

# Biblical Church Discipline | Member Restoration

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## AN INTRODUCTION

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One cannot overstate how vital it is to combine biblical conviction with sincere compassion when it comes to the issue of church discipline. These two ingredients are crucial for a congregation to have in order to honor God in their attempt to restore a wayward member. For many reasons, church discipline is a very difficult and challenging practice. However, we are fortunate that God did not leave his church in the dark when it comes to this important topic. This study is designed to emphasize our commitment to Scripture and our genuine love for fellow covenant members of Grace Baptist Church. Our prayer is that our message of commitment and compassion would be clearly communicated and perceived in every step that is taken as an attempt to spiritually rescue and restore an erring member.

**Church Discipline** is *not* for those members who struggle and fight to resist sin in spite of failure from time to time. Discipline is for those who claim to know Christ and yet “serve” sin. **(Romans 6)** To state it simply, church discipline is for sin that is serious and not repented of. Church discipline addresses sins that have a public dimension to them. Sins that mislead fellow members as well as mislead the unsaved about what following Christ looks like.

Our concern of honoring God in biblically compassionate church discipline is shared with Al Mohler, and is expressed in the following paragraph:

“**The decline of church discipline** is perhaps the most visible failure of the contemporary church. No longer concerned with maintaining purity of confession or lifestyle, the contemporary church sees itself as a voluntary association of autonomous members with minimal moral accountability to God, much less to each other.” Al Mohler

### **Six Purposes of Church Discipline:**

1. To glorify God through our obedience (**Romans 15:1-6**)
2. To demonstrate genuine love to our erring brothers and sisters in Christ for the purpose of restoration (**1 Corinthians 13:4-7**)
3. To warn our erring brother or sister of the deceptive and destructive nature of sin (**James 1:12-15**)
4. To protect the congregation - leaven principle (**Galatians 5:7-9**)
5. To present a good witness to those who do not know Jesus Christ. (**Matthew 4:13-16**)
6. To lead every member to a careful and personal evaluation - The hard questions to ask are *not* limited to the erring believer. Before a congregation dismisses a member under discipline, every member should ask themselves the following three questions. (**Psalm 139:23-24**)
  - a. Do I love Jesus with all my heart? (**Matthew 22:37-40**)
  - b. Do I have compassion for my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ? (**1 Peter 3:8**)
  - c. Am I truly committed to God’s Word as the final authority for what I believe and how I behave? (**2 Timothy 3:16-17**)

**Biblical Church Discipline** by its very nature is designed to lead everyone to evaluate his or her own words and actions as well as our motives. It also drives one to prayer, realizing we do not have the wisdom or courage to go through church discipline in our own strength.

## **SCRIPTURE MODELS & COMMANDS OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE**

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Church Discipline is defined as the loving, compassionate confrontation and appeal by the body of Christ to a sinning believer, calling for repentance and recommitment to Jesus Christ.

**Galatians 6:1** *Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.* (“spiritual”) the one in a right relationship with Jesus Christ, (**1 John 1:7**)

1. Church Discipline is an expression of love, concern, and compassion.
2. Church Discipline is to be done in a humble and gracious manner.
3. Church Discipline’s goal is to restore an erring brother or sister in Christ.
4. Church Discipline's primary purpose is to glorify God.

By design, the word “Biblical” stands before “Church Discipline” and for a good reason. Over the years church discipline has been misused and abused. However, the remedy for poorly practiced church discipline is *not* to stop practicing it but to practice it in the right way. (i.e., according to biblical standards).

Church discipline is the process of graciously and lovingly correcting sinful behavior among members of a local church body to protect the testimony of Christ. The goal is to restore the sinning member to a right relationship with God and renewing fellowship among the church members. In some cases, church discipline can proceed all the way to excommunication, which is the formal removal of an individual from membership. The various stages of discipline mean that it’s not always necessary to remove someone from membership or make any public announcements.

### **Proper Order of Concern for Church Discipline:**

(1) God (2) Erring member (3) Congregation at large (4) Self

Our first concern for church discipline must start, and remain throughout the process, with of glorifying God through our obedience to Scripture, regardless of the outcome (**Ephesians 3:21**). With glorifying God as our primary motive, our second priority of concern is the sinning brother or sister in Christ (**1 John 4:11**). Our desire is to bring them back into proper fellowship with Jesus Christ and His church (**1 John 1:3-10**). By highlighting the spiritual need of the erring member, the congregation displays genuine love and an application of **Philippians 2:3-4** “*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.*” <sup>4</sup> *Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.*” Our third concern is on the congregation as a whole (Gal. 5:7-9). This is where the “leaven” principle comes into play. The potential danger in allowing violations of Scripture to continue is very real.

Pastor and author John MacArthur warned about the following “... in the Body of Christ—where unrepentant sin is like a ticking bomb—church leaders often act like

an ineffective bomb squad, taking a passive wait-and-see approach to sin in the congregation. And when the inevitable “explosion” happens, they’re left with deeply hurt people and collateral damage.” The Bible is clear that compassionate and firm action must take place because it expresses love for both the sinning member as well as all the other members (**1Corinthians 5:6-8**). The person or persons leading the process of discipline is the fourth in line and must keep themselves in this order. If we place our self above the desire to glorify God or the need of the erring brother or sister or even the congregation at large we would be tempted to resist any involvement. We would be tempted to give way to the fear of being misunderstood or misrepresented or we would continue the process with impure motives and a wrong spirit (**Ephesians 4:15, Philippians 2:3-4**).

It’s easy to understand why many believers ignore discipline altogether; it’s not an easy or simple task to demonstrate Christ-like love. It requires God’s wisdom and grace in our life.

## CHURCH DISCIPLINE COMES IN VARIOUS FORMS AND DEGREES

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Church Discipline has been given a bad name. It is usually perceived as something negative, judgmental, punitive and unloving. We often think of it only within the context of a public announcement of a member’s sin or in excommunication. When discipline is only viewed in this context, it makes sense why it is often criticized. That’s why it’s crucial to remind ourselves that discipline is something that is designed to help, it’s not something we *do to* someone it is something we *do for* someone. We must also understand that as believers we receive discipline on a regular basis in various ways.

