

Guidelines for Church Discipline and Restoration for Partner Church Members

This policy is a guideline only. VM partner churches will apply discipline, and if appropriate, restoration, as deemed appropriate in any particular situation.

As we look at the subject of “Church Discipline, Reconciliation, and Restoration,” let us do so with the understanding that the Lord God we serve is a God who disciplines, reconciles, and restores. Hebrews 12:11 tells us, *No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.*

Discipline in all that it is, is an essential element of healthy and vibrant growth. This is true in the natural as well as in the spiritual. We only need to look around at our culture to see the fruit of undisciplined lives. With this lack of discipline has come a lack of personal integrity and responsibility. Rather than accepting responsibility for our actions, there is a projecting of blame and responsibility. This abdication of personal responsibility and trust, has led to an avoidance of issues through a deep need for personal self preservation.

True discipline flows out of our need for relationships and accountability. Mankind was designed by the Lord to have limits and for correction to occur when those limits are breached. We can easily see this in the Garden of Eden. Limits were both in the Garden itself and in the command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When the limits of the command were broken, discipline occurred. Even as Christians, we have been given freedom and limits. These freedoms within their corresponding limits are there to serve us in the discipline (shaping) of our lives.

The Father has the right to discipline our lives because we are His. The fact that He disciplines us at all, is a proof that we are His children (Hebrews 12:1-13). Since we are His children, we need to recognize, be thankful for and submit to His disciplining (shaping) process.

There are various types of discipline, but they all have the same purpose: to so shape our hearts and lives, that we are brought into conformity with the image and likeness of Jesus Christ. The Bible says, *Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily* (Colossians 1:28-29).

When we look at types of discipline mentioned in the scriptures, we see two general distinctions:

1. Discipline that teaches, instructs and equips us through a positive form of discipline or,
2. Discipline that teaches, instructs and equips us through a punitive form of discipline.

Positive Discipline

The shaping of our hearts and lives to ever increasingly reflect the person and glory of Christ Jesus our Lord, through correction, warning, reproof, rebuking, teaching, training in righteousness, prayer, personal ministry, deliverance, relational accountability, friendship and discipleship.

Punitive Discipline

The shaping of our lives through direct application of governmental authority and consequence. This often results in punitive measures being taken to assert the authority of Christ Jesus within the hearts and lives of the people of God, his church. This may result in public rebuke, direct actions of a corporate accountability, loss of position, loss of fellowship with the church, etc.

Seek Positive Discipline

The Lord does not want us to dread His positive discipline. In fact, we’re to desire it, be grateful for it, and to seek it. The positive discipline of the Lord is highly valued in the scriptures. It’s the punitive discipline of the Lord that we’re warned against incurring. This warning is not a devaluing of it. This warning is simply to say that we do not have to walk the road of punitive discipline if we’ll heed the clear Word of the Lord’s positive discipline.

The simple truth is, if we continually do not heed the positive discipline of the Lord, we will come under the punitive discipline of the Lord at some point in time. In fact, the punitive discipline of the Lord comes because of unbelief, rebellion, stubbornness, pride and hard heartedness, without repentance. It comes simply because the positive discipline of the Lord hasn't been heeded to, over time and time again (Proverbs 5:12;15:10).

Authority for Discipline

The church has been given authority, in cooperation with the Lord Jesus Christ, to see that His discipline happens within the life of the church.

As Christians, we all have been given power and authority in and through Christ Jesus (John 1:12). Church leadership has also been assigned power for the building up of the kingdom of God, and to provide protection, direction, and correction for the saints within their sphere of responsibility. This power comes with an entrusted right of use, called authority. Leadership within the church of Christ Jesus, has been vested with the power and authority of Christ Jesus. It is a trust. It's a trust that church leadership will be and are indeed, held accountable for.

When we speak of the authority of Christ in church leadership, there are generally two types of authority that we need to look at.

1. Relational
2. Governmental

Relational Authority

Relational authority speaks first of that authority and power that is given in the midst of our relationship with Christ Jesus. Secondly, it speaks of that authority and power that is given in the midst of our relationship with others. It is not authority or power that we should ever presume upon. It is an authority of relationship and therefore of influence. It is an authority of permission; an authority of the heart; and its power lies in the influence that we bring to bear in our relationship with others through Christ Jesus. That influence flows out of the genuine heart of Jesus being revealed in, to and through church leadership, for others.

