9

If you answered yes, is that action irreversible?

Yes 19 No 76

7. Which of the following, if any, would be a proper recipient of some type of church discipline?

- 57 A. Someone engaged in a serious private offense.
86 B. Someone actively engaged in forming divisive factions.
84 C. Someone living in habitual violation of Biblical morality.
57 D. Someone who rejects essential doctrines of the faith.
2 E. None of the above.
5 F. Other (Please state briefly.)

8. Do you believe, in general, that the church has been

<u>2</u>	A.	too harsh
<u>82</u>	B.	too lenient
<u>7</u>	C.	consistently faithful
<u>12</u>	D.	other

in dealing with situations which may have required church discipline?

The Church Discipline Survey was mailed out to the following 150 representative churches:

<u>CHURCH</u>	<u>Number Mailed Out</u>	<u>Number Returned</u>
1. Assemblies of God	1	1
2. American Baptist	5	3
3. Baptist Bible Fellowship	1	1
4. Conservative Baptist	5	4
5. General Conference Baptist	1	-
6. Independent Baptist	1	1
7. Bible Church	3	2
8. Church of Christ	3	2
9. Christian Church - Disciples of Christ	1	1
10. Christian and Missionary Alliance	1	-
11. Church of God	1	1
12. Church of God (Anderson)	1	1
13. Community Church	8	7
14. United Church of Christ	3	3
15. Evangelical Church	37	29
16. Evangelical Free	1	1
17. Covenant Church	2	1
18. Foursquare	3	2
19. Free Methodist	2	2
20. Friends	4	4
21. Independent	6	4
22. Full Gospel	3	-
23. Interdenominational	1	1
24. Evangelical Methodist	1	1
25. American Lutheran	8	6
26. Missouri Synod Lutheran	5	2
27. Lutheran Church of American	4	2
28. United Methodist	17	5
29. Mennonite	1	1
30. Open Bible	1	1
31. Missionary Church	1	1
32. Church of the Nazarene	5	3
33. Pentecostal Holiness	1	1
34. Orthodox Presbyterian	1	1
35. Presbyterian	11	9

Chapter 6

ANSWERS TO SOME COMMON OBJECTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Whenever the church attempts to be faithful to the Biblical directions concerning discipline, a multitude of objections and questions are sure to arise. John Calvin was well aware of this when he wrote in the sixteenth century:

But because some persons, in their hatred of discipline, recoil from its very name, let them understand this: if no society, indeed, no house which has even a small family, can be kept in proper condition without discipline, it is much more necessary in the church, whose condition should be as ordered as possible . . . Therefore, all who desire to remove discipline or to hinder its restoration, whether they do this deliberately or out of ignorance, are surely contributing to the ultimate dissolution of the church. For what will happen if each is allowed to do what he pleases? Yet that would happen, if to the preaching of doctrine there were not added private admonitions, corrections, and other aids of the sort that sustain doctrine and do not let it remain idle. ²⁰

Many people mistakenly think that once a Biblical teaching is established, they need only raise a few objections against it to overthrow it. This is not the case. The only objections which can overthrow a doctrine are those which overthrow the facts on which it is based. None of the following objections or questions (many of which have been personally encountered) can do that. Nevertheless, many Christians face genuine struggles in the realm of church discipline. Therefore, as a help to the sincere questioner, the following answers are offered to some of these common objections and questions.

1. Objection: "The practice of discipline could cause divisions."

Answer: Yes, it could; but so could the consistent preach-

ing of the Word (See Luke 12:51-53). The fact is that obedience to Christ and his Word is more important than an artificial "unity" built on disobedience and compromise. If discipline is carried out decently and in order according to the Scriptural pattern, divisions will be kept to a minimum.

2. Objection: "To discipline someone would be to judge them."

Answer: If guilt is clearly established (as is essential), then the person has judged himself. As long as he refuses to repent, he continues to pronounce himself guilty. In discipline, the church does not determine a judgment, but only pronounces the judgment of Christ upon the person who insists on hearing his own guilt. Paul rebukes the Corinthians for failing to do this (See I Corinthians 5:1, 2) and the Lord similarly rebukes the church in Thyatira (See Revelation 2:20). There is a great difference between the right act of judging of I Corinthians 5:3, 4 and the wrong act of judging of Matthew 7:1-5.

3. Objection: "We are all sinners ourselves so how can we condemn another?"

Answer: This objection is similar to the previous one. Yes, we are all sinners ourselves. If we were to persist in open sin without repentance, remorse or desire to change, we would be subjects for discipline also. Again, the point is that we ourselves condemn no one. We only pronounce Christ's judgment upon those who bring this censure upon themselves by persisting in sin without repenting. Such impenitence is inconsistent with a Christian profession of faith.

4. Objection: "If our Christian leaders and friends intend to practice discipline, how can we trust them in confidence with any sin-problems we might have?"

Answer: Hopefully, we can always trust our Christian leaders to be faithful to Christ. If they are faithful to Christ, they will certainly be faithful to the best interests of his people. If I go to a Christian friend to ask his help in conquering a sin into which I have fallen I obviously expect that he will not betray my trust. If, on the other hand, I display persistent sinful behavior, and have neither intention nor desire to be delivered from the sin, then certainly discipline is required despite what may appear to be violated confidentiality and trust. In the latter case, the purity of God's church is being violated and his name profaned, and the individual's very soul destroyed because no one will confront him with his sin and call him to repentance.

5. Objection: "Church discipline (especially excommunication) seems so unloving."

Answer: Certainly, if progress is visible, as a person is confronted and Biblically counselled about his sin, then that procedure should be continued. If there is no visible progress in the form of repentance, or at least a professed desire to overcome the sin, then the church has no authority to continue hoping for deliverance without discipline. Compromise or toleration of overt and continual sin is not an option for God's people. To continue a process of dialogue with a person who has made clear his intention to continue in sin is a failure to act Biblically. It betrays the extent to which humanistic psychological theory has become authoritative in our churches. Lack of church discipline is to be seen for what it really is - not a loving concern as is claimed, but an indifference to the honor of Christ and the welfare of his people.

6. Objection: "Does not the phrase 'against you' (Matthew

18:15) limit disciplinary procedures to be followed to the one who is sinned against?"

Answer: Every sin, if persisted in without repentance, is a sin, first of all, against Christ, and then against his church, as well as against the specific individuals involved. Therefore, more is at stake than the feelings of the one currently sinned against.

To limit Christ's message in the way suggested here would be to turn his teachings into an absurdity. For if only the one sinned against is entitled to pursue discipline, then those outside the church who are sinned against have no recourse. Thus, whenever a brother sinned against his non-Christian neighbor, the church could do nothing about it, since no one within the church was sinned against. That would be a dishonor to the Lord.

If pastors and elders are to lead God's church (See I Timothy 3:5, 5:12; Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24), they must be entrusted with certain disciplinary powers. If the pastor has no right to proceed with discipline simply because he was not personally sinned against, his hands are tied and he is unable to fulfill his God-appointed responsibility to govern the church and guard the flock of God. In the Old Testament, priests had power to exclude the unclean and were held responsible when they failed to do so. The angels (pastors) of the seven churches of the Revelation are especially rebuked for failing to lead in the exercise of discipline.

In addition, the power of binding and loosing (Matthew 18:18) is given to the church, not to the individuals sinned against. The church must pronounce God's judgment faithfully even though it hurts the feelings of the offender. The integrity and purity of God's church demand

it.

Furthermore, persons sinned against may or may not be mature Christians, and may or may not be leaders in the church. If they are not mature in Christ, or adequately instructed in the Scriptures, they may, in keeping with the spirit of the age, fail to see the necessity of discipline. The integrity of the church in its obedience to Christ must, in such cases, be maintained by those appointed to rule.

7. Objection: "Who is to decide how much time is to be allowed between each of the steps prescribed in Matthew 18?"

Answer: The obvious fact is that somebody must decide. No prescription is given by the Lord as to how much time is to be allowed between each step; thus, we must assume that those closely involved in the disciplinary process must trust the Holy Spirit to lead them. It would seem, however, that to prevent extreme subjectivity, their chief criterion must be the presence or absence of visible progress or visible responsiveness to admonition and rebuke. In other words, one must ask what visible effect the Word of God is having on the offender. Does he show signs of hardening or softening as God's Word is applied to him? Church leaders can make critical decisions only on the basis of what is visible and, therefore, must proceed beyond admonition and rebuke when these produce no visible results.

8. Objection: "Why proceed with public censures if the offending member decides to pull out of the church in order to avoid them?"

Answer: First of all, a man should not be allowed to lessen the judgment against himself for his course of sin by leaving the church without proper cause and becoming a divider.

The integrity of Christ's church must be maintained against both

internal and external criticisms. At times, to allow a quiet withdrawal can only be construed as "sweeping sin under the carpet."

Furthermore, discipline, according to Biblical revelation, is necessary for the benefit of the offender for it may lead to repentance. The failure to administer discipline is equivalent to a tacit admission that there is no spiritual power or authority in the act, but simply a breaking of outward ties.

Then, too, excommunication forwarns of the future and final judgment of God upon the unrepentant person, a judgment which no one can escape by quiet withdrawal. This may further serve to deter others from sin.

A church has a duty to other Christian congregations not to allow a person to leave its membership in apparently good standing when it is known that that person is living in sin. Though this probably was not a problem in the first century church, it is a very real one today. No church has the right to forsake its responsibilities to other Christian communities. If another church, knowing that a certain person is under discipline, proceeds to receive that person into fellowship, their sin will be upon their own heads. On the other hand, if one church allows an unrepentant sinner to withdraw quietly, and then that person joins another church, the first church (which failed to discipline) is responsible for allowing the corruption of another church when it, by proper disciplinary action, may have prevented it. To allow a quiet withdrawal would be to seek peace through compromise rather than obedience. This is a worthless type of peace.

9. Objection: "I just cannot agree with throwing people out of the church for every little sin. The Lord did not call me to be a

policeman."