1. We receive a significant amount of discipline or reproof during our personal devotional time. The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to impress upon our hearts areas that need spiritual attention (**Hebrews 4:12-13, 2Timothy 3:16-17**).
2. Discipline is given through the preaching and teaching of God’s Word to the congregation at large. **Psalm 73:16-17** is an Old Testament example of how God’s Word brings one into proper spiritual alignment or discipline.

**2 Timothy 4:1-4** *I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: <sup>2</sup> Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. <sup>3</sup> For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but*

*according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; <sup>4</sup> and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.*

**Titus 2:11-15** *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, <sup>12</sup> teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, <sup>13</sup> looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, <sup>14</sup> who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. <sup>15</sup> Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.*

3. Discipline is given through encouragement to be alert to spiritual traps that lure the heart away from God.

**Hebrews 3:13-15** *but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. <sup>14</sup> For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, <sup>15</sup> while it is said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."*

**Ephesians 4:14-15** *that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, <sup>15</sup> but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ*

When we express concern to our brothers and sisters in Christ about their sinful words or actions we are disciplining them. We often do not see this as discipline, but that is what it is. God is using others to call us back into spiritual line. In most cases the response is "you are right," "I stand corrected," or "that is something I need to address in my life." It's common to hear a "thank you for being honest with me" or "thanks for caring." At times this occurs in casual conversation about the Christian life. We hear someone make a statement in general and God uses it to bring reproof into our lives.

The challenge comes into play when the one who is hearing discipline doesn't take heed to it. We all have an inner lawyer inside that defends us even when we are guilty, and we must guard against this. When a believer refuses to admit and address their sin, then discipline moves into another form.

4. Discipline moves from exhortation to rebuke.

A rebuke is a form of discipline that is under-valued. No matter what adjective we use to help present “rebuke” as something helpful it still comes across as unloving. We can call it *gracious* rebuke or *loving* rebuke, but rebuke still appears to be judgmental. That’s an unfortunate and unbiblical way of seeing it. It may seem to be unloving, and the rebuke may even be communicated unkindly, but it’s God’s demonstration of love through someone who is willing to take the risk to confront. (**Galatians 2:11-17**, Paul confronted Peter)

**Proverbs 1:23** *Turn at my rebuke; Surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you.*

In **Proverbs 1**, God’s wisdom is personified as a lady who stands at the busy entrance gates of the city to offer great counsel. One such offer comes in the form of a rebuke or strong discipline. Those who heed it reap significant benefits. Those who reject it suffer serious consequences. Wise is the one who sees rebuke as a gift of discipline from our gracious God.

**Proverbs 27:5-6** *Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend*

**Proverbs 28:23** *He who rebukes a man will find more favor afterward Than he who flatters with the tongue.*

**Hebrews 12:5-11** *And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; <sup>6</sup>For whom the LORD loves He chastens And scourges every son whom He receives.” <sup>7</sup>If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? <sup>8</sup>But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.*

<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? <sup>10</sup> For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. <sup>11</sup> Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

1. Don’t despise God's method of chastening (discipline).
2. Don’t become discouraged by God’s various forms of rebuke.
3. God will discipline everyone that is truly His child.
4. The analogy is that an earthly father who disciplines his children.
5. No one enjoys discipline but everyone needs it, and it's profitable.

Knowing that there are various forms of discipline helps clarify the difference between private/personal discipline versus public/formal discipline. It also sheds light on the process of discipline and why at times it needs to be public.

### **Various Forms and Degrees of Discipline:**

- Discipline occurs between the Holy Spirit and the individual believer.
- Discipline occurs in casual conversation.
- Discipline occurs by intentional confrontation from a fellow believer (God also uses non-believers to confront us as well). He used a donkey in the Old Testament as a means of rebuke. (**Numbers 22:22-35**)
- Discipline occurs in corporate worship through the preaching of God's Word.
- Discipline, at times, moves from encouragement to rebuke.
- Discipline brings others into the picture if repentance does not occur.
- Discipline may need to move from a small circle to the congregation if repentance is not exhibited.
- Discipline may result in dismissal or excommunication. Both result in removal of membership, but may not carry the same consequences.

### **Dismissal From Membership**

A member may be removed for a deliberate lack of attendance; in this case avoidance or disassociation of such a member would not be necessary as it may be for excommunication. There may be other reasons for dismissal that would not call for the "do not eat with" principle.

### **Excommunication**

Though both involve removal of membership, excommunication carries a stronger form of rebuke, and certain un-repentant behavior would call for clear separation and clarified guidelines of contact from current membership. Such clarification is to be given by the leadership and confirmed by the congregation. Again, not all dismissal or excommunication carry the same consequences. With that said, it is still a sad course of events for any believer to be out of fellowship with God and Christ's church. (**1 John 1:5-2:2**)

### **Formal or Public Church Discipline:**

Public discipline is uncomfortable for all involved parties, and that is why it often faces resistance and, at times, unfair criticism. With formal discipline, the circle of those who know about the believer's sin increases in size as a result of lack of

repentance. Exhortation and rebuke move to warning of the possibility of public exposure.

Many members see the value in formal church discipline and support it, until it's their own or a friend's or family member's turn to experience it. A common objection used against formal church discipline is from the words of Jesus in **Matthew 7:7** *Judge not, that you be not judged*. Jesus also taught that we are to judge, but to do so in a correct manner. This is *not* a contradiction and needs to be understood to remove potential misunderstanding.

**John 7:24** *Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."*

To "judge" righteously or rightly is to judge with facts; it's when we see or have evidence of sinful words and actions. The **Matthew 7** passage warns against judging someone's motives. There is a time that judging is wrong or it's done in a wrong way or a wrong spirit. However, the Bible doesn't teach that we can never judge someone or identify something as sinful behavior. The New Testament repeatedly reveals that men and women were judged for their sinful actions with full support from God. Some had their names shared in sacred Scripture as a means of public rebuke.

