

Corrective Church Discipline

**What Every Christian Should Know about the
Third Mark of the Church**

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In dedication: To Debbie Lauro,
a faithful servant whose help
was invaluable in
completing this project.

Preface

Corrective discipline is a topic of infrequent occurrence within the Evangelical church of today. It is seldom taught from pulpits or mentioned in Sunday School classes and almost never utilized by most church leaders. However, as a pastor for over thirty five years, I have found that it is an essential part of overseeing Christ's sheep and an indispensable tool in helping troubled believers.

While researching this topic for a dissertation in 2006, I developed a survey in order to have a baseline understanding of corrective discipline's usage within my own denomination (The Evangelical Presbyterian Church). I conducted phone interviews with a sizable portion of pastors who represented a large sampling of the EPC. It was already apparent from my interactions with numerous non-EPC pastors within my community that corrective discipline is seldom utilized and much less understood. In addition, my research into many scholarly books, articles and journals that spanned a large denominational spectrum more than indicated that corrective discipline is not an overseeing aspect of most North American congregations. Nevertheless, I desired to explore the extent of corrective discipline and began with the EPC. This was an important inquiry because the EPC identifies with its historical Protestant roots which dates back to the Reformation period (1500s – 1600s). The identification is apparent in its constitutional documents which include the Westminster Confession of Faith. During this pivotal time of church history, corrective discipline was not only revered, but also viewed as important as preaching and the administration of the sacraments (baptism and communion). A devaluing of discipline within the EPC would most likely signal greater problems in the broader evangelical community. This would be true of congregations

who do not emphasize identity with the Protestant Reformation as well. The survey data became the basis for further inquiry into the topic and remains as the only in depth review of corrective discipline within the EPC.

The survey data will be briefly reviewed toward the end of chapter one. Its findings, along with revised research and critical analysis is the basis for the pages that follow. This writing explores the needed resurgence of corrective discipline and its interrelationship to ecclesiastical practice, preaching and witness to the world. Christians who are affiliated with all denominations can benefit from this inquiry. The explorations and findings are trans-denominational in relevance.

Corrective discipline's designation as a "mark of the church" must be understood and implemented. This will ensure honor for God through holiness and pastoral care of the Great Shepherd's sheep. To this end, this book is written.

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Chapter One

The Eclipse of Church Discipline

Introduction

After thirty-five years of pastoral ministry, I have realized the simplicity of God's objectives for the shepherd's care of the Great Shepherd's flock, as well as the repercussions in failing to meet those objectives. Such objectives were neatly described by Ezekiel to the shepherds of Israel amidst a stinging rebuke. They had failed in the care of God's flock, and Ezekiel described their failure in vivid detail.

^{2b} Thus says the Lord GOD, "Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? ³You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat {sheep} without feeding the flock. ⁴ Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them" (Ezekiel 34:2b-4).¹

God was vitally concerned with all aspects of the sheep's care, and in particular, the bringing back of the lost (v. 4). The reference to the lost is not a designation of those outside the fold of God, but rather of those who are within its ranks. This retrieving of the lost concerns the burden of this study, namely the disciplinal care of God's people.

Maintaining discipline of God's people in my current pastorate has been paramount throughout my tenure. It has represented ex-

¹ All scripture quotations throughout this paper are taken from the *New American Standard Bible* (La Habra, CA: Foundation Press Publications, The Lockman Foundation), 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995.

hausting work with little earthly reward, as members simply resign or leave in order to follow sinful passions. Yet, it is essential for the church's leaders to oversee the flock with loving oversight that includes correction and rebuke when necessary.

On more than one occasion, I have felt alone in the task of discipline among colleagues who pastor other churches in the community. Discipline is often not thought of and, much less, enacted. In the past, an oversight case was brought before my presbytery of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC). I believe it was handled improperly and raised the following questions. What is the status of discipline within the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and the Evangelical world in general? What does the Reformed heritage provide as guidance for today? How can a detailed analysis of Scripture rekindle passion for the follow through of discipline among church leaders? This study, while focused on the Presbyterian wing of Reformed churches in the USA, will also be helpful for Baptist and Independent congregations as well. Many Baptist theologians and leaders have sounded alarm bells concerning the absence of corrective discipline. Several are cited in the following pages.

I have found that the concern for church discipline is not new among Evangelicals, yet no study of its occurrence has been done in or for the EPC. The chapters that follow represent an effort to explore several questions: How and why has church discipline deteriorated in the Evangelical Church of the USA and, in particular, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, and what can Scripture and Reformation history offer in correcting this problem?

A host of follow-up questions spring from the major research question:

- To what extent is corrective church discipline being done?
- How is it being accomplished?
- Is discipline fruitful?

The question of church discipline must be answered and examined carefully if the Evangelical church is to maintain integrity within itself and its distinctive nature within the world. To this end, this book is presented with a very humble reliance upon the great overseeing Shepherd Himself.

Statement of the Problem

Theologian and author, R. C. Sproul remarks, “The church is called not only to a ministry of reconciliation, but a ministry of nurture to those within her gates. Part of that nurture includes church discipline.”² The church has been rightfully concerned with evangelism; the ministry of reconciliation. Evangelicals are typically noted for evangelistic zeal in presenting the gospel to the world. However, nurture of those within their ranks has, all too often, been relegated to recovery groups and, on occasion, the offices of Christian counselors. Sin is a problem within the world and also within the church. J. Carl Laney, Professor of Biblical Literature at Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, remarks:

Congregational discipline is really an act of discipleship that functions as the corollary of evangelism. Evangelism ministers to those *outside* the church who are in bondage to sin. Congregational discipline ministers to those *within* the church who are in bondage to sin.³

² R.C. Sproul, *In Search of Dignity* (Ventura, CA: GL Publications, Regal Books, 1983), 182.

³ J. Carl Laney, “The Biblical Practice of Church Discipline,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143 (Oct. 86): 354.

Laney's concern for bondage is a valid one. All Evangelicals believe that those outside the church are lost and in bondage to sin. However, when a person becomes a Christian, the sin nature does not become annihilated.⁴ It continues to exist and creates a struggle for all Christians in developing a godly life (Romans 7:14-23). This struggle can lead some Christians into sinful patterns that are as destructive as those present in people still outside the loving confines of the church. Patterns of sin do result in bondage and alienation from God even though the Christian is still within the fold of Christ.

Discipleship requires not only teaching, but also the ministry of rebuke when sinful behavior demands it. Loving a fellow Christian means caring enough about him or her to confront the error that has given birth to sin. "Care-fronting"⁵ means that someone cares enough about another to confront the presence of sin which has taken root in the Christian's life. This is, indeed, part of the discipleship process.

The carrying out of discipline within the broader context of discipleship should always be done with love in order to produce conviction and sorrow. J. Carl Laney adds: "As an essential aspect of discipleship, discipline's purpose is always to help, heal, and restore

⁴ Reformed Theology holds that human nature's bent toward evil still exists within the life of the Christian. The Westminster Confession of Faith represents the Reformed position well: "Nevertheless, the temptations of Satan, the world, and their old carnal nature, along with neglect of the means of their preservation, may lead believers to commit serious sins and to continue in them for a time. They consequently displease God and grieve His Holy Spirit, have some of the fruit of God's grace and His comforts taken away from them, have their hearts hardened and their consciences wounded, hurt and offend others, and bring temporal judgments on themselves." – Chapter 17, Section 3 of *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, Revised EPC edition (Signal Mountain, TN: Summertown Texts, 1979), 27 (hereafter cited as *WCF*).

⁵ See David Augsburg's helpful booklet entitled, *Caring Enough to Confront* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1976), 2-19.

a wayward saint.”⁶ This echoes Paul’s remarks to the Galatians. “Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; {each one} looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted” (Galatians 6:1).

In defining church discipline, Marlin Jeschke of Goshen College highlights the Christian’s need for liberation from sin’s bondage. He remarks:

In discipline, as in the presentation of the good news to the non-Christian, a person is presented the opportunity of being liberated from the power of sin in all its forms by coming under the rule of Christ and walking in His way.⁷

Church discipline is an opportunity and benefit for all church members of Christ’s body. It is a loving expression of care which is normal within the continuing function of the church.

It must also be noted that church discipline has not always been exercised within the courts of the church with love and compassion. The seventeenth century Puritan, John Owen, lamented over disciplinal abuse during his age:

Discipline hath been metamorphosed into a hideous monster, an engine of . . . domination and tyranny, for . . . the terror of the souls of men, and the destruction of their lives with all their earthly concern, unto the erection of a tyrannical empire.⁸

This statement certainly reflects the dangers of abuse, but this should not dissuade church leaders from exercising loving discipline in the care of Christ’s people. Centuries earlier, Protestant Reformers were

⁶ J. Carl Laney, *A Guide to Church Discipline* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1985), 80.

⁷ Marlin Jeschke, *Disciplining the Brother* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1979), 181-182.

⁸ John Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church and Its Government*, abridged, ed., John Huxtable (London: James Clarke & Co., Ltd., 1897), 105.

endeavoring to include discipline as a part of church life that had previously been abused by popes and priests. Martin Bucer of Strasbourg (1548) noted the need for godly discipline, "...but that papal and sacerdotal power mounted on the back [is] not of church discipline and penance but of accumulating wealth and entanglement with princely courts."⁹ All aspects of the responsibilities given by Christ to church leadership may be abused by the unscrupulous or lazy. Yet, such abuses should not dissuade the church from enacting its God-given oversight.

There are two types of biblical church discipline. Don Cox, of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, clarifies the two types when he addresses the topic in an article entitled "The Forgotten Side of Church Discipline":

Writers who have addressed the subject from this broader perspective have thus spoken of church discipline by using two headings. Reformatory or *corrective* church discipline refers to discipline administered for the purpose of guiding an erring believer away from sin. If the believer willfully persists in sin, he should be removed from the church to protect the body from his detrimental influence. The goal of such discipline, even if removal becomes necessary, remains restorative; it is never punitive. *Formative* church discipline is broader than corrective discipline and refers to the nurture of believers through instruction and their shared life in the body.¹⁰ (Emphasis mine)

The concern of this study is the apparent absence of corrective or reformatory discipline. The problem is in evidence when the courts¹¹

⁹ Martin Bucer, *Concerning the True Care of Souls*, trans. Peter Beale (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), xx.

¹⁰ Don Cox, "The Forgotten Side of Church Discipline," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, vol. 4, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 44-45.

¹¹ The "court of the church" is the authoritative body that is empowered to hear cases of discipline and exonerate the innocent or punish the guilty. In Baptist churches, the power is usually reserved for the congregation itself. In

of the church fail to take corrective action in overseeing erring members. Such overseeing is part and parcel of the discipleship process. Discipleship involves training, but also correction. Authors Lynn R. Buzzard and Thomas S. Brandon, Jr. remark on the connection between discipleship and correction. They write:

Discipline for discipleship will be predominantly preventive, educative, enabling. But there are times when it will be corrective. It will include judgment. A community that takes its character seriously and disciplines will insist on repentance, it will refuse to let people dodge their callings, and in some instances it may ultimately require dismissal from the community of faith.¹²

Parents who love their children will correct their young ones when rebellion is in view. Correction is part of the responsibility of being a parent. The same responsibility is incumbent of the church. Correction must be enacted by the courts of the church when rebellious behavior demands it.

Formative discipline is also a necessary characteristic of healthy church life. Caring enough to confront someone about sinful error is a wonderful expression of Christian love. However, if the leadership fails to enact corrective discipline, and in so doing sets an example, how much formative discipline among church members is actually taking place?

The loss of corrective church discipline among North American churches was being noted by Christian leaders decades ago. Harold O. J. Brown remarks in 1983 that, “If discipline is a mark of the true church, as several Reformers insisted, then hardly any modern

Presbyterian churches, the power is granted to the local church Session, Presbytery and ultimately the General Assembly. Presbyterian ecclesiology holds to three court levels of judicial authority. Court one is the local church Session. Court two, or the middle court, is the Presbytery itself. Court three is the General Assembly.

¹² Lynn R. Buzzard, Thomas S. Brandon, Jr., *Church Discipline and the Courts* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1987), 65.

congregations possess that mark.”¹³ Daniel E. Wray laments the loss of discipline earlier in 1978:

It is necessary in our hardened and apostate age for the church to be called back to the New Testament doctrine of church discipline. In our day, the church has become tolerant of sin even when it is found in her own people. This warrants the wrath of God upon the church’s indifference to his holiness. The modern church seems more willing to ignore sin than to denounce it, and more ready to compromise God’s law than to proclaim it . . . It is true that, historically, the church has sometimes erred in this matter of discipline, but today the problem is one of outright neglect. It would be difficult to show another area of Christian life which is more commonly ignored by the modern Evangelical church than church discipline.¹⁴

Perhaps formative discipline had been taking place to a lesser extent, but anecdotal evidence suggests that corrective discipline had almost disappeared years ago from the scene of healthy church life. Just as certain animal species are in danger of becoming extinct, observations that church discipline was on the precipice of following the path of the dinosaurs were sounded as warning bells by noted Evangelical scholars decades ago.¹⁵

Current writers are continuing to ring the same alarm bells.¹⁶ R. Albert Mohler, Jr., a Reformed Baptist¹⁷ of the Southern Baptist

¹³ Harold O. J. Brown, “The Role of Discipline in the Church,” *Covenant Quarterly*, no. 41 (August 1983): 52.

¹⁴ Daniel E. Wray, *Biblical Church Discipline* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 1.

¹⁵ See also Robert McQuilkin, “Whatever Happened to Church Discipline?” *Christianity Today* 29 March 1974: 8-12. And Greg Wills, of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, noted discipline decline among Baptists just after the Civil War. Cited by Mark Dever, “Biblical Church Discipline,” *Baptist Theological Journal*, (2000, vol. 4): 34-35.

¹⁶ See the cover story “Fixing Church Discipline” and five supporting articles in *Christianity Today* (August 2005). Also see Cornelius Van Dam, *The Elder*:

Convention,¹⁸ is typical of recent Evangelical scholars who have been lamenting a loss of church discipline. He notes:

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.¹⁹

A decline of corrective church discipline among the broader Evangelical churches is most perplexing. However, the problem is additionally disconcerting if discipline has become eclipsed among churches who identify heavily with the Reformation itself. It was during the Reformation period that confessional statements and practices of church discipline were developed. Additionally, early confessional documents of the Reformation period make clear that church discipline was viewed as important as preaching and the administration of the sacraments. The Belgic Confession (BC) of 1561 is representative of such historical markers:

The marks by which the true church is known are these: If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure

Today's Ministry Rooted in All of Scripture (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2009), ix-x.

¹⁷ Reformed Baptists or Particular Baptists adhere to much but not all of the theology springing forth from the Reformation. In particular, they hold to the five points of Calvinism and give some credence to Covenant Theology. They are squarely against Reformed paedobaptism and most forms of connectional government found in Reformed and Presbyterian denominations. Nonetheless, they are vitally concerned for the practice of church discipline.

¹⁸ Don Randall Cox presented a 280 page dissertation to Southern Baptist Theological Seminary entitled, "The Shifting Role of Formative Church Discipline in the Evangelical Strategy of the Southern Baptist Convention Churches, 1950-1955," documenting the decline of church discipline within Protestantism's largest denomination.

¹⁹ R. Albert Mohler, *The Compromised Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 171.

administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin²⁰

The BC's usage of the words "punishing of sin" is addressing the corrective side of church discipline. It is only the courts of the church that possess the authority to confront and punish sin.²¹ The BC's use of the term "mark" has become distinctive in defining the characteristics of the church. In brief, the three marks serve as the legs of a stool. If one leg is short or missing, the function of the stool is compromised or useless. Great emphasis is placed today on preaching. Church growth experts often note that the ability of the pastor to communicate, and do so with dynamic style, is one of the most significant factors in a new church start-up, as well as assuring an older church of its attractiveness within a given community. The congregants must be sure that their pastor/leader is fulfilling his calling and preaching is central in the pastor-people relationship.²² In my opinion, discourse on the subject of the sacraments is less, but all Evangelical churches seeking to maintain orthodoxy regularly celebrate the sacraments. Yet, church discipline seems like a third cousin once removed at a family reunion rather than one of the *marks* of the true church.

²⁰ Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper and Row, 1931), 419-420.

²¹ Punishment, typically, includes the following censures: admonition, suspension from the sacraments, removal from church office and excommunication. Evangelical Presbyterian Church, *Book of Order, Book of Discipline* 10-8 (Evangelical Presbyterian Church, July 2015), 93-94.

²² See Gene Wood's book, *Leading Turnaround Churches*, Chapter six, "What Can You Expect from Your Pastor" (St. Charles, IL: Church Smart Resources, 2001).

A recovery of biblical church discipline is essential for the health of the church. Mohler addresses the consequences of the obfuscation of church discipline in the present church:

. . . without a recovery of functional church discipline – firmly established upon the principles revealed in the Bible – the church will continue its slide into moral dissolution and relativism . . . Authentic biblical discipline is not an elective, but a necessary and integral mark of authentic Christianity.²³

All of the marks of the church are necessary. Each one of the marks distinguishes Christ's body, which is essential to the church's integrity within itself and identity within the world (Matthew 5:13). The church loses integrity when the blessing of loving accountability is not practiced. At the same time, its identity becomes obscured by unobservable moral and behavioral differences between the church and unchurched.

This is a vital topic for discussion and review given the decline of the influence and integrity of Protestant orthodoxy across North America. While writing the introduction for Martin Bucer's *Concerning the True Care of Souls*, David F. Wright insightfully remarks:

This focus on discipline is justifiable for a further reason: it is probably this dimension of *True Pastoral Care* that at first sight will appear most alien to congregations of the churches of the Reformation in the rapidly de-Christianizing West. Yet by the very same token it may offer the sharpest challenge, and the largest hope, to Christian communities seeking to attain a distinctive identity amid such confusion.²⁴

²³ Mohler, *The Compromised Church*, 171.

²⁴ Bucer, xxii.

Indeed, the de-Christianizing of the West is well underway and many factors have contributed to it. Lovingly imposed church discipline must be among the correcting initiatives.

Focus on Disciplinary Status in the EPC

In examining the occurrence of discipline within the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), a brief history will be helpful in understanding the denomination's heritage. The EPC is currently serving Christ in its 33rd year of existence. Its early roots date back to 1981 when twelve churches, mostly from the large northern Presbyterian body known as the United Presbyterian Church (UPCUSA), withdrew and convened its first assembly. Great concern had been brewing for many decades with respect to the UPCUSA's slide away from orthodoxy and increasing embracement of theological liberalism.²⁵ Since its modest beginnings, the denomination has now grown dramatically in recent years.²⁶

The denomination's theological roots derive from the Reformation itself, and its zeal for sharing the gospel message is

²⁵ The theological slide away from orthodoxy toward liberalism within the United Presbyterian Church has been well documented. The tide of theological erosion may be traced back to many historical markers such as the Auburn Affirmation of 1924 which repudiated the five essential and necessary doctrines which must be held by candidates for ordination. Such doctrines included the virgin birth and the inerrancy of Scripture.

²⁶ The EPC's growth rate dramatically increased between 2009-2015. After the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (UPCUSA) merged with the Presbyterian Church of the United States (PCUS) in 1983 forming the Presbyterian Church (USA) (PCUSA), theological liberalism continued to advance. As a consequence, many congregations across the United States applied for withdrawal. Most of these congregations have found a home in the EPC. The enrollment of churches now stands at more than 550 with a membership of more than 148,000. See EPC Stated Clerk's report, 2013. (www.epc.org/2013ga-documents-webcast/).

founded in Evangelicalism. The word “Evangelical” was included in its name to distinguish it from the larger and theologically liberal UPCUSA. Being Reformed and Evangelical numbers it among conservative orthodox denominations within the U.S.A.

The EPC’s constitutional documents include its *Book of Order*, *the Statement of Essentials*, and the *Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF)* with its adjoining catechisms. The *Book of Order’s* Governmental section includes in concise detail the definition of a church. Chapter One, “The Church Defined,” clearly notes the importance of discipline. The constitutional document states:

The Visible Church, though more or less divided and obscured, is bound together in its essential unity where *scriptural discipline is practiced*, where the Word is rightly proclaimed, where the sacraments are properly observed, and where loving fellowship is maintained²⁷ (emphasis mine).