Answer: People are not cast out for "little" sins but for hardened impenitence in their sin. Nor should one be looking for sins in other people's lives. Such a mentality is distorted and unloving. If this subject is treated with Biblical faithfulness, there should be no such abuses.

10. Objection: "I believe that no true Christian can lose his salvation. Does not excommunication imply a loss of salvation?"

Answer: Not necessarily. In excommunicating a person, the church is not passing judgment on the offender's ultimate salvation. As has been noted, the long-range goal of discipline is the offender's spiritual restoration. It is not the church's prerogative to judge the category into which a particular offender fits. The example of David stands to remind us how badly a true man of God can fall while the life of Judas reminds us how close a man may be to Christ and yet perish.

There is obviously no limit as to the objections the human mind can bring against God's Word. I trust, however, that as concerns church discipline, the chief ones have been noted and answered fairly.

Chapter 7

GETTING ON WITH THE TASK

I think that it is safe to say that the recovery of healthy church discipline will not be easy. The church is afflicted with a kind of paralysis resulting from an inner contradiction - a desire to observe Biblical precepts countered by a fear of repeating the blunders of the past.

According to Matthew 18, as we have seen, the act of going to the brother is a function of the gospel analagous to evangelism or missionary proclamation. In discipline, as in the presentation of the good news to a non-Christian, a person is presented the opportunity of being liberated from the power of sin in all its forms by coming under the rule of Christ and walking in his way.

What is at stake is nothing less than the life of the church itself. It has become an accepted article of recent theology to consider evangelism as part of the essence of the life of the church and not merely a desirable ideal. In Emil Brunner's famous phrase, "The church exists by mission as fire exists by burning." Unfortunately, congregational discipline has not yet been afforded that position, although according to Reformation thought, church discipline was one of the marks of the church.

Congregational discipline belongs to the essence of the church as much as evangelism because both are inescapable implications of the gospel. It makes no sense to declare the good news of liberation from sin

to people outside the church and then refuse to declare it to Christians within the church. . The gospel is not merely good news by which the sinner can be converted. It is also good news by which the Christian can continue to live.

Not just on the basis of theological principle, but in practice as well, it makes no sense to accept the task of evangelism and then to neglect discipline. What is the point of adding people to the church through gospel proclamation if membership in that church becomes meaningless because of failure to discipline? Evangelism itself is soon undermined if people discover that in the absence of discipline, to belong or not belong to the church really makes no difference.

If there is aggressive evangelism without supporting discipline in the church created by that evangelism, there comes a shift in the purpose of the evangelistic program. It often ceases to be considered the task of incorporating people into a church and becomes instead a religious experience for its own sake.

There are some who might still ask, however, whether modern revivalism isn't consistent with the thesis that congregational discipline is a function of the gospel. The answer is that much modern revivalism fails to take seriously the most basic thing envisaged by the gospel - namely, the church. Proclaiming the gospel means calling people into that community which accepts the rule of God and lives for its eventual full realization on earth.

It is clear, then, that church discipline is of primary importance. Without it, the church ceases to have meaning and without a meaningful church, evangelism also loses its meaning. It is mistaken to think, therefore, as some modern popular theology seems to hold, that

ever more aggressive evangelism will make up for the neglect of discipline and its consequent weakening of the church. The call for more evangelism not backed by discipline ends up as "cheap grace."

The parallel between gospel proclamation and church discipline implies that both are equally indispensable to the realization of the Kingdom of God. In the light of this, we can insist that the recovery of discipline according to the gospel will strengthen the mission of the church. Evangelism will be clarified when people see that conversion leads to a disciplined life in the church. The outreach of the church can only benefit from faithful discipline.

Again, no doubt some people will think that an attempt to recover this ministry of discipling the brother will lead back to the kind of legalism that has characterized so much of the history of the church. This can happen, of course, but only if discipline ceases to ground itself in the gospel. As we have seen, the alternatives are not legalism or indulgence. It is, therefore, not acceptable to pit one against the other and to say that indulgence is no worse than legalism. When laxity is put forward as the answer to legalism, it shows that people have not yet caught sight of the gospel. The real options are the liberation of men through the gospel or continued bondage to sin in the form of either indulgence or legalism - it doesn't really matter which one. Legalism is still not true liberation any more than license.

A recovery of discipline does not, therefore, imply a new era of the inquisition. There are, frankly, problems to be faced in churches where discipline has been neglected and a backlog of sin in the church has been allowed to build up. Where congregational discipline is exercised properly, however, its effect is to reduce the number of instances

of corrective discipline that arise because the meaning of discipleship is kept clearly in view. It is just like discipline in a home. We may say of a Christian congregation that it is well disciplined, not when perpetually engaged in efforts to reclaim offenders, but when there are few offenders to be reclaimed. Instances of discipline are not, of course, to be desired. But if sin makes its appearance, discipline is very much to be desired as the answer to the problem.

Too many people think that congregational discipline is somehow a disgrace to the church and, therefore, cases of discipline are swept under the rug. The really serious disgrace, however, is failure to tender help to a stumbling brother. What is disgraceful about offering a thief, for instance, liberation from compulsions that are robbing him of a life of genuine happiness, the kind of life God intends for him? And, if he refuses such liberation, what is disgraceful about reminding him honestly that such conduct is incompatible with life in the Kingdom of God? Such integrity becomes, at this stage, the only avenue to his liberation.

Church discipline will not be considered a disgrace if it is carried out redemptively instead of punitively. Recall that Jesus' invitation to tax collectors and sinners was an attempt to reclaim people excommunicated from the synagogue. Surely, his call to discipleship is not to be considered an embarrassment or disgrace! On the contrary, it issues in joy and celebration - that is what it should and can be in our churches, too.

APPENDIX A

CHURCH DISCIPLINE SURVEY COVER LETTER
AND CHURCH DISCIPLINE SURVEY

Evangelical CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
Holding Forth the Word of Life
4927 NORTHEAST FIFTY-FIFTH AVENUE, PORTLAND, OREGON 97218

January 27, 1984

Dear Pastor,

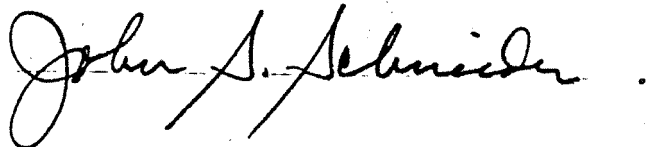
My name is John Schneider and I am currently ministering in the Evangelical Congregational Church in northeast Portland.

I am presently enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry program at Western Evangelical Seminary and am engaged in an independent study of the nature and exercise of church discipline.

I would sincerely appreciate your help in taking a few minutes to answer the following questions on the subject and returning them to me in the self-addressed stamped envelope by March 1st. Your reply will greatly enhance my research in the matter and you can be assured that the information will be used for statistical analysis only and will remain confidential.

Thank you.

Sincerely in Christ,



John S. Schneider

JS:sh

1. Do you believe there is a necessity for and/or purpose in exercising church discipline in any form?

Yes ____ No ____

2. Of the following statements, which one(s) best describes what you believe to be the rationale behind the exercise of church discipline?

- ____ A. Obedience to God and His Word.
- ____ B. To reclaim offenders.
- ____ C. To maintain church purity
- ____ D. To vindicate the integrity and honor of Christ.
- ____ E. To deter others from sin.
- ____ F. To avoid the judgment of God upon the local church.
- ____ G. None of the above.
- ____ H. Other (Please state briefly).

3. In your ministry, have you ever been involved in a situation where you believe church discipline (mild or severe) was required?

Yes ____ No ____

4. Which of the following types of discipline (if any) have you used?

- ____ A. Admonition
- ____ B. Reproof, rebuke
- ____ C. Excommunication (removal from fellowship)
- ____ D. None of the above.
- ____ E. Other (Please list).

5. Which of the following types of discipline (if any) would you use as the circumstances warranted?

- ____ A. Admonition
- ____ B. Reproof, rebuke
- ____ C. Excommunication (removal from fellowship)
- ____ D. None of the above.
- ____ E. Other (Please list).

6. Do you believe there is ever cause to remove someone from the fellowship of the church?

Yes ____ No ____

If you answered yes, is that action irreversible?

Yes ____ No ____

7. Which of the following, if any, would be a proper recipient of some type of church discipline?

- ____ A. Someone engaged in a serious private offense.
- ____ B. Someone actively engaged in forming divisive factions.
- ____ C. Someone living in habitual violation of Biblical morality.
- ____ D. Someone who rejects essential doctrines of the faith.
- ____ E. None of the above.
- ____ F. Other (Please state briefly.)

8. Do you believe, in general, that the church has been

- ☐ A. too harsh
- ☐ B. too lenient
- ☐ C. consistently faithful

in dealing with situations which may have required church discipline?

Thank you for your responses. If you would care to receive the results from this survey, please check here.

APPENDIX B

A CASE STUDY: BILL

Bill came to our church with positive recommendations, tremendous enthusiasm for the Lord and his work, and a willingness to serve and be disciplined. He had lived in my home town, had attended my home church and had been involved in ministry there.

Shortly after Bill and his family arrived in the community and began attending our church, the staff position of Youth Director became available. This was a part-time position and seemed tailor-made for Bill. With a growing family, he could use the extra money the position paid but, more importantly, Bill demonstrated the skills and love necessary for the demanding job of working with Junior and Senior Highers.

Upon review of the job description, interviews with the Youth Committee and Church Board and several sessions with the kids themselves, Bill was offered the job of church Youth Director. To our delight, he accepted.

Bill, his wife and children rapidly became an integral part of the congregation. On several occasions, members of the church family helped them out with finances, housing, babysitting and the like. The youth group was prospering; Bill was happy; the congregation was happy.

Through all this time, I met weekly with Bill to share mutual joys and burdens, to set goals and make plans for the youth work, and to pray together. It was a positive experience for me, and I learned to accept Bill and to trust him. In addition, Bill was meeting regularly

with the Youth Committee and our Board of Deacons (Elders).

