

Redemption Bible Chapel

Church Discipline Policy

Purpose

The purpose of this church discipline policy is to glorify God by maintaining the purity of the church, protecting its members from harm, and pursuing the restoration of those who have fallen into sin. This policy is rooted in Matthew 18:15-20, which outlines a process for addressing sin within the body of Christ, Galatians 6:1-5, which calls for gentle restoration and mutual accountability among believers and 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, which gives some specific relationships with sinners who profess a faith in Christ.

NOTE: If in any manner this policy is found to contradict Holy Scripture, the Word of God will be followed as our guideline and directive.

Biblical Foundation

- **Matthew 18:15-20:** This passage provides a step-by-step process for addressing sin within the church, emphasizing private confrontation, escalation with witnesses, involvement of the church, and, if necessary, removal from fellowship, all with the goal of repentance and restoration.
- **Galatians 6:1-5:** This passage instructs believers to restore those caught in sin gently, with humility, while bearing one another's burdens and examining their own conduct to avoid falling into temptation.
- **1 Corinthians 5:1-13:** This passage warns believers about associating with those in persistent, unrepentant moral sins. This includes Paul's quoting of Deuteronomy, "Purge the evil from among you," stressing the need for discipline to protect the community's spiritual health.

See Appendix 2 for elder interpretation and application of these passages.

Principles

1. **Restoration:** The primary goal of church discipline is to restore the individual to a right relationship with God and the church community (Galatians 6:1).
2. **Love and Humility:** All steps must be taken with love, humility, and a spirit of gentleness, recognizing our own susceptibility to sin (Galatians 6:1-3).

3. **Accountability:** The church is called to maintain holiness and protect its members by addressing unrepentant sin (Matthew 18:17).
4. **Confidentiality:** To honor the dignity of the individual, matters of discipline should be handled with discretion, involving only those necessary at each step (Matthew 18:15).
5. **Unity:** The process seeks to preserve the unity of the church under Christ's authority (Matthew 18:18-20).
6. **Protection:** Unrepentant sin, if left unaddressed, can harm the church community and its testimony (1 Corinthians 5:11-13).

Process of Discipline

The following steps are based on Matthew 18:15-20 and are to be carried out with the guidance of Galatians 6:1-5 and 1 Corinthians 5:1-13. (FYI there is a separate process for elders/pastors/ministry staff who are in sin as per 1 Timothy 5:17-22).

A helpful flow chart of decision making is found in Appendix 1. This was part of a workshop by Lee Lewis (Biblical counsellor, GCC), used with his permission.

1. Private Confrontation (Matthew 18:15)

- If a member of the church is observed in unrepentant sin, another believer should approach them privately, in love and humility (Galatians 6:1-2), to address the issue and encourage repentance.
- The confronting member should pray beforehand, examine their own heart (Galatians 6:4-5), and seek to restore the individual gently.
- If the individual repents, the matter is resolved, and no further action is needed (unless there is a legal obligation to report to the police or a moral/ethical/security obligation to report the sin to the elders).

2. Involvement of Witnesses (Matthew 18:16)

- If the individual does not repent after private confrontation, the confronting individual should return with one or two other mature believers who can confirm the situation and/or witness the heart and attitude of the second confrontation. They would also be there to further encourage repentance.
- These witnesses should be impartial, prayerful, and committed to restoration, acting in a spirit of gentleness (Galatians 6:1).
- If repentance occurs, the matter is resolved, and confidentiality is maintained.

3. Church Involvement (Matthew 18:17a)

- If the individual remains unrepentant, the matter is brought to the church elders for review. The elders will prayerfully assess the situation and may involve the broader congregation in prayer, and if appropriate, asking them to approach the individual with an additional request to repentance.

- The elders will seek to ensure counsel has been and/or is provided for the individual, urging repentance and offering support for restoration.
- The focus remains on gentle restoration and bearing one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2).

4. **Removal from Fellowship (Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:11-13)**

- If the individual persists in unrepentant sin, despite repeated efforts, the elders may recommend public (at a member's meeting) removal from fellowship, officially placing the individual under church discipline. This step is taken only after prayerful consideration and with the agreement of the church elders, as guided by Matthew 18:18-20.
- This action is taken to protect the church's purity (1 Corinthians 5:6-7) and to prompt the individual toward repentance (1 Corinthians 5:5).
- Removal from fellowship may include suspension or removal of membership, removal from any serving or leading roles in the church, in many cases, treating the individual as outside the fellowship of the church as they appear to not be a true believer. It would also necessitate that they not be allowed to partake in communion as this is only for believers.
- Even in this step, the church commits to praying for the individual's repentance and restoration, leaving the door open for their return upon genuine repentance. To pray for and interact with them, assuming they are an unbeliever in need of salvation. Christian fellowship is removed, as they appear not to be saved.
- Members may be instructed not to associate with the individual in any way, due to significant moral sin (1 Corinthians 5:11) or due to divisive and dangerous character and conduct (Titus 3:10-11).