Governmental Authority

Governmental authority builds upon relational authority. Then and only then, should it speak of the authority and power of position (i.e. of eldership or cell leader). This authority is direct, legal and comes with a deep trust. It's the kind of authority that has the power to enforce the will, word, and ways of the Lord Jesus Christ. There's the right to command, judge, expect obedience unto the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word. Governmental authority comes with the role, office, call and appointment. It isn't inherent in the person, rather it lies in the position itself. This authority doesn't exist by permission of man but of the Lord God and His living and alive Word.

Regarding Church Discipline and Restoration

- It is important to see discipline as an opportunity to reassess what's going on in your family, cell, partner church, etc. As is true of parenting, that children will most often reflect the parents, so it is true of ministries and churches. Proper church discipline should cause us all to seek the face of the Lord for insight into what He is saying to us in and through this circumstance.
- Some discipline issues should result in policy changes. It also may give an opportunity to discover weaknesses within your teaching, training or organizational dynamics. In other words, don't be so consumed with the discipline issues and so narrow in your focus that you miss the gift of growth and change the Lord has presented you through this or any other discipline circumstance.
- In some cases of church discipline, (leadership and / or members) there can become opportunities for discerning issues that need ministry or prayer. An example would be territorial issues, or family issues, historical issues, open wounds of the past becoming evident in the present; thinking that reflects a cultural dimension rather than a kingdom of God dimension.

No Christian leader rejoices over the need for corrective discipline. It is a duty which must be performed when other more positive methods to cause growth and maturity have failed. Most leaders would prefer not needing to discipline any church member. Wherever the fault may lie, the need for

corrective discipline is an indication of failure, not of success. The wise leader enters into a corrective discipline situation with compassion, understanding and an abundant supply of grace.

A wise leader also enters into corrective discipline with firm resolve. While the need for such discipline may be tragic, the outcome is at the heart of every leader's purpose. What leader does not want to see individuals cleansed and restored into a protected, united, healthy church? Especially at times of spiritual disease in the church, God's leaders can be grateful that this important tool is available thus sparing the flock and keeping the "disease" from spreading. The Bible clearly develops this tool for the use of the wise shepherd leader.

Reasons for Discipline

Church members may need corrective discipline for any number of reasons. When a member enters into sin in a way that threatens his own spiritual life and those around him, he and the church must be protected. The church needs wise and decisive action of its leaders in such a case. In addition, other church members must understand their own role in the process of corrective discipline and restoration. Areas that may require decisive discipline of church members are:

Unresolved offenses between members	Racism
Moral impurity	Unbiblical divorce
Covetousness	Rebellion
Extortion	Idolatry
Any form of disobedience in the Bible	Railing
Active, aggressive divisiveness	Drunkenness
Ongoing refusal to receive input from leadership	

Failure to Discipline

A church's leadership may fail to discipline a sinning member for any of several reasons. It is good to explore them briefly, to know and understand them in advance. When discipline situations occur, a foreknowledge of the difficulties involved can support the resolve and effectiveness of church leadership. Fear and ignorance are the two primary reasons, expressed in several ways:

FEAR

- Fear of the congregation's distaste for the process
- Fear of the people developing an emotional identification with the problem
- Fear of the church receiving a reputation in the community of being hard or legalistic
- Fear of angry, bitter or destructive reactions from those under discipline
- Fear of wounding the tender spirits of children and young people
- Fear of embarrassment and damaged ministry or reputation to the ones under discipline

IGNORANCE

- Ignorance of the necessity for discipline
- Ignorance of the biblical principles of discipline
- Ignorance of the process of discipline

Benefits of Church Discipline

1. It has the potential for bringing about change and growth in the individual's life when nothing else will.
2. It evidences a standard of biblical conviction for living that the Christian is commanded to uphold.
3. It prohibits the leavening influence of sin from gaining a foothold in other members of the congregation.
4. It counteracts the spirit of lawlessness of our age.
5. It underscores the value of righteousness as the basis for all relationships in the body of Christ.
6. It is part of the responsibility of the oversight of the local church.
7. It may save some other pastor or Christian leader the task of disciplining an even worse case later.
8. It helps the individual member deal with sin in himself that by himself he has been unable to eliminate.
9. It can potentially save a congregation from a church split in some cases.
10. Without church discipline, there is no clear standard of right and wrong among the congregation.

11. Without church discipline, sinning members go on sinning, destroying their own potential fruitfulness in God.
12. Without church discipline, others may do outwardly what they have only been tempted to inwardly, because of the lack of discipline implies approval of an activity.
13. Without church discipline, the spiritual life of the body as a whole becomes greatly weakened. Spiritual vitality and life seep out and a progressive spiritual stagnation sets in.
14. Without church discipline, confidence and respect for the church leadership is lost.