In addition, the second division of the *Book of Order* is entitled, *The Book of Discipline*. This thirty three page document outlines the process and procedures for the enactment of corrective discipline by courts of the church. It begins with the EPC’s definition of discipline. Chapter One states:

Discipline is the exercise of authority given the church by the Lord Jesus Christ to instruct and guide its members and their children and to promote its purity and welfare.²⁸

The EPC’s confessional document is equally weighty on the topic of church discipline. The *Westminster Confession of Faith*

²⁷ Evangelical Presbyterian Church, *Book of Order, Book of Government* (Evangelical Presbyterian Church, July 2015), 8.

²⁸ Evangelical Presbyterian Church, *Book of Order, Book of Discipline* (Evangelical Presbyterian Church, July 2015), 77.

devotes one entire chapter to the topic of church discipline and the responsibility of officers to carry it out accordingly.²⁹

However, notwithstanding church discipline's underpinning within the EPC's constitutional documents, there is still concern for the occurrence of such practice within Presbyteries and local church Sessions.³⁰ The former chief executive officer, Stated Clerk Reverend Michael Glodo, notes as far back as 2004 that discipline occurrences within the EPC are problematic. He remarks, "Discipline is a cause for concern. Many of our congregations and Presbyteries do not do it well. A few do it better than others."³¹

In researching this topic, it is apparent that the EPC has experienced some absence of church discipline. While collecting data from pastors within the EPC, one noted that an elder from his congregation had remarked: "We should drop discipline from our vocabulary." The pastor wished to remain anonymous for understandable reasons. This comment does not reflect the denomination as a whole, but it does accent the problem which is so notable in the broader-based Evangelical world.³² Even with the concern for discipline being grounded in its constitutional documents, the EPC has suffered an eclipse to an extent. This eclipse will be explored later in this chapter.

²⁹ See *WCF* 30.1-4.48. This section of the Confession will be examined in Chapter Four of this study.

³⁰ A Presbytery is a regional church over many local congregations within a geographic area. In turn, individual churches are governed by a Session. Both Sessions and Presbyteries consist of elected elders and ordained pastors.

³¹ Michael Glodo, Stated Clerk of the EPC in a phone interview by the author, 30 June, 2004, Detroit, MI.

³² Marlin Jeschke, "How Discipline Died," *Christianity Today* (August 2005): 31.

Reasons for a General Decline within Evangelicalism

If discipline has declined in the broader Evangelical church, of which the EPC is a part, then what would be the reasons behind such an occurrence? A variety of reasons are valid, but nine are key in understanding the eclipse.

First, there is currently a decline of a high view of church membership. In the *Journal of Presbyterian History*, a document dating back to 1966, the author notes the high view of membership within southern Presbyterian congregations. However, the study reflects slippage in the requirements for membership among 150 congregations between 1800 and 1900. At the time of writing (1966), the present situation with regard to membership requirements had changed. W. D. Blanks, of Union Theological Seminary remarks:

In comparison with present requirements, the membership standards maintained by a majority of the Presbyterian churches of the nineteenth century South were very strict. "Professors," as members were sometimes called, were required to attend worship service, to support the church, and to live moral lives within the standard set by the Word of God as interpreted by the Westminster Standards. Membership in the local church was not to be taken lightly, for it required personal sacrifices and a way of life distinctive in many ways from that prevailing in the general community. Indeed, it is this view of the seriousness of church membership and its demands on the total life of the Christian, which in large measure distinguished the nineteenth century view of the Christian life from that prevailing in the twentieth century.

This high view of membership was manifested in nearly every aspect of the life of the church, but it is perhaps nowhere more obvious than in the requirements for admission to membership and

in the use of corrective discipline to enforce and maintain those requirements.³³

Blanks' observations about the status of membership requirements within the Southern Presbyterian congregations are representative of the developing problem across the North American church in general.

Membership is vital because it indicates a sense of official belonging through a Christ-centered profession of faith and desire to submit to the leadership of the church. The *WCF* notes that the visible church is a “. . . house and family of God.”³⁴ No one is naturally born into the family of God. A second birth of a spiritual nature is required (John 3:1-5). To become a member necessitates joining the family in some official way through a profession of faith in Christ.³⁵ Simply attending a weekly worship service is not sufficient. Many Christians, throughout North America, have adopted a freelance style of church participation which resists official membership. However, becoming officially connected to the church carries with it the blessing of salvation.³⁶ The *WCF* notes that “the

³³ W.D. Blanks, “Corrective Church Discipline in the Presbyterian Church of the Nineteenth Century South,” *Journal of Presbyterian History*, vol. 44 (1966): 89-90.

³⁴ *WCF* 25.2.42.

³⁵ Presbyterian ecclesiology understands the visible church to be comprised of individuals through profession of faith and their children. Children are viewed from birth as part of the covenant community by virtue of their relationship to believing parents. Consequently, they receive the sign of membership (baptism) with the hopeful prayer that they, too, will one day make their own profession of faith and then be able to participate in communion.

³⁶ Both Calvin and Augustine argued strongly for the idea that no forgiveness may be obtained outside the church. For Augustine, see Augustine of Hippo *Enchiridion* 17.65. for Calvin, see *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols, Library of Christian Classics, 20-21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 4.1.4.

visible church is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ . . . outside of which people cannot ordinarily be saved.”³⁷ People still come to Christ at youth camps, through television crusades, and extraordinary situations occur such as death bed conversions or in distant lands where the gospel is preached with no visible church at hand. Yet, the *WCF* is correct in its assertion that salvation is within the church and apprehension of it requires some sort of official induction. Exceptions are possible but not the rule. Dutch theologian R. B. Kuiper remarks:

The Scriptural rule is that, while membership in the church is not a prerequisite of salvation, it is a necessary consequence of salvation. Outside the visible church there is no ordinary possibility of salvation. (Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter XXV, Section II)³⁸

People who have converted to Christianity must understand that following Christ necessitates submission to a local church. Without official membership there can be no official corrective discipline enacted by the church’s governing authority. Christians are free to wander wherever their tastes desire and on occasion continue in a sinful lifestyle with no official correction offered. In remarking on the problem of regular attendees who resist membership, Philip Ryken, president of Wheaton College, notes that such people . . .

. . . reserve the right to pick and choose their doctrine, lifestyle, and ministry. In effect they become their own elders, denying the authority of the church to carry out its mandate of gathering and perfecting the saints. To put this in theological terms, they separate union from Christ, the head of the church, from union with his

³⁷ *WCF* 25.2.42.

³⁸ R.B. Kuiper, *The Glorious Body of Christ* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 112.

body. As a result, they confuse themselves and others – outside as well as inside the church – about what it means to be a Christian.³⁹

The membership⁴⁰ question cannot be understated in this study’s contention for the need of corrective church discipline. When membership or simple attendance is viewed as the same, danger follows in the church’s practical life.⁴¹ Emil Brunner, the Swiss neo-orthodox theologian, saw the concern for membership and discipline as far back as 1942. He insightfully remarks:

The function of church discipline has . . . to a very great extent, fallen into disuse. . . . The church ought to know, however, that this absence of any kind of church discipline inevitably gives the impression that to belong or not to belong to the church comes to the same thing in the end, and makes no difference in practical life.⁴²

However, decline in church membership was observable even during the latter days of the Reformation in Europe. While confessional documents were being completed such as the Westminster

³⁹ Philip Graham Ryken, *The Communion of the Saints* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2001), 55.

⁴⁰ The concern for membership will be covered more thoroughly in Chapter Two.

⁴¹ Official membership in a local congregation has a long historical footing in the USA. For example, there has been debate among historians concerning the spiritual status of President Abraham Lincoln. During his early years as a lawyer, Lincoln was hostile toward Christianity. However, in years preceding and during the Civil War, he attended both Presbyterian and Baptist churches. His attitude was more accommodating and affirming. Yet, he was never baptized and did not become a member of a local church. The decision to not affiliate through membership during a time in America’s Protestant history where official church membership clearly meant “Profession of Faith” has caused continual doubt and speculation on Lincoln’s true spiritual state. See Stephen Mansfield’s excellent book *Lincoln’s Battle with God*. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 81, 87, 90-91, 153.

⁴² Emil Brunner, *The Divine Imperative* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1947), 558, 559.

Confession (1648) and the London Baptist Confession of 1689, orthodox Protestantism in England was in decline and lax requirements for membership were among the reasons for malaise entering the church. Baptist pastor and writer, Steven J. Lawson notes:

Since the seventeenth century, gospel preaching had waxed cold throughout Europe, but especially in England. The state church was already in spiritual decline. Presbyterianism had weakened, and the General Baptists began a slippery descent from Arminianism to Unitarianism.

Several factors caused these days of drought. Many churches no longer required a *regenerate church membership* and were careless in whom they admitted to the Lord's table.⁴³ (emphasis mine)

Church membership comes with many blessings. The enactment of correction is part of Christ's benevolence which is extended to those within the church. Consequently, "Discipline is a privilege of membership."⁴⁴

In addition, there is further cause for concern over churches who do emphasize membership while de-emphasizing the topic of discipline in member preparation curriculum. Chuck Lawless, author of "Membership Matters," notes the low level of discipline awareness within curriculum used by Evangelical congregations who do stress the need for membership. He and his staff were surprised to learn that:

. . . While 96 percent of the churches [who stress membership] emphasized expectations, only 25 percent addressed church

⁴³ Steven J. Lawson, *The Evangelistic Zeal of George Whitefield* (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2013), xvi.

⁴⁴ Laury Eck, *The Recovering of the Ministry of Church Discipline* (Albuquerque, NM: Christian Conciliation Services, 1982), quoted by Lynn R. Buzzard and Thomas S. Brandon, Jr., *Church Discipline and the Courts* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1987), 81.

discipline in their membership classes. That is, churches raised the bar of membership but failed to talk about what would happen if church members didn't live up to those expectations⁴⁵

Consequently, even among churches who emphasize membership, discipline is not taught as a consequence of failing to meet expectations.⁴⁶

Second, many Christians, who are members of local churches, do not know what to expect from the corrective discipline process. They are unclear about which sins should be disciplined, as well as the basis for church discipline. Furthermore, this ambiguity is a sub-argument for church membership: if prospective members know the demands of membership, confusion will be alleviated among those who are recorded on the membership roles. New member classes must clarify the importance of biblical submission to authority (Hebrews 13:17) as well as possible consequences for sin and rebellion.

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church membership induction questions are quite clear on member responsibility including the call to submission. Those being received as members through transfer or profession of faith must publicly respond in the affirmative to several questions including the following:

Do you submit yourself to the government and discipline of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and to the spiritual oversight of this church Session, and do you promise to promote the unity, purity and peace of the Church?⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Chuck Lawless, *Membership Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 25.

⁴⁶ For a survey listing of church curriculum topics and discipline's low occurrence, see Appendix A.

⁴⁷ Evangelical Presbyterian Church, *Book of Government*, 20.

In order to consciously understand and submit to spiritual oversight, careful instruction must be facilitated. Many independent Evangelical churches do not even have a corresponding membership induction question which leads to a lack of understanding and expectations among members. Additionally, if the corrective and formative discipline motifs from Scripture are not visited in the teaching schedule of a given church, then what was introduced in a comprehensive membership induction class will fade over time.

Third, conflict between current evangelistic techniques and the function of church discipline is a further reason for corrective discipline's decline. Evangelicals have always been concerned with reaching the lost with the gospel. There has been a sense that being Evangelical is to be evangelistic. The quest for evangelism has not waned as the twentieth century came to a close and the twenty-first burst on to the scene. The quest is right and should not be abandoned.

However, great concern has been expressed over a watering down of the gospel message in order to gain and maintain an audience in postmodern America. The "seeker sensitive service"⁴⁸ is now common place within the Evangelical world. In some instances, preached messages de-emphasize the mandates of Christ as well as the need for repentance in favor of preaching that explores how Christ can complete one's life more than saving it from sinful rebellion.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ The "seeker sensitive service" was originally defined and implemented by Gilbert Bilezikian, Bill Hybels, and the staff of Willow Creek Church, Barrington, IL during the 1980's. The term is now common place throughout Evangelicalism.

⁴⁹ This Evangelical model for church growth has had a devastating effect upon the Christian youth of America. Researchers have been noting the spiritual decline among youth who were raised in the church. Through a longitudinal national study of youth and religion, analysts have coined the term "Moralistic

Many writers have pinpointed the problem in recent years.⁵⁰ A diluted gospel equates to an inadequate understanding of Christ's lordship and authority. If Christ's authority is misunderstood, then the church's authority will surely be obscured in the fog of a diluted message. No one has better clarified the problem than Baptist pastor and theologian John MacArthur. He remarks:

Listen to the typical gospel presentation nowadays. You'll hear sinners entreated with words like, "accept Jesus Christ as personal Savior"; "ask Jesus into your heart"; "invite Christ into your life"; or "make a decision for Christ." You may be so accustomed to hearing those phrases that it will surprise you to learn none of them is based on biblical terminology. They are the products of a diluted gospel. It is not the gospel according to Jesus. The gospel Jesus proclaimed was a call to discipleship, a call to follow Him in submissive obedience, not just a plea to make a decision or pray a prayer.⁵¹

MacArthur's highlighting of a call to discipleship and submissive obedience is very much needed. If Christ is Lord and requires obedience to His church (Matthew 16:18-19; Hebrews 13:17), then this message (the gospel) will often drive attendees out of the pews

Therapeutic Deism" to describe how most churched young people think about God. Christianity is reduced to a belief that God is a divine therapist who desires all to be healthy and display brotherly kindness. "Time and time again in our interviews, we met young people who called themselves Christians, who grew up with Christian parents, who were regular participants in Christian congregations, yet who had no readily accessible faith vocabulary, few recognizable faith practices, and little ability to reflect on their lives religiously," 16. Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3-44.

⁵⁰ See R.C. Sproul, *Getting the Gospel Right* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999); Michael Scott Horton, *Made in America: The Shaping of Modern American Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1991); and Iain H. Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950 to 2000* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000).

⁵¹ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 21.

or the more modern theater seats. Unfortunately, pastors became entrepreneurial organization builders instead of pastor-theologians. This has led to a de-emphasis upon doctrine, and the need for church discipline suffered accordingly.⁵² Even the secular media has observed the shift in a diluted message within Evangelical outreach. Researchers for *Time Magazine* noted division within the Evangelical outlook. Megachurches, employing Bill Hybels' seeker sensitive worship structure often reflect MacArthur's concerns. *Time Magazine* observes:

Some conservative Evangelicals denounce megacongregations as devotion lite, delivering plenty of entertainment, but asking for little commitment. However, for the millions of worshippers who want relevant spirituality delivered with the same custom-fitted, on-demand convenience they get from secular merchants, Hybels' creation is the answer to their prayers.”⁵³

The problem of man's resistance to authority is as old as Adam and Eve's plunge into self-awareness (Genesis 3). Professing Christians must understand Christ's authority and their responsibility to submit to his commands (John 14:15). If Christ's authority is misrepresented in the gospel message, then the church's authority will be compromised from the onset.

When worship services become man-centered, as the seeker sensitive model emphasizes, worship of God becomes distorted. Man-centered worship services often become the norm without the sheep, at least, initially realizing the shift. Church discipline will most assuredly become absent as the attenders are encouraged to be “feeling” driven instead of Word driven. Church discipline should

⁵² David F. Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.2008), 8.

⁵³ David Van Biema, *etal.*, “The 25 Most Influential Evangelicals in America,” *Time Magazine*, Inc. (7 February 2005): 42.

naturally correct this error as elders or other designated church overseers step forward to call for emphasis upon God and not man. However, the gatekeepers are no longer maintaining a stance by the gate. Having no enforcement of theological orthodoxy, worship of God declines and the vacuum is filled with imaginations that end in idolatry. American essayist and poet of the mid-19th century, Ralph Waldo Emerson insightfully observes:

A person will worship something, have no doubt about that. . . . That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts will determine our lives, and our character. Therefore, it behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping we are becoming.⁵⁴

Distortion of the gospel can be found in many quarters of the Evangelical witness today. A gospel with no demands has also allowed for the rise of self-esteem prophets or their surrogates who project their message internationally through broadcast television and the internet. Evangelical Christianity is often viewed throughout the world as a means for wealth in the present with grace and security to come in the hereafter. Joel Osteen is representative of such heretics. In the landmark book *Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics*, Ross Douthat highlights the popularity and impact of Osteen.

Osteen's weekly television show runs constantly on Daystar and the Trinity Broadcasting Network, both Christian channels – but also on network affiliates in all of the top thirty markets. (On a typical Sunday in Washington, D.C., in the mid-2000s, you could catch ten different showings of an Osteen service, on eight different channels.) Like [Billy] Graham, Osteen courts a worldwide audience: More than 200 million people around the globe tune in to his broadcasts. And like Graham, he's been known to sell out Madison Square Garden. . . . His God gives without demanding,

⁵⁴ Dean, 1.

forgives without threatening to judge, and hands out His rewards in this life rather than the next. . . . By linking the spread of the gospel to the habits and mores of entrepreneurial capitalism, and by explicitly baptizing the pursuit of worldly gain, prosperity theology has helped millions of believers reconcile their religious faith with their nation's seemingly unbiblical wealth and un-Christian consumer culture.⁵⁵

This sort of distortion, now exported around the world, was observable in American churches as far back as the early 1800s. Sermons were being critically examined and French political thinker and historian, Alexis de Tocqueville, was at least one of the evaluators. In 1836 he remarked on distorted content present in American sermons while highlighting an early example of the prosperity gospel. While scrutinizing sermon content of his day, he ponders, "Whether the principle object of religion is to procure eternal felicity in the other world or prosperity in this."⁵⁶

Moreover, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in confronting the Lutheran Christian's compromise and capitulation to the Nazis in the 1930s, remarks, "If you board the wrong train, it is no use running along the corridor in the opposite direction."⁵⁷ Any distortion of the gospel diverts the train (the church) in a direction away from Christ. This affects corrective discipline from the outset of a new convert's understanding of what demands are present in order to be a disciple of Christ. Bonhoeffer's critique of the Lutheran church highlights the

⁵⁵ Ross Douthat, *Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics* (New York: Free Press, 2012), 183.

⁵⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 2. Henry Reeve, trans. (New York: J and H. G. Langsley, 1840), 261.

⁵⁷ Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 176. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a courageous Lutheran pastor whose ministry co-existed with the rise and fall of Germany's Nazi party. He was assassinated by the Nazis only a couple days prior to his concentration camp being liberated by the Allies.

behemoth shift that must take place within Evangelicalism to correct the watered down gospel now present within many congregations. Minor changes are simply “running along the corridor in the opposite direction” as the church continues in the direction of heresy. A track correction is absolutely necessary.

Fourth, church discipline has, in some instances, become replaced by well-meaning counselors. Individuals and families seeking help for all manners of dysfunction are replete within North American culture. The church, which is vitally concerned with the functionality of the individual and the family, has responded (as in the secular world) with Christian counselors who are in private practice or on the staffs of larger congregations. Frequently, those who have fallen into sin are merely referred by the pastor to a counselor for help. Biblical counseling may be helpful, but this is not a substitute for church discipline. Counseling may be included as part of the discipline process, but it should be subordinated to the overall disciplinal oversight of the church court.

Discipline is a right and benefit of church members. Counseling is not a substitute for the benefits of corrective discipline. Biblical counselor and seminary professor, Jay Adams remarks:

Every believer in Jesus Christ has the right to be disciplined. Counselees may say, “That’s the kind of right I can do without.” No, they can’t. Church discipline is extremely important. Discipline is not some process that God has given to get rid of troublemakers in the church, as a lot of people think, though it might do that at times. But that’s not its main purpose. The purpose of church discipline is to win others back to the Lord and to bring about reconciled conditions between brothers.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Jay E. Adams, *More Than Redemption* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1979), 288, 289.