After a year or so, in one of our weekly meetings, Bill expressed a desire to expand his ministry beyond just the youth to the adults of the congregation. I appreciated his willingness to serve, and having been assured that his schedule allowed for such a commitment of time and energy, encouraged him to begin a home Bible study group with several of the newer folks attending our church. Because of my own commitment to lead a discipleship group on the evening Bill's Bible study group chose to meet, I asked one of the church board members to attend regularly to give Bill encouragement and support and to serve as my liason.

I continued to meet with Bill regularly, though now, more and more often, there were conflicts on both sides which prevented us from meeting as often as before. Still, when we did meet, there were very candid sessions as we discussed church and personal struggles, dreams, frustrations and the like. He shared what he felt was right and wrong with the church and my ministry as did I. Though we didn't always agree, there was always a common bond of concern, love and trust that we seemingly continued to share. It had been nearly two years now since Bill had been in a position of leadership. I had no inkling as to the storm that was about to burst upon the horizon.

It began one Sunday morning as Bill spent the entire Morning Worship hour in discussion with one of the deacons. Later, I learned that some very serious matters had been brought up and that Bill had requested that I, as pastor, and the Board of Deacons meet with him the following evening. In preparation for that meeting, a written document had been prepared and handed to me that Bill said he would like to share with us confidentially at that meeting.

I did not examine the document until shortly before the scheduled meeting, but imagine my shock as I read the following unsubstantiated charges leveled against the spiritual leadership of our congregation -

1. Deacon A (mentioned by name)
 - a. does not control his tongue
 - b. devises evil in his heart behind a smile.
 - c. His family is not in order.
 - d. There is doubt as to whether he is truly a Christian.
 - e. If no repentance -- then removal.
2. Deacons (as a group)
 - a. fearful to confront and fight evil in our midst.
 - b. powerless to confront evil but ignore it or push it aside.
3. Sunday School Teachers
 - a. don't know the first thing about communicating their ideas to the students.
 - b. don't know the elementary things about God, Jesus or Satan.
 - c. They cannot teach because they are not Spirit-led.
4. Pastor John Schneider
 - a. does not rule family. Bitterness causing whole family to be destroyed.
 - b. too young to be senior pastor.

His conclusion was that a change was needed but that several key persons, including myself and others of the church leadership, were keeping it from occurring.

Though deeply grieved at what had been charged, I along with the

deacons, met with Bill and engaged in a great deal of self-examination and prayer. We felt that if there was indeed substance to any of his accusations with the Lord's help and our mutual support, these could be worked out among ourselves in confidence. The problem was that the matter had for some time been anything but confidential.

We learned from Bill that the document charging the church leadership, which we had received only hours before, had been circulating among the members of his Bible study group for several weeks and that they had "discussed" the truth of his accusations with others. What was thought to have been a private matter was now discovered to be anything but private but, in fact, involved a large portion of the congregation.

It was here that I began to see clearly the wisdom of Biblical directives for church discipline. As a first step, the deacons and I spent considerable amounts of time in continued self-examination and prayer (Matthew 7:5; Galatians 6:1, 2). We tested our motives to determine whether they were properly aimed at Bill's restoration or improperly at revenge. Then, having the confirmation of God's Spirit that we were personally in a right relationship with him, we proceeded along the lines set forth in Matthew 18:15-18 and the church constitution.

I personally met with Bill in personal counsel on at least three occasions and through Biblical teaching and exhortation tried to bring him to repentance. I tried to show him that his actions in maligning the church leadership as he had publicly done was divisive and that, in teaching in such a manner, he was guilty of heresy and slander and of bringing reproach to the reputation of Christ and his church. At this point, there was no evidence of repentance but a repeated refusal on

Bill's part to submit to the authority and discipline of the church.

Since the desired response to bring about Bill's repentance was not gained in private, we moved to the second step recorded in Matthew 18 as Bill, the deacons, several "impartial" witnesses and I met to review the situation and to bring about restoration. After repeated attempts over the period of several weeks, Bill still refused to repent.

At this point, the church leadership felt it necessary that before further action was forthcoming in bringing the matter before the congregation, Bill should be dismissed from his position of Youth Director and that he be asked to discontinue his Bible study group. Upon Church Board approval and Bill's consent, this was done.

We now were, according to Matthew 18, to "tell it to the church." The following letter, as required by the Church constitution, was sent to each member of the congregation:

"To the Membership of the Evangelical Congregational Church:

It is with deep sorrow but firm conviction that this letter comes to you.

For the past several weeks now, the Pastor, the Deacons and the Church Board have been dealing with a situation that, if not handled carefully and in line with God's Word, could seriously damage the unity and ministry of this congregation.

By action at its last meeting, the Church Board has removed Bill _____ from his position as Youth Director. This action was not taken in haste but only after hours of self-examination and prayer, and personal as well as collective counseling. This was in keeping with the steps to achieve restoration as set forth by our Lord in Matthew 18.

Therefore, in keeping with Scriptural and Consitutional guidelines, you are (as a member of the Evangelical Congregational Church) called to be present at a congregational trial to hear the charge of heresy/slander being brought against Bill _____.

In keeping with our Constitutional guidelines (Article III, Sections 3-6), only those members who are called as witnesses will be allowed to speak. You, as a congregational member, will be present in an effort to bring about restoration and repentance. Failing in this, you and your fellow members (members only) will determine Bill's guilt or innocence, and his possible removal from the fellowship of the church."

At the same time as this letter was mailed to the congregation, I personally hand-delivered the following letter to Bill (in accordance with the church constitution):

"Accused - Bill _____
 Charge - Slander/Heresy
 Accusers and Witnesses - Pastor and Deacons
 Trial Date - _____

Bill, because we love you, our focus even in this trial will be to restore you rather than to expose or condemn you. All of us sincerely regret that matters have been such that so extreme a measure as this has been necessary. We pray that in the spirit of God's Word (Matthew 18, Ephesians 4:15, Romans 16:17-18 and II Timothy 4:2) your heart might be softened and that you might be humbled before the Lord. Through all of this, we have been brought to that place . . . may you allow God to do the same for you."

In the intervening days, several further attempts at counsel were made to bring about the desired repentance from Bill, but to no avail.

I wish I could report a positive outcome from this whole matter saying that Bill had repented of his sin and was fully restored to his place in the body. But such was not the case - The trial was held; Bill admitted misjudgment on his part but refused to repent. He was found guilty of the charges by the congregation and removed from the fellowship of the church.

Many lessons were learned from this unfortunate circumstance (which only further proves God's ability to bring good from what was meant for evil). Among those lessons learned were:

1. First, and obviously of least importance, I learned that God has interesting ways of giving out dissertation topics.

2. I recognized the need to act swiftly, firmly and Scripturally when discipline is needed. Had the leadership of the church hesitated or faltered in the exercise of the described discipline, I have no doubt that the result would have been a severely divided church, perhaps

beyond repair.

3. I learned the importance of having spiritual men and women who fully support me (though they may not always agree with me) in positions of church leadership.

4. I came to see the difficulty of any meaningful church discipline in view of the splintered church .

In Bill's case, within weeks of his removal from our church fellowship, he had become a member of another evangelical congregation just several miles away. The desired repentance and restoration for which we have been praying, no longer seems possible. Churches, especially evangelical churches, need to take greater care in making sure that persons desiring membership in their local assembly are not under the discipline of another body. Such cooperation would help serve to make church discipline the effective discipling tool it was intended to be.

APPENDIX C

WHAT THE PROTESTANT FOREFATHERS TAUGHT
CONCERNING CHURCH DISCIPLINE

It is of great value and support for the position of strong church discipline to consider what has been written on this subject in several of the leading Protestant creeds. These creeds represent the insights of large groups of churches which on various occasions called the best of their leaders together to state in writing exactly what they believed. These creeds provide information concerning how mainstream Protestantism has interpreted Scripture. The following does not obviously exhaust the material, but is especially clear on the subject.

The Heidelberg Catechism was introduced into the churches and schools of Heidelberg, Germany in 1563. It has remained a widely-used tool in Reformed Churches. In it we find the following:

"Question 83. What are the keys of the kingdom of heaven?

(Matthew 16:19)

Answer. The preaching of the holy gospel, and Christian discipline, or excommunication out of the Christian church; by these two, the kingdom of heaven is opened to believers, and shut against unbelievers. (John 21:23; Matthew 18:15-18).

Question 84. How is the kingdom of heaven opened and shut by the preaching of the holy gospel?

Answer. Thus: when, according to the command of Christ, it is declared and publicly testified to all and every believer, that whenever

they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are readily forgiven them of God, for the sake of Christ's merits; and on the contrary, when it is declared and testified to all unbelievers, and such as do not sincerely repent, that they stand exposed to the wrath of God, and eternal condemnation, so long as they are unconverted: according to which testimony of the gospel, God will judge them, both in this and the life to come. (Matthew 28:19; John 3:18-36; Mark 16:15, 16; II Thessalonians 1:7-9; John 20:21-23; Matthew 16:19; Romans 2:2-17).

Question 85. How is the kingdom of heaven shut and opened by Christian discipline?

Answer. Thus: when, according to the command of Christ, those who, under the name of Christians, maintain doctrines or practices inconsistent therewith, and will not, after having been brotherly admonished, renounce their errors and wicked course of life, are complained of to the church, or to those who are thereunto appointed by the church; and if they despise their admonition, are, by them, forbidden the use of the sacraments; whereby they are excluded from the Christian church, and by God Himself from the Kingdom of Christ; and when they promise and show real amendment, are again received as members of Christ and His church. (Matthew 18:15; I Corinthians 5:12; Matthew 18:15-18; Romans 12:7-10; I Corinthians 12:28; I Timothy 5:17; II Thessalonians 3:14; Matthew 18:17; I Corinthians 5:3-5; II Corinthians 2:6-11; Luke 15:18)."