Scripture is clear, and reality confirms that all believers struggle in their walk of faith and yield to various forms of sin. It is also clear that the church needs to show the world that it means something to claim that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior. The claim is *not* that believers are sin-free; it's that they are willing to admit their sin and are willing to seek help in working through their sinful attitudes and actions. Our message to the world is this, as Christ followers, we will deal with our problems in an honest way and take whatever God-honoring steps are necessary to correct the problem or prevent it from repetition. This is done to support Scripture that teaches there is a distinction between the church and the world (**1 John 2:15-17**). This distinction is that believers are to live a life of confession and repentance, and hold one another accountable to practice this. Believers are to have a lifestyle of repentance.

## **BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE**

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- **Romans 16:17-18** Those who cause division and reject sound teaching were to be exposed before all and were to be avoided to prevent them from

bringing further damage to the Lord's church. Causing disunity is a serious offense and God takes it very seriously. (**Proverbs 6:16-19, Ephesians 4:1-3**)

- In **1 Corinthians 5**, Satan is also referenced in connection with church discipline. Satan is the author of sin and delights in tempting us with sin. Sin has stages, and **Hebrews 11** speaks to the pleasure stage of sin and that this stage is for a season or only temporary. **Proverbs 9:17** teaches that stolen waters are sweet but ends with very serious consequences. Once sin runs its course it results in a great amount of conflict and heartache for the one directly involved in sin and for family and friends as well. The purpose of turning believers over to Satan is to accelerate the stages of sin. It's meant to bring a person to the place where they see sin and its deceptive and destructive nature in order to bring them to repentance. A great example of the deceptive stages of sin is the prodigal son in **Luke 15**.
- **Philippians 4:2** Two women members allowed their personal grievances to deepen to the point that their disunity affected the congregation. They did not take heed to previous means of discipline which led to them being publically rebuked within the pages of Scripture.
- **2 Thessalonians 3:6-15** Within the congregation certain members were slothful and justified their inactivity (laziness) by saying it was God's will. The instruction to the church was to disassociate from those guilty so that shame may bring them to repentance. It was apparent that the members knew whom it was that Paul was referring to. Notice the purpose was to bring them back in line with what God expected; this is what discipline is deigned for.
  - *V15 And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. <sup>15</sup> Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.*
  - These members were saying and doing "enemy" like things, but they were *not* the enemy. This distinction is important to keep.
- **1 Timothy 1:20** Paul informed Timothy of two men who had made a spiritual shipwreck of their walk with Christ. He turned them over to Satan so they would learn some valuable lessons about sound doctrine and the sacredness of God. The Holy Spirit, the divine author of Scripture, led Paul to disclose their names in print.
- **1 Timothy 5:19-20** Instructions were provided on how to discipline a leader of the church. The purpose of this public rebuke was to express to the entire

body how seriously God takes godliness and that those in leadership position are not exempt from discipline.

- **2 Timothy 3:2-9** After laying out a list of sinful passions, Paul used an Old Testament example that involved Moses' rebuke and discipline on Jannes and Jambres.
- **2 Timothy 4:9-15** This is Paul's final letter and soon he was to be executed by the Roman government. He avoided crucifixion due to his dual citizenship. In his last letter and final words, he denounced both a professed believer and a non-believer. He was concerned by the effects both would have on the church.
- **Titus 3:9-11** Some members of the church, where Titus was a pastor, caused disunity among the congregation. They were to be repeatedly warned by the leaders of the seriousness of their sin. If this method of discipline did not bring about favorable results, they were to be excommunicated.
- **3 John 9-11** John had to address the selfish desire of Diotrephes who sought to hold preeminence within the church. He wanted the limelight to the degree that it led to his mistreatment of missionary guests.

These examples confirm that when an individual member does *not* address their sin, it becomes a problem for the membership at large. When exhortation, rebuke, and warning are ignored, public discipline is required for the protection of the name of Christ and His church. Imagine the damage that would have been done to the congregation if these sinful actions had been left unchecked. However, each case of public discipline and excommunication could have been settled privately had repentance taken place.

Though public discipline is uncomfortable, we must realize the danger in allowing sinful attitudes and actions to continue. The potential for damage on numerous levels is real and immense. Had the men and women listed in Scripture repented of their sins the process of going public would have stopped. This principle is important to grasp. Public discipline and the extreme case of excommunication occur when the sinning member refuses to end their sinful behavior. **Members are *not* to be shunned or excommunicated because they sin; members are to be disciplined and even excommunicated because they will *not* address their sin. This is so important to understand and a key principle that often gets lost in the process of discipline.**

*Proverbs 28:13 He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.*

To cover sin is to deny it, excuse it, re-label it, compare it, play dumb, or minimize it. Any type of rejecting responsibility for sin creates conflict and problems. However, notice there is a wonderful promise for the one that confesses and turns away from their sin. The Bible has many descriptions for our offenses against God.

- **Sin** means to miss the mark, fall short of God's standard.
- **Trespass** is to ignore God's signs, to reject or defy His warnings.
- **Transgress** is to rebel against God's commands.
- **Iniquity** is moral uncleanness in word, thought or actions.

*Psalm 119:59 I thought about my ways, And turned my feet to Your testimonies.*

## UNDERSTANDING REPENTANCE

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**Repentance literally means a change of mind.** It's a change of mind about God and lifestyle. Every time we choose to sin, there is something fundamentally wrong or many things wrong in our thinking about God.

The Prodigal Son is a beautiful illustration of how he applied **Proverbs 28:13** and **Psalm 119:59**. In **Luke 15** we read how the prodigal 'came to himself' meaning he considered his sinful way of living and confessed his sin to God and his father. He demonstrated his sincerity, which allowed the father to celebrate on his son's re-commitment. The same principle of rejoicing lies within the body of Christ when a sinning member repents. Once repentance takes place God's plan is for the repentant member to experience support and encouragement from everyone within the congregation. When such action takes place, it's a beautiful picture of Biblical Christianity (**2 Corinthians 2:1-11**).