Conversely, church leaders should not hand over spiritual oversight to secular or Christian counselors no matter how well-intended. The same abdication of responsibility would also apply to self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous. Once again, counseling and group therapy may be helpful, but neither involves ecclesiastical power which is intrinsic in the keys given to the church (Matthew 16:18-19).⁵⁹

As far back as 1981, Eugene P. Heideman of the Reformed Church of America clearly saw the problem that counseling was creating with respect to the abdication of church discipline:

Matters which a century or more ago would have been cause for excommunication now are remitted to the pastor or other experts for ‘pastoral counseling’. Having thus referred the matter, nothing more is heard about the case in the official assembly unless the congregation begins to ask too many questions. Yet there remains an uneasy feeling within the breast of the office-bearers, who fear that official discipline is too ‘rigid’ and pastoral counseling is too ‘permissive’.⁶⁰

Now, some thirty-five years later, the problem has grown as counseling has become a front line referral service within today’s Evangelical church. Once again, such counseling may be helpful and an essential part of corrective discipline. However, it should never be a substitute.

Fifth, technical language used in corrective discipline manuals has also been a hurdle for leadership to enact the process. The byline of Presbyterian polity is “decently and in order” (I Corinthians 14:40). Consequently, Presbyterian procedures for discipline cases, including the EPC, are quite extensive. To say such procedures are

⁵⁹ This text will be examined in greater detail in Chapter Two.

⁶⁰ Eugene P. Heideman, “Discipline and Identity”, *Reformed Review* 35 (Fall 1981): 17-18.

like opening and reading a phone book is an overstatement, but the discipline section of the *Book of Order* can be overwhelming for both ruling and teaching elders.⁶¹ The *EPC's Book of Discipline* entails some fourteen chapters stretching over thirty three pages, as well as, twenty three additional pages of procedural forms. Once again, Heideman remarks:

. . . the books of discipline are written so as to protect the rights of the innocent, with the result that except in the most scandalous of cases the attempt to apply formal judicial procedure is far more trouble than it is worth. In a voluntary and mobile society it is easier to pray that the sinner's firm may transfer him to another community than to initiate formal charges.⁶²

Indeed, books of discipline (in part) appear as legalese – difficult to understand, but the terminology is necessary. Some things in life are more technical than others. In order for corrective discipline to be done properly, some technical language will be necessary and procedures followed, in order to protect the innocent and maintain the church's honor. If such procedures and difficult language were used more often, then unfamiliarity would not be such a hurdle to overcome during the employment of corrective discipline.

Sixth, a general lack of care may be added to the list of contributing factors to the disappearance of discipline. North American culture is fast paced as members of society lead

⁶¹ Ruling elders are elected and ordained members of a local congregation. Teaching Elders are pastors who are ordained members of a local church's Presbytery. The Teaching Elder, typically, has greater theological training than Ruling Elders. Both serve on a local church's Session (governing board) and may function in Presbytery (regional church) as well as at the annual meeting of the General Assembly. Calvin distinguishes between Ruling and Teaching Elders. See John Calvin's *Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, eds. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 262.

⁶² Heideman, 19.

disconnected lives from one another. The church is not immune from such disconnectedness as members and attendees squeeze congregational involvement into already over-filled schedules. The result is that the sense of community and elder oversight suffer within Christ's flock.

The truth is that Christians must care enough about one another in order to confront sin. Loving each other includes loving enough to confront a wrong. David Augsburger wrote a little book in 1973 entitled *Caring Enough to Confront*. The book's overall concern is more for formative discipline than corrective discipline as employed by the courts of the church. Yet, the title and thrust of the book is important for this study, too. There must be a healthy sense of care for one another at all levels within a given church. Augsburger coined the phrase "care-fronting" and he defines it as:

Care-fronting is the key to effective relationships. It's the way to communicate with impact and respect, with truth and love. "Speaking the truth in love" . . . is *the way* to the mature right relationships shown us in Jesus. "Truthing-it-in-love," the original phrase St. Paul chose, sums up the caring-confronting way of responding and respecting each other by taking the Jesus way *through* conflict.⁶³

If the church does not care enough to confront issues of conflict and sin because of the tyranny of the urgent, then discipline will always slip through the cracks of church life. Jesus says in John 13:34, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." If Christians love one another as Jesus loved them, then the church should see a healthy employment of both formative and corrective discipline. To do less is to fall short of the loving commands of the Lord.

⁶³ Augsburger, 3.

The very honor of God is at stake when corrective discipline is not employed. This, in turn, leads to dishonor among the sheep. To do less is to invite spiritual disaster. The great New England pastor, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) addressed these concerns often in his sermons. He remarks:

If you tolerate visible wickedness in your members, you will greatly dishonor God, our Lord Jesus Christ, the religion which you profess, the church in general, and yourselves in particular. As those members of the church who practice wickedness bring dishonor upon the whole body, so do those who tolerate them in it. The language of it is that God does not require holiness in His servants, that Christ does not require it in His disciples, that the religion of the gospel is not a holy religion, that the church is not a body of holy servants of God, and that this church in particular has not regard for holiness or true virtue.⁶⁴

Seventh, the absence of church discipline may also be left at the doorsteps of pastors and elders who, even as given leaders of the church, are too busy with the general administration of the church to invoke discipline when needed. The shepherds of Israel were rebuked for not bringing back the lost and the same rebuke should be leveled today (Ezekiel 34:4).

The leadership of churches is not insulated from the general lack of care which afflicts so many North American congregations; however, overseeing the conduct of the membership is primary on the duties list of all Presbyterian elders and overseers of other Evangelical Reformed congregations. In 1846, the general assembly of the Free Church of Scotland gave a summary of the elders' duties. The following extract notes salient points as summarized by David Dickson:

⁶⁴ Jonathan Edwards, *To All the Saints of God: Addresses to the Church* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2003), 134-135.

1. That they sit in Session along with the minister, and assist in the administration of discipline and in the spiritual government of the church.

2. That they take a careful oversight of the people's morals and religious principles, of the attendance upon public ordinances, and of the state of personal and family religion.⁶⁵

The priority of church discipline, as noted by Dickson, was carried forward into most, if not all, Presbyterian books of government. The EPC is typical in this regard. In a sixteen item duties list for church Sessions, church discipline is listed as point five: "To monitor the spiritual conduct of the members, and to take action when appropriate according to procedures set forth in the *Book of Discipline*."⁶⁶

There can be no doubt that the rigors attached to the elders' office are demanding of time, talent, and treasure. Nevertheless, overseeing the conduct of the sheep is part and parcel of the exercise of the elders' office.

Pragmatism also contributes to this particular reason for disciplinal decline of Christ's sheep. Enacting a discipline process does require a huge investment of time, and often those disciplined simply leave because of the discipline imposed. Individuals may also stir up strife among unsuspecting church members causing greater problems among the sheep. For many elders, the fruit for the investment is not worth the effort. However, failure to enact discipline when needed is not demonstrating care for those who have fallen into sin and opens the door for holiness erosion among the

⁶⁵ David Dickson, *The Elder and His Work*, edited by George Kennedy McFarland and Philip Graham Ryken (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2004), 38.

⁶⁶ Evangelical Presbyterian Church, *Book of Government*, 51. In the 2012 edition, discipline was listed as number one.

saints in the future. Parents often enact disciplinal care of their children with little return in the near term. Those who shrug parental responsibility by looking the other way when corrective care is warranted will pay a greater price (in time, talent, and treasure) in the ensuing years.

There is no rebuttal to the assertion concerning the amount of time required in order to effectively employ corrective discipline. A heavy time investment is necessary for proper corrective discipline's employment. If it is done and done right, a large investment of time will be required of church leaders who have been charged to do the overseeing. A pragmatic default is probable when this question is asked: Is the offense worth the time? The short answer is yes, but demands from other cares of the church may compete for a necessary time allocation. However, in view of discipline's importance, is not another question warranted? How can we fail to do less?

Eighth, the litigious age, now at epidemic levels within the USA, must also be cited as an impediment to the enforcement of corrective church discipline. Lawsuits have steadily grown in all facets within the United States over the past thirty years. Churches have not been immune to being hauled into court over various complaints, including discipline over objectionable behavior.⁶⁷

It is interesting to note that one of the protections for churches not being subjugated to the secular court's intrusions is the presence of a complete statement of discipline and enforcement in place before

⁶⁷ See J.A. Quince, "Court Involvement in Church Discipline" – Part I, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, v.149, no. 593 (January 1992): 61. The thrust of this article is to clarify that churches need not fear lawsuits from the secular courts if they follow previously established procedures which were made known to the congregation during membership requirements or when newly enacted.

offenses occur.⁶⁸ However, if Sessions⁶⁹ are not familiar with the law of the church and the relevance of secular law, too, then avoidance of this third mark of the church becomes the easy path to take. The fear of litigation becomes another non-motivator to be thrown on the pile of excuses as to why church discipline has become eclipsed.

Ninth, a misuse and lack of understanding of Jesus' remarks in the Sermon on the Mount must also be cited as cause for the eclipse of both corrective and formative discipline (Matthew 5-7). Specifically, Jesus' command in Matthew 7:1-2 to "Do not judge lest you be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you," has paralyzed Christians, including church leaders, from invoking disciplinary action. However, Jesus' remarks were directed at censorious critics who function as fault finders in seeking out the failings of others. Anglican pastor and theologian John Stott remarks, in refuting the prohibition motif, that:

. . . our Lord's injunction to 'judge not' cannot be understood as a command to suspend our critical faculties in relation to other people, to turn a blind eye to their faults (pretending not to notice them), to eschew all criticism and to refuse to discern between truth and error, goodness and evil. How can we be sure that Jesus was not referring to these things? Partly because it would not be honest to behave like this, but hypocritical, and we know from this and other passages his love of integrity and hatred of hypocrisy. Partly because it would contradict the nature of man whose creation in

⁶⁸ Former Stated Clerk, Rev. Michael Glodo, chief executive officer for the EPC, remarks, "An insulation against lawsuits is the structure and use of the EPC's *Book of Discipline* which is a part of our constitutional documents. Churches who try to enact discipline without a prior structure in place are in a compromised position. Consequently, if our congregations have discipline problems, they should use the book. If they don't, they are liable to litigious lawsuits;" (Phone interview by the author, June 20, 2004.)

⁶⁹ A Session is the governing board of a particular church comprised of Ruling and Teaching Elders.

God's image includes the ability to make value-judgments. Partly also because much of Christ's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount is based on the assumption that we will (indeed should) use our critical powers.⁷⁰

The entire thrust of the Sermon on the Mount is to be different than the world. To be different requires making judgments about which behavior is right or wrong. Jesus is not prohibiting our mental faculties from making judgments about the rightness or wrongness of behavior. However, he is warning against being a fault finder and to be more concerned with ones own behavior. Yet, he also says that once one has removed the log from one's own eye, that one will be able to deal with the brother's speck (Matthew 7:3-5). To remove a log or a speck requires the faculties of judgment. This text should never be used as a proof for the prohibition of corrective or formative discipline. Nonetheless, it is in fact used not only among the theologically liberal, but also by Bible-believing Evangelicals.

The nine *key* reasons cited in this study, not withstanding some of the genuine pragmatic reasoning underlying each, do not validate church discipline's disappearance among EPC congregations or the greater Evangelical church as well. Without discipline, the church will lose its identity in the world and integrity within itself. Robert Godfrey of Westminster Theological Seminary sustains this conceit:

The exercise of the discipline taught in Scripture demonstrates the church's determination to pursue holy living before the Lord. If flagrant heresy or notorious unchristian behavior is tolerated in the church, how can that church be genuinely receiving the Word of God? . . . Discipline is necessary in the church according to the Belgic Confession (Article 32) to preserve harmony, unity, and

⁷⁰ John R. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5-7*, The Bible Speaks Today series (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1978), 175, 176.

obedience. *Where such discipline is missing, the church is not recognizable as a holy community* (emphasis mine).⁷¹

The EPC and the Occurrence of Corrective Discipline

The EPC has not been immune to the eclipse of church discipline as found throughout the broader Evangelical world. A neglect of discipline is observable. A Presbytery is a regional church over many congregations within a geographic area. In turn, each individual church is governed by a Session. Both Sessions and Presbyteries consist of elected elders and ordained pastors. The representative churches of the Presbyteries to be reviewed are the Mid-Atlantic and the Midwest. Jointly, they constitute sixty six churches or thirty four percent of all congregations of the EPC.⁷² Their total membership represents nearly thirty five percent of the EPC. In particular, the Mid-Atlantic's inclusion was deemed important because it was noted as “. . . perhaps the best in imple-

⁷¹ W. Robert Godfrey, “The Marks of the Church,” *Tabletalk*, vol.16, no. 5 (May 1992): 12.

⁷² Michael Glodo, *2004 Annual Report to the General Assembly* (Golden, CO: Evangelical Presbyterian Church, 23 June 2005). As has been previously noted, the EPC has grown in number of congregations and membership since this survey was conducted. See this author's notes, page 12, Footnote #26. Nevertheless, no study on the occurrences of Church Discipline has been conducted since this one. It is doubtful that the data noted in the following pages are improved. In fact, the occurrence of church discipline may be less given the fact that the congregations coming into the EPC from the PCUSA have been engaged in concerns focused upon biblical authority and orthodoxy. For many, exhaustion has occurred in simply trying to maintain some semblance of Evangelical orthodoxy while heterodoxy increased in the General Assembly and Presbytery courts. The exhaustion is also a result from legal battles for many congregations over property possession while trying to depart from the PCUSA. For many congregations, the Reformed heritage, including church discipline, has not been central for church life over many decades.

menting discipline among all the EPC Presbyteries.”⁷³ If deficiency is detectable in the Mid-Atlantic, then what would its failure insinuate for the remaining Presbyteries? The inquiry was accomplished through a seventeen question phone survey which was accomplished during the summer of 2004.⁷⁴

The survey data reveals that corrective discipline does occur in the EPC, but there is need for improvement. In all, the awareness of pastors’ and Sessions’ sensitivity to the church’s third mark of discipline is low. Such conclusions are evident in the data that follows.

An initial key question was asked of all surveyed pastors regarding their preparation for the implementation of discipline (2005). Question number one stated, “Did your seminary training prepare you for the implementation and confrontation necessary for the exercise of church discipline (both corrective and formative)?” Forty-one respondents from both Presbyteries (all with formal education from various Evangelical and Reformed institutions) indicated that there was no preparation in the seminary curriculum. Only nine pastors indicated a “somewhat preparedness.” This data is most perplexing in view of the particular seminaries attended by respondents: several Evangelical schools and many Presbyterian and Reformed-based institutions.⁷⁵ Theological institutions such as Calvin, Erskine, Gordon-Conwell, Reformed Theological Seminary, Princeton, Fuller, and Union are all included in the larger list.

⁷³ Michael Glodo, former Stated Clerk of the EPC, phone interview by the author, 30 June 2004.

⁷⁴ The survey was targeted at all senior and solo pastors of the studied Presbyteries. The complete results are included in Appendix C.

⁷⁵ See Survey Question #1 in Appendix C for actual listings of responses and schools.

In reviewing several catalogs from such schools, an indication as to why these pastors felt ill-prepared *may* be evident. For example, most schools do not mention church discipline in their systematic core course offerings, yet they do cite sacraments, while preaching is thoroughly covered under the homiletic offerings.⁷⁶ This may represent the genesis of the growing weakness within the church's third mark. (See Appendix A.)

It is noteworthy that Reformed Theological Seminary had the highest number of pastors who indicated no preparation or only somewhat preparedness from their seminary education. This is perplexing in view of the fact that RTS features the third mark of the church in course descriptions more than most of the other cited schools.⁷⁷ If RTS-trained pastors report low preparedness on corrective discipline and it is highlighted in course descriptions then what may this reveal about the preparedness of pastors who received training elsewhere?

A review of how ecclesiastical courses are described *may* reveal a primary reason for the diminishing of discipline in relation to

⁷⁶ Some seminaries, including RTS, periodically invite denominational representatives to teach mini courses on their own specific government. Discipline should be covered in such courses. However, most seminary students do not know, while attending school, which denominations will eventually credential them. Secondly, those courses are offered as electives. The mark of discipline must be as central as sacraments and preaching within the core curriculum if the third mark of the church is to have any validity.

⁷⁷ Professors Dr. Scott Swain and Dr. Michael Glodo of RTS' Orlando Campus both report that in addition to a brief citing of the three marks in Systematic Theology II: Ecclesiology and Sacraments, it is also more thoroughly covered in two particular courses: Theology of Ministry I and Church Polity. Dr. Glodo remarks, "One of our primary texts is Martin Bucer's *The True Care of Souls*. Bucer's longest chapter (75 pages) is on the subject of what was called "penance" back then but which we would term restoration." Personal emails from Dr. Glodo and Dr. Swain to the author on 26 Nov 2014.

preaching and sacraments. It must be added that I am not suggesting that RTS or any cited school is not teaching about the third mark at all. However, discipline appears to be de-emphasized in contrast to preaching (which is typically covered in multiple homiletic courses) and sacraments, both of which receive great attention in ecclesiology or specially developed courses for baptism and communion alone. One fact is clear, that in the case of fifty surveyed pastors of both the Mid-Atlantic and the Midwest Presbyteries of the EPC (2005), all said they had little to no preparation for the implementation of church discipline.

The General Assembly's Christian Education Committee developed and submitted a new Leadership Training Guide for review during its 2004 Assembly held in Virginia Beach. The manual is essentially a mini-overview of church history and theology from a Reformed perspective. It is written and presented well, but its ecclesiology section mimics the diminishing of church discipline as noted in the reviewed seminary course descriptions and the responses of surveyed EPC pastors. The approved 2007 edition of the Leadership Training Guide is now widely used but remains weak on corrective discipline.

Chapter nine of the Leadership Training Guide is "Ecclesiology and Sacraments." Once again, the third mark of the church is not noted in the chapter heading. This is similar to the trend in the seminary course descriptions previously examined. Yet, midway through the chapter the designation, "The Marks of the Church" is highlighted. The manual notes: "Generally, three marks of a true church were recognized: (1) the true preaching of the Word; (2) the right administration of the sacraments; and (3) the faithful exercise of

discipline.”⁷⁸ Though discipline and preaching are not listed in the chapter heading, all three are mentioned as true marks. The chapter does an excellent job of explaining the Reformed view of preaching and sacraments, but *says nothing* on church discipline. The topic of church discipline is raised again in Chapter Twelve with reference to the *EPC Book of Discipline*. This brief note includes no scriptural warrant. Moreover, nothing is said of the historical importance of church discipline within the writings of Calvin and Knox. Furthermore, no reference is made to the *WCF*. The training manual is a microcosm of a fading of church discipline within the EPC and the Evangelical church as a whole. How can ruling elders be concerned with discipline when almost nothing is said of it in the training curriculum? Yet, discipline remains a stated priority within the *Book of Government*.⁷⁹ After defining the three marks of the church, the training manual curiously asks, “How does our church measure up?”⁸⁰ In view of the findings as revealed in question number one of the survey, the answer is inadequate, to be sure.

The understatement of church discipline within the *Leadership Training Guide* is also apparent in additional EPC developed curricula. However, in this next example, the problem is depicted in material designed to train young people. The Bible is full of admonitions to teach and train young people. Parents are the main responsible parties in this task, while the church is called upon to assist parents in the proper raising of young people in the ways of the

⁷⁸ *The Leadership Training Guide, 2007-2011*, mentions church discipline as one of three marks, but does not expand on it as the other two. See pages 116-121. The manual briefly mentions discipline again in chapter twelve during a discussion on “The Power of Order.” 156-158.

⁷⁹ Evangelical Presbyterian Church, *Book of Government*, 57.

⁸⁰ *EPC Leadership Training Guide*, 116.

Lord (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). Yet, not withstanding the injunctions of Scripture, the EPC nearly failed in its task to teach the young the necessity of accountability. This breakdown further highlights the problem that seminary trained pastoral staff is ill-equipped to integrate discipline as an integral part of church life.