One of the great Protestant creeds is The Westminster Confession of Faith completed in 1646. Chapter XXX is entitled "Of Church Censures" and reads as follows:

"I. The Lord Jesus, as King and Head of His church, hath therein

appointed a government, in the hand of church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate.

II. To these officers the keys of the Kingdom of heaven are committed; by virtue whereof, they have power, respectively to retain, and remit sins; to shut that kingdom against the impenitent, both by the Word, and censures; and to open it unto penitent sinners, by the ministry of the Gospel; and by absolution from censures, as occasion shall require.

III. Church censures are necessary, for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren, for deterring of others from the like offences, for the purging out of that leaven which might infect the whole lump, for vindicating the honour of Christ, and the holy profession of the gospel, and for preventing the wrath of God, which might justly fall upon the Church, if they should suffer His covenant, and the seals thereof, to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders.

IV. For the better attaining of these ends, the officers of the church are to proceed by admonition, suspension from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper for a season; and by excommunication from the church, according to the nature of the crime, and demerit of the person."

While the predominantly Presbyterian Westminster Assembly was meeting in England, the Congregationalists of New England were experiencing the need for a confession of faith of their own. So the leading Congregationalists met in Synod at Cambridge, Massachusetts, from 1646 to 1648. Desiring to demonstrate their substantial doctrinal agreement with their brothers in England, they adopted the Westminster Confession with some changes which concern points of controversy in church discipline. They then proceeded to offer a much more detailed statement of

church discipline than had been previously offered in a creed. The following is Chapter XIV of The Cambridge Platform, which is entitled "Of Excommunications and Other Censures."

"1. The censures of the church are appointed by Christ for the preventing, removing, and healing of offenses in the church; for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren; for the deterring of others from like offences; for purging out the leaven which may infect the whole lump; for vindicating the honour of Christ, and of his church, and the holy profession of the gospel; and for preventing the wrath of God, that may justly fall upon the church, if they should suffer his covenant, and the seals thereof, to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders. (I Timothy 5:20; Deuteronomy 17:12, 13; Jude 23; Deuteronomy 13:11; I Corinthians 5:6; Romans 2:24; Revelation 2:14-16, 20.)

2. If an offence be private (one brother offending another) the offender is to go, and acknowledge his repentance for it unto his offended brother, who is then to forgive him, but if the offender neglect or refuse to do it, the brother offended is to go, and convince and admonish him of it, between themselves privately: if thereupon the offender be brought to repent of his offence, the admonisher hath won his brother, but if the offender hear not his brother, the brother offended is to take with him one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established (whether the word of admonition, if the offender receive it, or the word of complaint, if he refuse it): for if he refuse it, the offended brother is by the mouth of the elders to tell the church, and if he hear the church, and declare the same by penitent confession, he is recovered and gained; and if the church discern him to be willing to hear, yet not fully convinced of his offence, as in case of heresy,

they are to dispense to him public admonition, which declaring the offender to lie under the public offence of the church, doth thereby withhold or suspend him from the holy fellowship of the Lord's Supper, till his offence be removed by penitent confession. If he still continue obstinate, they are to cast him out by excommunication. (Matthew 5:23, 24; Luke 17:3, 4; Matthew 18:15-17; Titus 3:10.)

3. But if the offence be more public at first, and of a more heinous and criminal nature, to wit, such as are condemned by the light of nature; then the church without such gradual proceeding, is to cast out the offender from their holy communion, for the further mortifying of his sin and the healing of his soul, in the day of the Lord Jesus. (I Corinthians 5:4, 5, 7.)

4. In dealing with an offender, great care is to be taken, that we be neither overstrict or rigorous, too indulgent or remiss; our proceeding herein ought to be with a spirit of meekness, considering ourselves, lest we also be tempted; and that the best of us have need of much forgiveness from the Lord. Yet the winning and healing of the offender's soul, being the end of these endeavours, we must not daub with untempered mortar, nor heal the wounds of our brethren slightly. On some have compassion, others save with fear. (Galatians 6:1; Matthew 18:34, 35; 6:14, 15; Ezekiel 13:10; Jeremiah 6:14.)

5. While the offender remains excommunicate, the church is to refrain from all member-like communion with him in spiritual things, and also from all familiar communion with him in civil things, farther than the necessity of natural, or domestical, or civil relations do require; and are therefore to forbear to eat and drink with him, that he may be ashamed. (Matthew 18:17; I Corinthians 5:11; II Thessalonians 3:6, 14.)

6. Excommunication being a spiritual punishment, it doth not prejudice the excommunicate in, nor deprive him of his civil rights, and therefore toucheth not princes or other magistrates, in point of their civil dignity or authority. And, the excommunicate being but as a publican and a heathen, heathens being lawfully permitted to come to hear the Word in church assemblies, we acknowledge therefore the like liberty of hearing the Word may be permitted to persons excommunicate that is permitted unto heathen. And because we are not without hope of his recovery, we are not to account him as an enemy but to admonish him as a brother. (I Corinthians 14:24, 25; II Thessalonians 3:14, 15.)

7. If the Lord sanctify the censure to the offender, so as by the grace of Christ, he doth testify his repentance, with humble confession of his sin, and judging of himself, giving glory unto God, the church is then to forgive him, and to comfort him, and to restore him to the wonted brotherly communion, which formerly he enjoyed with them. (II Corinthians 2:7, 8.)

8. The suffering of profane or scandalous livers to continue in fellowship, and partake in the sacraments, is doubtless a great sin in those that have power in their hands to redress it, and do it not. Nevertheless, inasmuch as Christ and his apostles in their times, and the prophets and other godly in theirs, did lawfully partake of the Lord's commanded ordinances in Jewish church, and neither taught nor practised separation from the same, though unworthy ones were permitted therein; and inasmuch as the faithful in the church of Corinth, wherein were many unworthy persons, and practices, are never commanded to absent themselves from the sacraments, because of the same: therefore the godly, in like cases, are not presently to separate. (Revelation 2:14,

15, 20; Matthew 23:3; Acts 3:1.)

9. As separation from such a church wherein profane and scandalous livers are tolerated, is not presently necessary: so for the members thereof, otherwise worthy, hereupon to abstain from communicating with such a church, in the participation of the sacraments, is lawful. For as it were unreasonable, that a godly man should neglect duty, and punish himself in not coming for his portion in the blessing of the seals, as he ought, because others are suffered to come, that ought not, especially considering that himself doth neither consent to their sin, nor to the neglect of others who should put them away, and do not: but on the contrary doth heartily mourn for these things, modestly and seasonably stir up others to do their duty. If the church cannot be reformed, they may use their liberty, as is specified. But this all the godly are bound unto, even every one to do his endeavor, according to his power and place, that the unworthy may be duly proceeded against, by the church to whom this matter doth appertain. (II Chronicles 30:18; Genesis 18:25; Ezekiel 9:4; Chapter XIII, Section 4.)"

Some years later, the leading Congregationalists who had participated in the Westminster Assembly, along with some other notable Congregational leaders of England, met in a Synod to adopt a statement of faith. The result was The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order which was simply The Westminster Confession with minor alterations, especially in the area of church government. Following is their brief statement on church discipline (last chapter, Nos. 18 and 19):

"18. Whereas the Lord Jesus Christ hath appointed and instituted as a means of edification, that those who walk not according to

the rules and laws appointed by him (in respect of faith and life, so that just offence doth arise to the church thereby) be censured in his name and authority. Every church hath power in itself to exercise and execute all those censures appointed by him in the way and order prescribed in the gospel.

19. The censures so appointed by Christ are admonition and excommunication. And whereas some offences are or may be known only to some, it is appointed by Christ, that those to whom they are so known, do first admonish the offender in private; in public offences where any sin, before all. And in the case of non-amendment upon private admonition, the offence being related to the church, and the offender not manifesting his repentance, he is to be duly admonished in the name of Christ by the whole church, by the ministry of the elders of the church; and if this censure prevail not for his repentance, then he is to be cast out by excommunication with the consent of the church."

Though not enjoying the practice of censure of its' members, Protestant churches nevertheless have generally recognized it as a necessary function of the church. If any are still contentious against this Biblical practice, it can only be said, as Moses said to Israel in Exodus 16:8, "You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord."

APPENDIX D

COMMUNITY BIBLE FELLOWSHIP
GUIDELINES FOR DISCIPLINE AND RECONCILIATION IN THE CHURCH

Pertinent scriptures:

Matthew 18:15-17
I Corinthians 5:1-5
II Corinthians 2:5-11

Galatians 6:1-5
I Timothy 5:19-20
James 5:13-20

Who is responsible to confront and bring to reconciliation one who is in sin and out of fellowship with God and His church? The terms the scriptures use such as "brothers," "witnesses," "you who are spiritual" and "the church," imply that we are all responsible and that it is not the exclusive responsibility of elders. Anyone in the church has the authority to initiate and carry out the scriptural process of discipline and reconciliation with the knowledge and guidance of the elders.

What is the process the scriptures provide for us?

STEP 1: If you see a brother or sister in error or involved in sinful and inappropriate behavior - go and "show him his fault" privately. You have the authority by the Holy Spirit to do this without "sitting in judgment," but you must be certain the behavior is sinful or destructive to Christ's reputation. If you are uncertain or fearful, seek the counsel of someone you trust.

Results - If he or she listens and repents, they are restored and the process stops. (They may need to depend on you for continuing help and encouragement to maintain victory).

- If he or she doesn't respond, continue the process.

STEP 2: Secure one or two additional witnesses, or people close to the person involved (eg. from the same fellowship group) to establish the facts and make a further appeal.

Results - Same as step one.

STEP 3: Inform an elder of the situation and the need to carry the process further. The elders may elect to make an appeal themselves. With the elders' approval, the matter must be "told to the church" if reconciliation is resisted. Because relationship is such an important ingredient to this process, we may limit the definition of "church" to his or her fellowship group. If necessary however, the larger gathering of people committed to this body and to the person involved will be included in this step, and normally no public worship services will be used for this purpose.