## A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS 5 & MATTHEW 18

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The next two Bible examples of Church Discipline are the most commonly known. **1 Corinthians 5** and **Matthew 18** provide details that are not found in the other passages. Both passages address excommunication. We must remind ourselves that excommunication is *not* for those members who struggle and fight to resist sin and who confess it when they sin. Public discipline or excommunication is for those members who claim to know Christ and yet "serve" sin. They express little or no interest in repentance or desire to please Christ with how they live. In a sentence,

**public church discipline and excommunication are for members who continue in sin without demonstrating any willingness to repent.**

**1 Corinthians 5:1-13** This is perhaps the best-known and most extended passage on church discipline. There was a member of the church who was having an immoral relationship with his father's wife. The severe judgment from Paul for immediate excommunication was a result of the man's public sinful behavior and the members' sinful response. It was quite disheartening that the congregation boasted about how non-judgmental they were towards this member's obvious immoral behavior. The member was to be excommunicated in the hope that his sinful desires would bring him to an end of himself and back to God. It was an expression of concern over his relationship with Jesus Christ. Satan's influence is brought into play once the man is removed from the blessings of being a part of God's church. The sin of the stepmother was not addressed, and we could assume for the reason that she was not a member of the church. This clearly implies that membership was practiced in the early church.

"Paul exhorts the Corinthian Christians to deliver the sinning man to Satan, he is referring to the public removal of the church's affirmation of his salvation. He is to be handed over publicly to the worldly life that he has chosen and excluded from the believing earthly community. Such an action was not meant to express their belief that the man was unregenerate; rather *it* affirmed their knowledge that he was living as if he were unregenerate, which he may have been. Excommunication would *not* necessarily have forbidden the man to attend public services; he was simply not to be regarded as a member, and he was therefore not to participate in the privileges of membership, **especially in the Lord's Supper.**" Mark Dever

**1 Corinthians 11:23-32** explains the seriousness of participating in the Lord's Supper (Communion) with an un-confessed sinful lifestyle. God brought personal and severe discipline on those who dishonored the Lord's death by not seeking repentance and making light of their disobedience to God.

**1 Corinthians 5** teaches that we are *not* to spend casual time with an excommunicated member. The general principle is this; we are *not* to act in any way or participate in any way that will cause the excommunicated member to think little of the church's action or their sinful lifestyle. We are not called to shun the person completely; for example, the one being disciplined or even excommunicated is welcome to attend the public worship service to hear God's Word preached in the hope that God would bring them to repentance. However, it should be clear that a

disciplined member understands that things are not normal in regards to his or her relationship with the membership.

When sin is allowed to go unchecked, it continues to distort God's Word. The very nature of sin, its DNA, is that it is never satisfied. Sin will continue to confuse and consume as many people as it can. Sin is *not* our friend, and some make it their companion thereby requiring the church to confront such behavior. It's a very loving thing to help someone see that their sinful choices hurt Jesus Christ, the testimony of the church and themselves.

The account of excommunication given by Matthew is slow and deliberate in comparison to the Corinthian passage.

**Matthew 18** teaches (1) the desire is to see the sinning member repent and (2) to keep the number small regarding those who are involved in the process.

- The process of discipline moves slowly, thoughtfully, and graciously.
- Excommunication should only occur by the congregation when repentance does not occur by the sinning member.
- All doubt should be removed regarding compassion and motive of the congregation.
- Churches exist in part to protect us from self-deception. The discipline process is given to the body of Christ to help every believer.

The goal of church discipline is the restoration of the individual to full fellowship with both God and other believers. The discipline is to start privately and gradually become more public. It is to be done in love toward the individual, in obedience to God, and in godly fear for the sake of others in the church.

### **Five Biblical Principles in Confronting Others In A Way That Glorifies God**

1. Evaluate Your Motives...(Ask yourself, "Why do I want to get involved?")

- a. Is it out of curiosity or out of legitimate concern?
- b. Is it due to jealousy or genuine sincerity?
- c. Is it to humiliate the fellow believer or is it to help them?
- d. Is it to glorify God by obeying his one another commands?

2. Examine Your Own Life

- a. This doesn't mean you have to have your act totally together first, because no one does. However, it does mean that you are in proper fellowship with Christ and His Church.

- b. Examining your own life means that you allow God to search your heart and motives on a regular basis and you understand how God uses Communion to emphasize this command.
- c. Examining your own life means that you have confessed your sin before ever approaching someone else.

### 3. Exhibit Grace

God has poured grace and mercy into our lives and we want to exhibit that to the sinning brother or sister. It's easy to give grace when you realize how much you have received it and need it in your own life. **(Micah 6:8)**

- a. This means we see the sin as a serious problem and are concerned.
- b. Use "we" and "us" often in your conversation as a means to demonstrate humility. (ex: "We all struggle." and "We all sin.")
- c. Speaking the truth in love means grace and firmness go well together. Call sin what it is. Call for repentance but do so with concern and compassion.

### 4. Exalt Christ

- a. You cannot say enough about who Christ is and what he has done for us.
- b. Focus on the price Jesus paid for us on the cross. **(2 Corinthians 5:14-15)**
- c. It is the person of Jesus, not just his commands we are to hold before others.
- d. It is his will, not our own agenda, that is to be highlighted.
- e. Jesus died for more than just our future. He died for our day-to-day life on this side of Heaven.

### 5. Engage in Prayer

- a. Pray for yourself in regards to obedience and courage. Pray that your appeal is grace-filled.
- b. Pray for the one you will confront, remembering it is God's responsibility to change hearts.