Process of Church Discipline

The New Testament contains very clear injunctions about the need for discipline, and its place in church life. We will now look at important verses describing the process of church discipline.

• **Confrontation**

We begin with the words of Christ in Matthew 18:15-17:

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 (Matthew 18:15-17).

• **Exclusion From Fellowship**

Discipline, then, may reach a stage of putting a person out of fellowship with the church. This reached a very strong expression in a case at the church at Corinth which the apostle Paul addressed:

Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.

What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you" (1 Corinthians 5:3-5,12-13).

Discipline involves clear judgment, to pronounce an opinion of right or wrong, and to separate the unrepentant. It is exercised as an internal function of the church, and does not function in regard to non-Christians or people who are not part of a church fellowship.

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 as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15).

The Greek word for “note” in this passage involves a process where the church uses an act or circumstance which has a clear meaning and message to the person under discipline.

God protects the church from the spiritual attacks of the enemy. In some cases, an unrepentant sinner may take harbor under the protective covering of the church, and will not fully reap what he has sown. That is why Paul states in 1 Timothy 1:20, *Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.* The vicious attacks of Satan without the protective covering of the church may be the only thing that break through a spiritually hardened condition to reactivate a person’s conscience.

• **Sin Beyond Repentance**

It is possible for a Christian to fall beyond repentance. The church cannot recover those who have consigned themselves to hell. *Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him,* Paul commands in Titus 3:10. A heretic is a sectarian, one who follows his own preferences in a self-willed way, to undermine the church. In the last days, also, blasphemers would do harm to the work of God, and must be cast out of fellowship irretrievably (2 Timothy 3:2).

• **Protecting the Church**

In very severe cases, then, discipline in the church ceases to be a matter of restoring an individual’s soul, and becomes a function of the church defending itself against the attacks of the enemy. As in all areas of church discipline, but especially in this one, church leadership must act in a decisive and timely manner. Discipline may benefit not only the ones disciplined, but the rest of the church as well: *Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning (1 Timothy 5:20).*

But when a person refuses to recover from sin, the church must protect itself:

Urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord

Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people (Romans 16:17-18).

• **Confession and Cleansing**

The Bible gives us clear guidance on the next step of effective discipline that leads to recovery. In this state, the guilty party is responsible to confess, and God is faithful to cleanse.

When anyone is guilty in any of these ways, he must confess in what way he has sinned (Leviticus 5:5).

Acknowledge and confess (Psalm 35:1-5).

Therefore confess your sins to each other...(James 5:16).

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

But if we walk in the light...the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin (1 John 1:7).

He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy (Proverbs 28:13).

Confession must be directed toward two parties: to God, and to the people who have been injured by a sin (Romans 14:7).

• **Restoration and Reception**

In this stage, the church has a responsibility to its fallen and cleansed member. In 2 Corinthians 2:1-11, the apostle Paul is speaking to the church about restoring a previously disciplined person to the fellowship of the body. The goal of discipline has been achieved—this individual has repented of his sin. To receive this individual back into fellowship, the church is told to:

Forgive (2 Corinthians 2:7). To forgive someone is to remove all condemnation and critical attitudes toward a person, to release from your spirit all wrong feelings.

Console (2 Corinthians 2:7). Speak encouraging words, lift up the hands that hang down.

Love (2 Corinthians 2:8). The church is to assure the repentant one of their love, to reaffirm their love for him, to restore him to his full place in their affections. This step is critically important! Especially when someone has just been separated, the devil will try to turn that into a permanent division. The church must aggressively step forward to re-incorporate the person into the body.

Give Satan No Advantage (2 Corinthians 2:11). It's time for a cautious double-checking now. The church must make certain that it has definitely and effectively performed the first three steps above, and that no wrong spirits have crept into the process anywhere along the line, among any of the people involved in the process. "We don't want Satan to win any victory here!" is the J.B. Philips translation of part of this verse. The church is forewarned to not be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good.

GUIDELINES FOR THE PROCESS OF DISCIPLINE

Cell and partner church levels:

Step One: Discovery

- You become aware of the issue(s) potentially needing disciplinary attention.
- Begin to seek the face of the Lord for His wisdom and His discernment, praying also for a full disclosure of the truth concerning all that is going on.
- You also begin written documentation of all that has and continues to occur throughout this whole process, from beginning to end. Be sure to keep thorough and accurate notes of each meeting, discussions, agreements and disagreements. This will help you to remember and provide a timeline of events if needed for future reference. Be sure to date each meeting and note attendees.
- Keep lines of communication open with all parties concerned at all times.