Consider the Student and Young Adult Ministries development of *The Youth Membership Curriculum*. This curriculum has been approved for use in EPC churches since the twentieth General Assembly, 2000, and was revised in 2002.⁸¹ The 2002 edition covers ten lessons and, once again, did not address the need for accountability and discipline for youth membership within the EPC. Furthermore, this edition covers the authenticity of Scripture, the Trinity, Salvation, Spiritual Gifts, and Creeds. However, its “Lesson Eight,” on The Church, says nothing of church discipline, while “Lesson Seven” is completely devoted to the sacraments. “Lesson Ten” concludes the study with basic membership induction questions. Question number five clearly notes prospective members’ responsibility to submit to eldership authority.⁸² Yet, how have young people given informed affirmative responses to a question that was not explored in the curriculum? Errors and omissions on church discipline made with young people will only continue the EPC’s deficiency as they reach adulthood.

⁸¹ See Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Student & Young Adult Ministries Committee, *Youth Membership Curriculum*, revised 2002 at the 20th General Assembly. The curriculum notes, “. . . additions and corrections are most welcome.” The content of this paper was made known to the General Assembly Staff. As a result, a revision of the occurrence of discipline is now included in this document and includes the purpose of discipline and why excommunication is necessary in some situations. See *Youth Membership Curriculum*, page 26.

⁸² See pages 17 - 19.

One of the positive results of the data that serves as the basis for this book is that a revised version of the *Youth Membership Curriculum* was approved at the 2005 General Assembly, held in Golden, Colorado. While working on the dissertation that became the basis for this book, I made contact with the Director of Student and Young Adult Ministries and apprised him of the church discipline deficiency with the curriculum. A significant revision was made.⁸³ However, if I would not have made known the problem, how long would the error have gone unchecked?⁸⁴ Additionally, the *Revised 2005 Youth Membership Curriculum* now contains more information on church discipline (including thirteen Scripture texts) than the *Leadership Training Guide* which is used to prepare elders for office. One entire single spaced page is included, complete with a quotation from Louis Berkhof's *Reformed Theology*. *The Youth Membership Curriculum* is a major improvement and the Student and Young Adult Ministries Committee is commended for its labor.

The EPC presently does not provide an adult curriculum for membership. Each church is expected to provide its own while still requiring the same membership induction questions for all ages. One can only wonder how poor a job is being done in regard to church discipline if each congregation was examined. Question number one of the survey data clearly depicts a huge deficit in the preparation and confidence of teaching elders in the implementing of church

⁸³ See Appendix D for the complete change in the Youth Membership Curriculum.

⁸⁴ According to Marc Santom, Director of Student and Young Life Ministries for the EPC, changes were made to the document by a committee and approved during the EPC's 25th General Assembly. Changes on the subject of discipline were made as a result of the deficiency being highlighted by this writer. Mark Santom, Director of Student & Young Life Ministries of the EPC. Phone interview by the author. 12 August 2005.

discipline. This inadequacy is still apparent in its *Leadership Training Guide*. Moreover, additional Presbytery survey data will confirm that church discipline is under-taught, under-valued, and under-employed within the EPC.

Turning to additional findings, the contrasts and comparisons between the two Presbyteries are instructive on corrective discipline's status within the EPC. The topic of discipline received mixed reviews in time spent in instruction to and by leadership. Examples are as follows. Numbered examples correspond to the survey questions included in Appendix C:

- The Mid-Atlantic (MAT) teaches Ruling Elders more on the subject, yet one-third of its churches and half of the Midwest (MW) have no instruction. (Survey Question #2)
- The MW appears to raise the issue in new member classes more than the MAT, yet two-thirds of the MW and half of the MAT say very little about church discipline or nothing at all regarding church discipline. (Survey Question #3)
- The topic is not approached in preaching to a high degree. Seventy five percent of the MW have not preached on the topic or only mentioned it in passing over the past five years. The MAT is not much better with sixty five percent not addressing the concerns for discipline in preaching. (Survey Question #4)
- Almost none of the churches of both Presbyteries have offered church discipline as a Bible Study or Sunday School offering. Only one church of the MAT and one of the MW did so. It was mentioned briefly in two MW Bible studies. (Survey Question #5)

Conclusions from the survey data bear out that discipline is low in priority with respect to teaching and preaching. In addition, the *EPC Book of Discipline* has seldom been used over the last five years; fifty to sixty percent of the churches have not used it at all. The MAT

was more apt to use it. Seven MAT churches used it three times, while three churches used it four times or more over the past five year period. (Survey Question #6)

Once again, Reformational heritage, as well as constitutional documents, clearly note the importance of discipline in relationship to the other marks of the church. Yet, the data continues to suggest a decline in discipline:

- MAT congregations were more likely to have a greater sense of accountability to the Session, while the MW had nine congregations in the lowest designation. (Survey Question #7)
- Most of the churches of both Presbyteries believe they do not have a reputation for discipline in the community, yet the MAT did distinguish itself with fifteen churches who said they did have a reputation or somewhat of a reputation in the community. Yet, few are distinguishable as churches who maintain accountability. (Survey Question #8)
- Discipline is not viewed as a priority at the same level as is preaching or the sacraments. Only the MAT has two churches that believe discipline to be of the same priority and two additional churches say, “somewhat.” This finding dovetails with the responses to question #1. Discipline is clearly not revered as a third mark of the church. (Survey Question #9)

However, even though an eclipse of discipline is evident, the two Presbyteries have used corrective discipline to an extent. Some conflicting responses were apparent in the following:

- Corrective discipline does happen among both Presbyteries, but not in great numbers. (Survey Question #10)
- Both Presbyteries report good ends or mostly good ends in more than fifty percent of occurrences, when corrective discipline was exercised. (Survey Question #11)

- More than half of both Presbyteries report that people do not submit and depart when accountability is enforced. Some pastors still viewed that departure as a good end in view of #11. The responses to question #12 appear to be at odds with #11. (Survey Question #12)

Both Presbyteries report fears in regard to the implementation of church discipline. Both legal action and negative fallout for the local church are fears that are cited. Questions thirteen through fifteen reflect fear-based anxieties, although the threat of legal (civil) cases are practically non-existent.

- Sixty percent of the MW and thirty five percent of the MAT pastors have fears about the use of discipline in the congregation. The most common responses are concerns over disruption to the church, such as people leaving, and avoidance of confrontation. Once again, this fear may be the result of the findings reflected in survey question one. Pastors felt ill-prepared to implement church discipline. (Survey Question #13)
- The MAT is more likely to engage in discipline than the MW. This finding may account for why twelve of their pastors are more concerned with legal fears than seven of the MW. (Survey Question #14)
- Ninety percent to one hundred percent of both Presbyteries have not been sued or threatened. Only one MAT church had two cases. (Survey Question #15)

There is great dichotomy between the two Presbyteries in view of their response to the last two questions. The MAT pastors are very confident in their Session's knowledge of transgressions committed by members. In addition, the MAT has great confidence in their Presbytery's ability to handle discipline cases at the middle court level.

- The MAT is far more confident of its knowledge of transgressions committed by members than the MW. This is even true of larger churches in the MAT. (Survey Question #16)
- The MAT pastors, overwhelmingly, have greater confidence in their Presbytery's ability to handle discipline cases. It should be noted that during the time the survey was conducted the MW had recently been involved in an oversight case which was viewed as poorly handled by many pastors. (Survey Question #17)

In considering all of the data, corrective church discipline is taking place among the surveyed Presbyteries, but it is at a low ebb. The pastors' admission of poor seminary preparation coupled with the low responses regarding on-going church instruction and membership training on the subject indicate that church discipline is not a high priority item. A review of the biblical data on church discipline and the Reformational heritage is needed and will be reviewed in subsequent chapters. However, it should also be noted that the occurrences of discipline within the EPC are probably helped by its constitutional documents. If these documents were not in place, and many broader-based Evangelical churches do not have them, then the sensitivity to this third mark of the church might be that much less. Moreover, all of the aforementioned evidence noted by authors cited in this study warrants a perplexing dilemma in the body of Christ with far-reaching consequences. If discipline continues to be deemphasized, then one of the distinguishing characteristics of the church will be lost. This will result in a compromise of ecclesiastical integrity which would only serve to blur the distinctions of the church from the world.

Chapter two will explore pertinent biblical data, and chapter three will focus upon the Presbyterian heritage of church discipline

as expressed in the writings of John Knox and John Calvin. Chapter four will continue the Presbyterian heritage inquiry with a focus upon chapter thirty of the *WCF*. Finally, chapter five will offer conclusions and suggestions to overcoming the eclipse of church discipline.

As this chapter began, it was noted that Evangelicals must be as concerned with evangelism as well as with church discipline.⁸⁵ Both involve deliverance from the bondage that stems from a sinful life. When the ministry of moral conduct within the local congregation is neglected, the church loses its integrity within itself while its identity becomes obscured within the world. The passion for evangelism, so noticeable among Evangelicals, should also be in evidence by the church's shepherds to lovingly look after Christ's sheep. Evangelistic outreach and church discipline are complementary to one another. Jonathan Edwards remarks, "If strict discipline and thereby strict morals were maintained in the church, it would in all probability be one of the most powerful means of conviction and conversion toward those outside the church."⁸⁶ Emil Brunner took the concern a step further when he linked enforcement of discipline to the effectiveness of evangelism. His concern is for social justice done by members of the church as well as moral failure. He writes: "If the church no longer possesses either the courage or the power to refuse communion to a person who is known openly as one who "sweats" his employees, then power to witness is at a very low ebb."⁸⁷ Whether incidents of ungodly behavior be personal or social, the shepherds of the church should have concern and act appropriately.

⁸⁵ See J. Carl Laney's remarks, chapter one, 3.

⁸⁶ Jonathan Edwards quoted by Don Kistler, *Church Discipline: The Priority of Discipline*, tape one (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Ministries, 1991), Cassette.

⁸⁷ Brunner, 559.

In 1538, Martin Bucer, who later led the Protestant Reformation in the City of Strasbourg, for more than twenty-five years produced a Reformational handbook on pastoral theology. In a chapter entitled “What sort of people the Elders are to be, and how they are to be chosen and installed,” he writes:

Since these servants of the Lord are to fulfil the work of our salvation in the church by means of teaching, *exhorting, warning, chastising, disciplining, pardoning*, and all this through the dispensing of God’s word, as we want to set out further here from the testimony of Scripture, and at the same time people are weak and discipline and punishment are unpleasant, it is necessary that these ministers should as much as possible be trusted and respected by the believers among whom they are to serve the Lord, and also that they be possessed of a genuine zeal to be faithful shepherds of Christ’s sheep, and equipped with the requisite skills and the power of the Holy Spirit. This is why the greatest fear of God and the most earnest diligence are to be employed in the choice and installation of such men. (emphasis mine)⁸⁸

Bucer appears to echo the disconcerting words of Ezekiel as noted on page one of this study.⁸⁹ Ezekiel’s words were a rendering of judgment upon Israel’s shepherds for not fulfilling their job as shepherds while Bucer makes the point that men must be gifted, called, and informed of what their responsibilities will be as shepherds (Elders). None of the nine key reasons cited in the study for a decline of church disciple can stand in view of Ezekiel’s judgment and Bucer’s insights on Elders fulfilling “... the work of our salvation in the church by means of teaching, exhorting, warning, chastising, disciplining, pardoning.”⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Bucer, 41.

⁸⁹ See Ezekiel 34:2b-4.

⁹⁰ Bucer, 41.

Elders must oversee all who are a part of their charge. Paul's admonition to the elders of Ephesus still applies today. "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). Jesus loves the church, and His shedding of blood on the cross remains solid proof of His particular affection. Consequently, the shepherd must love what He loves. This devotion requires and demands that loving discipline be an active part of the body of Christ.

Chapter Two

The Biblical Basis for Church Discipline

Old Testament Foundation

In order to recapture the importance and function of corrective church discipline, a thorough biblical inquiry is in order. It is the Scripture alone that serves as the basis for the church's function within the world.¹ Consequently, this part of the study will begin within the Old Testament by examining the foundation for New Testament church authority and the enforcement of church discipline.

Obedience to God is outlined early in God's interactions with man (Genesis 1, 2). The call to obey is intrinsic within the Covenant of Works,² as are the consequences for failing to comply (Genesis 2:16-17). Adam, of course, disobeyed and plunged himself and his posterity into sin (Romans 5:12). Even though spiritually separated from God, man is still required to obey as the plan for redemption³

¹ See *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, Revised EPC Edition, Chapter 1, Section 4 (Signal Mountain, TN: Summertown Texts, 1985), 4. Also see *The Shorter Catechism with Scripture Proofs*, Question numbers 1 and 2 (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust), 1.

² Reformed and Presbyterian theology maintains that a unilateral covenant was enacted by God complete with a blessing of life for obedience and a curse of death for disobedience. See *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 13. Also see Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1976), 214-221, and Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. II, Part II, Anthropology (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. A. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 117. And Morton H. Smith, *Systematic Theology*, vol.1 (Greenville, SC: Greenville Seminary Press, 1994), 275-290.

³ Covenant Theology maintains that a Covenant of Grace was initiated in Genesis 3:15 and then slowly revealed through successive covenants made to

unfolds. Requirements for obedience are extensively articulated to the Old Testament church (Israel) during the Mosaic period. The reason for obedience is to be different from the surrounding nations and to reflect the holiness of God (Leviticus 19:2, Deuteronomy 6:14, 17-25). If non-compliance is detected within Israel itself, then the perpetrators are to be dealt with according to the Mosaic Law, as overseen by the elders of Israel. Old Testament literature is replete with injunctions made by God to Israel's elders in monitoring godly conduct. Many examples can be cited.⁴ The following remarks by Moses in Deuteronomy 19:11-12 are representative:

But if there is a man who hates his neighbor and lies in wait for him and rises up against him and strikes him so that he dies, and he flees to one of these cities,¹² then the elders of his city shall send and take him from there and deliver him into the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die.

While Israel is wandering in the wilderness, God empowers elders to assist Moses in the task of administrating the people (Numbers 11:13-17). Just before their empowering, Moses is overwhelmed because of the burden of oversight. Consequently, God requires men who function as elders to be set aside (Numbers 11:16) so that the same spirit that rests upon Moses will be placed upon them. The unfolding story regarding the initial selection of elders to help Moses adjudicate civil cases among the Israelites is instructive for this study.

Prior to the giving of the Law (Ex. 20-23), Moses was not only busy leading the people as God's spokesman, but also judging their

Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and culminating in the work of Christ by His passive and active obedience. See *WCF*, 7.4-6,13,14. For a full discussion of both the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace, see Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 272-282.

⁴ See Numbers 11:16-30 and Deuteronomy 21:2-18; 27:1.

disputes with one another. The entire account is recorded in Exodus 18:13-27 and Numbers 11:13-17. The text reads “Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood about Moses from morning until evening (Ex. 18:13). It is clear that Moses was using judicial authority (corrective discipline) to hear and make rulings on matters that had become points of contention among the Israelites. The phrase “stood about Moses from morning till evening” is a Hebrew figure of speech that indicates the vast number of cases being brought before Moses.⁵ Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, is surprised by the huge amount of work that Moses has taken upon himself and asks the question, “Why do you alone sit as judge?” (Ex. 18:14) The problem is not over Moses’ right or responsibility to exercise authority in mediating disputes. The problem is that he is performing it alone. Help is needed and Jethro has a solution. In verse 19 of this chapter, Jethro begins his counsel.⁶ His wisdom is to select “able men, God fearers, truth lovers, haters of dishonest gain” and then “place these over them” (Numbers 18:21). Consequently, a judicial hierarchy is formally established⁷ to not only hear disputes, but also

⁵ John Currid, *Exodus*, Vol. I. (Auburn, MA: Evangelical Press, 2000), 382.

⁶ The recording of Jethro’s counsel and Moses’ reception is a strong case for the reliable transmission of Scripture. Jethro was a Midianite priest. The Midianites will become arch-enemies of Israel. They become confederates with Moab (Numbers 22:4), God commanded that they be stricken (Numbers 25:16-18), and two hundred years later Israel would become subjugated to them (Judges 6:1-6). In view of Israel’s history with Midian, it would have been very easy for scribes to edit Jethro’s counsel. Nahum Sarna notes: “That so important an Israelite institution as the judiciary is ascribed to the initiative and advice of a Midianite priest. This extraordinary fact testifies to the reliability of the tradition and its antiquity. In light of the hostility that later characterized the relationship between the Midianites and the Israelites, it is hardly likely that anyone would invent such a story.” Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (Philadelphia:JPS, 1991), 100.

⁷ Prior to this event, the biblical text makes clear that elders were in evidence (Ex. 3:16,18; 4:29; 12:21; 17:5-6). Yet, now they are to have ruling authority

render rulings.⁸ They in effect become judges to assist Moses in overseeing the people. After the stating of the Moral and case laws (Exodus 20-23), the seventy elders join Moses in worship before Yahweh (Exodus 24:1) and actually are present for an appearance of God upon Mt. Sinai (Exodus 24:9-11).⁹

In addition, the authority of the body of elders carries so much judicial power so that bringing a matter “to God” or to the elders are viewed as synonymous. Exodus 21:1-6, part of the Book of the Covenant, details a devoted slave who desires to be in his master’s service for the remainder of his life. His ear is pierced by his master in the presence of the ruling elders. The expression “bring him to God” (Ex. 21:6) is synonymous with a hearing before the elders (judges). A comparison with Exodus 22:8-9 indicates that the judges functioned with ruling authority and the “to God” expression (Ex. 21:6) appears to indicate the same body of men.

John L. MacKay comments:

‘Judges’ renders the word usually translated ‘God’ or ‘gods’, and some have argued that this ceremony takes place before God at the sanctuary. However, human judges may here be considered as ‘powerful ones’ (as the word may basically signify) who have had

which means they are empowered to not only impart wisdom, but also make judgments.

⁸ Within Presbyterian ecclesiology, the office of ruling elder originates from the ruling power given to the office in the Old Covenant and affirmed in the New Covenant (I Timothy 5:17).

⁹ The text reads “and they saw the God of Israel,” Exodus 24:10. Many commentators view this appearance as a theophany (a pre-incarnate appearance of the second person of the Trinity). See John Currid, *Exodus*, Vol. II. (Auburn, MA: Evangelical Press, 2001), 138.

divine authority bestowed on them. They officially approve the change of status.¹⁰

The sense is that during the early history of Israel, God raised up men who would serve as His emissaries in overseeing His people. Their role is so infused with God's authority that the expression "to God", "judges" or "powerful ones" were viewed as identical and representative of God's authority here on earth.

The purpose is comprehensive godly supervision coupled with the empowerment of such men to speak for the people. The late Edmund P. Clowney, former president of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, PA, remarks on the call to oversee and represent. He states:

The Old Testament concept of elders as representatives of the people was not simply carried over from patriarchal societies. It was founded by God's command when, in response to the plea of Moses, the Lord told him to assemble seventy elders acknowledged by the people to share with him the burden of judging Israel (Nu.11:16). These elders were set apart to their office by a gift of the Spirit. They were not only judges, but also spokesmen for the people (Dt. 19:12; 21:19; Ex. 3:16; 4:29; 24:1-2; 1 Sa. 8:4; 2 Sa. 5:3).¹¹

Their responsibility is difficult to grasp, since they become God's direct guidance through their instruction, example, and admonishment. Their call is high in caring for God's Old Testament church.

Israel is responsible to obey the commands of God, but the elders and their judges are responsible to teach and enforce God's mandates. The historical record clearly notes the leadership's failure, as the nation slips into pagan worship and immorality of the

¹⁰ John L. MacKay. *Exodus*. (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2001), 366-367.

¹¹ Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1995), 206.

Canaanites during the three hundred and fifty year span of the Judges. One very sad example of eldership failure is recorded in the book of Judges. After the slaughter of the Benjaminites by the other Israelite tribes, the nation worried the Benjaminites would not survive as a tribe. Cornelis Van Dam remarks:

To get around the oath that the other tribes had taken not to give one's daughter in marriage to a Benjaminite, the elders of the assembly commanded the Benjaminites to seize for themselves a wife from the girls of Shiloh when they joined in the dancing at the annual festival there. The elders promised to help resolve any complaints (Judg. 21:16-23). This action of the elders went against the express commandment of God, which punished kidnapping with death (Ex. 21:16), and thus fed the moral chaos of the times.¹²

The theme of the book, repeated twice, is “. . . every man did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6, 21:25). This reflects a man-centered view of life and is foretold by Moses earlier in the historical record (Deuteronomy 12:8; 31:16-17).