**Matthew 18** records the teaching of Jesus Christ in regards to (1) humility, (2) compassion, (3) confrontation, and (4) forgiveness. The context of the chapter is built around a response from Christ to his disciples who asked, *"Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"*

- The teaching of **humility** was built around God's view of children. An alarming illustration was given by Christ in regards to offending children. **Matthew 18:1-10**

- The teaching of **compassion** dealt with a shepherd's concern for one lost sheep despite the fact that he had safely accounted for 99 of them. **Matthew 18:11-14**
- The teaching of **confrontation** directly deals with our topic of church discipline. **Matthew 18:15-20**
- The teaching of **forgiveness** focused on two men and their debts. The parable ended with a serious warning of divine judgment for any who refused to forgive. **Matthew 18:21-35**

The context of **Matthew 18:15-20** is Jesus providing four steps of action by calling a sinning believer back to repentance. None of these steps have a promise from Christ that restoration will occur. Notice the use of the word "if" throughout the passage. The **Matthew 18:15-20** process recognizes the legitimate role of the congregation as an instrument of both loving exhortations and, if necessary, loving public chastening. When discipline follows this biblical mandate, it is a picture of God's love for His children. Even when church discipline fails to bring about repentance, it is still needed to accomplish other good purposes such as (1) maintaining a good testimony in the world, (2) confirming the congregation's commitment to God and His Word, (3) leading the church family in self-discipline and heart-examination, and (4) encouraging fellow believers to have a proper fear of the Lord.

### **Step 1 | Go alone to the one who has sinned and address the issue.**

**Matthew 18:15** *Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.*

We exhibit a number of Biblical mandates when this passage is put into practice:

- Biblical love - **1 Corinthians 13**
- Genuine concern for a fellow believer's spiritual welfare - **Galatians 6:1-2**
- Awareness of how sin deceives and hardens the heart, making confrontation necessary - **Hebrews 3:12-23**
- Keeping the matter private; retaining the information to the closest circles possible - **Proverbs 17:9**
- An opportunity for reconciliation - **2 Corinthians 5:18-20**

### **Seven Cautions to Step 1**

1. Be cautious of assuming a Scriptural violation has occurred when possibly the real issue is unmet personal expectations or personal preferences that caused the hurt feelings.

2. Be cautious of focusing more on how you were sinned against versus how God was sinned against.
3. Be cautious with placing emphasis on how you were offended instead of the spiritual recovery of the one who has sinned.
4. Be cautious of confusing the balance between forbearance and confrontation.
5. Be cautious of minimizing the sin to justify why you will *not* confront the erring believer.
6. Be cautious of unnecessarily or carelessly sharing the offense with others, which violates Scripture and creates additional problems.
7. If an offense(s) is repented of, then demonstrating forgiveness to the one who sinned against you is in order. **(Luke 17:4)**

### **Step 2 | Go again this time with one or two other believers.**

“**Considerable weight** is to be given to the judgment (counsel) of men and women who live near to God, and in most instances, their verdict will not be a mistaken one...” C.H. Spurgeon 1834-1892

- The second confrontation with others demonstrates even greater love and concern.
- This confrontation intensifies the seriousness of un-repented of sin.
- The one or two other believers are usually, but not limited to, church leaders, such as pastors and deacons.
- This step protects all parties involved from allowing emotions to blur the facts and goal.
- If repentance occurs, the process is ended.
- When steps 1-2 are ignored by the offending believer, step 3 is to be put into motion.

### **Step 3 | Go to the congregation.**

- If the sinning member refuses to repent, their name along with a brief and careful explanation needs to be shared with the congregation (members only).
- Keep in mind that only un-repented sin is addressed, and is only addressed to the congregation if step one and two received a negative response.
- This is called public “church discipline” since the entire congregation is called forth to help in the restoration process.
- The goal of spiritual recovery does not change, only the number of people involved.

- The church is not seen as infallible in the **Matthew 18** passage nor will God ever endorse error, but when a congregation responds to God's way, they have his blessings.
- God's Word is the authority of church discipline.
- You are richly blessed if you are a part of a church that practices biblical discipline upon its membership.
- If the sinning member refuses to listen to the congregation, then the final step needs to be taken.
- The goal of all three steps is always the same: to get the sinning member restored.

### **A closer look at Matthew 18:15-20 :**

*"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. <sup>16</sup> But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' <sup>17</sup> And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. <sup>18</sup> **"Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. <sup>19</sup> **"Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."*****

- The "two or three witnesses" and the "binding and loosing" deal with church discipline.
- When the membership follows God's Word in the process of discipline, they gain God's blessing and have His authority. God is saying to the obedient church, which is acting out His will, whoever you "bind and loose" will be "bound or loosed" in heaven. In other words, God agrees with and supports that act of discipline.
- The congregation is able to proclaim, when an erring member continues in sin, that they are "bound" or under both divine and church discipline. The congregation is able to proclaim this with authority delegated to them from Scripture. When the member repents, the congregation is able to proclaim that they are forgiven of their sins and freed or loosed from discipline. The congregation is not forgiving sins; they are affirming God's promise of forgiveness to the believer when confession and repentance occurs.
- The church has the confidence of divine direction and support in their proclamations. This is a powerful and beautiful blessing upon the

congregation that seeks God's will in disciplining and restoring a fellow member. It's as if Jesus is present in the service, standing among the congregation, and giving his full support. This is a powerful truth (**v19**).

#### **Step 4 | Excommunication by the Congregation from the Membership**

- This step is done to protect the name of Christ and to intensify the seriousness of sin to the offender.
- This action confirms the sad state of a believer who is more committed to sin than they are to Christ and His church.
- Privileges of membership such as the Lord's Supper and church fellowships are forfeited, but the offender is encouraged to attend the preaching and teaching of God's Word.
- Members should avoid personal meetings with the excommunicated member unless the purpose is to call the believer back to repentance.
- Excommunication is reversible. If repentance and confession occur, then the membership should be reinstated with a spirit of rejoicing and wholehearted support (**2 Corinthians 2:5-10**).

**A Witness to the World...**Another reason we practice church discipline is to be a good testimony to those outside of Jesus Christ. We should exhibit a great example of how we address sinful behavior, and more importantly, what true repentance looks like. This does not mean the world will appreciate the church's "process of discipline." But the watching world should see how the biblical church addresses her members and leaders who practice sin.

**A member who is in the process of church discipline cannot avoid the discipline process** by stating they no longer choose or desire membership. Though it is true they are free to stop attending services and may choose to exercise that right, their membership is bound by a congregational vote for official removal. Members waive their right to withdrawal from membership when discipline is pending and must wait for the congregation's fulfillment of their biblical mandate to encourage repentance and restoration. This process is laid out in the church constitution.