On the cell level, there must be a commitment to openness, honesty, transparency, and genuine vulnerability by the oversight team (partner church eldership) leading this process. On the partner church eldership level, there should be a commitment to openness, honesty, transparency, and genuine vulnerability by the oversight team (Apostolic Council or designates) leading this process.

Step Two: Assessment

- You now engage the process discovering the truth concerning these issue(s).
- Remember: you are not only looking at the truth of specific actions and behavior, but a clear discernment of the heart conditions of those involved. This will be important to your judgment process.
- This is the information and fact finding process. Look for the truth and accurate facts, not senses or suspicions, or emotions and accusations, etc.

- This is where you speak to all those involved in the process, if need be.

Step Three: Judgment

- It is here that you will make a judgment based upon all that has been weighed and assessed. This includes the heart issues as well as the specific nature of the events involved.
- If need be, you will seek outside counsel concerning these issues as to your legal options.
- You will also consider resources available to you to deal with these issues redemptively as you prepare for the discipline process.
- It is at this point that you will render a clear decision. If your decision is such that discipline must essentially follow, then move to the next step.

Step Four: Consequence

- Strategy of discipline laid out
- Oversight of discipline process is clearly set in place. Specific person(s) are assigned as a team, to walk through the disciplinary process with those being disciplined; point of relationship, communication and accountability
- Assessment of discipline effectiveness scheduled to occur periodically
- Follow through to godly conclusion is committed to by all those involved in this process
- Remember: church discipline is a lot of work and all of that work must flow out of a heart that is of the Lord Jesus Christ's. There must be a commitment to seeing God's redemptive purposes fulfilled in each other.
- Implementation of discipline actually begins

Step Five: Reconciliation with Full Restoration

After following through with the disciplinary process successfully, there needs to be as much heart felt commitment and prayer to the restoration process as there was to the disciplinary process. Closure does not happen without restoration and healing having taken place.

DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS THAT COULD BE TAKEN

Here are some possible steps of action:

- Increased commitment to building relationships with specific steps of follow-through
- Specific prayer and fasting for a brief season
- Personal ministry, inner healing and deliverance
- Teaching and personal study of the Word as specifically relates to issues
- Counseling (personal, marriage, family)
- Conflict mediation
- Bringing in outside specialist(s) to aid in this healing process
- Confrontation and rebuke (personal and private)
- Confrontation and rebuke (cell and or corporately)
- Removing from areas of responsibility for a set season of time
- Removal from fellowship in one cell or partner church and placement in another
- Cutting off from all cell activities for set season of time
- Cutting off from all celebration activities for a set season of time
- Involvement of and cooperation with public authorities
- Outside medical help
- Withdrawal of membership (from cell and or celebration)

Warning: If at any time in the process of church discipline, a member resigns and leaves the church, all church disciplinary action must be considered ended. {Right to Privacy Law }

When considering how to handle a given issue, be sure that you are soaking this process with prayer, and receiving outside godly counsel from wise men and women of God. Accurate discernment of the heart conditions of those you are working with is critical to a godly and just strategy of church discipline and restoration. All church discipline strategies must be truly redemptive in focus and objective with a strong

biblical foundation and with a New Testament focus upon Christ Jesus and not of the law. There also must be absolute agreement to the discipline process by all the leadership involved.

As we seriously look at the discipline process, let's review a few recommendations for church leadership desiring to operate in biblical discipline.

1. Consult an attorney
2. Be consistent
3. The bylaws of the church and its doctrines should be clear and understandable to the average member.
4. Signed documents: All documents that reflect the government of the church, including disciplinary procedures, bylaws, doctrinal statements, etc. should be given to the people in writing. Some partner churches require all membership, especially new members, to sign off on having read them, submit to them, and that they understand them.
5. Have membership classes that teach the basic biblical doctrines from the scriptures. The *Biblical Foundation Series* books by Larry Kreider could be used. Teach clearly from the scriptures about biblical church discipline. Then have each person completing the course sign a document stating they understood and submit to these scriptural guidelines.
6. The scriptural principles and doctrines as expressed by the church should be practiced by the church.
7. 1 Corinthians 6 should be understood and practiced by the church
8. Be up front and honest; if a mistake is made, admit it, correct it and move forward.

Always remember, the purpose of all discipline is reconciliation and restoration through the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. May we always remember the scriptural admonition in Galatians 6:1-2: *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.*

Guidelines for Discipline and Restoration of Fallen Leaders

This policy is a guideline which is not binding and VM will apply discipline, and if appropriate, restoration, as deemed appropriate in any particular situation.