Later, there are brief seasons of repentance in which godly kings reign, as well as times in which messages by divinely appointed prophets are heeded. Yet, the spiritual leaders of Israel are always responsible to lead by teaching the law and enforcing its requirements.

During the period of the divided monarchy, the elders still maintained a level of respect from kings and the people. For example, in the Northern Kingdom governed by wicked kings, the elder still carried a mantle of esteem and respect. In 2 Chronicles 28, King Pekah of Israel (Northern Kingdom) took many Judean captives, but the prophet Oded called for the people to release them in order to avoid God's wrath. Elders stepped forward, designated as

¹² Cornelis Van Dam, *The Elder: Today's Ministry Rooted in All of Scripture* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2009), 48.

“heads of the sons of Ephraim”¹³ and required that the captives be freed. The prisoners were set free (2 Chronicles 28:14). The stand of these elders is surely an unpopular one, yet the authority of these men is clearly recognizable.

In the Southern Kingdom, the elders also maintained a place of importance and influence. Elders, noted as the “heads of the houses”, participated with the Levites in making a covenant with the king (2 Chronicles 23:2-3).¹⁴ Van Dam summaries:

From other passages it is evident that the elder retained a position of leadership in Judah (Lam. 4:16; 5:12). The elder is called the “head” of the nation (Isa. 9:14-15). God told Jeremiah to take some elders and priests as witnesses of his prophecy (Jer. 19:1). Unfortunately, the elders also contributed to the downfall of the kingdom by their sin (Ezek. 8:9-12; 9:6).¹⁵

Centuries later a sad rebuke is issued to the elders for their poor oversight. Ezekiel delivers the verbal blow to the incompetent shepherds of Israel. They were feeding themselves and not the sheep. They did not strengthen the weak nor seek out the lost. They were merely looking out for themselves (Ezekiel 34:1-10). Consequently, the people of God are portrayed as wandering sheep throughout the mountains with no guidance from a loving shepherd (Ezekiel 34:6). Ralph H. Alexander, formerly of Western Seminary, laments the loss then, and the need now, for leadership that recognizes its responsibility to carry out corrective discipline. He writes:

God makes it clear that a leader has a primary responsibility to care for those he leads, even at the sacrifice of his own desires. Would that political and spiritual leaders both then and now would

¹³ Hanoah Reviv, *The Elders in Ancient Israel* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1989), 15-21, 132-134.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 117.

¹⁵ Van Dam, 54.

recognize this heart attitude of leadership! Lack of leadership always leads to the disintegration of God's people and personal and corporate heartache and injury. Leadership carries an awesome responsibility.¹⁶

Leadership does carry significant responsibility. Alexander's commentary implies that a leadership role looks beyond ones self – focusing on eternal principles, rather than temporal gratification. The corrective care of God's people may never be taken lightly.

The spiritual leaders of Israel were responsible to convey the godly way of dealing with conflict between people, as well as honoring God in worshipful conduct. The law they were to teach was not simply the Ten Commandments, but also the case law which flows from the decalogue. The case law conveys God's care that instruction be clear during times of confusion and that the elders have concise directives for the enactment of corrective discipline. Eugene P. Heideman writes:

We go wrong when we study the Ten Commandments in Bible study groups without reference to the case law context in which they appear in the Pentateuch. One of the greatest problems facing us today is that the church insists upon relegating the Old Testament case law to a previous dispensation. Actually, when one studies the case law which tells about how to deal with people who stole sheep in contrast to those who stole oxen, with men who take slave girls for wives and who had the problem of dividing the inheritance between the two sons of their two wives, with the problems of money lenders who could take a cloak in pledge during the daylight hours, but who had to return it by nightfall, then one begins to understand how God wills that pastoral care and discipline be carried on in the confusing context of human history.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ralph H. Alexander, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 6, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 912.

¹⁷ Eugene P. Heideman, "Discipline and Identity," *Reformed Review* 35 (Fall 1981): 24.

All of the law has value for the lovers of God, as well as administrative clarity for those who oversee those whom God loves. The Law's clarity on right and wrong always brings an end to confusion, if it is highly regarded and applied when necessary.

In preparing to examine the New Testament requirements for church discipline, it is critical that the foundation of Old Testament oversight be understood. The New Testament rests upon the Old Testament. Both are linked and should not be separated. Consequently, when injunctions are made to elders in the New Testament to shepherd the flock of God willingly, respectfully, and as examples (I Peter 5:1-4), then one understands that such responsibilities are not new within God's design. From the beginning, His revealed plan is for His people to be taught, guided and corrected when wrong by godly elders. God-given elders shepherd His flock and must never tire in looking after the chief shepherd's lambs (I Peter 5:4). The New Testament establishment of eldership for the care of God's people was not new. The foundation was well in place prior to Christ's call of the twelve and their subsequent appointment of elders over churches throughout the first century Roman Empire.

New Testament Pattern

The New Testament pattern of church authority and discipline must begin with Jesus, Himself, as head (Ephesians 5:23-24; I Corinthians 11:3). The church is comprised of the "called out" *ekkesia* who are required to serve him with obedience (John 14:15,21; 15:10). Elders continue the Old Testament practice of oversight and shepherding care, but Jesus remains as the chief shepherd (I Peter 5:4).

The office and function of New Testament eldership is notable within the biblical record. The English word “elder” is translated from the Greek term *presbuteros*.¹⁸ Its noun and adjective forms are found throughout the Greek New Testament. The New Testament occurrences of *presbuteros* and the similar Greek term *episkopos* make clear the delineation between the office and function. For example, Paul instructed Titus to appoint “elders” *presbuteroi* and then described their function as “overseers” or “bishops” *episkopoi* (Titus 1:5,7). The same usage is found in Luke’s writing within the Book of Acts as he described events in the Ephesus church. “Elders” *presbuteroi* were called together and later instructed to “oversee” *episkopoi* (Acts 20:17, 28). James Boice, former pastor and theologian, comments on the nuances of the Greek term *episkopos* in clarifying its synonym implications with *presbuteros* as pertaining to the office of “elder.” He writes:

Spiritual *oversight* is the thrust of the word *episkopos* (translated “overseer”), which in other places is sometimes translated “bishop.” . . . In each of these passages and others, the word *episkopos* is used as a descriptive term for elder and is therefore to be considered synonymous with that term . . . The function of oversight is seen in the meaning of the word *episkopos* itself. Bishop is merely an Anglicized pronunciation of the Greek word, but the word itself means “guardian.” *Epi*, the prefix, means “over”. *Skopos* is “guardian”. So *episkopos* refers to one who is a guard over other persons. An elder has a responsibility for oversight. Elders are to be concerned for others’ welfare.¹⁹

¹⁸ The Presbyterian form of government takes its name from this Greek term *presbuteros* meaning elder. The noun form *presbuterion* is an assembly of elders, also called the Presbytery. For a detailed discussion, see W.E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Company), 360-361.

¹⁹ James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1986), 636-637.

The terms *elders* and *bishops* refers to the same individual. *Elder* concerns the office, while *bishop* concerns the function.

But what sort of power comes with the office of elder? He is to oversee, but what and how much authority does he possess? These questions will now begin this portion of the study by highlighting key corrective discipline texts found in the New Testament. The first to be explored comes from Matthew's gospel account.

Matthew 16:18-19

This account reflects the well known interchange between Jesus and Peter over the question, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" (Matthew 16:13). Peter responded with the revelation that Jesus was the Christ and the very Son of God (Matthew 16:16). Peter was then singled out for his correct declaration and given the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven coupled with the power to bind or loose (Matthew 16:19). Most Evangelicals and Reformed scholars would hold to the interpretation that Jesus was addressing Peter, ". . . as representing the group"²⁰ of apostles. This would stand in stark contrast to Roman Catholic scholarship that holds to the supremacy of Peter and Apostolic succession.²¹

Yet, there is no doubt that Jesus' apostles possessed "the keys," which entailed the preaching (gospel) of "the way" (John 14:6) and the authority to close the gate (discipline) in the face of errant

²⁰ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 650.

²¹ For a discussion of the Roman Catholic viewpoint on the keys of the kingdom and apostolic succession, see John A. Hardon, S. J., *The Catholic Catechism* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1975), 219-223; 449-450. For a Protestant response, see D.A. Carson, *God With Us, Themes from Matthew* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1985), 98-100.

preaching or unrepentant sin (II Timothy 4:1-5). William Hendriksen, former professor of New Testament literature at Calvin Seminary remarks:

The one who “has the keys” (cf. Rev. 1:18; 3:7) of the kingdom of heaven determines who should be admitted and who must be refused admission. Cf. Isa. 22:22. That the apostles as a group exercised this right is clear from the entire book of Acts. All did this on an equal basis (4:33); there was no boss or superintendent. . . . Discipline was also exercised by The Twelve, and here again the role played by Peter is emphasized (5:1-11). Somewhat later Paul, too, very effectively used both keys: the preaching of the gospel and the exercise of discipline. The former requires no proof, for it is evident from all of his epistles as well as from chapters 13-28 of the books of Acts. As to the latter, discipline, both the shutting and the opening or at times reopening of the door, are beautifully illustrated, respectively, in I Cor. 5:1-5 and II Cor. 2:8.²²

Clearly, Hendriksen understands the keys as including the authority to close the gate of the church. Discipline is as important as preaching.

The “binding and loosing” portion is repeated again by Jesus during his later instruction on discipline (Matthew 18:18). “Binding and loosing” are rabbinical terms meaning “forbidding” or “permitting.”²³ It is clear that authority to close the door of salvation was being given by Jesus to church leadership. This would include the authority to correct heretical teaching which distorts the entrance

²² Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Matthew*, 650.

²³ “The binding in Matt.16:19 and 18:18 recalls the Heb. *‘āsar* which denotes both teaching authority (to determine what is forbidden) and disciplinary power (to place under ban). ‘Binding and loosing’ was a technical term in Rab. Jud. for the authority of the rabbis in teaching and discipline.”W. von Meding and D. Muller, “Bind” in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. I, Colin Brown, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House,1975),171. For a detailed discussion on the terms “Binding and Loosing” and their connection to rabbinic usage, see Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Book V (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 645-646.

into the kingdom as well as the rebuke of professing Christians who continue in open sin.

Wayne Gruden, of Phoenix Seminary, highlights the importance of discipline while commenting on the Greek structure in both Matthew 16:19 and 18:18. He notes that both employ:

. . . an unusual Greek verbal construction (a periphrastic future perfect). It is best translated by the NASB, “Whatever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.” Several other examples of this construction show that it indicates not just a future action (“shall be bound”), for which a common Greek tense was available (future passive), but rather an action that would be completed before some future point, with effects that would continue to be felt. Thus, Jesus is teaching that church discipline will have heavenly sanction. But it is not as if the church must wait for God to endorse its actions after the actions have occurred. Rather, whenever the church enacts discipline it can be confident that God has already begun the process spiritually. Whenever it releases from discipline, forgives the sinner, and restores personal relationships, the church can be confident that God has already begun the restoration spiritually (cf. John 20:23).²⁴

Consequently, Jesus is promising that the relationship between God and the disciplined person will be affected depending how the church invokes disciplinary action. Such discipline *was already* initiated or repealed in heaven. Therefore, church authority cannot be underestimated, nor should it be abused. Within the Matthew 16:19 and 18:18 texts, Jesus drew attention to specific actions of the

²⁴ Wayne Gruden, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Intervarsity Press, 1994), 891. In addition, Dan Doriani, an EPC ordained pastor, adds, “Matthew 16:19 literally reads, ‘Whatever you loose on earth shall have been bound.’ That is what we bind or loose has already been bound or loosed in heaven. We do not determine who enters heaven and who is shut out. When we proclaim that a man or woman can attain eternal life only by trusting in Jesus Christ, Son of God and Savior, we only restate what God has already stated.” Daniel Doriani, *Reformed Expository Commentary: Matthew*, Vol. II (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2008), 90.

church, which have the effect of life and death. “So ‘binding’ and ‘loosing’ . . . refer to the enacting, disciplining authority in connection with membership in the church.”²⁵

Peter was not the only one to receive this power of the keys. Jesus stated, “Truly I say to you (plural), whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.” (Matt. 18:18) This promise was confirmed by Jesus after the resurrection. John 20:21-23 states, “So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’”²² And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’²³ If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.”

An interesting parallel is also in view between the Matthew texts 16:19 and 18:18 and the remarks of Jesus in the twentieth chapter of John’s gospel. Jesus declares to the apostles in John 20:23, “If you forgive the sins of any, {their sins} have been forgiven them; if you retain the {sins} of any, they have been retained.” The “binding” of Matthew 16 and 18 is parallel to the “retaining” of sins in John 20.²⁶ The disciplined person’s life has been judged inconsistent with a repentant heart. Matthew 18 concludes that the person is prohibited from the fellowship of the brethren (Matthew 18:17). Conversely, the “loosing” as noted in the Matthew texts is parallel to the “forgiving” as noted in John 20. If someone has been

²⁵ Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), 361.

²⁶ “It is clear that the Matthew passages refer to the authority which the church exercises by means of the apostolic office. It would, therefore, seem logical that here in John 20:23 the meaning is the same.” William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: John*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996), 461.

under discipline and shows clear signs of a changed heart with respect to sin, then he or she is loosed and forgiven. Clearly, the forgiveness of sins is something that only Jesus can do (Matthew 9:5-6), but church authority is empowered to set conditions which reflect the judgment of heaven.²⁷ Kuiper notes: “In a word, the Lord authorized the apostles to lay down conditions for entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven.”²⁸ In addition, the church can set conditions for the barring of the unrepentant through the retaining of sins. Hendriksen states:

That the apostles cannot act independently, that is, apart from the Spirit who speaks in the Word, is already evident from the fact that the gift is linked with the Spirit! “Receive the Holy Spirit ... If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven,” etc. Absolutions pronounced arbitrarily have no standing in heaven. Only then has the Church, acting through its officers, the right to declare sins forgiven or retained when it acts in harmony with the Spirit-inspired Word.²⁹

The church is never infallible in its decision making processes. It may not be assumed that church leadership’s decisions with respect to discipline are always correct and in line with God’s will. However, when church leadership enacts discipline with charity, according to

²⁷ A similar unusual Greek construction is used in John 20:23 as was employed in Matthew 16:19 and 18:18. “The commission to forgive sins is phrased in an unusual construction. Literally, it is: ‘Those whose sins you forgive have already been forgiven; those whose sins you do not forgive have not been forgiven.’ The first verbs in the two clauses are aorists, which imply the action of an instant; the second verbs are perfects, which imply an abiding state that began before the action of the first verbs. God does not forgive men’s sins because we decide to do so nor withhold forgiveness because we will not grant it. We announce it; we do not create it.” Merrill C. Tenney, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Vol. 9*. Gen. Ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 193.

²⁸ R.B. Kuiper, *The Glorious Body of Christ* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 300.

²⁹ Hendriksen, *John*, 461.

the mandates of the Word of God, it may expect the blessing of God, for He has given the authority to do so.

The salvation which the church proclaims and the discipline which it enacts go hand in hand and, in view of the importance of the Reformation, must not be misunderstood. The chief Roman Catholic error is found in the belief that salvation is within itself.³⁰ The church somehow becomes an intermediary between Christ and the convert. Rome holds that “. . . Christ has indeed wrought salvation by His atoning death, but that He has committed the dispensing of salvation to the church.”³¹ Moreover, Rome maintains that the church *dispenses saving grace itself*, while the protestant view maintains that the church dispenses *the means of saving grace*.³² The means are proclaimed through the preaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments. This is an important distinction when the subject of discipline is broached. Consequently, I am not suggesting that the church is salvation in itself, but rather the “. . . church includes believers of all ages and no one else, and outside of it there is no salvation.”³³ Therefore, salvation is in Christ and being rightly related to Him necessitates membership in the church.³⁴ Membership

³⁰ “. . . whoever is saved owes his salvation to the one Catholic Church founded by Christ. It is to this Church alone that Christ entrusted the truths of revelation which have by now, though often dimly, penetrated all the cultures of mankind. It is this Church alone that communicates the merits won for the whole world on the cross.” John A. Hardon, S. J., 236.

³¹ Kuiper, 109.

³² For a concise exposition of the Word and sacraments as a means of grace, see Louis Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963).

³³ *Ibid*, 281.

³⁴ There is a movement among Protestant and Roman Catholic Charismatics that asserts the points of difference with Rome, as noted during the Reformation, are now over. The assertion is made that distinction over justification by faith alone

is a consequence of salvation, and discipline is a consequence of a breakdown in the convert's relationship to Christ. Church leadership is empowered to admonish, correct, and if necessary, eject the erring brother for the good of both him and the church.

New Testament passages which follow in this study will show that church leadership was admonished by apostolic authority to exercise corrective discipline of the wayward. The power of the keys were being passed along to overseeing elders who were admonished to use them when necessary (I Corinthians 5; II Thessalonians 3:6; Titus 3:10-11). In addition, those who number themselves among the church were admonished to be submissive to their elders who served over them (I Thessalonians 5:12-13, Hebrews 13:17, and I Peter 5:5, I Timothy 5:17). These directives, regarding the power of the keys, lead to a further discussion over the rightful place of church membership requirements.³⁵ Philip Graham Ryken notes the importance of membership. He remarks:

The basis for the communion of the saints is union with Christ by faith, not a listing in the church directory. However, failure to become a church member can be costly. This is because failure to become a church member or to take one's church membership seriously hinders the communion of the saints. And to the extent that a church's membership roll is an earthly copy, however

is now rectified. (Bishop Tony Palmer and remarks made by Pope Francis. *The Miracle of Unity* www.youtube.com/watch?v=NHbeW71_EK; accessed March 2014.) However, clear points of difference remain in regard to justification, inspiration of Scripture alone, the efficacy of the sacraments and the nature of salvation as dispensed by the church. For a concise understanding of the difference between Catholicism and Protestantism, see R. C. Sproul, *Are We Together: A Protestant Analyzes Roman Catholicism* (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2012).

³⁵ The concern for church membership was previously cited in this paper under reasons why corrective discipline has declined. See chapter one, 15-20.

imperfect, of the Lamb's Book of Life (Rev. 20:15), neglecting church membership calls one's salvation into question.³⁶

Ryken is correct in this matter. Church membership is essential even though it is not an explicit doctrine of Scripture. Church membership is an implicit doctrine, as in the same way the doctrine of the Trinity is implicitly taught within Scripture.³⁷ There are no New Testament injunctions that say "Thou shalt become a member," but a perusal of the following texts and simple logic will make the matter clear.

The church has a head in the Lord Jesus Christ with a structure designed to worship, teach, care for, and disciple those within its ranks. Such a structure requires submission to godly elders who oversee the church. It was previously noted in this chapter that elders are called to oversee while the faithful are called to submit and obey. With regard to the church or elder's power of *binding* or *loosing*, Morton H. Smith of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary remarks:

Since the church here is the body exercising discipline there seems little reason to doubt that the disciples understood this to be the representatives of the church, namely, the elders. The universal practice in the synagogue, with which the disciples were familiar, was to have the elders handle disciplinary matters.³⁸

Overseeing elders are endowed with the authority to oversee the correct preaching of the gospel, right administration of the sacraments, and the careful use of discipline, when needed.

³⁶ Philip Graham Ryken, editor, *The Communion of the Saints* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 2001), 42.

³⁷ For a discussion on the implicit teaching of Scripture on the Trinity, see Gruden, *Systematic Theology*, 226-248.

³⁸ Morton H. Smith, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Greenville, SC: Greenville Seminary Press, 1994), 538-539.