Just as a person cannot walk into a church service and "member" himself, a member cannot "un-member" himself. Membership is a result of congregational approval and to have one's name removed is by the same process. Excommunication is the action of the congregation and not by selected leaders or pastors. (**Matthew 18:17**)

## CHURCH DISCIPLINE REGARDING DIVORCE

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**“Because marriage is so important**, so valuable, churches do well to offer pre-marital counseling and to perform weddings and to hold small groups for young married people. Because marriage is so important, churches must discipline any member who proceeds with an unbiblical divorce.” Mark Dever

The Covenant of Marriage is sacred and needs to be protected by all means. **The Grace community is committed to the success of the marriages among our membership** even when a couple may feel like giving up due to adverse circumstances. The following information is *not* a study on what may be considered as legitimate divorce. It’s about the filing for divorce or divorcing without submitting to Biblical authority and consideration of the testimony of the church’s submission to Christ.

### **Divorce as it relates to the submission of Biblical authority:**

1. The leadership of Grace is *not* ignoring the problem(s) within the marriage but disagrees with the solutions entertained by the member(s) when divorce is filed without any pastoral counsel.
2. The purpose of Biblical counseling is to help members see their problems and solutions in light of Scripture. **(Romans 12:1-2)**
3. A troubled marriage creates a fog-like atmosphere that hinders sound reasoning. That is why submission to the leadership of Grace is crucial. The feelings and emotions that accompany a marriage in conflict cannot be trusted.
4. Many times a divorce only trades off one set(s) of problems for another set of problems, which can be even more difficult than the troubled marriage.
5. We must all be reminded of the big purpose. We are called to honor God with our lives and marriage is a living example and a picture of the relationship between Jesus Christ and His church. **(Ephesians 5)**
6. The spiritual enemy delights in divorce because it distorts the picture of Jesus and His Church and brings discouragement and confusion to so many.
7. Divorce does more than break a covenant, it has a negative impact on family, friends, and the congregation. Divorce breaks people, not just a covenant.
8. Separation within marriage, either a legal separation or otherwise, is not Biblical, but may be necessary on a temporary basis **(I Corinthians 7:1-5)**. Separation should be done under Pastoral care and counsel.

For these reasons and more, the membership and leaders of Grace must reach out with compassion to help every marriage that is facing the possibility of divorce. The Bible is clear that members are to submit to the biblical authority of the pastors. Notice that the word “biblical” is placed with the words “of the pastors.” **We understand that Christ alone and Scripture alone is the final authority for our lives and not the leadership of any church.** However, Scripture is clear on submitting to the leaders when they are following Christ and attempting to help members honor Christ in their marriage. The Apostle Paul laid the biblical principle of following God's leaders as they follow Christ (**1 Corinthians 11:1**). The church has God’s full approval concerning the discipline process (**Matthew 18**).

***Hebrews 13:17** Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.*

## **EXPLANATION OF THE LEAVEN PRINCIPLE AND ITS APPLICATION TO BIBLICAL AUTHORITY**

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Leaven is used in Scripture as a picture of the negative influence sin has on others. (**Matthew 16:6-11, 1 Corinthians 5:6, Galatians 5:9**)

The leaven principle comes into play when members are allowed to ignore or reject the invitation of pastors to help them see their current situation in light of Scripture. The refusal to respond to the pastors’ request opens the door for other members to practice the same. This is no small offense and highlights the importance of honoring God through His structure of authority. When a congregation allows members to divorce without addressing it, or when they ignore discipline, they diminish God's covenant of marriage. Lack of action on the part of the church family encourages other couples that struggle in their marriage to seek divorce instead of seeking Biblical soul care. It also communicates to future marriages that the covenant of membership and the covenant of marriage are not to be taken seriously. Such confusion is avoided when loving discipline is in place.

## **POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS TO CHURCH DISCIPLINE**

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1. We would constantly be confronting believers because we sin against each other all the time.

First of all, we must be sure a biblical violation has clearly occurred. This step has been abused by members who were too suspicious or sensitive, which led them to imagine themselves wronged without any true biblical foundation. However, we cannot disregard our Lord's command simply because some misuse this step. Delay in confronting sin would only lead to one becoming more persistent in their sin as well as the possibility of leading others into sin. The bottom line is that sin complicates life for everyone involved and that is why discipline is so important (**Proverbs 4:23, Hebrews 3:12-13**).

2. What if I obey this command and the believer continues to sin against me?

This is the same objection Peter brought up in **Matthew 18**, which Jesus addressed in verses **21-22**. The bottom line is that forgiveness does *not* have a limit. Does this mean we allow people to repeatedly mistreat us or that we become some form of a doormat for others to abuse? Absolutely not! Church discipline by its design is to help protect from such abuse. If a person continues to repeat their sin toward you, sound reason would serve that there is a lack of genuine repentance and a need for additional help. You should seek counsel and support from spiritually mature believers.

3. If you bring a member before the congregation, you could possibly cause a serious division.

This is very true, but if the goal of restoration is clarified and the process is done in a spirit of love, the damage should be minimal. However, Scripture does not ignore the fact that we can do the right thing for the right reason and still receive negative feedback. Having members misunderstand the big picture or seeing them leave the church is not a pleasant thing. The main goal is to honor God through obedience and then leave the results up to Him. When a member has family or friends under discipline, the true test of their love for Jesus Christ is on the line and nothing will prove the congregation's commitment to Scripture more than church discipline.

4. We would have church discipline constantly if we took it seriously.

It's true we all sin and we should not take any sin lightly. As stated earlier, discipline in a sense does occur often in a private setting, but this objection is geared more toward public or formal discipline. Unconfessed sin is serious and it does break fellowship with God and calls for his displeasure and discipline. (**Hebrews 12:5-11**) A clarification of the objection is this, only **un-repent**ed sin is brought before the congregation for possible excommunication. That is the reason for the process of step one and two in **Matthew 18**. If repentance occurs then church

discipline ceases. Most discipline never makes it to the public forum because the prior steps of discipline were effective.