Restoration

- If at any point in the process the individual repents, the church will work to restore them to full fellowship, offering forgiveness, support, and accountability (Galatians 6:1-2).
- The church should extend forgiveness and love, reflecting Christ's grace.
- Restoration may include steps such as counseling, accountability, and gradual reintegration into church activities, as determined by leadership or other measures to help the individual grow in faith and avoid further sin.
- The church will celebrate the individual's return to fellowship, reflecting God's grace and love.

Roles and Responsibilities

- **Church Leadership:** Oversee the discipline process, ensuring it aligns with Scripture, and provide guidance and support to all involved.
- **Members:** Approach discipline with humility, prayer, and a commitment to restoration, while maintaining confidentiality and avoiding gossip.
- **The Individual:** Respond to correction with a willingness to examine their actions, repent if necessary, and seek reconciliation.

Special Considerations

- **Who:** Church discipline will normally be applied to those who are members of RBC. There may be situations where someone has been significantly identified with RBC, has a clear testimony as a believer, and thus the process would be followed with them as well. Scripture does not say it is only to be applied to members, but that would be our normal practice.
- **Significant Sin:** In cases of severe sin (e.g., as described in 1 Corinthians 5:1), the leadership may expedite the process to protect the church, while still seeking the individual's repentance.
- **Confidentiality:** All steps should be handled with discretion, involving only those necessary to resolve the matter.
- **Leadership Role:** The elders are responsible for overseeing the process, ensuring it aligns with Scripture and is conducted with integrity.
- **Legal Obligations:** If the sin involves illegal activity (e.g., abuse), the church will comply with legal reporting requirements while pursuing biblical discipline.

Scope

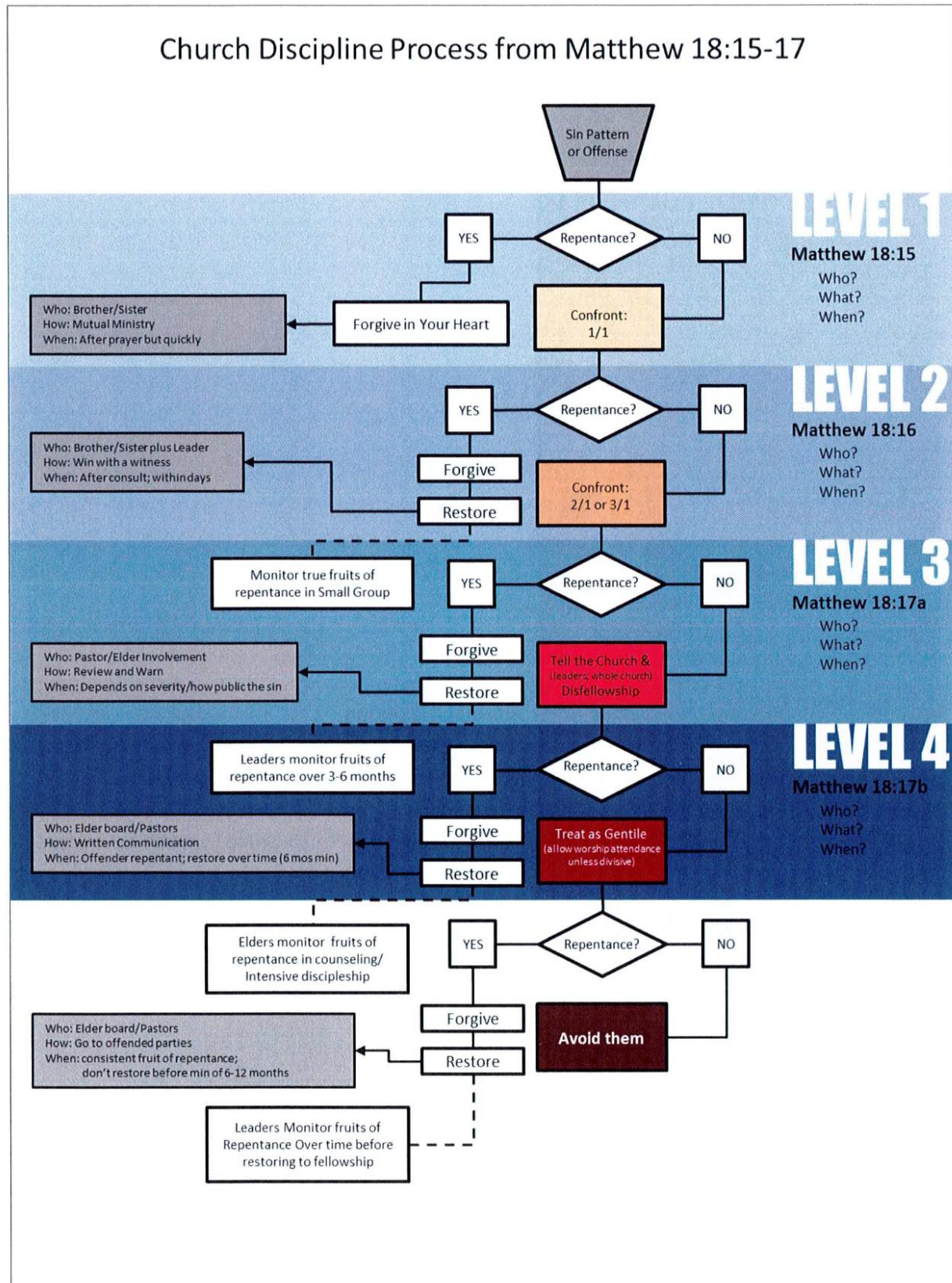
This policy applies to sins that significantly disrupt the individual's relationship with God or the church community, such as unrepentant moral failures, divisive behavior, or false teaching. Minor offenses or differences of opinion should be resolved through personal reconciliation and forgiveness, as guided by Scripture.