Such disciplining matters would be overseen by church leadership who must logically know who is a part of their charge. Records on who was a part of the church were essential for oversight. Consider Philip Ryken's concise summary of passages which indicate that within the first century church a careful record was being kept of those who were a part of the church. For example, new converts entering the church are noted within Scripture as being "added to their number" (Acts 2:41, 47; 5:14). As the church grew, deacons were chosen to correct a problem regarding widowed church members who were not receiving an allotment of daily food. There must have been some way of determining the identity of the slighted widows (Acts 6:1-7). It is also clear from Paul's remarks to Timothy that the church of Ephesus developed a detailed listing of widows who were a part of the congregation (I Timothy 5:9). This is ". . . not surprising, given that the apostle Paul addressed them as 'members of God's household'" (Ephesians 2:19). Moreover, Paul admonished the church of Corinth to disfellowship a man who was engaged in open immorality. Obviously, the Corinthian eldership was able to determine those who were a part of the fellowship and those who were not based upon some public affirmation (I Corinthians 5:2). The apostle John, in a similar way to Paul, was able to distinguish those who "belonged to us" and those who "did not really belong to us" (I John 2:19). "It only makes sense: if elders must 'give an account' (Hebrews 3:17), they must know for whom they are accountable . . . shepherds must know who their sheep are."³⁹ In addition, Peter exhorted elders to not lord over those who are "allotted to your charge" (I Peter 5:3). Once again, an implied responsibility is highlighted to not dominate those who have been assigned to an

³⁹ Ryken, *The Communion of the Saints*, 52,53.

elder's charge. Peter H. Davids remarks on the Greek term translated as "charge" in I Peter 5:3. He writes:

Here the term stands in parallel to "the flock" and thus indicates that portion of God's people over which an elder had the oversight (as in 5:2) – probably a house church, as each city usually consisted of several house churches at this time.⁴⁰

Oversight of a church in a house or a city meant that the elder(s) had charge over them.

God has always been concerned with the membership of His people within the church. Membership defines His people. The registry of who is a part of the church is alluded to numerous times in Scripture. The following list is a summary of Edmund P. Clowney's remarks on how Scripture reveals membership rolls.

- God's book of life is in heaven with an earthly record as well (Exodus 32:32-33, Malachi 3:15).
- Gentile names were envisioned to be recorded on the rolls of the people of God (Psalm 87:4-5).
- Paul recognized the names of Euodia, Syntyche, and Clement as being recorded in the Book of Life. They were acknowledged as being a part of the church of Philippi (Philippians 4:2-3).
- Luke recorded the numbering of Mathias as an apostle as well as those who had been numbered with the disciples (Acts 1:26; 2:41; 4:4).
- The first total of the three thousand was noted in connection to baptism (Acts 2:41).⁴¹

⁴⁰ Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 180.

⁴¹ Clowney, *The Church*, 104.

When New Testament texts are woven together, membership appears as the implicit teaching of Scripture. Simply attending, even on a regular basis, will not create the bond necessary for godly authority to help guide or discipline the Christian's life. There must be some sort of public acknowledgement of a desire to belong and submit to a particular local church as well as some sort of record which is kept by the leadership to delineate who is a part of the fold.

The forgiveness of God is not found in isolation. Christian belief is not an individualistic matter. Isolation and individualism lead to spiritual error. The historian R. H. Tawney remarks, "The man who seeks God in isolation from his fellows is likely to find, not God, but the devil, who will bear an embarrassing resemblance to himself."⁴²

Local churches and denominations may differ on what the specific grounds of membership may be, but there must be some grounds which distinguish a person's desire to belong and submit. The EPC membership induction question on submission to church authority is specific on the matter.⁴³ Some Evangelical churches may not be as demanding. However, there should be some public recognition that he or she wishes to belong to a specific church and understands the requirements of membership. Christians ". . . are called to belong, not just believe."⁴⁴ Simply believing without formal connection and oversight is ignorance at the least or rebellion at the worst. Church authority cannot do its job properly if Christians are not duly accounted for. Rick Warren's enormously popular *The*

⁴² Cited by Ben Patterson, "Discipline: The Backbone of the Church," *Leadership* (Winter 1983): 111.

⁴³ See chapter one, 20.

⁴⁴ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 130.

Purpose Driven Life includes salient comments about the need and responsibility for church membership.

The New Testament assumes membership in a local congregation. The only Christians not members of a local fellowship were those under church discipline who had been removed from the fellowship because of gross public sin . . . Today's culture of independent individualism has created many spiritual orphans – “bunny believers” who hop around from one church to another without any identity, accountability, or commitment. Many believe one can be a “good Christian” without joining (or even attending) a local church . . .⁴⁵

“Hop around” believers are not the New Testament expectation for Christian submission. There must be a settling into a particular communion of believers where there is faithful preaching; the sacraments are rightfully observed; and godly discipline is employed.

The power of “binding and loosing” and the “retaining or forgiving of sins” has been given to church authority. It began with the apostles and then was disseminated to all who would be raised up to serve as overseers of God's people. Paul exhorted young Timothy to reprove, rebuke, and exhort those that he had responsibility for (2 Timothy 4:2). Therefore, the elder must know who he is responsible for and membership requirements will clear up any ambiguity.

Jesus' remarks with regard to disciplinary action of the church will continue to inspire awe and wonderment. Moreover, the corresponding passages of Matthew 18:18 and John 20:23 will further the sense of awesome responsibility imparted to church leadership. Church authority, with the power to invoke corrective discipline, has indeed been given by Christ to overseers of the church. To excuse or abuse it will have frightening consequences for

⁴⁵ Ibid, 132-133.

those in office as shepherds (Ezekiel 34:2-4, I Peter 5:2-4, James 3:1).

Matthew 18:15-20

This text contains the “divine warrant for the regular practice of church discipline.”⁴⁶ The latter portion of the text (Matthew 18:18-19) was examined in the previous section. However, the remaining verses are as awe-inspiring as those already cited. The Lord Jesus Christ sets forth a process for correction within His church.

Here is specific instruction from our Lord regarding the church’s commitment to and procedures for church discipline. Here there is no indifference to sin; rather should ever any one of them go astray, there must be an all-out concerted, determined, inexorable effort at recovery, even to the point of the “shock treatment of expulsion.”⁴⁷

Jesus’ directives begin by reflecting His concern for “your brother” (Matthew 18:15). Church discipline concerns those within her ranks. The church does not carry ecclesiastical power over those outside the fold of Christ. Consequently, Jesus begins His prescription on church discipline by noting that His injunctions refer only to those within the church.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Harold O.J. Brown, “The Role of Discipline in the Church”, *The Covenant Quarterly*, (August 1983): 51.

⁴⁷ Lynn R. Buzzard and Thomas S. Brandon, Jr., *Church Discipline and the Courts* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1987), 39-40.

⁴⁸ Knox Chamblin, formerly of Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi, has made a formidable case that Matthew’s usage of *adelphoi* (brothers) always has reference to Jesus’ disciples and never refers to those outside the church. He writes: “Viewing the term *adelphoi* in this passage in light of its usage elsewhere in Mt, I conclude that Matthew, like Jesus before him, refers to disciples. For support of this view see D. A. Carson, *Matthew: Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8, editor Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 519-20 Consider the following evidence: a. 12:46-50. Told that his

Secondly, there is debate over the text's meaning in regard to offenses committed in private or public. Many commentators⁴⁹ would agree that Jesus prescribes private confrontation in the case of private sins, but some, including Calvin, question the necessity of private confrontation before a public admonishment. Calvin saw a pattern for discipline in Galatians 2:11-14 and Timothy 5:19-20 which led him to conclude that private confrontation is *not* necessary before a public admonishment.⁵⁰ However, the process of private rebuke is a good practice because the underlying concern of Jesus was love of the brother. William Hendriksen remarks:

. . . Jesus is here speaking about private offenses, the underlying requirement of showing love and the forgiving spirit toward all makes it reasonable to state that whenever the interests of the church demand or even allow it, the rule of Matthew 18:15 should also be applied to public sins.⁵¹

mother and brothers (*adelphoi*) are seeking him, Jesus 'replied, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers [*adelphoi*]?" Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers [*adelphoi*]. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven [and that means true disciples, 7:21-27] is my brother [*adelphos*] and sister and mother.'" b. 23:8, 'You have only one Master and you are all brothers [*adelphoi*].' Their common allegiance to Jesus makes them brothers to one another. c. 28:8-20. Jesus instructs the women, 'Go and tell my brothers [*adelphois*] to go to Galilee; there they will see me' (v. 10). It is 'the eleven disciples who, in obedience to this command, gather in Galilee (v.16).'" Reformed Theological Seminary course No. 502, *Gospels and Acts* by Chamblin. Commentary written chiefly for the course, 1989, 226-227.

⁴⁹ See D.A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol.8, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 402; G. Cambell Morgan, *Studies in the Four Gospels* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1931), 232-233; Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary*, vol. 5 (McLean, Virginia: MacDonald Publishing Company), 258.

⁵⁰ See John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. II, editors Torrance and Torrance, trans. T.H.L. Parker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing House, 1972), 226-227.

⁵¹ Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Matthew*, 698.

The goal of all discipline is the restoration of the brother and not unnecessary humiliation. Jesus remarks that “. . . if he listens to you, you have *won your brother*” (Matthew 18:15b). The confrontation is to be initiated to highlight the wrong-doing and need for repentance. Hopefully, this approach will lead to the winning of the brother and not censorious public criticism.⁵² In many cases, confidentiality and privacy are essential depending on the nature of the offense. Jay Adams remarks:

As you read the words of our Lord in that passage [Matthew 18:15ff], you get the impression that it is only reluctantly, when all else fails, that more and more persons may be called in. The ideal seems to be to keep the matter as narrow as possible.⁵³

Narrowness means keeping things private until greater and greater public awareness is necessary. To do otherwise would be in opposition to Jesus’ mandate for love of one another (John 13:34, 35).

Thirdly, if the brother does not heed the rebuke, then additional confronters, “one or two more” (Matthew 18:16a), are to be added to the confrontation. Jesus then quoted Deuteronomy 19:15 in adding Old Testament law to the ramping up process in behalf of the wayward brother. Their precise function is not immediately understood. D. A. Carson remarks:

It is not at first clear whether the function of the witnesses is to support the one who confronts his erring brother by bringing additional testimony about the sin committed (which would require at least three people to have observed the offense) or to provide

⁵² The *EPC Book of Discipline* provides for sanctions by a court being made private or public depending upon the circumstances and nature of the offense. See Principles for the Administration of Sanctions, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, *Book of Order, Book of Discipline*, Section 10-7 (Brighton, MI: Evangelical Presbyterian Church, July 2002), 104.

⁵³ Jay E. Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1974), 32.

witnesses to the confrontation if the case were to go before the whole church.⁵⁴

The text may be interpreted either way. The probability is that the witnesses will further the case if the entire church should become involved.

The most significant point regarding Matthew 18:16 is Jesus' command to intensify the process by bringing more people into the restoration process. It is at this point that most Christians and church leaders fail in the work of restoration. The serious nature of adding additional personalities to the confrontation paralyzes many with an attitude that says, "It's just not worth it." However, Jesus does believe it is "worth it" no matter how thorny the process may become.

Fourthly, Jesus commands that the matter be told to the church if the brother is incorrigible (Matthew 18:17). A Christian's view of church government will dictate how this text is followed. A Presbyterian and Reformed view would necessitate that elders were involved at least by this stage. They, jointly, would act for the church as a whole and may or may not bring the matter to the entire church's attention.⁵⁵ A Baptist context would view the discipline process from a congregational government viewpoint. In this case, the offending person would make public acknowledgement of sin to the congregation itself.⁵⁶ In either case, the defiance of the believer in

⁵⁴ D.A. Carson, *Matthew: Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8, editor Frank E. Gaebelain (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 403.

⁵⁵ EPC membership induction questions, which are similar to most Presbyterian denominations, clearly state that the Session itself is due submission and not the congregation. See *EPC, Book of Order, Book of Government*, Section 9-2 (Brighton, MI: Evangelical Presbyterian Church, July 2004), 20,22.

⁵⁶ See Mark Dever, "Biblical Church Discipline," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, vol. 4, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 36.

question may lead to complete local church knowledge regardless of the employed form of church polity. In fact, if the believer is to be treated as an outsider (Gentile and tax-gatherer, vs. 17b), then the matter is to be made known within the Christian community.

Most importantly, verse 17b is a description of corporate exclusion from the church of Jesus Christ. Hendriksen concludes:

. . . just as foreigners and tax-collectors who are still unconverted must be considered as being as yet outside the kingdom of God, so also this impenitent person must now be viewed as being in the same class. Because of his own stubbornness he has lost his right to church membership, and it has now become the church's painful duty to make this declaration – in order that even this severe measure of exclusion may, with God's blessing, result in the man's conversion (I Corinthians 5:5; II Thessalonians 3:14, 15).⁵⁷

It must further be noted that restoration or conversion is still the goal even at this drastic point of expulsion. In the next segment of this study, I Corinthians 5 will be examined and clearly show that excommunication is meant to lead toward salvation. Additionally, such disciplining action is not irreversible. In fact, Jesus later remarks in Matthew 18:18-35 imply that salvation or restoration should be expected because of God's long-suffering nature. Hope is never lost even though the matter ultimately remains in God's sovereign plan.⁵⁸

In closing, Jesus' remarks in Matthew 18 reflect His concern for corrective discipline and the process for invoking it when needed. Jesus remains the chief shepherd (I Peter 5:4), and His model for the care of His sheep should not be undervalued or employed

⁵⁷ Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 701.

⁵⁸ God's predestinating election is the ultimate determinate with regard to the salvation of the sinner or the repentance of the excommunicated. His sovereign wisdom is not to be questioned, but trusted. See *WCF* 10.

haphazardly. Moreover, every denomination, as well as independent churches and the EPC, must have a disciplining process in place that is underpinned with the concern and format as outlined in Matthew 18. It is always a hope that such a process will not be needed, but the Christian's battle with individual sin will necessitate the inevitability of corrective discipline of some in the course of time.

I Corinthians 5:1-13

The Corinthian church had been blessed in many ways, but it was also marked by disorder, factions (I Corinthians 1:10-4:21) and, in the text to now be expounded, immorality. The church, being situated within a city known for immorality, was obviously impacted by licentious behavior of the citizenry.⁵⁹ Paul wastes no time at the beginning of chapter five to make the Corinthian leadership aware of his knowledge of immorality within the local church (I Corinthians 5:1). Later, in chapter seven, he addresses “matters about which you wrote” (I Corinthians 7:1). Yet, here at the outset of chapter five, he gives the distinct impression that he received a report about the immorality situation in the Corinthian church. The fact of pervasive immorality in first-century Corinth is not news; Corinth had long

⁵⁹ “The most conspicuous landmark at Corinth was the Acro-corinth, a mountain to the south of the city. Reaching a height of 1886 ft (575 m.), it was an ideal situation for a fortress that could control all the trade routes into the Peloponnesus. The temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty, stood on its highest peak. The thousand female prostitutes who served there contributed to Corinth's reputation for immorality. In fact, it is to this evil trade carried on in the name of religion that Strabo, the geographer, ascribed the prosperity of the city. The degree to which Corinth was given over to vice is apparent as early as the time of Aristophanes by the coining of the word *korinthiázomai* (lit. ‘Corinthianize’), meaning ‘practice immorality’; similarly ‘Corinthian girl’ (Gk. *Korinthia Kórē*) designated a prostitute. That the situation continued into Paul's day is evidenced by the evils he attacks in his Corinthian letters.” Donald Madvig, “Corinth” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. I, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 773.

been noted for its licentiousness. However, open immorality among the people of God is another matter. The *New American Standard Version* sub-titles chapter five as “Evil in the Church,”⁶⁰ while the *New Geneva Study Bible* sub-titles the section “Immorality Must be Judged.”⁶¹ That which was being tolerated in the Corinthian church was serious immorality, coupled with litigious disputes (6:1-20). Both had Paul’s undivided attention. Gordon Fee, professor emeritus of Regent College, remarks on Paul’s concern in noting his preoccupation for the church to act while using little ink on the nature of particular sin(s). He writes:

. . . what is most remarkable about 5:1-13 and 6:1-11 is how little time he devotes to the “sins” (and “sinners”). He does threaten the latter with the grave consequences of their wrongdoing, but he is far more exercised in both cases with the *church* and its *attitudes*. The question is, will they pay attention to him on these matters when he is “with them in Spirit and the power of the Lord Jesus,” or will they continue to follow their new prophets who are remaking the gospel into worldly wisdom divorced from truly Christian ethics? (Emphasis added).⁶²

Evidently, the church had tolerant attitudes toward such sin,⁶³ and Paul, with apostolic authority, is very concerned that the church

⁶⁰ The Lockman Foundation, *The New American Standard Bible*, Reference edition, (La Habra, CA: Lockman Foundation, 1973), New Testament section, 258.

⁶¹ Luder Whitlock, Jr., executive director, *The New Geneva Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 1804.

⁶² Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ed. F.F. Bruce, New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 194.

⁶³ “Greco-Roman culture was characterized by what Christians consider to be sexual promiscuity. Among other things, men kept mistresses. Homosexual acts were widely practiced and tolerated. Many pagan religions were tied to temple prostitution. Then, as now, sexual promiscuity is the fruit of paganism – fertility rights, union with the divine, goddess worship, and so forth. Paganism often provides the needed justification to sin against nature.” Kim Riddlebarger, *First*

immediately invoke corrective discipline. The reasons why an expulsion of this member was necessary may be answered in the following outline of I Corinthians, chapter five.

- 5:1-5 For the sake of the brother
- 5:6-8 For the sake of the church
- 5:9-11 For the sake of the witness
- 5:12-13 For the sake of justice ⁶⁴

This outline will serve as a textual guide for the following exposition.

5:1-5

There is not a more clear text to be found in the New Testament which highlights the necessity for the ongoing practice of discipline than I Corinthians 5. The immorality entails an incestuous situation that may have been notable in the world, but never tolerated in the church. The fact that such a problem manifests itself in the church is not significant. As the church labors in the work of evangelism, it is normal that all sorts of people with varying degrees of immorality will be ushered into Christ's fold. The church is a hospital for sin sick sinners who are repentant, but continual spiritual lawlessness may not be tolerated.

While the church is to be a hospital for sinners, and while there should always be sufficient grace for anyone struggling with sin, those who insist upon living as a law unto themselves, and who harden their hearts and are unrepentant when confronted, must be

Corinthians, Series Editor Jon D. Payne, The Lectio Continua: Expository Commentary on the New Testament, (Powder Springs, GA: Tolle Lege Press, 2013), 129.

⁶⁴ James Thorne, *I and II Corinthians Study Guide Outline*. Course No. NT801M, Trinity College of the Bible and Theological Seminary (Newburg, IN, 2000), 38.

removed from the church, with a view to sincere repentance and restoration in the future.⁶⁵

What stood amiss at Corinth was the failure of the elders to invoke corrective discipline. When such discipline is not employed, the holiness distinctive of the church becomes obscured. A. T. Robertson remarks in his excellent Greek studies in the New Testament that:

Corinthian Christians were actually trying to win pagans to Christ and living more loosely than the Corinthian heathen among whom the very word “Corinthianize” meant to live in sexual wantonness and license.⁶⁶

Corinthian Christians had to learn how to live in Corinth while not becoming “Corinthianized”. The same challenge exists for the church today, and elders must help in overcoming this obstacle to holiness.

The apostle Paul heightens the severity of the rebuke by noting that such immorality does not exist even among the gentiles (I Corinthians 5:1). Paul’s remarks are hyperbolic to an extent, but he desires to underscore his outrage that nothing has been done in correcting the situation. “Paul alludes to the gentiles to prod the Christian community to take action instead of allowing one member to shame the entire congregation.”⁶⁷ It is important to notice how sternly Paul spoke about the church’s laxity toward the issue, than he does about the guilt of the individual offender who is never named, even though presumably everyone knew of this person. The behavior of the man in question was certainly condemned by Old Testament law (Lev. 18:8; 20:11; Deut. 22:30; 27:20). In brief, this behavior did

⁶⁵ Riddlebarger, *First Corinthians*, 119.

⁶⁶ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 4 (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1931), 111.

⁶⁷ Simon J. Kistemaker, *I Corinthians*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 156.

not fall into a grey area.⁶⁸ Without holiness, the church of Jesus Christ always brings shame upon itself and Christ (Ephesians 1:4, 5:24-27,32). The people of God are always to be clothed in holiness which distinguishes them from the world (I Peter 1:15-16; 2:9).