5. Church discipline, especially excommunication, seems so unloving.

It may appear unloving but the very opposite is true. Nothing is more loving than calling a person to be in a right relationship with Jesus Christ. The problem with this objection is that the church has bought into the culture's definition of love. Church discipline is a great opportunity to reveal what true love looks like. Any parent should be able to work through this objection because they have to discipline their children, which is done out of love and concern for their safety and well-being. Biblical church discipline is an act of genuine concern, sincere compassion, and true love, even if it doesn't look like it to those who are wayward.

6. What if the discipline or excommunicated member wanted to meet with me or have lunch?

The social impact of discipline has lost its force in our day due to various reasons. The reality is that many who are under discipline will just join another church without any resolution. With that said, the mandate found in **2 Thessalonians 3:14-16** states to "*have no company with him*" and **1 Corinthians 5:11** states "*not to keep company with*" and "*not even eat with such a person.*" It seems clear that any and all normal types of church fellowships are jeopardized. Yet the Thessalonian passage also states "*admonish him as a brother.*" The question is this, is it a hard and fast rule that any meal or meeting with a disciplined or excommunicated member is out? The Corinthian passage lists other sinful behavior for the exclusion of fellowships, such as the *sexually immoral, greedy, idolater, abusive, drunkards, and swindlers*. The context is these practicing sinning members were known for their ungodly lifestyle and yet they desired to participate in church fellowship. They wanted both a selfish lifestyle *and* spiritual community; they loved the world and yet did not want to give up the benefits of the church. Scripture teaches that you don't get both, and it's the church's role to communicate this in a loving but firm manner. This is specifically demonstrated by their exclusion from Communion. Does this mean individual members could *not* meet with the sinning brother or sister? The **Matthew 18** passage informs us to treat the member who has been excommunicated like an unsaved person. We would want to be kind to someone without Christ. We would want to spend time with them to share the gospel. What if the disciplined or excommunicated member wants to meet for lunch? This is a difficult question that a mature believer should wrestle with, and it would be no surprise to see various perspectives on this. Perhaps like other New Testament principles, God left "some" room for variation. Church discipline can seem like aiming at a moving target due to

the numerous circumstances and the varying levels of spiritual maturity of all personalities directly or indirectly involved.

At excommunication, the entire congregation is to participate. With these challenges in mind, the following points are presented as guidelines to help each believer navigate through the murky and unsettled waters that at times accompany church discipline.

## **GUIDELINES FOR MEETING WITH A NON-REPENTANT OR EXCOMMUNICATED MEMBER**

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A. What is the motive or purpose for the meeting? **It would need to be clear, very clear, that the purpose of the meeting was to defend the decision of the congregation and call the person to repentance.** This topic, to some degree, must be a part of the conversation. Motives play a major role in the Christian life. God looks at our heart and we need the Holy Spirit and the Word of God to help reveal our motives. **(Hebrews 4:12-13, Psalm 139:23-24)**

B. A full and literal application to the command “*don’t eat with them*” in **1 Corinthians 5** would mean a member should *never* meet for lunch or dinner with one who is under formal church discipline. Was the command regarding church wide dinners that were very common and called *agape* or love fellowships? Such meals were designed to meet both the physical and spiritual needs of the members. Perhaps the “spirit of the command” would allow an individual member to meet them at a house or at another private setting, but at a location that would *not* place you in a compromising position. Again, the meeting is to occur only if the motive is to call for repentance. The reason for a consideration of the “spirit of the command” is a concession in that it provides an opportunity to speak truth into a person’s life without being connected to the meals of the early church community. Again, the question is, was Paul’s example of “*do not eat with*” only referring to the church at large when they had dinner fellowships? Was Paul also referring to the individual member? It makes more sense if Paul only had the church fellowships in mind because it would allow for the “spiritual” members to privately have the opportunity to admonish the fallen member to repentance. However, if a congregation embraces the view that it allows individual members to reach out to a disciplined member, the following steps should be seriously considered. (1) The church leaders need to be made aware of the meeting to protect the testimony of the member who is reaching out. (2) The leaders would determine if the congregation would need to be made aware of the personal meeting. For example, if the disciplined member was very influential or the magnitude of the sin was great or

well known or concern over the social media aspect, then the membership may be included.

C. What would it look like to meet with a disciplines or excommunicated member? During the course of the meeting, take the opportunity to say something similar to... “my heart is broken for you and for our church over the recent discipline” and “I really want to help you work through this”, or “I am more than glad to go with you and meet with the leaders of the church.” This is difficult to do but it is wise and right. It would require an act of faith on the part of the member reaching out. but faith is what honors God. (**Hebrews 11:6**) Prayer would play a major role to help prepare your heart as well as the heart of the one you are appealing to. This appeal would also express genuine concern and love for the fellow believer. Another option would be to hand a prayerfully thought out letter which expresses your concern. Have Scripture printed out for them to review. Also, make it clear you are willing to walk beside them during the restoration process with the church.

7. What if the excommunicated member feels that injustice has occurred in their dismissal?

In most cases, where repentance is *not* displayed, the expelled member is sure to think they have been dealt with unjustly and, more than likely, they will have certain members who agree. For this reason, careful attention needs to be given to how graciously the steps of actions are handled, and clear and deliberate teaching needs to be demonstrated before the congregation. The Bible is the final authority, not the pastors, church leaders, or the congregation. If God's Word has been clearly shared regarding discipline, then the congregation should stand on their decision regardless of any possible criticism or negative reaction.

For further study on objections and challenges that accompany church discipline see: **Kicked Out of Church / How God Brought Me Home** (Article by Scarlett Clay Modal, Guest Contributor)

More than likely the congregation and leaders will face verbal persecution if there is *not* repentance from the member being disciplined. This is a painful experience but one we must be willing to endure if we are to take following Jesus Christ seriously.

**1 Peter 2:20-23** *For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. <sup>21</sup>For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:<sup>22</sup>“Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth”*

*23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;*

### **Church Covenant**

Those who make up the membership of Grace willingly sign a Covenant of Membership. This covenant is important to review when any stage of discipline is in process.