If possible, the solution to these problems should be worked out within the person's fellowship group, where an atmosphere of trust and relationship exists, and where there is the best opportunity for effective reconciliation and support. If the matter must go before a larger group of people, the fellowship group or its representative is encouraged to present the situation if appropriate.

Results - Same as steps one and two.

STEP 4: Upon refusal to listen to the church, the person is to be "put out of fellowship" and regarded as one who spurns the fellowship of the church and the authority of Christ.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS:

- Those who become involved in this process must do so with gentleness and humility, watching themselves and their own walk with the Lord (Galatians 6:1).
- This process should not be initiated or carried through with haste, but with the same patience and longsuffering that God extends to all of us.
- Elders are just as subject to this process as anyone, with the qualification that there be two or three witnesses to his behavior (I Tim. 5:19-20). This extra caution to confirm the facts is probably because elders are accountable to stricter judgment for their behavior and example. It is likely that the elder board will carry out this process if one of them is found to be in sin.
- The elders as individuals and as a group are available for counsel and support to any who are concerned about restoring a brother or sister who is in trouble. It is your right and responsibility to confront sin and irresponsibility within the body, but if the situation is serious enough to warrant it, you are asked to consult with the elders before taking further steps in the process of discipline and reconciliation.

APPENDIX E

CONSTITUTION OF THE EVANGELICAL CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
OF PORTLAND, OREGONARTICLE VI
DISCIPLINE

Section 1 - Authority. The rule of discipline shall be the law of Christ as recorded in Matthew 18:15-18.

Section 2 - Private Offenses. In private offenses the one offended is, by a fraternal, prayerful conference, to seek a spiritual healing, and so "gain a brother." Failing in this, let him/her take "one or two more" and again strive to exert loving, patient, healing power which shall soften and subdue and avert the necessity of resorting to the law and the penalty of a Church trial.

Section 3 - Public Offenses. In public offense, inasmuch as every member suffers in the wrongs done to the Church, every member cognizant of the same shall labor in the spirit of Christ to bring the offender to repentance. Failing in this, he/she shall communicate the matter to the Deacons.

Section 4 - Charges. In bringing the matter before the Church, the aggrieved person shall present his/her charges in writing. If the Church votes to consider the complaint, they shall then appoint a time and place for hearing of the complaint and summon the accused to be present. At least one week before the trial the accused shall be fur-

nished a written copy of the charges and the names of the witnesses relied upon for proof.

Section 5 - Fair Hearing. Upon trial, the accused may call to his/her aid any member of the Church. In case of his/her non-appearance, a member shall be appointed to defend the absentee. The confession of the accused or the testimony of two witnesses, or that which is fairly equivalent, shall be required for conviction.

Section 6 - Decision of the Church. If the Church shall find the accused guilty they may in their judgment admonish, suspend or excommunicate. In cases of difficulty the aid of counsel may be sought.

Section 7 - Clemency. An excommunicated person may, upon evidence of repentance, confession of sin and reformation of his conduct, be readmitted to the Church by subscribing anew to the Confession of Faith.

APPENDIX F

THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH AND ITS MINISTRIES
by Bill Scheidler
(Bible Press, Portland, Oregon. 1980)

THE DISCIPLINE OF THE FAMILY

There are tremendous benefits in belonging to the family of God. It is the greatest family in the universe. It is in the context of the family of God that we are going to come to fruitfulness and maturity. One means God uses to produce this maturity in us is discipline. Many natural families vary in terms of discipline and it is not difficult to see the different results in the fruitfulness and maturity of the children produced in those homes. There is only one right way of discipline and that is God's way of discipline. Only God's means of discipline will achieve the desired results. Families in which there is no discipline administered are chaotic and the children produced are generally rebellious. Discipline in the family is necessary because none of us is born into the family with a natural desire for, or knowledge of the right ways of God. Man naturally tends to be egocentric in all of his pursuits. If God's people are ever going to be matured, discipline is absolutely essential. God is very fair in His discipline, as can be seen in His use of it in the following ways:

1. Discipline is to be administered where there is a persistent following after the wrong ways of God (Matthew 18:15-20). When a man or woman claims to have Jesus as his Lord, but will not follow the ways of God, his confession must be challenged.

2. Discipline is to be exercised where there is danger of harm to the rest of the family of God (I Corinthians 5:1-13; II Thessalonians 3:6-15; II Timothy 2:17-18; Titus 3:9, 11). Paul clearly taught that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. When problems go unchecked, others who are likeminded will tend to err from the faith as well. Problems unchallenged will never "work themselves out." God wants unhealthy situations that affect body life dealt with in a positive way.

3. Discipline is always administered with a view to restoration (Galatians 6:1; Revelation 3:19; Hebrews 12:5-11; II Corinthians 2:5-11). God does not want any to perish but He would have all come to the knowledge of the truth. For this reason He has to discipline. Most people do not come to the knowledge of the truth without some kind of external stimulus (i.e. discipline).

4. Discipline has degrees (Matthew 18:15-20). God in His mercy never disciplines severely unless an individual has been given warning or instruction in the mouth of two or three witnesses. God gives to every individual a chance to repent and change at an early stage. But if we fail to respond to a voice, He may have to use a switch. If we fail to respond to the switch, He may have to use a bigger stick. God cannot make us obey Him but He has ways of making us more willing to respond. God has given us a natural progression in New Testament Church discipline involving four stages, (a) go to the brother alone, (b) take two or three others, (c) tell it to the church and, finally (d) expel him from the fellowship. God is gracious and full of mercy but that does not preclude the fact that He desires truth in the inward parts. God will continue to discipline until He gets the desired response.

The fourth step in this process which is the most extreme is more severe than most of us realize. When we understand that the Church is a place of covering and protection that is respected by God and Satan alike, we realize that to be removed from that place immediately opens one up to the attacks and deceptions of the enemy. This act of excommunication was so severe in Paul's mind, that when referring to it, he indicated that what they were doing was in effect delivering "such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh" (I Corinthians 5:5). He talked about Hymenaeus and Alexander whom he had "delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme" (I Timothy 1:20). Even this drastic measure, however, is administered with the view to restoration that "the spirit might be saved in the day of Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 5:5). What a great day of rejoicing when the Corinthian believers were able to receive the repentant son back into the doors of the assembly (II Corinthians 2:5-11).

APPENDIX G

CAN YOU FIND GOD'S ANSWER IN THE FORGOTTEN TRUTH OF MATTHEW 18?

Rediscovering a Forgotten Truth
Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts, 1976.

These neglected steps, if followed, would answer Christ's prayer in John 17.

1. "If your brother . . .

Both God and the world expect Christians to demonstrate a special loyalty toward each other. In fact, "we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." (I John 3:16) We are to "do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." (Galatians 6:10) The world's test of whether we are genuine disciples is if we have love one for another.

2. "Shall trespass against you . . .

The word which is translated trespass comes from the verb hamartano. The Greek tense used normally indicates a specific act of sin. It means to miss the mark, to cause one not to share in the prize.

The words "against you" do not appear in some manuscripts. In a basic sense, though, whenever a Christian misses the mark he not only damages the reputation of Christ but offends everyone else called by His name. When David sinned, the prophet said, "Thou has given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme." (II Samuel 12:14)

The immediate response when we see a brother missing the mark is to think, "He hasn't actually offended me, therefore, I'm not responsible." But Scripture makes it every Christian's responsibility when another

Christian stumbles. When one member of the body hurts, the whole body suffers. (Romans 12:5)

3. "Go to him . . .

Going to an offending brother to restore him has been and always will be God's greatest test of genuine love. It is easy to pass judgment in our mind and then forget it. It is also easy to tell someone else in a spirit of genuine concern and hope that they'll do something about it. It is even easy for some to go boldly to him and tell him that he was wrong.

But to go in the spirit of Galatians 6:1 requires some very painful preliminary steps. First, we must examine ourselves to see if we have failed in a similar area in our own life - "Thou that judgest doest the same things." (Romans 2:1-3) . . . or if we have failed this brother by lack of consistent prayer for him - "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you." (I Samuel 12:23) . . . or if we have failed in our example to him.

The people around us are often reflections of ourselves. Therefore, we are to "make straight paths for (our) feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed." (Hebrews 12:13) . . . or whether we have an offensive spirit of pride or lack of love which he will sense and react against - "Restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering yourself lest ye also be tempted." (Galatians 6:1)

Second, we must work out steps of correction. The very idea of restoring a brother assumes that we have steps of action to suggest to him so that he can get from where he is to where he should be. This is

why God stipulates, "If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual . . ." (that is, the spiritual ones among you). These would be the ones who have the maturity and exemplary life to teach others.

4. "Tell him his fault . . .

The one who would follow Matthew 18 is now faced with an even more difficult question. What do I say when I approach him? What valid reason can I give him for talking about something he probably doesn't want to discuss? How can I avoid giving him the idea that I am intruding in his private business, especially if his offense was not directed against me?

THE ANSWER IS TO APPROACH HIM WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT. " I ALWAYS WANT TO GIVE A GOOD REPORT ABOUT YOU TO ANYONE WHO ASKS. FOR THIS REASON I WONDER IF YOU COULD EXPLAIN SOMETHING THAT I'M NOT SURE I UNDERSTAND."

This statement assures him that you are loyal to him, that you are not condemning but that you are coming as a learner and as a servant.

If his offense was directed against you personally, you might say, "Is there something that I have done to cause you to react to me in this way?"

We are given precise instruction by our Lord that we will only see clearly how to take the splinter out of our brother's eye after we first take the beam out of our own. (Matthew 7:3-5)

The most powerful way to tell someone else their fault is to point out our own in the same basic area. In fact, this is in harmony with God's way of doing things the opposite to our natural inclinations. The more we humble ourselves, the more He is able to minister grace through

our lives to others. (II Corinthians 4:12)

A WARNING!