Conclusion

Church discipline is an act of love, designed to protect the holiness of the church and pursue the restoration of its members. By following the principles of Matthew 18, Galatians 6, and 1 Corinthians 5 we seek to honor God, uphold His truth, and reflect His grace in all we do.

Appendix 1

Discipline Flow Chart from Lee Lewis (used with permission)



Appendix 2

Galatians 6:1-5:

- It indicates a willingness to sacrifice time/energy/money by church members to help others out of their sin.
- There is a willingness to risk friendships for sanctification and holiness in others.
- This text puts forth a mutual ministry, a commitment to the one another's of Scripture.
- This involves responsibility on both sides, for the spiritual person and for the one caught in sin. A mutual commitment to let others help, speak into one another's lives, etc.
- Humility is key in this.
- Practicing this "fulfills the law of Christ" – loving one another.
- "Lest you too be tempted", ask the question, in what? Pride? Thinking you are better, you wouldn't do what they do, sitting in judgment? Likely means just to sin – tempted to sin, but could mean being tempted to commit the same sin as the sinner.
- In this we must watch our heart. Easy to get frustrated that they don't get it, won't repent, this can cause us to sin in many ways.
- We need to teach and disciple our people in this as part of the church discipline instruction and implementation.
- Those who are, "spiritual" (6:1) are, in our terms, those who are living out the 5Gs consistently.
- **Abiding** properly leads you to **connect** biblically, and then to **share** lovingly.
- A willingness to do this is an outflow of our love for Christ and for others.
- The motive in all of this is restoration, in a spirit of gentleness not of judgment, superiority, or legalism.
- Living this out, in the church, is a picture of the sweetness of the family of God, the faithful church of God.
- The idea in this text is not to be watching your brother or sister, waiting for them to fall or sin. This is sinful on your part. The idea is to assume the best of one another, pray for the best, look for the best, but we willing to step into this if there is sin. This is humility and love, anything else is pride and hatred.
- Verse 3, "if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself" – this is a living out of humility.
- Pride is the killer of humility, we must pursue humility, as Spurgeon said, "If any man thinks ill of you, do not be angry with him, for you are worse than he thinks you are".

1 Corinthians 5:1-13:

- Context – sexual immorality in the church – perverse sexual immorality.
- Paul says – “remove from among you” – some sins need to be dealt with immediately.
- This is not so much a reprimand of the sinner, but of the church, for not taking sin seriously, not caring for this man properly, not taking holiness seriously.
- This is why he calls them, “arrogant”.
- “You are arrogant!” – means? They think they are doing good by allowing this person to stay in the church? They don’t think they need to deal with sin? They boast about their spiritual gifting, they are spiritual, so this doesn’t really matter, we are still doing well?
- “Perhaps they looked on the incest as an expression of their Christian liberty”.
- Judgment is called for by Paul – some people say, don’t judge me, but Paul says judge.
- “Purge the evil person from among you” – put them out, out of fellowship, out of membership, out of ???
- “Not even to eat with such a one.” So, what contact and for what reason?
- To not even eat with such a one, was perhaps referring to the communion meal, which Paul also addressed with Corinthians as they were getting drunk at communion meal
- “Don’t associate with sexually immoral people” – in the church only – for he adds, “not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world”.
- How do we do this in the church? What does this mean exactly?
- Is this an association like Matthew 18, for gospel reasons, but not fellowship?
- Entire church should know about this.
- This is one professing to be a Christian (“who bears the name of a brother”, yet in deep sin.
- And yet they are a Christian – “you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.”
- So not saved now? Seems to be a brother in Christ (mother-in-law isn’t?) or is that we hope he will get saved by this discipline.
- “For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing.” There was an authority Paul had, in planting them, in being an apostle, but shows that we too have some authority in the local church (Hebrews 13:17), so we need to exercise this authority.
- RBC London is a loaf of bread, if we don’t deal with sin, it leavens the whole loaf.
- “Sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler” – so not just sexual sin, but is this a “type” of sin?
- Are these sins against how one is representing Christ?
- This is likely a group of sins that involves sinning against others, hurting the fellowship of the church, the people of the church, dangerous to the people of the church.