The scriptures make it clear that God expects purity of heart and holy living in all His people, and emphasize that those in church leadership are expected to live blameless lives, above reproach. Due to their high visibility and responsibility, apostolic council members, elders, fivefold ministers, ordained and licensed ministers, and stewardship team members, must be Christ-like in their life-styles and conduct. When ministers of the gospel fall into sin, the integrity of the church is called into public question. There are four basic areas of sin that a leader may commit that may require a process of discipline and restoration: moral failure, irreconcilable disputes, disorderly conduct, and apostasy.

One of the most important areas in which corrective discipline protects and heals the church is when a moral breakdown occurs in church leadership. The following outline of scripture policy concerning discipline of church leaders is derived from 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and 5:17-25, and Titus 1:5-9. We are not addressing divorce or remarriage, but dealing specifically with immorality which defiles the sanctity of the marriage bed. This is probably the most serious failure which destroys ministries in the church today. When handled properly, however, redemptive restoration can be achieved, ministries can be resurrected, and the church can move forward in health.

Effects of Moral Breakdown in a Leader's Life and Ministry

Marital infidelity affects a person, and especially the ministry, in the following areas of life:

Morally A minister disqualifies himself from ministry through a moral breakdown. A wife can also disqualify her husband from ministry by immoral conduct.

Domestically If an elder or a minister does not have his own house in order, he cannot rule the house of God. This order and rule involves all family relationships. The husband-wife relationship, especially, must be rebuilt and restored for family healing to take place.

Mentally and Emotionally Damage to relationships and the torment of guilt involve deep mental and emotional wounds that can be healed only through God's working. Cooperating with God's healing requires

genuine repentance, confession, and reception of cleansing and renewal. Rationalizations for sin cannot be justified or tolerated. They make healing impossible, and open the leader to even greater deception and sin.

Ethically Any leader who fails morally should step down from public ministry for a period of time. This is an important visible return to scriptural ethics which aids in the healing process. The time period of this removal from ministry should allow fulfillment of discipline, including healing to all parties involved.

Spiritually Moral breakdowns especially wreak damage and devastation on a public ministry where the leader is in public view and is held up as an example of godly life-style. Spiritual restoration must be sought for the good of all individuals concerned.

Ecclesiastically Proper and scriptural discipline must be upheld because the ministry, which functions before the “ecclesia” (God’s called-out people), has a very great area of influence. None of us live to ourselves, we all affect others, and this is most true of Christian leaders. If we fail to uphold scriptural discipline, we set precedents for many other moral breakdowns, and the suffering of the church is magnified. The leader who sins, whether elder or governmental minister, should be openly rebuked before all so that others may fear. Such failings generally become church (or public) knowledge, and must be dealt with scripturally and decisively. This will cause gossiping and imaginations to cease.

Guidelines for Corrective Discipline of Leaders

Because every circumstance and every individual involved is different from case to case, we do not propose detailed disciplinary measures. Nor does the Bible. Scripture does present some practical, general guidelines, however. Note that the process below must not be pursued in a legalistic or pharisaical, “holier-than-thou” spirit or attitude. When God forgives, He truly forgives. When God restores, He truly restores. The goal of the church throughout this process is to restore the fallen leaders...*gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted (Galatians 6:1).*

Confession and Repentance First, the guilty party must genuinely repent and confess. He or she must make this confession to all appropriate parties, based on whom the sin affected, and the level of private or public knowledge of the sin.

Forgiveness Second, after true repentance, all parties involved must offer forgiveness. This will involve all people directly affected by the sin, but may also involve people who suffer reproach as a result of the sin—the Lord Himself, family, other church leadership, and the church at large.

Probation Third, the forgiven party should step down from public ministry. A period of probation should be instituted, for 6-12 months, allowing time for “rebuilding the walls” broken down through immorality in the various areas mentioned above. This is a time to clear away the damage; truly rebuilding the marriage relationship takes more time than this. God’s order of healing is: forgiveness, probation and restoration.

Counseling Fourth, the leader on probation should have an effective, ongoing counseling relationship with a counselor who can minister redemption in a restorative manner.

Restoration Fifth, the ministry shall be restored to leadership after a suitable period of probation has given evidence of a sound restoration process. Church leaders must understand, however, that there are times when a sinning leader cannot be restored to a ministry office. Causes for this may be the number of failures, or the depth of deception involved. Wherever genuine repentance occurs, restoration of the individual is always biblical—but this does not always mean restoration of the individual’s ministry. This is an area which requires great sensitivity and discernment of a church leader.