The apostle addresses the need for mourning over such sins and the need for expulsion (I Corinthians 5:2). Shockingly, the Corinthians are proud over their creation of a church with no moral and spiritual boundaries. They should be overwrought with grief, but they have become the church of tolerance.⁶⁹ In the strongest terms possible, “In the name of the Lord Jesus” (I Corinthians 5:4) Paul uses “the power of the keys” to decisively underscore that this individual should be turned over to Satan so that through the destruction of the flesh,⁷⁰ he might be saved (I Corinthians 5:5). There is no debate on Paul’s intent for the excommunication of this individual, but there is debate on the precise meaning of Satan’s destroying the flesh.⁷¹ It is doubtful that Paul’s intent was for the literal death of this man’s body, but rather the driving of his soul back to God through remedial correction. Craig Bloomberg, of Denver Seminary, notes the euphemistic sense of the Greek meaning and adds the following comment. He writes:

The Greek reads literally, “so that his flesh may be destroyed.” But when Paul contrasts flesh and spirit, he usually does not refer to body versus soul but to the old versus new natures of a believer (or

⁶⁸ Riddlebarger, *First Corinthians*, 122-123.

⁶⁹ Riddlebarger, *First Corinthians*, 124.

⁷⁰ John Hurd remarks, “The church [is] an island of life in Christ surrounded by a sea of death ruled by Satan.” Cited by Simon J. Kistemaker, “Deliver This Man to Satan (I Cor. 5:5): A Case Study in Church Discipline.” *The Master’s Seminary Journal*, vol. 3, #1 (Spring 92): 43.

⁷¹ For a detailed analysis of Paul’s usage of “deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of his flesh,” see Kistemaker, *I Corinthians*, 160.

to the individual as oriented toward sin versus oriented toward God). In I Timothy 1:20, Paul describes how he handed two believers over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme, so presumably they did not die. And a good case can be made for seeing the repentant sinner of II Corinthians 2:5-11; 7:8-13 as this same individual addressed in I Corinthians 5. In either event, Paul's purpose clearly remains remedial.⁷²

The expulsion's design is for the remedial work of the spirit to take place within the heart of the man in question. Corrective discipline is to be employed for *the sake of the brother*.

5:6-8

The next section of the text concerns the benefit to the church when corrective discipline is employed as well as the detrimental effects to the church when it is absent. If sin is not confronted and dealt with properly, then the integrity of the church is in jeopardy. Paul uses the very strong language of turning the erring member over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh (vs. 5). Richard Pratt, theologian and president of Third Millennium Ministries, clarifies the intent as he writes:

To do this is to exclude the wayward brother from the Christian community and to treat him as "a pagan or a tax collector" as Jesus instructed (Matt. 18:17). It is to deliver him into Satan's sphere of influence (John 12:31; 16:11; Eph. 2:2). Paul used similar terminology to describe other church discipline cases as well (1 Tim. 1:20). The purpose of this action is destruction of the sinful nature. In Scripture Satan occasionally receives permission from God to test and trouble believers by weakening their physical

⁷² Craig Bloomberg, *I Corinthians, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 105-106.

conditions (Job 2:4-6; 2 Cor. 12:7), so it is possible that Paul referred to this type of destruction here.⁷³

Paul employs the leavening metaphor for sin in illustrating the effects of uncorrected wickedness. A little yeast can and does affect the entire lump of dough (I Corinthians 5:6). Paul then ties the metaphor to the Passover feast⁷⁴ in highlighting the holy status of the church. W. Harold Mare comments:

So the command is to get rid of such sin individually and in the church, for the believing community is an unleavened batch of dough, a new creation in Christ, who has been sacrificed as our Passover lamb.⁷⁵

The unleavening is the presence of truth and sincerity (I Corinthians 5:8). The Greek idea of truth is “. . . to be out in the open.”⁷⁶ Paul’s point is not that sin should be displayed in the open without correction, but rather to expose wrong-doing as sin and employ correction when needed. In another epistle, Paul addresses the church of Rome during his introduction by remarking about those who “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18). The Greek root translated as *suppress* is *katakein* meaning “to hold down with

⁷³ Richard L. Pratt, Jr., *I & II Corinthians, Holman New Testament Commentary*, Gen. Ed. Max Anders, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 75.

⁷⁴ “Paul reminded his readers that one aspect of baking of bread without leaven was the removal of all leaven from the home and the deliverance of the Hebrew people from the trials of Egypt (Ex. 12:33-34,39). In much the same way, Paul urged the Corinthians to remember that they had to remove the old leaven of immorality from their church because they lived in the age of Christ’s Passover sacrifice. In this sense, the church is to **keep the Festival** of Passover every day without the old leaven of **malice and wickedness.**” Pratt, 76.

⁷⁵ W. Harold Mare, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 218.

⁷⁶ Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 115.

extreme force.”⁷⁷ The people of the world incarcerate the truth of God every day, but the church is the harbinger of truth in correct doctrine and godly practice. When immorality is present, the church must expose and confront it with the truth of Scripture. The Corinthian church is to be God’s temple in Corinth, but it cannot serve this function effectively with this kind of evil going on in its midst.⁷⁸

The church of Corinth is a model (notwithstanding Paul’s admonitions) of what *not to do* in cases of flagrant sin. Their response is similar to the world in *not* living and seeking for the truth (3 John 1:3). The church must expose the wrong-doing as sin and thus maintain the holiness and honor of Christ.⁷⁹ Corrective discipline must be employed *for the sake of the church*.

5:9-11

The next segment of Paul’s admonition concerns the witness of the church. The apostle refers to a previous letter in making his case to disassociate from the immoral (I Corinthians 5:9). He is not saying that all contact with immoral people should be cut off. The church is to be a light within the world (Matthew 5:14) and not isolated from it. The world is obviously full of immoral people (I Corinthians 5:10). Paul’s concern is rather for the presence of immoral people

⁷⁷ For a concise discussion on the meaning of *katakein* in Paul’s letter to Rome, see R.C. Sproul, *The Gospel of God, an Exposition of Romans* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), 30.

⁷⁸ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 214-215.

⁷⁹ “In not protecting the church from evil, the entire church will be impacted. If the church does not exercise discipline, the signal is sent that no immoral conduct will be regarded as beyond the pale, and the Corinthian church will cease to be a true church (or a healthy church).” Riddlebarger, *First Corinthians*, 127.

living openly within the church. If this problem is not corrected, the world will look like the church, and the church will look like the world. This damages the witness of the church and raises the specter of worldly criticism being leveled against the people of God and Christ Himself. The timelessness of Matthew Henry's remarks are worth noting on this point. He writes:

Christians are quickly noted and noised abroad. We should walk circumspectly, for many eyes are upon us, and many mouths will be opened against us if we fall into any scandalous practice.⁸⁰

Moreover, the text makes the point that the church has no authority over those still within the world (I Corinthians 5:11). However, there is a jurisdiction over those within the fold of Christ. Calvin, in remarking on John Chrysostom's position, writes:

The Christians in Corinth had no jurisdiction over those outside, and they had no power to control their dissolute lives. Therefore it was necessary for them to leave the world, if they wanted to avoid the wicked, those vices they could not cure.⁸¹

To "leave the world" necessitates forsaking the immorality that is common place throughout Adam's descendents (Romans 5:12). Such immorality is to be expected among those still within the world. However, God's regenerating power (John 3:1-5) has renewed a son of Adam, who has now become a son of Christ (Romans 5:13-19). Inasmuch, obedience is required of the son (John 14:15). Paul went so far as to command that immorality not even be named among the saints (Ephesians 5:3-4). His point was not only to abstain from it, but also to avoid the appearance that immorality is tolerated within

⁸⁰ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary*, vol.6 (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Company, n.d.), 528.

⁸¹ John Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, eds. David W. Torrance and Thomas E. Torrance (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960), 113.

the church. Avoid that which is evil (I Peter 2:12; I Thessalonians 5:22).

The desire for obedience to Christ, an expression of devotion to Christ and not the winning of favor, sets the church apart from the world. The church's quest for holiness, though imperfect and in need of the daily grace of God, distinguishes itself from people who still serve the god of this world (II Corinthians 4:4). The people of God, in contrast, should be endeavoring to abstain from every appearance of evil (I Thessalonians 5:22). When they do so, the witness of the church maintains clarity and is not confused with worldly practice. Consequently, the world benefits when the church corrects erring members. The invoking of corrective discipline is therefore also *for the sake of the witness*.

5:12-13

The final section of Paul's remarks on the immorality in the Corinthian church concerns justice. Paul continues his thoughts about jurisdiction, but not from the standpoint of *witness* as much as *justice*. The point of these two verses is that God will judge those outside the church's jurisdiction, but the church must exercise discipline over those who are *within* her jurisdiction. Paul's remarks to "remove the wicked man from among yourselves" (I Corinthians 5:13) has a strong allusion to Moses' comments that are seasoned through the book of Deuteronomy. The removal or expelling of the wicked man is a common theme (Deuteronomy 13:5; 17:7,12; 21:21; 22:21). The notable Greek patristic preacher of the fourth century, Chrysostom, remarks on Paul's intent:

Paul uses an expression taken from the Old Testament, partly because he is hinting that the Corinthians will be great gainers in being freed from a kind of plague and partly to show that this kind

of thing is no novelty but goes right back to the beginning. Even Moses the lawgiver thought that people like this should be cut off, but he did it with greater severity than is shown here. Moses would have had the man stoned, but Paul thinks only of trying to lead him to repentance.⁸²

Sin is always a plague because others may become infected as well as affected and others desensitized with a licentious spirit. Much damage to the Bride of Christ is done when such problems are not carefully rectified. In addition, Chrysostom is correct in not only highlighting the need for expulsion but also for pastoral concern so that the wayward may be led back through repentance (Matthew 18:15).

So then, Paul closes this portion of the letter by requiring the need for justice. Why must corrective discipline be employed? It is accomplished for the sake of the brother, for the sake of the church, for the sake of the witness, and finally, for the sake of justice. All four motifs may be found in this brief fifth chapter of I Corinthians. When discipline is not enacted, all four concerns will suffer. The “prince of the expositors”, G. Campbell Morgan, sums up this section of Paul’s remarks as he ably offers a warning to the church today:

. . . there are times when I think that in the church, discipline is almost lost, and its loss weakens the testimony of the church, and gives a false sense of security to the wrongdoer. The church has no right to tolerate evil on the ground of broad-mindedness. If there is a definite evil within the church, the church is called upon to exercise discipline, and put outside her fellowship those guilty of the sin. The history of the church shows that the church pure is the church powerful; and the church patronized and tolerant towards

⁸² Gerold Bray, ed. *1-2 Corinthians, New Testament*, vol. 7, gen. ed. Thomas C. Oden, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1999), 49.

evil is the church puerile and paralyzed. There is great necessity for the exercise of discipline.⁸³

Jesus did not intend for the church to become paralyzed toward evil in its midst. The EPC and all orthodox Evangelical churches must take Paul's remarks to heart. It is far better to have the disdain of the world for correcting wrong-doing than its approval in allowing ungodliness to exist without correction.

II Corinthians 2:5-11

This section of Paul's second letter to Corinth concerns an individual who has been punished through corrective discipline. Commentators are mixed on whether this man is the same one mentioned in I Corinthians 5:1-13.⁸⁴ This may be the case, but the text will not allow for certainty. However, what is noteworthy is that the text reveals an individual who has been disciplined (probably excommunicated) and is now ready to be restored (v. 7). Paul's concern is that the penitent's sorrow not be excessive (v. 7). The apostle continues his thought by encouraging the church to reaffirm its love for him (v. 8). Paul is stern on the point of forgiveness. In I Corinthians 5, he is just as stern in directing that discipline be employed, but in this section of II Corinthians 2, he wants to insure that the church is not overly severe. There must be a balance between

⁸³ G. Campbell Morgan, *The Corinthian Letters of Paul* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1946), 84.

⁸⁴ Calvin is resolute in his position that this man is the same as the one referenced in I Corinthians 5. See Calvin's, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, New Testament Commentaries, eds. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 29. For a listing of the alternatives, see Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary, II Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1997), 80-83.

severity and graciousness. Calvin remarks that the text should be carefully noted . . .

. . . for it teaches with what impartiality and mildness the church's discipline is to be exercised in order that it may not be unduly severe. Severity is required in order that wicked men may not be made more bold by being allowed to go unpunished – for this is rightly said to be an enticement to sin. But on the other hand there is a danger that a man who is disciplined will fall into despair so that the church must practice moderation and be ready to pardon anyone as soon as it is sure that he has sincerely repented.⁸⁵

Paul is not contradicting himself. Severity and graciousness do go hand in hand, depending upon the presence of repentance in the heart of the disciplined.

II Corinthians 2:9 represents interesting support for the case that Paul's thoughts concern the same individual mentioned earlier in I Corinthians 5. Paul had chastised the church for failing to take action and now he appears to be suddenly changing from a severe judge to a defender. Richard Pratt makes the following points:

Apparently, having once decided to discipline, some people within the church were determined not to grant relief or restoration. But Paul insisted that the church **ought to forgive and comfort** the man they had disciplined. Why? Paul wanted to protect the church from too much grief. He did not want the man to be **overwhelmed by excessive sorrow**.

Sorrow should not always be avoided. In fact, it often leads to repentance. Even so, once repentance has occurred, a serious danger lurks for those who are not restored to good standing in the church: they run the risk of too much sorrow.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ John Calvin, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, 29.

⁸⁶ Pratt, *I & II Corinthians*, 310.

Calvin believed the disciplined man of II Corinthians 2 is the same one who needed discipline in I Corinthians 5. With this in mind, he writes:

. . . such an impression might greatly detract from Paul's authority but his answer is that he has now got what he wanted, satisfaction has been made to him so that now his anger must give way to clemency. Now that their carelessness has been corrected there is no reason why they should not show mercy and restore the man who is prostrate and cast down.⁸⁷

Whether the man in each book is one or the same remains a secondary issue. The salient point is that the apostle has now given two admonitions with regard to corrective discipline within the letters to Corinth; most importantly, corrective discipline is imposed when required (I Corinthians 5), and discipline is relaxed when repentance has had its effect within the heart of the sinner (II Corinthians 2). Herein lies normal practice for churches of Christ who serve Him throughout the world.

Verse 10 introduces several interesting points: 1) First of all, Paul clearly wants forgiveness to reign within Christ's body once corrective discipline has produced a profitable result. To this end, Paul is satisfied that corrective discipline has been successful. He places the matter before the "face of Christ," as the churches of Christ must do as well (v. 10); and 2) Secondly, Paul notes the authority of the church of Corinth to forgive and he will follow suit. Herein is an example of the "power of the keys" (Matthew 16:19; 18:18-19) being employed by apostolic ordained leadership. "Surprisingly, Paul makes no mention of divine forgiveness, which implies that the community's forgiveness conveys it (see Matthew

⁸⁷ Ibid, 30.

18:18).”⁸⁸ As noted earlier in this chapter, the church has great power and authority in dealing with sin within its ranks.

The power of “binding” and “loosing,” of “forgiving” and “retaining,” had only been given to the apostles representatively and collectively, and therefore to the Christian church (John 20:23) in its corporate capacity.⁸⁹

What the apostles have received is now operative within the collective church. Once again, elders are endowed with such authority in carrying out their responsibility to oversee those within their charge.

Finally, Paul warns that forgiveness in the face of repentance is absolutely necessary for the additional reason of the devil’s schemes (v. 10). In I Corinthians, the church was being admonished to turn the sinner over to Satan (I Corinthians 5). Now, in II Corinthians, he is warning the church to be wary of the evil one if forgiveness is *not* forthcoming. J. Carl Laney notes the severity of the situation by including an amusing anecdote. He writes:

Since the Corinthians are fully aware of Satan’s wicked designs, they ought to forgive, comfort, and reaffirm love for the sinning brother. Failure to do so is to give a victory to Satan. It would be like Roy Riegel’s history-making touchdown in the 1929 Rose Bowl – he scored for the opposing team!⁹⁰

Laney is correct. The church of Jesus Christ is certainly not in the business of scoring points for the opposition. Restoration of an offending brother should be cause for great celebration. Jay Adams

⁸⁸ David E. Garland, *II Corinthians*, vol. 29 of The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 129.

⁸⁹ H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, editors, *Corinthians*, vol. 19 of The Pulpit Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), bk. 2:38.

⁹⁰ J. Carl Laney, *A Guide to Church Discipline* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1985), 99.

believes that restoration of the offending brother must be as public as the dismissal. Jesus' remarks concerning the prodigal son include a great celebration once the wayward returned home. A festive robe, ring and sandals were given to the prodigal son in conjunction with an embrace and warm kiss (Luke 15:21-23). Consequently, there was great joy initiated once the son returned home. Yet, the parable also reflects the eldest son's complaining over the prodigal's behavior and welcome home. Subsequently, he refused to enter into the festive activities surrounding the younger brother's return. The elder son was admonished and the church must take heart. "Restoration of an offender to the flock is a time for rejoicing and ought to be made such."⁹¹ This is the joy of corrective love. The end result, in the case of the offending brother, is his complete restoration into fellowship. The church of Jesus Christ is in the business of restoration. However, it should also be noted that depending on the nature of the offense, fellowship is always granted, but reinstatement to office may not. If a minister, for example, was involved in adultery or some other scandalous practice, the restoration to a ministry office may not be prudent for him or the church. D. A. Carson remarks on the point that there is great joy when the sinner returns from spiritual ruin:

But that does not necessarily mean that the Christian leader who has been restored to the Lord, and perhaps restored to church membership and participation in the Lord's Table (if we assume that he or she has been excommunicated) should also be restored to Christian leadership. Not every Christian in good standing in the church is qualified for every office in the church.⁹²

In regard to a minister, the *EPC Book of Discipline* is specific. The document states:

⁹¹ Jay E. Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, 96.

⁹² D.A. Carson, "Perspectives on Church Discipline," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* (Winter 2000): 88.

When a Minister is removed from office, his pastoral relationship shall be dissolved; but when he is suspended, it shall be left to the discretion of the Presbytery whether the sanction shall include the dissolution of the pastoral relationship.⁹³

It is a safeguard for the church that the court which ordains and oversees is the authority in matters of restoration as well as discipline. The decision to resume ministry in the case of a minister, elder, deacon or Sunday school teacher, etc. rests with the session or presbytery.

In concluding the study of I Corinthians 2:5-11, the following points should be remembered. First, this text provides a clear example of corrective discipline in the working process at the time of Paul's writing. Corrective discipline was obviously a part of the first century church. (See also I Corinthians 5.) Secondly, the "power of the keys" to bind and loose were in evidence at Corinth. Paul was not present when the discipline was lifted and probably not present when it was imposed. Church authority was continuing to be administered through the officers of the church. Ordained leadership was being encouraged to use the power of the keys. Thirdly, the church of Corinth, as well as the body of Christ today, must be careful not to be overly harsh with its sanctions or maintain them longer than necessary. Balance between enforcement and forgiveness must be maintained. Punishment should lead to shaping of the spirit and not its breaking. William Barclay adds some helpful anecdotal remarks about Martin Luther in this regard. He summarizes well the goal of the discipline no matter what era it was needed. He writes:

⁹³ *EPC Book of Discipline*, 10.7.94. The *EPC Book of Discipline* provides extensive procedures for the proper reinstatement of the disciplined offender. Great care is given to the reinstatement that it be as public as the sanction imposed by the court. See *EPC Book of Discipline*, 96-97.

Luther could scarcely bear to pray the Lord's Prayer because his own father had been so stern that the word father painted a picture of grim terror to him. He used to say, "Spare the rod and spoil the child – yes; but, beside the rod keep an apple, to give the child when he has done well." Punishment should encourage and not discourage. In the last analysis, this can happen only when we make it clear that, even when we are punishing a person, we still believe in him.⁹⁴

This is the goal of all corrective discipline. Correction should encourage the believer to pursue Christ more fully in the given area of weakness which resulted in discipline in the first place. Members must be taught that such encouragement may be needed from time to time. It is a benefit and not a detriment.