If there is even the slightest offense or attitude or neglect on our part which has contributed to a brother's offense, we cannot follow the steps of Matthew 18. We must instead follow the steps of Matthew 5:23, 24. "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has aught against you; leave there your gift before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."

5. "Between you and him alone . . .

If we tell anyone else about an offending brother before talking to him, we create three problems. First, we prove to God and the ones we tell that we don't love the offender and, in a deeper sense, we also prove that we don't love the Lord Himself who said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." (John 14:15)

Second, we tempt the listener to take up an offense against him and may even destroy a strong friendship that might have existed between them. "A whisperer separateth chief friends." (Proverbs 16:28)

Third, we destroy the sincerity of our approach to him and hinder the potential of restoring him. It is for these reasons that Scripture warns, "Debate thy cause with thy neighbor himself; and discover not a secret to another." (Proverbs 25:9)

To give a bad report about a brother is to speak evil of him. "He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: (which tells him not to do this) but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.

There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?" (James 4:11, 12)

Perhaps the most important reason to go to the offender first is to check out the facts. When we hear a report and share it with others, it is almost impossible to be accurate in words and in the inflection of our voice.

6. "If he shall hear you, you have gained your brother . . .

The very structure of these words reinforces the spirit in which we should have gone to an offender. God assumes that we wanted to win the brother rather than condemn him. If we went with the spirit and purpose of exposing rather than restoring, then we have fallen into one of the temptations warned about in Galatians 6:1, ". . . restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."

Perhaps the greatest offense comes through words, and so often the one who says them is not aware of what they mean to other people. By having an offender hear what his words meant to us in our frame of reference, we will help him expand his thinking and become more precise in his message to others. When we assume that a man meant what we heard him say and then attack him for it, we are using Satan's most effective method of dividing Christians within the church.

7. "If he will not hear you, then take with you one or two more that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established . . .

If it was difficult to go to an offender alone, it may be even more of a struggle to go a second time with the right witnesses, but this is necessary if we are to follow the steps of Christ in restoring

a brother who persists in his offense.

If the offense was with words, then it is important that two or three others confirm what he really meant by those words. If it is an offense of actions, then the ideal witnesses would be those who have conquered a similar problem in their own life. They would first be witnesses to him before they would be witnesses against him.

8. "If he shall neglect to hear them, then tell it to the church . . .

The purpose of telling the church is still not to expose but rather to enlist their help in the program of restoration. As more and more people know about the offense, it should be more and more humbling to the offender. This in turn is God's way of giving him more grace. God gives grace unto the humble (James 4:6). Grace is the desire and power to do God's will, and this is precisely what the offender needs to overcome his problem.

At this point, though, a new program must be initiated. God has a greater purpose in allowing a problem to come within the church than just resolving it. He wants to use it as a warning and cleansing agent within the church. It is usually true that when one member stumbles, there are many others with the same weakness.

Therefore, the church's first response should be a day of prayer and fasting for the purpose of self-examination. When the offender sees the humbling effect on the church, he will experience one of the most powerful motivations for his own repentance. Again, if the church has in any way contributed to the offense, they must first ask the offender for forgiveness.

9. "If he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto you as an heathen man and a publican

Paul reinforces this procedure in I Timothy 5:19-21 when dealing with an offending elder in the church. "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality."

This phrase assumes a very important factor - that the entire church is in agreement as to the wrong of the particular offense.

If there is division within the church with some saying it is right and others saying it is wrong, then this is God's call to the church leaders to teach God's standards so that there is one mind and one spirit among them on this matter.

Others may resist correcting the offender with the statement. "There are other sins that are worse than this within the church." This, too, is God's call to cleanse the church before any attempt to discipline an offending brother. When the church is united and a brother persists in his offense, then that is the time to exert public pressure on him so that he will be ashamed and come to repentance.

"And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." (II Thessalonians 3:14, 15) When Paul wrote to the Corinthian church and told them to separate the immoral man from their company, he was sure that they all agreed to the wrongness of the action since his offense was "not so much as named among the Gentiles." (I Corinthians 5:1)

In that same chapter he lists six basic types of offenses which require church discipline. "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat . . . therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." (I Corinthians 5:11, 13)

" SUFFICIENT TO SUCH A MAN IS THIS PUNISHMENT, WHICH WAS INFLICTED OF MANY . . . FORGIVE HIM, AND COMFORT (COUNSEL) HIM, LEST PERHAPS SUCH A ONE SHOULD BE SWALLOWED UP WITH OVERMUCH SORROW. WHEREFORE I BESEECH YOU THAT YE WOULD CONFIRM YOUR LOVE TOWARD HIM . . . LEST SATAN SHOULD GET AN ADVANTAGE OF US: FOR WE ARE NOT IGNORANT OF HIS DEVICES."

II CORINTHIANS 2:6-8, 11

Even after an offender has been separated from church fellowship, the responsibility of Christians to restore is not ended. Christ gave the steps that must be followed in church discipline, and Paul gave the illustration of how it was applied in an actual situation. When the immoral man in the Corinthian church was filled with sorrow, the church had the corporate responsibility of affirming the love they should have had for him all along by forgiving him and counselling him as one of their own. If the church is not alert to do this, Satan will gain an advantage within the church as well as in the life of the offender.

THE OUTLINE OF MATTHEW 18

GIVES DIRECTION FOR FURTHER STEPS

The particular circumstances of the offense and the initial response of the offender would determine what further steps should be taken. Each step, however, must be in harmony with three goals: 1. to restore the offender, 2. to involve a minimum number of people, and 3. to examine our lives before we try to approach an offender.

Outline of Matthew 18

A. PRIDE AMONG DISCIPLES (Vs. 1-5)

The disciples asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Jesus answered, "Whoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

B. WARNING ABOUT OFFENSES (vs. 6-9)

"Woe unto the world because of offences ! For it must needs be that offences come; but woe unto that man by whom the offence cometh!"

C. PLEA TO RESTORE EVERY OFFENDER (Vs. 10-14)

"Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones . . . for the Son of man is come to save that which was lost . . . if a man have an hundred sheep and one of them be gone astray doth he not leave the ninety and nine . . . and seeketh that which is gone astray?"

D. STEPS TO RESTORE AN OFFENDER (Vs. 15-19)

"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. . ."

E. PROMISE OF CHRIST'S PRESENCE (Vs. 20)

"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there

am I in the midst of them."

Note: This well-known promise is given in the context of two or three Christians meeting together to make things right. If Christ's presence is not recognized or if He is not controlling each word, there will be confusion and deeper hurts.

F. NATURAL RESPONSE TOWARD OFFENDERS (Vs. 21-22)

"Lord how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus said . . . Until seventy times seven."

G. TEACHING ON TRUE FORGIVENESS (Vs. 23-35)

The parable of the servant who was forgiven a great debt but turned around and put a fellow servant in prison who owed him a small amount.

JUDGING ANOTHER IS SIN. (MATTHEW 7:1) DISCERNING THEIR SPIRITUAL CONDITION IS A GIFT. (I CORINTHIANS 12:10) THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO IS OUR DESIRE AND ABILITY TO GIVE STEPS OF CORRECTION.

THE MARK OF SPIRITUALITY IS NOT WHETHER WE ARE ABLE TO EXPOSE A BROTHER BUT WHETHER WE ARE ABLE TO RESTORE HIM. (GALATIANS 6:1)

WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN EVERY CHRISTIAN FOLLOWS MATTHEW 18?

SLANDER is telling the truth with a design to hurt.

GOSSIP is sharing detrimental information with those who are not part of the problem or part of the solution.

1. GOSSIP AND SLANDER WILL CEASE

If every Christian were committed to giving only a good report, gossip and slander would cease. If someone wanted to give a bad report, those around him would ask, "Have you gone to him first? Are you telling us so we can go to him with you?" We should not hear a bad report unless we are a part of the problem or a part of the solution.

2. CHRISTIANS WILL EDIFY EACH OTHER.

The steps of Matthew 18 are a built-in basis for giving and receiving loving correction within the body of Christ.

We are to exhort one another daily, "Lest any of (us) be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." (Hebrews 3:13)

3. LOYALTY WILL BUILD SECURITY

When each member of the body of Christ knows that every other member is going to give only a good report about him unless he comes to him first, he experiences a deep sense of loyalty and security. On the other hand, when a bad report is given about another Christian before going to him first, it destroys fellowship and builds insecurity and suspicion within the group. ". . . a whisperer separateth chief friends." (Proverbs 16:28)

4. PHYSICAL HEALTH WILL IMPROVE

"... a good report nourishes the bones." (Proverbs 15:30) The health of the whole body is in the blood, and the blood is manufactured in the marrow of the bones. Therefore, the healthier our bones are, the healthier our bodies are.

5. THE WORLD WILL BELIEVE

The mark of a true Christian to the outside world is the quality of his love for other Christians. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (John 13:35)

When the world sees Christians loving each other enough to follow God's steps of correction as outlined in Matthew 18, they will believe that God did send Jesus into the world. "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." (John 17:21)

APPENDIX H

THE DISCIPLINE OF THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF NORTH AMERICACHAPTER V
JUDICIAL ADMINISTRATION

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. (Matt. 18:15-17.)

Church trials are to be regarded as an expedient of last resort. Only after every reasonable effort has been made to correct any wrong and adjust any existing difficulty, should steps be taken to institute a trial.

Brother going to law with brother respecting any matter which might be amicably adjusted, is neither consistent with the teaching of the New Testament, nor in harmony with the traditional position of the church. (See I Cor. 6:1-6)

Section I

Arbitration

463. Should any disagreement arise between members of The Evangelical Church of North America relating to debts or demands which the parties concerned cannot peaceably adjust, the minister shall inquire into the circumstances of the case, and if necessary he shall recommend

to the contending parties to submit the matter to the decision of arbiters, one arbiter each to be chosen severally by the parties concerned, and the third to be named by the two chosen arbiters provided that such arbiters are all members of The Evangelical Church of North America.