- If we don't, are we making people think these sins aren't that bad, perhaps more will get drawn into this, etc.
- Are these sins that tarnish the reputation of the entire witness of the church, of the body of Christ, so separate yourself and the church from this sin and sinner!

Matthew 18:15-20:

- "brother" = professing believer, not dealing with non-believers
- "sins" = miss the mark
- "two or three gathered" – context is of church discipline – not prayer meeting, etc. but is the promise as outlined with great commission (and behold I am with you to the end of the age), Christ promises His involvement, His power, His provision, etc.
- "sins against you" – does not restrict this to only one sinned against
- "go" – go, get up and go, we must be active in this
- "witnesses" – not necessarily to their sin, but to their attitude to being confronted – so either/or. Good to teach on who to select for this and why.
- Progressive nature of this shows the mandate to not drop this, sin has to be dealt with, must pursue this, no option other than 1) repentance or 2) next step.
- A process to help bring wayward sheep back in, to bless them, to be conduit of God's grace to them.
- This process is one of consideration, done in private, not spread around, unless not owned, then escalating nature of it, to a public call. Is gracious, loving, gentle, etc. yet firm.
- The parable before (lost sheep), even the "who is the greatest" before, and what comes right after, question of how many times I must forgive, these all shape the character, attitude, heart of how leadership and churches must practice this.
- We deal with sins privately, unless we have to move to public due to an unrepentant heart and life.
- "won your brother" – means to prevent the loss of your brother – goal always in this is repentance and restoration, not punitive.
- Ekklēsia (church) = could be entire congregation, but likely best to see this as our membership, the official church.
- Steps:
 - 1. Go in private.
 - 2. Go with a few witnesses.
 - 3. Go to the elders – they approach him.
 - 4. Tell it to the church – they pray and ask him/her to repent.
 - 5. Treat him/her as Gentile or tax collector.
- We would see this as descriptive rather than prescriptive – has some subjective adjustments if we see this helps our church.
- "Tell it", it = what – how much, how little? We must say it is sin, don't be too vague. And it is sin requiring discipline, so not minor. This has been confirmed by several who have been witnesses to this process and agree with this final step. Our goal, again, is

restoration, so be careful what is said, as the prayer is for this one to be restored. Unless it is an already publicly known sin, then we could say in a general way the sin.

- “Treat as a Gentile and tax collector” – not excommunication – but no Christian fellowship, does not appear to be a fellow Christian, so interaction should not be fellowship, but gospel. So be careful you don’t just go on as normal, it can’t be “normal”.
- However this looks it must cause a loss of Christian fellowship and care, such that there is an “ache” in his/her life to help bring them to repentance.
- Does this apply only to membership? We think to anyone who: 1) clearly identifies as a Christian, and 2) clearly identifies as a part of our church (subjective, but we think the Scripture does not limit it to just “members”).
- If a member, the tell it to the church would require removing their membership as well.
- All of this should be done with gentleness.
- If they leave – we ask to continue to meet – if they refuse, we put them to final step and tell the church.
- If they are under discipline, we could contact every so often, asking if they are willing to meet and discuss their sin.
- They would be allowed to continue coming Sundays, not serving, not in any other ministry, unless they fall into a Titus 3:10-11.
- This needs to be a timely process, not rushed, but not taking too long. This would be timely process, with some regular action steps. Within our elder team we think something like a 3-5 month process would be reasonable, but we would deal with each situation on a case-by-case basis. Thinking (internally) a week to a month per step.
- This action by an elder team and church, when done Biblically, for the right reasons, it has the support/authority of God, “18 Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”
- Leon Morris – binding and loosing – declaring forbidden or permitted, where the church has to say whether what the person has done is forbidden or permitted, so the leadership view of this has God’s backing. Verbs are future perfect, “shall have been” – so this is not us binding God, but as the church is responsive on the Word and way of God in these decisions, they are actually just affirming of what God has said and written, affirming and holding others to His will and way. Understand the verbs “shall be bound” means “shall already have been bound or already have been loosed in heaven”.