### **A Covenant of Membership for Grace Baptist Church**

Jesus loved the church and gave Himself for it. **In Ephesians 5:25**, Jesus calls for believers to have a seriousness of commitment in regards to His church. The conduct of members within and without the church services is of great importance to the name of Jesus Christ. A Covenant differs from Statements of Faith in that they emphasize conduct over doctrine. A Church Covenant (1) highlights a meaningful and sincere commitment which follows the pattern of Scripture, (2) gives the covenant-making member an opportunity to visibly display their commitment to Jesus Christ and to the body of believers, and (3) encourages members that their godly lifestyle makes an evangelistic impact upon the community.

The signing of the Covenant should only be completed after a sincere heart examination and commitment to Jesus Christ has been made. The following Covenant is first and foremost made to God and then to fellow brothers and sisters who are members of Grace Baptist Church.

## THE GRACE MEMBERSHIP COVENANT

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Having received Christ as my Savior and having been baptized, being in agreement with the Grace Statement of Faith, and accepting the Bible as the inspired word of God and my final authority in all matters of faith and practice, I now believe I am led by the Holy Spirit to unite with the Grace Baptist Church family. In so doing, I commit myself to God and to the other members of Grace to do the following:

1. **I will protect the unity of Grace**
  - a. by acting in love toward other members (**1Peter 1:22**)
  - b. by using my words to build up one another (**Ephesians 4:29**)
  - c. by following the leaders of Grace (**Hebrews 13:17**)
2. **I will share the responsibility of Grace**
  - a. by praying for the leaders, members, ministers, and growth of Grace (**Eph. 6:18-19**)
  - b. by inviting the un-churched to attend services (**Luke 14:23**)
  - c. by warmly welcoming those who visit (**Romans 15:7**)
3. **I will serve the ministry of Grace**
  - a. by discovering my gifts and talents and using them at Grace (**1Pet 4:10**)
  - b. by allowing myself to be equipped for the work of ministry by my pastors (**Eph. 4:11-12**)
  - c. by developing a servant's heart (**Philippians 2:3,4,7**)
4. **I will support the testimony of Grace**
  - a. by attending faithfully (**Hebrews 10:25**)
  - b. by living a godly life through the power of the Holy Spirit (**Gal. 5:22-25**)
  - c. by regular financial giving (**1Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 9:6-7**)

Recognizing my inability in my own strength to keep this covenant, yet believing that God will enable me to fulfill its terms; I hereby attach my signature below, implying the ready assent of my heart to each of the terms of this covenant.

I have read the 2011 Church Constitution, specifically in the area of church discipline, and give my consent thereof.

*(The above Covenant is shared at the membership information class and during the membership interviews.)*

## CLOSING COMMENTS & OVERVIEW

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God in his infinite wisdom has designed church discipline as a means to express our sincere love and passion for Christ, a platform to demonstrate our genuine concern and compassion for others, and a spiritual tool to carefully examine our own heart.

### **Psalm 139:23-24**

“We should never undertake the task of chiding another’s sin unless cross-examining our own conscience, we can assure ourselves before God that we are acting from love. If reproaches or threats or injuries voiced by the one you are calling into account have wounded your spirit than for that person to be healed by you, you must not speak until you are healed yourself lest you act from worldly motives, to hurt and make your tongue a sinful weapon of evil, returning wrong for wrong, curse for curse. Whatever you speak out of a wounded spirit is the wrath of an avenger, not the love of an instructor...And if, as often happens you begin some course of action from love and are proceeding with it in love but a different feeling insinuates itself because you are resisted, deflecting you from reproach of a man’s sin and making you attack the man itself – it were best, while watering the dust with your tears to remember that we have no right to crow over another’s sin since we sin in the very reproach of sin if anger at sin is better at making us sinners than mercy is at making us kind.” Augustine (354-430)

**Grace Mission Statement:** Encouraging believers to pursue a personal journey into the heart of God through sincere Bible study and prayer, resulting in a passion for God and a compassion for others.

- The primary reason for church discipline is to glorify God through obedience to His commands.
- We must place the spiritual rescue of erring brothers and sisters above our own comfort. Diligent effort should be made to reclaim all members who spiritually fall. **Galatians 6:1**
- Church discipline is redemptive in nature, while many only see it as punitive.
- Far too many congregations tolerate sin in general as well as in their own membership. This is a time for every member to ask themselves hard questions about their commitment to Christ.
- The church needs to demonstrate an accurate view of church discipline.
- Though misunderstood, it’s very loving to graciously call sinning believers to repentance to help them restore proper fellowship with God.
- Church discipline provides a platform for the church to display genuine love.

To love someone is to want the very best for them. **The very best for anyone is to be in a right relationship with Jesus Christ.** The main goal of the church should be to encourage people to look to Jesus Christ and desire Him as their greatest treasure.

The desire of the Grace Baptist Church congregation is to see repentance and restored fellowship. To be in right fellowship with the church is vital because it is so much bigger than any one individual member. Right fellowship with the church is about being in right **fellowship with the Father and Jesus Christ.** There could be no greater reason to be in a right relationship with one's church family.

**1 John 1:3-4** *that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, **that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.** 4 And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.*

The message of Scripture is clear, the church has the right and responsibility to expose and excommunicate those who refuse to take following Christ seriously. The work of the Church is of eternal consequence, and to have the name of Christ damaged by a member who refuses to take their sin seriously cannot go unchallenged. However, our goal isn't to dismiss a member, it is to glorify God by calling sinning believers to repentance. This process requires a great amount of faith on the part of the congregation even at the risk of being misunderstood and misrepresented. The practice of church discipline pleases God and makes possible spiritual restoration thereby making obedience well worth any risk. A congregation finds great joy in leading an erring brother or sister back to the immeasurable grace and mercy in Christ.

**James 5:19-20** *Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, <sup>20</sup> let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.*

**1 John 1:8-2:2** *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup> If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. <sup>2</sup> And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.*

**In Jesus Christ we find complete and full forgiveness. He is our Savior, our High Priest, and our Advocate. (Hebrews 4:14-16)**