464. Should either of the parties be dissatisfied with the decision rendered, such party may appeal to the Local Conference for a second arbitration, and if the Local Conference see sufficient cause, it shall grant the appeal. Each party shall then choose two arbiters, and these four together choose a fifth, the judgment of a majority of them shall be final, and either of the parties refusing to abide by such decision shall be dealt with as others who are disobedient to the order and Discipline of the church.

Section II

Limitation

465. No charge shall be entertained for any alleged offense which shall not have been committed within five years immediately preceding the filing of the complaint, except in cases where there is a conviction in a civil or criminal court, and in such cases the charges must be filed within one year after the entry of the final judgment.

Section III

Investigation

466. In all cases of Disciplinary procedure there shall first of all be an investigation by a committee to be known as the committee on investigation (appointed as provided for in Paragraphs 496-498, 502),

which shall gather the necessary information and shall inquire into the accusation in the presence of the accused. If the accusation seems to be well founded, this committee on investigation shall formulate and prefer charges against the accused, and bring him to trial. The charge preferred shall be presented in writing, setting forth in specifications the accusation made, an exact copy of which shall be delivered by the committee on investigation to the accused and to the chairman of the trial committee not less than thirty days before the time set for the trial. The trial shall be confined to the accusation set forth in the bill of charges and specifications, and the decision rendered shall be in harmony therewith.

Section IV

General Rules Governing All Trials

When after due investigation it becomes necessary to conduct a trial, the following rules shall be observed.

1. Conduct of Trials

467. All trials shall be conducted in a consistent Christian manner, by a properly constituted committee, without the employment of magistrates or attorneys to administer oaths or conduct investigations.

2. Trial Committees

Trial committees shall be constituted in the following manner:

A. For a Lay Member

468. The trial committee for a lay member shall be composed of five members of the charge appointed by the minister, who shall serve as chairman of the trial. The trial committee shall hear the case, render

decision, and impose the penalty. Should the minister deem it expedient, he may choose the members of the trial committee from some field of labor other than the one to which the parties belong; also an itinerant elder from another field of labor to serve in his stead as chairman of the trial.

469. The accused shall be furnished with the names of the members of the trial committee at least fifteen days before the trial is held, and shall have the right of peremptory challenge of any two members as named by the minister to serve on the trial committee, in addition to unlimited right of challenge for cause, provided such challenges are registered with the minister at least ten days before the time set for the trial. The chairman of the trial committee shall adjudge the validity of the challenges for cause, and shall fill all vacancies created in the trial committee.

B. For a Minister

470. The trial committee for a local elder and for a probationer, not under appointment, shall be composed as for a lay member of the church. (See Paragraphs 468-469.)

471. The trial committee for an itinerant elder and for a probationer or local elder under appointment, is the judicial committee of the Annual Conference, consisting of five itinerant elders elected by the Annual Conference, in addition to the conference superintendent who shall serve as chairman of the trial committee. (See Paragraphs 125, 511.)

472. The trial committee for a conference superintendent is the

judicial committee of the Annual Conference of which he is a member.

(See Paragraphs 471, 511.)

473. The accused shall have the right of peremptory challenge of any two members of the judicial committee as elected by the Annual Conference, in addition to unlimited right of challenge for cause, provided such challenges are registered with the chairman of the trial committee at least ten days before the time set for the trial. The chairman of the trial committee shall adjudge the validity of challenges for cause, and shall fill all vacancies in the trial committee. Should the membership of an Annual Conference be insufficient to fill the number required for a trial committee, the chairman of the trial committee is empowered to draw upon the membership of an adjacent conference to fill the required number of such trial committee.

3. Chairman

474. The chairman of the trial committee shall be the conference superintendent, or the minister of the field of labor of which the accused is a member. (See Paragraphs 468, 470-472.) The chairman shall in all cases preserve a strictly impartial attitude and shall have no part in determining the decision. He shall appoint the counsel for the church, and shall fix the time and place of holding the trial, giving the accused written notice of the same not less than thirty days before the time set for trial. He shall call the trial committee, adjudge the validity of all challenges for cause, and fill all vacancies created in the trial committee. (See Paragraphs 469, 473.) He shall sign the proceedings of the trial after they have been approved by the trial committee.

4. Secretary

475. A secretary shall be elected by the trial committee from among its own members, who shall keep an accurate record of the proceedings and be custodian of all papers and documents submitted. After the proceedings have been approved by the trial committee, they shall be signed by the chairman and the secretary. If an appeal is made, the secretary shall furnish the body to which appeal is made with a certified copy of the proceedings of the trial and of the notice of, together with the reasons given for the appeal. If demanded, a copy of the proceedings shall be furnished the accused.

5. Counsel

A. Counsel for the Church

476. The chairman of the trial committee shall appoint counsel for the church, who shall institute and conduct the official prosecution before the trial committee.

B. Counsel for the Accused

477. The accused shall be entitled to be represented by counsel of his own selection and to be heard in oral or written argument. Such counsel shall be a member in good standing in The Evangelical Church of North America, a lay member if the accused is a lay member, and a minister if the accused is a minister.

6. Accuser and Witnesses

478. The accuser must be a member of The Evangelical Church of North America in full and good standing. Witnesses though not members of The Evangelical Church of North America may be heard.

7. Accused and Accuser

479. The accused and the accuser shall be brought face to face. If the accuser cannot be present, evidence should be presented otherwise. If the accused evades a trial by absenting himself, though duly informed in writing (at least thirty days before the time set for the trial) as to the time and place of the trial, the hearing shall be held as though he were present.

480. The accused shall have the opportunity to plead guilty or not guilty, and if the accused pleads guilty to the charges preferred against him, no trial shall be necessary, but penalties shall be imposed as provided for in the Discipline.

8. Offenses

481. Offenses for which charges may be preferred are the following:

1. Immorality.
2. Trespass.
3. Imprudent and unchristian conduct.
4. Disobedience to the order and Discipline of the Church.

9. Penalties

A. Censure or Reprimand

482. If the accused is found guilty of imprudent or unchristian conduct, or of disobedience to the order and Discipline of the Church, he shall be censured or reprimanded by the chairman of the trial committee, or by someone appointed by the trial committee.

B. Probation

483. If the accused is found guilty of imprudent or unchristian

conduct, or of disobedience to the order and Discipline of the Church, or of trespass, he may be placed under a period of probation of not less than three nor more than six months.

C. Suspension, or Revocation of License

484. If a minister is found guilty of immorality, trespass or gross disobedience to the order and Discipline of the Church, he shall be suspended from all ministerial functions and from the privileges of church membership for a period not to exceed one year, or his license as a minister shall be revoked and his ordination papers annulled.

D. Expulsion

485. (1) Any person found guilty of an offense expressly forbidden in God's Word, sufficient to exclude one from the kingdom of God (I Cor. 6:9-10), and (2) any person found incorrigible, and (3) any person under probation showing no improvement, shall be expelled from the church. (See Paragraph 524.)

486. Penalties that have been imposed shall be carried into effect, in the case of a lay member, by the minister, and in the case of a minister, by his conference superintendent(s).

10. Appeals

The right of appeal shall be allowed the defendant in all cases under the following conditions:

A. Lay Member

487. Any lay member dissatisfied with decision of the trial committee may appeal to the next Local Conference of the charge of which he is a

member by giving notice thereof to the secretary of the trial committee within thirty days after said trial, together with the reasons for such appeal. It shall be the duty of the secretary to furnish the Local Conference with a certified copy of the proceedings of the trial and of the notice of, and the reasons given for the appeal. The Local Conference shall carefully examine the charges and the specifications and the evidence presented for and against the accused and, by a majority vote of the members present, shall decide the case, which decision shall be final.

B. Local Elder and Probationer Not Under Appointment

488. Any local elder, or probationer not under appointment, dissatisfied with the judicial decision of the Local Conference, may appeal to the ensuing Annual Conference within thirty days after the Local Conference, by giving notice to the secretary of the Local Conference in writing of his intention to appeal, together with his reasons for making such appeal. It shall be the duty of the secretary of the Local Conference to furnish a certified copy of the proceedings, the notification of, and the reasons given for such appeal, to the Annual Conference. In such instance, the Annual Conference shall sit as an appellate court and as such, its action shall be final.

C. Ministerial Member of Annual Conference

489. Any ministerial member of an Annual Conference dissatisfied with the judicial decision thereof, may appeal to the court of appeals, provided he gives written notice to the secretary of said Annual Conference within thirty days after the adjournment thereof, setting forth both his intention to appeal and the reasons for making such appeal. It shall be

the duty of the secretary of the Annual Conference to notify the conference superintendent immediately, and upon order of the conference superintendent, to transmit a certified copy of the proceedings of the Annual Conference in said case to the court of appeals. The court may affirm or reverse the findings and decision of the Annual Conference, or affirm in part and reverse in part; but it shall not reverse the same, nor remand the case for a new trial on account of errors plainly not affecting the result. The decision of this court shall in all cases be final, except when objections are taken on the ground that the proceedings were irregular in the application of law, and said objections are entered before the decision of the court is pronounced. In the case of appeal from the court under this clause, the appellant must give notice within thirty days to the secretary of the court, who shall send a certified copy of all proceedings in said case to the conference Council of Administration.

490. The necessary expenses incurred by the assembling of said court of appeals shall be paid by the appellant if the appeal is not sustained. The appellant, in all cases, at the time the notice of appeal is given, shall deposit with the secretary of said Annual Conference security for the payment of said expenses, in an amount fixed by said secretary.