Integrity, both ethically and morally, is the issue that church leaders must address if we would come to some understanding of the problem of pastoral sexual misconduct and the related question of restoration to spiritual leadership.

Although much of the church and society in general seem to be operating in a mind-set opposed to restrictions and discipline, God expects the church to exercise discipline over its members. In so doing, it must guard against harshness and condemnation toward the one being disciplined. The general attitude on all sides must be aimed at restoration of the fallen, purification of the church, and in the end, glorifying and honoring God.

There have been three common approaches to handle the problem of fallen leaders.

1. Immediate restoration to leadership position. “Immediate” is defined as fewer than twelve months after the sexual failure.

2. Future restoration to the position of spiritual leadership after a period of time for counsel, as well as family and personal recovery. The procedure varies from church to church, but generally one to three years elapses before the fallen pastor is restored to spiritual leadership.
3. Personal restoration of the fallen leader but no possibility for restoration to spiritual leadership.

Biblical church government and a proper policy of church discipline and restoration protects the leadership from rebellious members, and protects the members from tyrannical leaders.

Scriptural guidelines from 1 Timothy 5 regarding the accusation against elders need to be heeded. Leaders who are accused should have the opportunity to respond face to face to their accusers. To avoid slander, an accusation against an elder should be taken to the elder by the individual. The accusation needs to be based on reality of actual events and facts (not “prophetic insight”).

Matthew 18 should be followed with accusations brought. If Matthew 18 is violated and information is made public prematurely, 1 Corinthians 6 should be used. According to 1 Corinthians 6, a council of judges should hear the issues, evidence, testimony and render a decision. This should be done swiftly. Clear records should be kept of dates, times, evidence, discipline carried out, and specific sins confronted.

If an elder of a partner church has fallen, the senior elder and a member(s) of the Apostolic Council or designates should be involved in this process of discipline and restoration along with the other elders. If the senior elder has fallen, two Apostolic Council members or designates should lead this process with the involvement of the others in eldership. If a fivefold minister has fallen, his senior elder, eldership, and a representative from the Apostolic Council should be involved in the discipline and restoration process. If a member of the Apostolic Council has fallen, the international director, other Apostolic Council members and a recognized spiritual advisor should be involved in the process. If the international director has fallen, two or more of the recognized spiritual advisors should lead the process of discipline and restoration along with the other Apostolic Council members.

If sin is substantiated, it must be made public to the congregation or realm of influence. The details of the sin should not be made public. The facts and the process of restoration also need to be made public, so the sin cannot be brought up “down the road.” True repentance and restitution includes a clear acknowledgment of the sin. “I was wrong, there was no excuse.” There needs to be a willingness to submit to the process of discipline and restoration. Those responsible for administering the process of discipline and restoration should set clear goals for the fruit of repentance. The size of the church or ministry the offender is responsible for, his gifting or human charisma should not change the standards. A leader cannot opt out of discipline. Time does not change rebellion in a person’s heart. “Gross” sin is evidence of major character weaknesses. The character qualifications of 1 Timothy 3 for spiritual leaders must be fulfilled. This takes time and accountability.

If someone leaves a church, denomination, or movement because of not responding appropriately to discipline, the bad report should go with him. This person should not be protected through privacy. There should be communication with other churches in the area that the church relates to.

There needs to be a public disclosure of facts and the restoration process so all can see if the process is complete. This gives the opportunity for future ministry to resume. The spiritual leader who has fallen should be removed from leadership for a period of time. Here are some guidelines:

If there has been a tryst—minimum of one year

If there has been a full affair—minimum of two years

If there has been financial misconduct—same as above

If there has been a very negative family situation—minimum of six months

There can be no set amount of time for a complete restoration. Leave it open-ended. Have the fallen leader submit to the “eldership” the Lord has placed over him. Restoration to ministry should not be assumed as the end result. There needs to be a genuine heart change and new habit patterns built into the life of the leader who is going through the discipline and restoration process.

Restoration should be first a personal restoration of the individual to God. Then there should be a restoration to his family (spouse). Then there needs to be a restoration to the local church. Next there needs to be a restoration to other churches. Then there is the possibility of restoration to a ministry position of spiritual leadership.

There may also be a need for counsel for the family to be healed. There needs to be weekly (or regular) counsel for the restoration of the leader. There should also be six months severance pay for transition if the

person is in full-time supported ministry. This, however, should only apply if they are submitted to the discipline process.

