

Appendix B: Statement on Church Discipline

Throughout its pages, the Bible sounds a recurring theme: those God loves, He disciplines.¹ Discipline is a sometimes challenging process of God correcting His people's thoughts, words and behavior so they can fulfill their calling to become like Him. God disciplines His people through a variety of means. He calls His people first to self-discipline. Each Christian is called to hear the Word of God as they read the Bible and hear the Bible taught and applied.² As they compare their life to God's Word, they adjust themselves to conform to their Savior. But individual interaction with God through His Word is not the only means that God uses to make His children holy. God also uses His people. "Brothers," writes Paul, "if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness...."³ As members of Sovereign Grace Church we take seriously our responsibility to "restore" members who fail to allow God to discipline them personally for their sins. This means that beginning with private confrontation and, if necessary, leading to public rebuke, we seek to help one another overcome any refusal to repent of those words and actions that the Bible clearly defines as sin.⁴ This includes not only sinful words and behavior, but also refusal to turn from heretical doctrine.

Jesus outlined a process for addressing another believer's sin in Matthew 18:15-17.⁵ As a church we agree that this is the way for us to approach someone who refuses to appropriate God's grace for change. Initially, church discipline should be informal: if a Christian sees sin in a brother or sister that appears to be continual, he should approach that person and inquire about it. If in fact there is unrepentant sin and a refusal to repent, then the concerned brother or sister should involve one or two others, which may include a pastor. If this group confirms that, in fact, sin continues without repentance, the process must move to formal church discipline.

When the church begins to formally discipline a member, the church's pastors inquire with the individual member in question to confirm fact and to appeal for change. If change is not forthcoming, the pastors will inform the church of the member and their sin, urging members to contact the erring member and appeal for repentance. During this time, the member under discipline may not participate in the Lord's supper or attend meetings for the purpose of fellowship. Instead, their participation with members should revolve around their need for change. If, after a reasonable period of appeal, no repentance is forthcoming, the pastors will inform the church again, this time announcing that they must revoke membership and that the church must now treat the unrepentant person as they treat unbelievers: in other words, when they interact with this person they should not have "fellowship" as the Bible defines it, but they should appeal for the former member to put their faith in Jesus' work on the cross for them and turn from their sin.

Church discipline has nothing to do with “shunning” a person. It involves first confronting in love and gentleness and, if unsuccessful, withholding fellowship. It is not rejection of a relationship but a change in the nature of a relationship. If a person under discipline is not factious, disruptive or a harmful influence, they are welcome to attend all church meetings that are open to unbelievers with the exception of small groups that meet for the purpose of fellowship. The pastors may decide to abbreviate or eliminate the process of appeal for repentance if the sin is especially notorious, or if the member proves to be factious, disruptive, or leading others into sin or error. In these cases, the pastors may ask church members to avoid all contact with an individual in order to mitigate their sinful influence.

At times a member may seek to withdraw from the church to avoid church discipline and its consequences. Just as a good shepherd will go after a sheep that has wandered from the flock (Matt. 18:12-14; Ezek. 34:4,8,16), so shall the pastors and members of this church seek to restore a wandering member to the Lord through biblical discipline. Therefore, discipline may be instituted or continued either before or after a member seeks to withdraw from membership if the Board of Governing Pastors determines that such discipline may serve to guard and preserve the honor of God, protect the purity of the church, or restore the wandering member to the Lord.

While the church cannot force a withdrawing member to remain in this congregation, the church has the right and the responsibility to encourage restoration, to bring the disciplinary process to an orderly conclusion, and to make a final determination as to the person’s membership status at the time withdrawal is sought or acknowledged. In doing so, the Board of Governing Pastors, at its discretion, may temporarily suspend further disciplinary proceedings, dismiss any or all charges pending against the accused, or proceed with discipline and pronounce an appropriate censure.

If a member leaves the church while they are under the scrutiny of the disciplinary process or while a censure against them is still in effect, and if the Board of Governing pastors learns that they are attending another church, the Board may inform that church that the person is currently under church discipline and may ask that church to encourage the accused to repent of his sin and to be restored to the Lord and to any people whom he has offended. Such communications enhance the possibility that a person may finally repent of their sin, and, at the same time, serve to warn the other church to be on guard against the harm that the accused might do to their members (see Matt. 18:12-14; Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Thess. 3:6-14; 2 Tim. 1:15; 2:16-18; 4:9, 14-15; 3 John 9-10).

Once the pastors make a sin publicly known, they commit as well to inform the church of repentance and restoration to fellowship as appropriate to the situation and the good of the church.

Christians who attend Sovereign Grace Church and have been excluded from fellowship from another church will not be allowed to participate in fellowship at Sovereign Grace Church unless they repent of their sins and make confession and restitution with their former church or the pastors of Sovereign Grace Church are able to determine that the former church did not apply church discipline according to Scripture.

_____	_____	_____
<i>Print Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
_____	_____	_____
<i>Print Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
_____	_____	
<i>Pastor</i>	<i>Date</i>	

¹And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives". (Hebrews 12:5-6 ESV, see also verses 7-13)

²See John 15:3, 10, 20; John 17:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:14; 2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 4:11-13

³Galatians 6:1 ESV

⁴Other New Testament passages (besides Galatians 6:1 and Matthew 18:15-17 ESV) that support this practice include: 1 Corinthians 5; Acts: 20:28ff; Galatians 2:11-14; 1 Timothy 5:20; Titus 3:10-11; Romans 16:17; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11.

⁵If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector." (ESV)