D. No Right of Appeal for Plaintiff

491. The plaintiff has no right of appeal under any circumstances.

Section V

Trial of a Layman

496. Should a lay member be accused of immorality, trespass, impru-

dent and unchristian conduct, or disobedience to the order and Discipline of the church, the minister shall appoint two or more faithful members of the charge as a committee on investigation, which shall gather the necessary information and shall inquire into the accusation in the presence of the accused. If it should appear that the accusation is well founded, this committee shall formulate and prefer charges against the accused and bring him to trial according to the rules governing trials. (See Paragraphs 466-469, 474-483, 485, 486.) Should the accused be dissatisfied with the decision of the trial committee he may appeal to the Local Conference. (See Paragraphs 487, 491.)

Section VI

Trial of a Minister

1. Trial of Local Elder and Probationer

Not Under Appointment

497. Should a local elder and probationer not under appointment, be accused of immorality, trespass, imprudent and unchristian conduct, or disobedience to the order and Discipline of the church, the minister of the charge where such minister holds his membership, shall appoint two or more disinterested persons as a committee on investigation, which shall gather the necessary information and shall inquire into the accusation in the presence of the accused. If it should appear that the accusation is well founded, this committee shall formulate and prefer charges against the accused and bring him to trial according to the rules governing trials. (See Paragraphs 466-470, 474-481.) If a majority of the trial committee is satisfied that the accusation is sustained, the trial committee shall suspend the accused from all ministerial functions

and privileges of church membership until the next session of the Local Conference where the accused shall be accountable. It shall be the duty of the trial committee to transmit in writing the entire proceedings of such trial to the Local Conference where the case shall be reviewed, and if the findings are sustained the Local Conference shall ratify the proceedings and impose the penalty. (See Paragraphs 482-486.) Should the accused be dissatisfied with the decision of the Local Conference, he may appeal to the Annual Conference. (See Paragraph 488.)

2. Trial of Itinerant Elder and Local Elder and Probationer Under Appointment

498. Should an itinerant elder, or a local elder or probationer under appointment be accused of immorality, trespass, imprudent and unchristian conduct, or disobedience to the order and Discipline of the church, the conference superintendent shall appoint a committee on investigation of two itinerant elders, which shall gather the necessary information and shall inquire into the accusation in the presence of the accused. If it should appear that the accusation is well founded, the committee shall formulate and prefer charges against the accused before the judicial committee of the Annual Conference, which shall try the case according to the rules governing trials. (See Paragraphs 125, 466, 467, 471, 473-481.)

499. Should the trial committee be convinced that the accusations are sustained, and that the accused is guilty as charged, the trial committee shall suspend the accused from the exercise of all official and ministerial functions and privileges of church membership, without

salary from the time of suspension until the next session of his Annual Conference where he shall be accountable. It shall be the duty of the judicial committee to transmit in writing the entire proceedings of said trial to the Annual Conference, where the case shall be reviewed by the committee on conference relations, and if the findings of the judicial committee be sustained, the committee on conference relations, shall recommend the ratification of the proceedings of the trial committee and the penalty to be imposed by the Annual Conference. (See Paragraphs 482-486.) Should the findings of the judicial committee not be sustained by the Annual Conference, the salary withheld during the period of suspension shall be paid to the defendant. Should the accused be dissatisfied with the decision of the Annual Conference, he may appeal to the court of appeals. (See Paragraphs 489, 490.)

500. If the case is such that an itinerant elder, or local elder or probationer under appointment, under the above named accusation cannot be examined immediately, and if the offense is flagitious, he may be suspended by the conference superintendent from the exercise of all ministerial functions until a trial can be held.

501 An Annual Conference may entertain charges against an itinerant elder, or a local elder or probationer under appointment, and proceed to trial at once although no preliminary investigation has been held, provided that at least ten days before the session of the Annual Conference due notice has been given the accused and the charges have been presented to him in writing, setting forth in specifications the accusations made. Such trial shall be held by the judicial committee of the Annual Conference under the chairmanship of the conference superin-

tendent, who shall also appoint the counsel for The Evangelical Church of North America. The case shall be reviewed by the committee on ministerial relations, and if the findings of the judicial committee are sustained, the committee on conference relations shall recommend the ratification of the proceedings of the trial committee and in case of guilt the penalty to be imposed by the Annual Conference. (See Paragraphs 482-486, 489-491.) When such a case cannot be fairly tried during the session of the Annual Conference, the Annual Conference shall refer it to the conference superintendent and judicial committee which shall, after the Annual Conference session, try the case according to the usual Disciplinary procedure.

3. Trial of a Conference Superintendent

502. Should a conference superintendent be accused of immorality, trespass, imprudent and unchristian conduct, or disobedience to the order and Discipline of the church, any ordained minister to whom it is known shall refer the matter to the chairman of the committee on ministerial relations of the previous Annual Conference session, who shall call the committee on ministerial relations into session in order to gather the necessary information and shall inquire into the accusation in the presence of the accused. If it should appear that the accusation is well founded, the committee on investigation shall formulate and prefer charges against the accused before the judicial committee of the Annual Conference, which committee shall select another conference superintendent to act as chairman of the trial committee. The case shall be tried according to the rules governing trials of itinerant ministers. (See Paragraphs 125, 466, 467, 472-481, 499.)

Section VII

Order of Procedure

505. When a trial becomes necessary, the following order shall be followed:

(1) A committee on investigation shall be appointed to inquire into the accusation, and, if the accusation appears well founded, to formulate and prefer charges against the accused, and present an exact copy in writing to the accused, and to the chairman of the trial committee. (See Paragraph 466.)

(2) The chairman shall appoint counsel for the church who shall institute and conduct the official prosecution before the trial committee. (See Paragraphs 474, 476.)

(3) The chairman shall fix the date and place of the trial, and give the accused written notice thereof, not less than thirty days before the trial. (See Paragraph 474.)

(4) The chairman shall call the trial committee, which has been duly appointed, and when necessary adjudge challenges for cause, and fill vacancies. (See Paragraphs 468-474.)

(5) The trial committee shall elect a secretary who shall keep accurate record of all the proceedings; the counsel for the church shall openly read the accusation and the accused shall have opportunity to plead guilty, or not guilty. If the accused pleads "not guilty," the counsel for the church shall proceed with the trial. (See Paragraphs 475-480.)

(6) After the case has been fully heard and the accused shall have had full opportunity to prove his innocence, the trial committee, after careful deliberation, shall render its decision. (See Paragraphs 468, 474, 477, 479, 481-485.)

(7) If the accused is found guilty, penalty shall be imposed. (See Paragraphs 482-485.)

(8) Penalty shall be carried into effect. (See Paragraph 486.)

Section VIII

Judicial Bodies

1. Judicial Committee

511. In each Annual Conference there shall be a judicial committee consisting of five itinerant elders elected by ballot of the ministerial members for a period of five years, one to be elected each year. This committee, in addition to the chairman, shall serve as a trial committee in all cases where charges are preferred against any itinerant elder or local elder or probationer under appointment. Only those who are itinerant elders in The Evangelical Church of North America in good standing are eligible to serve as members of the judicial committee. (See Paragraphs 125, 145, 471, 472.)

512. A conference superintendent shall serve as chairman of this committee, but he shall not be entitled to vote. (See Paragraphs 471, 472, 501-504.)

513. The judicial committee shall elect, from among its members, a secretary, who shall receive and hold all documents and records per-

taining to any trial. He shall keep a true record of all proceedings of the committee, and shall submit a certified copy thereof signed by the chairman and himself to the Annual Conference. He shall furnish the accused a certified copy of the proceedings if he demand it.

514. If the accused is found guilty of the charges preferred, this trial committee shall suspend him from the exercise of all ministerial functions and privileges of membership in the church until the next session of this Annual Conference to which the proceedings of the judicial committee on conference relations shall recommend the ratification of the proceedings of the trial committee and the penalty to be imposed by the Annual Conference. (See Paragraphs 482-486.)

515. If in trying a case a vacancy in the judicial committee should occur by right of challenge, or for any other reason, the chairman of the trial committee shall fill the vacancy.

516. The expenses of the committee on investigation and of the trial committee shall be paid by the Annual Conference.

517. There shall be in each Annual Conference a court of appeals elected by ballot from among the itinerant elders of the Annual Conference, who shall hold office for three years.

Section IX

Expelled Minister

524. A minister, in whatever order of office he may stand, who is expelled from The Evangelical Church of North America shall not be allowed to perform any official functions, nor shall he be recognized as

a member or minister of The Evangelical Church of North America, without penitential confession and reformation, and without being received anew as a member into The Evangelical Church of North America, and as a minister. In case a minister's license is revoked, or he is expelled from the church, or he withdraws either under charges or in an irregular manner, his license as a minister and ordination papers shall be annulled and he shall surrender them to the conference superintendent.

ENDNOTES

- ¹II John 5, 6 (New International Version or NIV).
- ²S. J. Greenslade, Shepherding the Flock (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1967), p. 92.
- ³I Cor. 5:13 (NIV).
- ⁴Gal. 1:9 (NIV).
- ⁵II John 11 (NIV).
- ⁶Jude 22 (NIV).
- ⁷John Wesley, The Heart of Wesley's Journal, ed. William J. Petersen and Warner A. Hutchinson (New Canaan, Connecticut: Keats Publishing, Inc., 1979), p. 329.
- ⁸C. H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom (Glasgow: Collins, 1961), pp. 138, 139.
- ⁹Emil Brunner, The Divine Imperative (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), pp. 558, 559.
- ¹⁰Max Thurian, Confession (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1958), p. 34.
- ¹¹I Cor. 5:5 (NIV).
- ¹²II Thess. 3:13-15 (NIV).
- ¹³Leslie Newbigin, The Household of God (New York: Associated Press, 1954), p. 7.
- ¹⁴Rom. 12:19 (NIV).
- ¹⁵Matt 7:5 (NIV).
- ¹⁶Gal. 6:1, 2 (NIV).
- ¹⁷Matt. 18:15-18 (NIV).
- ¹⁸Titus 3:10, 11 (NIV).
- ¹⁹I Tim. 5:19 (NIV).
- ²⁰John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1968), Bk. IV, Ch. XII, Sec. 1.

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