The following are areas of sin and concern that may warrant the process of discipline and restoration:

1. Immorality, e.g., adultery
2. Sexual abuse
3. Sexual harassment
4. Physical abuse
5. Abuse of power (excess control, manipulation, intimidation)
6. Misuse and abuse of finances
7. Abuse of privileges
8. Divisiveness within celebration, DCFI, etc.
9. Advocating heretical teaching within cell(s), partner church(s), DCFI, etc.
10. Participation with an effort to subvert other leadership.
11. Slander, especially of cell, celebration, or DCFI leadership, etc.
12. Marital discord/divorce
13. Intense family conflict, e.g., teenagers out of control
14. Irreconcilable disputes
15. Disorderly conduct
16. Apostasy

WHAT DOES THE PROCESS OF A LEADER BEING DISCIPLINED LOOK LIKE?

At the small group, partner church and VM Levels:

Step One: Discovery

- You become aware of the issue(s) potentially needing disciplinary attention.
- Begin to seek the face of the Lord for His wisdom and His discernment, praying also for a full disclosure of the truth concerning all that is going on.
- You also begin written documentation of all that has and continues to occur through out this whole process, from beginning to end.
- Keep lines of communication open with all parties concerned at all times. There must be a commitment to openness, honesty, transparency, and genuine vulnerability by the oversight team leading this process.

Step Two: Assessment

- You now engage the process discovering the truth concerning these issue(s).
- Remember: you are not only looking for the truth of specific actions and behavior but a clear discernment of the heart conditions of those involved. This will be important to your judgment process.
- This is the information and fact finding process. Look for the truth and accurate facts, not senses or suspicions, or emotions and accusations, etc.
- This is where you speak to all those involved in the process, if need be.

Step Three: Judgment

- It is here that you will make a judgment based upon all that has been weighed and assessed. This includes the heart issues as well as the specific nature of the events involved.
- If need be, you will seek outside counsel concerning these issues as to your legal options.
- You will also consider available resources to assist you in dealing with these issues redemptively as you prepare for the discipline process.
- It is at this point that you will render a clear decision. If your decision is such that discipline must essentially follow, then move to the next step.

Step Four: Consequence

- Strategy of discipline laid out

- Oversight of discipline process is clearly set in place. Specific person(s) are assigned as a team to walk through the disciplinary process with those being disciplined; point of relationship, communication and accountability.
- Assessment of discipline effectiveness scheduled to occur periodically.
- Follow through to a godly conclusion is committed to by all those involved in this process.
- Remember: church discipline is a lot of work and all of that work must flow out of a heart that is of the Lord Jesus Christ's. We must be committed to seeing God's redemptive purposes fulfilled in each other.
- Implementation of discipline actually begins

Step Five: Reconciliation with Full Restoration

After following through with the disciplinary process successfully, there needs to be as much heart felt commitment and prayer to the restoration process as there was to the disciplinary process. Closure does not happen without restoration and healing.

There needs to be genuine repentance before the restoration process can begin. The scriptures tell us in 2 Corinthians 7:10-11: *Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.*

Repentance, according to the scriptures, speaks of a genuine change of heart that has been touched by the Lord Jesus. When this occurs, there will be plenty of evidence that will stand the test of righteousness and godliness.

Due to the intensity and severity of the actions of a Christian leader, the process in going from step one to step four may only take a few hours. It is important to note however, that having come to a point of judgment concerning the sin of a fallen leader and having taken a proper course of action, you are not through with your responsibilities. There will need to be a clear assessment of the damages to God's people, the cells, and the congregation.

There will need to be an assessment where we may have missed something along the way that could have prevented this from going this far. Were there warning signs, procedures, structures in place that helped this occur? If so, how and what do we need to change? What preventative steps can we take that will diminish the risk of this occurring again?

Warning: don't fall into the trap of assuming that once the fallen leader has been taken care of, there's no longer any concern. In reality, you may be only beginning the real work.

Here are some possible additional steps that could be taken:

- Specific prayer and fasting for a brief season
- Personal ministry, inner healing and deliverance
- Teaching and personal study of the Word as it specifically relates to issues you are dealing with.
- Outside training (specialized to specific disciplinary issues)
- Counseling (personal, marriage, family)
- Conflict mediation and reconciliation
- Bringing in outside specialist(s) to aid in this healing process
- Confrontation and rebuke (personal and private)
- Confrontation and rebuke (cell and/or corporately)
- Removing from areas of responsibility for a set season of time
- Suspension with pay and or removal of license to minister within the DCFI field of ministry
- Removal from fellowship in one cell or celebration and placement in another
- Cutting off from all cell activities for set season of time
- Cutting off from all celebration activities for a set season of time
- Involvement of and cooperation with public authorities
- Outside medical help
- Restitution
- Withdrawal of membership (from cell and/or celebration)

Extra Guidelines on Disciplinary Action Concerning Sexual Sin(s)

Step One: Discovery

- Once discovered, assessment must be quickly entered into.

Step Two: Assessment

- Leader must be confronted at once.
- If he/she admits to this event (sin), then move on, determining the proper course of action.
- If there is denial, then continue the assessment process.
- Once assessment has taken place, and all that is needed for a judgment is in place, then move on to it prudently.

Step Three: Judgment

- If all seems to be truthful in terms of discovery and assessment, then a decision must be made as to guilt and or innocence.
- If guilty, then move on to consequences.

Step Four: Consequence

- There needs to be an immediate removal of that leadership person from any and all responsibilities.
- All primary leadership persons are to be immediately informed.
- The cell, celebration, and partner churches must then be informed.
- Information to be limited to the specific kind of sin, and of the plan of discipline set in motion, but no personal information
- Depending upon the individual situation, financial compensation should continue for at least three months. This could certainly be re-evaluated at a later date.

Step Five: Reconciliation and Restoration

- Time: How long should the suspension and removal last? At the least, a year. If the leader's heart has grown hard or rebellious, it could be much longer. If there is no godly sorrow, but only contrition (of regret, embarrassment, humiliation and the natural effects of simply having gotten caught), then it could take a long time, as well. There should be given only approximate time tables because there is no way of knowing how long it is going to take to see the heart issues genuinely change within an individual's life. Change must occur in their hearts before any kind of restoration can be honestly considered. Remember: you can change your mind, but keep your heart intact. We need to believe for and hold out for new hearts and new spirits in the lives of those being disciplined and restored.
- Ministry and consequence for all who are or were involved in this sexual action, should be seriously considered. This especially applies to areas of complicity.
- If the leader is willing to submit to the discipline process, then put into place everything reasonably possible to help him recover personally, in his marriage, in his family.

The area of discipline, reconciliation and restoration needs to be thoroughly understood at a revelation level by all those in leadership. Teaching, training and even some sort of practical application training in these three areas would be of great benefit for all concerned.

Leadership persons need to develop their skill level in the areas of crisis management, conflict resolution, entry level counseling, and personal ministry. Those in leadership need to have their awareness level raised of the vital necessity of their walking out both positive and preventative discipline as a ministry life-style. Specialists in these areas need to be developed.

Conclusion

God's leaders must use discipline wisely and firmly to help the church grow "in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation." Otherwise, the church will lose her ability to act as salt and light for a fallen world. We can all thank God that He has given us clear instruction in the Bible on how to deal with sinning church members and leaders.

As God restores New Testament leadership, which the church so desperately needs, we must keep our hearts open and changeable. God will have to change our thinking as well as our hearts as he brings His people back to scriptural patterns and priorities. Today, God is telling His leaders to allow His Spirit to prepare their inner attitudes and motivations and thoughts for a great moving of His Spirit in the future. Through His own tests and trials, God will prepare the vessels that He desires to use in specific functions. He will require His leaders to obey the Word, and be living examples of it, rather than just studying or hearing it.

Remember that the issue in preparing church leadership is not the ability of the leaders but the ability of the One who prepares them. If you are called by God to a governmental ministry, you can have confidence in the outcome of the process. Avoid digressions. Cooperate with the dealings of God and the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

The goal of anointed servanthood, of preparing the Bride for her wedding day, lies before us. Let all of God's people cooperate with him as he continues the making of a leader in each one of us.

—Written by Larry Kreider. Thanks to Philip McAlmond Jr. for his input with these Guidelines.

Additional resources on discipline and restoration of church members and leaders

The Biblical Role of Elders in Today's Church, Chapter 11, "Discipline and Restoration," by Larry Kreider, Ron Myer, Steve Prokopchak, Brian Sauder (House to House Publications).

Due Process, by Dan Juster, (Destiny Image Publishing).

The Making of a Leader by Frank Damazio (Bible Temple Publishing).

The Church in the New Testament by Kevin Conner (Bible Temple Publishing).

Additional sources for church leaders

Healing the Wounded by John White and Ken Blue (Intervarsity Press).

Can Fallen Leaders be Restored? by John H. Armstrong (Moody Press).