II Thessalonians 3:6-15

The apostle Paul now provides another operative picture of corrective discipline within his second letter to the Thessalonians. Paul sees a developing problem in brothers who are leading an unruly life (v.6). Previously, in his first letter, Paul had addressed those who were *disorderly* and would not work (I Thessalonians 4:11ff, 5:14). Evidently, his admonishment was not heeded. The adverb in use, *disorderly*, is from the same root employed in I Thessalonians 5:14.⁹⁵ Perhaps because of their belief in the nearness of the second coming, they felt that menial labor was insignificant. However, Paul had specifically taught on this concern earlier, for he notes that these brethren were not following "the tradition which you received from us" (v. 6). Paul desires that the Thessalonian church

⁹⁴ William Barclay, *The Letter to the Corinthians*, Rev. Ed. Daily Bible Study Series (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 182.

⁹⁵ See Leon Morrice, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, gen. ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 250-253.

should follow his example (v. 7), and work to sustain themselves and not be a burden to anyone (v. 8-9). The expression “eat anyone’s bread” (v. 8) carries the idea of everyday work. The insightful Leon Morrice notes:

“To eat bread” is evidently a Semitism. It means not simply “get a meal” or even “meals,” but rather “get a living” (cf. Gen. 3:19; Amos 7:12, etc). Paul does not mean that he had never accepted a hospitable invitation, but that he had not depended on other people for his means of livelihood.⁹⁶

Paul makes the point that brothers within the body are not to be imposing upon others. His own life was an example of being diligent and purposeful.

The apostle then commanded the church to withdraw from such brethren in verse 6. Then, in verse 10, he insists that those who do not work will not eat. The graciousness of the church, which is geared toward help and compassion (Romans 12:9-13) should not be extended to those who will not care for themselves. “From a very early time, denying food to the lazy was a traditional form of discipline in the church.”⁹⁷ This matter of “no work for food” must be corrected, and Paul wants to insure that the church understands the value of ordained labor (Genesis 3:19). The former pastor and beloved Bible teacher of Moody Church in Chicago, H. A. Ironside, remarks:

These men to whom Paul refers were simply ignoring the divine plan, for honest labor has a very prominent place in Christianity. Every Christian mechanic or professional man knows that he is expected to give his very best service in return for the remuneration

⁹⁶ Ibid, 253.

⁹⁷ Robert L. Thomas, *First and Second Thessalonians*, vol. 11 in *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 334.

he receives. It is God who has ordained that men should support themselves by their labor. When men are not employed properly there is always the danger that they will busy themselves in matters in which they ought not to interfere. So they become a nuisance and are used of Satan to disturb the peace of the church.⁹⁸

When men are not gainfully employed, particularly because of their own doing, they can become conduits of Satan in stirring up dissention (v. 11). Consequently, Paul commanded these people to secure their own jobs and eat the fruit of their own labor (vs. 12). To not labor for your own sustenance indicates the curse of God. Calvin remarks on this point:

In the Psalm we read, *thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be* (Ps. 128:2), and in the Proverb, *the hand of the diligent maketh rich* (Prov. 10:4). It is certain, therefore, that indolent and idle conduct are cursed by God.⁹⁹

If Calvin is right about the *curse*, then all the more the church should exhibit a proactive stance in dealing with discipline cases. Jesus said that He came that we might have life and have it in abundance (John 10:10). This is not a reference to the insidious health and wealth gospel¹⁰⁰ so prevalent today, but many Christians, because of disobedience, do not experience the abundance and peace that comes with their salvation. They live far below the measure of fulfillment that Christ purchased for them. All the more, the church should look after these brethren by correcting the faults of their way.

⁹⁸ H.A. Ironside, *First and Second Thessalonians* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, Inc., 1976), 120.

⁹⁹ John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul to the Romans and Thessalonians*, vol. 8, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, editors David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 418.

¹⁰⁰ For a comprehensive look at the errors of the health and wealth rhetoric, see Michael Horton, editor, *The Agony of Deceit: What Some TV Preachers are Really Teaching* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990).

The point that is so perplexing about the behavior of these members is that their sin does not appear as serious as fornication, adultery, or even theft. Consequently, dealing with this problem is easily forgotten among long “to do” lists of pastors and elders. However, their sin of idleness not only creates problems for them, but also the church. Hendriksen envisions them as he writes about their typical day in thinking of the Lord’s return while not working:

It is easy to picture these persons – there were some, not many – laying down their tools, running from one “brother” to another with fantastic stories about Christ’s immediate Return – the “day” had already arrived! – making extravagant claims for the truthfulness of their thrilling tales, returning home without the day’s wages to buy food, then attempting to sponge on others or even on “the benevolence-fund” of the church, meddling in the affairs of the authorities, etc.¹⁰¹

Hendriksen’s portrait is probably an accurate portrayal. Even though their sin may not appear as dark as immorality, it still needed correction.

Finally, Paul exhorts them to work (v. 12) and the church to withdraw if their behavior does not change (v. 14). It is hoped that such withdrawal will lead to shame and create the impetus to adjust their behavior. Finally, Paul admonishes the church to remember the disciplined as your brother (v. 15). The goal of discipline is always restoration and not censorious criticism. Anglican theologian Ronald A. Ward remarks:

Paul wanted them to keep that in mind as they admonished him. This is very important. Unbrotherly criticism may do more harm

¹⁰¹ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), bk. 1:203.

than good. Even admonition can be expressed in a spirit of love. Perhaps the best comment is Galatians 6:1: Mend him!¹⁰²

Ward's use of Galatians 6:1 is a helpful reminder. Paul remarks to the church of Galatia:

Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, *restore* such a one in a spirit of gentleness; {each one} looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. (Emphasis added)

Once again, the *mending* or *restoring* motif must not be lost in any judicial process. Love of the brother is of utmost importance. Paul's concern in Galatia, as well as Thessalonica, is “. . . not just with *what* is to be done in such a difficult situation, but also with *how* it is to be done” (Emphasis added).¹⁰³

Moreover, such discipline must involve the entire church, and not just the elder, if the correction process is to have the desired effect. Keep in mind that this letter was written to the entire congregation of Thessalonica. All must participate. Consequently, the entire church must be educated on the whys and hows of corrective church discipline.

It is important to understand that this text is not describing excommunication, although some commentators have this view.¹⁰⁴ What is evident from Paul's remarks is a stern admonition.¹⁰⁵ This is

¹⁰² Ronald A. Ward, *Commentary on First and Second Thessalonians* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1980), 172.

¹⁰³ Mark Dever, “Biblical Church Discipline,” 33.

¹⁰⁴ Calvin takes the position that Paul is referring to excommunication. See Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul to the Romans and Thessalonians*, 422.

¹⁰⁵ The *EPC Book of Discipline* provides for such a censure. “Admonition is the formal reproof of an offender by a church court, warning of his guilt and danger, and encouraging him to be more careful and watchful in the future.” *Book of Discipline*, Section 10-3, 93.

an intermediate form of discipline which may be a precursor to greater discipline in the future. Hendriksen notes:

This man is not being excommunicated, at least not yet and probably never. That will depend on his own subsequent behavior . . . To be sure, it may develop into something analogous to the stern disciplinary measure demanded in the fifth chapter of I Corinthians, but that stage has not been reached here.¹⁰⁶

In closing, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit has provided another informative glimpse of corrective church discipline being practiced in the first century. The grievous nature of the described sin does not appear as serious as those noted earlier in the Corinthian letters, but idleness to the point of not providing for one's own family is deemed by Paul as ungodly. Consequently, corrective discipline is for heinous sins, as well as those of lesser moral significance. The faithful church member is to be in pursuit of holiness in all conduct (I Peter 1:14-16) while the church is called upon to teach and discipline (II Timothy 4:2).

I Timothy 1:18-20

This text is the first of three which Paul directs to his young leaders, Timothy and Titus. Both were young disciples of Paul and set apart with apostolic authority to appoint and train men to shepherd the church (I Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Paul offers guidance and support to these young elders in caring for newly developed churches. His words are full of wisdom and encouragement for them to fulfill their ministry (2 Timothy 4:5; Titus 2:1; 3:8).

¹⁰⁶ Hendriksen, *Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews*, bk. 1:206.

The remarks of Paul to Timothy, within this first letter, are full of affection as he directs the young leader in how to deal with various situations. As the first chapter closes, Paul tells his young *son* to fight the good fight in accordance with previous prophecies made over him (v. 18). He then concerns himself with those who have shipwrecked their faith. They did not keep the faith and a good conscience (v. 19). Paul makes known who he has in mind by naming two individuals (Hymenaeus and Alexander). He states that he has turned them over to Satan (v. 20). These two individuals were first century heretics and perhaps the same ones described as false teachers in verses 6-11. Hymenaeus is, apparently, referred to again in Paul's second letter (II Timothy 2:17) in conjunction with his theological error.¹⁰⁷ Consequently, this discipline case concerns heresy and not immorality or idleness as noted previously in Paul's letters to Corinth and Thessalonica. Purity in doctrine also matters. Philip Ryken passionately makes this point:

Paul's command is a reminder never to take sound doctrine for granted. The people of God have never been able simply to rest in the faith; they have always had to fight for it. This good fight began in the Old Testament. By the time Moses came down from the mountain, the children of Israel were already worshipping the golden calf (Ex. 32). Joshua had to confront them with the choice between serving God and serving the gods (Josh. 24). Elijah was outnumbered by the prophets of Baal, 450 to 1 (1 Kings 18). Although not all God's prophets faced the same odds, they all faced the same enemy. Like Ezekiel, they had to oppose "the prophets who see false visions and who give lying divinations" (Ezek. 13:9).

The warfare was resumed in the New Testament. The preponderance of Jesus' teaching contradicts the false theology of the Pharisees. Every New Testament epistle is concerned with

¹⁰⁷ II Timothy 2:17 reveals that the error was in teaching that the resurrection was past, and it caused unrest within the church. For a fuller discussion on the theological error, see Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Pastoral Epistles* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 93-94.

sound doctrine. Apparently, there were as many enemies inside the early church as there were outside.¹⁰⁸

The men's faith had become shipwrecked, i.e. their personal faith or the corrupting of the Christian faith in general. The Greek structure is imprecise, but both views are significant. If the true doctrine of *the faith* is somehow corrupted, then the legitimacy of one's *personal faith* is in question. This is particularly true if the conscience is being violated in the propagation of the error. Commentator, D. Edmund Hiebert, makes the case for both as he interacts with other expositors:

“The faith” may mean that their own personal faith was wrecked. “The Christian teacher who does not practice what he preaches will find his faith will fail him” (Lock). But more probably “the faith” is objective and means the true doctrine of the Gospel. “The yielding to sin dulls the perception of truth, and opens the way for the influx of error” (Harvey). In reality both things actually occur. “Disaster falls alike on ‘faith’ and ‘the faith,’ when a good conscience is rejected or rather ejected” (Pope).¹⁰⁹

A “good conscience” is rejected (v. 19). The Greek sense of the term is *thrust away* or *push away*.¹¹⁰ Luther's remarks on the point of conscience are instructive on this matter. As he stood before the dignitaries of the church who commanded him to recant his reformation teaching, he notes, “. . . to go against conscience is neither right nor safe.”¹¹¹ Hymenaeus and Alexander blew right

¹⁰⁸ Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 48-49.

¹⁰⁹ D. Edmond Hiebert, *First Timothy*, Everyman's Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1957), 46-47.

¹¹⁰ Hendriksen provides a complete discussion of the term's use and possible metaphor meaning with “shipwrecked.” See Hendriksen, *Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews*, bk. 2:86.

¹¹¹ Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1950), 185.

through their conscience which is designed of God to be a safety net for the soul.

As a result of Hymenaeus' and Alexander's errors, corrective discipline was needed. Paul uses familiar language in administering correction to them – “Whom I have delivered over to Satan . . .” (v. 20). The same expression is used by Paul in correcting the situation at Corinth (I Corinthians 5:5,13). Corrective discipline is once again in view. In this case, Paul's remarks are not of admonition (II Thessalonians 3:6-15), but of excommunication. Homer Kent, of Grace Theological Seminary, soberly writes:

Excommunication from the church places the offender back in the world which is Satan's domain. Hence to deliver unto Satan can be understood as removal back to the world, and this accords with other scriptural statements. “We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the evil one” (1 John 5:19, ASV).¹¹²

A removal of these heretical teachers does three things: 1) It protects the church from error which, if not corrected, leads others astray; 2) If false teachers are allowed to continue in their error, then they will continue in the delusion that they are correct – removal dispels the delusion; and 3) As a result of expulsion into Satan's domain, the disciplined persons have been confronted with the truth and are subject to great buffeting from the evil one. If they are of the elect, such discipline will eventually drive them back into Christ's fold.

The EPC has taken steps to guard against heretical instruction by its teaching elders. All ministers must sign a “Reaffirmation of Faith”¹¹³ annually and submit it to their respective Presbytery. The

¹¹² Kent, Jr., 94.

¹¹³ The document reads, “Do you continue to believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the Word of God, totally trustworthy, and fully inspired by the Holy Spirit and the supreme, final and only infallible rule of faith and

second court of the church (the Presbytery) has the power to investigate theological error and, if necessary, remove the offending minister.

I Timothy 5:19-20

This section of the letter is written as general instruction to Timothy, while the aforementioned missive concerns actual church members. This instruction concerns the disciplining of elders. Two or three witnesses are required for a legitimate accusation to be brought against an elder (v. 19).¹¹⁴ “This was a standing principle of Jewish legal procedure (Deut. 19:15), and was evidently valued in the apostolic church: cf. Mt. 28:16; Jn. 8:17; 2 Cor. 13:1.”¹¹⁵ What is of great interest is Paul’s concern that elders may not even be accused of a sin unless multiple witnesses step forward with testimony. “Two or three witnesses are required, not for a conviction, but before an accusation can be entertained at all.”¹¹⁶ The concern of Paul is for elders not to be subject to slander or gossip made by ill-natured people. The malice of men must be guarded against. Calvin remarks that:

practice? Yes or No. Are you still in accord with the Essentials of the Faith, the Catechisms, the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Book of Order of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church? Yes or No.” Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Midwest Presbytery Annual Review of the terms of call, Midwest Presbytery Form 01/05/05.

¹¹⁴ John Stott adds, “Adherence to this biblical principle would have silenced many a malicious talebearer and saved many pastors from unjust criticism and unnecessary suffering.” John Stott, *Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 138.

¹¹⁵ John Normal Davidson Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1963), 126.

¹¹⁶ Ryken, *1 Timothy*, 226.

. . . none are more exposed to slanders and insults than godly teachers. This comes not only from the difficulty of their duties, which are so great that sometimes they sink under them, or stagger or halt or take a false step, so that wicked men find many occasions of finding fault with them; but added to that, even when they do all their duties correctly and commit not even the smallest error, they never avoid a thousand criticisms.¹¹⁷

The Great Reformer is very protective of those who answer the call to teach Christ's sheep. He is, perhaps, somewhat overly protective, but his underlying concern should be heeded. Obviously, Paul has the same concern as he writes to Timothy.

The *EPC Book of Discipline* does not provide that accusations must be brought by two or three. However, courts of the church are required to thoroughly investigate a charge¹¹⁸ and determine any bias on the part of the accuser.¹¹⁹ Additionally, more than one witness is required in order to prove an allegation that is set forth in a formal indictment.¹²⁰

In verse 20, Paul instructs that the rebuke be made public.¹²¹ This may appear overly harsh, but leaders are called to higher

¹¹⁷ John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, and the Epistles of Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, 263.

¹¹⁸ *EPC, Book of Discipline*, Section 6-1, 84.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, Section 6-6, 84-85.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, Section 8-10, 89.

¹²¹ The NASV rendering of I Timothy 5:20 favors a reading that would suggest if the elder continues in sin, perhaps after a rebuke, then rebuke him publicly. However, the NIV renders the verse as "Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly . . ." and indicates that sin of the minister is serious and should require public condemnation. "Those who sin" is a present participle and may be translated as "are sinning." The NIV translation is preferable. Ralph Earle favors the public nature of the rebuke being made before the elders (Session or Presbytery) instead of the congregation. See Ralph Earle, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, editor Frank E. Gaebelien, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 381.

standards and judged accordingly (James 3:1). Authors R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell write:

This may sound cold and unloving, but it must be done, for the sake of the church – “so that the others may take warning” – both minister and congregation. This is where today’s church has lost its nerve. Leaders sin with impunity – and then move on to other churches to do the same thing. We must determine not to fall to such a loss of courage but rather to lovingly confront those who are doing wrong. A lack of fortitude is not loving but unloving – unloving of Christ, unloving of the church, unloving of the offender.¹²²

The grace of Christ must reign in all the determinations of the church. No discipline can be employed gratuitously, and it must be invoked with impartially (v. 21). Conversely, the elders addressed by Paul are corrected in the presence of the church, which benefits from such grave situations, for “. . .the rest also may be fearful of sinning” (v. 20).

So then, Paul gives instructions to shield elders from bias and unsubstantiated accusations, while further noting that leaders are not immune to corrective discipline when sin is present.¹²³ Moreover, I Timothy 5:19-20 is further proof that corrective discipline is a major concern on Paul’s mind. He is now passing along this concern to Timothy, who must take up the cause (v. 21).

¹²² R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *First and Second Timothy and Titus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 133.

¹²³ The *EPC Book of Discipline* states “No Minister should be shielded from discipline or lightly sanctioned on account of his office. Neither should actions for serious charges be received against him on slight grounds.” Section 1-2, 77.

Titus 3:9-11

This letter is similar to those written to Timothy, Paul's other young disciple in the faith. Once again, a glimpse of instruction on corrective discipline is in view.

Paul commands Titus to shun foolish controversies and disputes over the law (v. 9). Such disputes are centered on Jewish heretical teachings which were circulated on the Island of Crete. Titus is instructed to *shun* them. "Quite literally, it means 'to turn oneself about' for the purpose of avoiding . . . the tense points to a continuing attitude."¹²⁴ Titus is instructed to reject this factious person (v. 10). The Greek term, *hairetikos*, is only found here in the New Testament. Homer Kent adds important background information on the term and its relevance to schism in the church.

The term *hairetikos* is based on a root meaning "choice." In the literal and original sense, a heretic was one who makes a choice which pleases him, independent of other considerations. In the realm of doctrine, a heretic came to denote one who chose to follow doctrine contrary to that of the church. From this basis arose the meaning of one who caused dissension and division, gathering around himself others of like persuasion and thus causing schism in the church.¹²⁵

As a result of this factious spirit, Paul tells Titus to reject this man after a first and second warning (v. 10). The Greek term for *reject* may also be rendered as "*have nothing further to do with.*" This is not the technical term for excommunication.¹²⁶ However, the context

¹²⁴ D. Edmond Hiebert, *Titus and Philemon, Everyman's Bible Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1985), 74.

¹²⁵ Kent, Jr., 237.

¹²⁶ C.K. Barrett notes that the term's usage does not indicate excommunication. See C.K. Barrett, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Outreach Publications, 1986), 146.

would clearly indicate that Paul's intent is expulsion. Hendriksen's view is preferable. He remarks:

The expression "Have nothing further to do with" must be taken in the sense of refuse, reject (cf. I Tim. 5:11; II Tim. 2:23). There seems to be a reference here to Matt. 18:15-17. Official exclusion from church-membership is probably indicated.¹²⁷

Paul also instructs the church of Rome to turn away from those who cause dissension (Romans 16:17). Factions in the body of Christ are serious problems in view of the Scripture's concern for oneness (John 17:21-23; Romans 12:16). However, factions over doctrine are even more problematic in that they not only divide, but also lead to theological error. Such error leads to a faulty belief system.

Finally, Paul notes that the heretic is *perverted* (v. 11). The *New International Version* uses *distorted* while the *New King James Version* translation is *warped*. All carry the idea of ruin. If someone persists in theological error and stirs up factions in the process, then he is without hope. Paul buttresses this contention by noting that the man is *self-condemned* (v. 11). There is no point in continuing to admonish this person, for correction is bouncing off of him like a tennis ball skipping across asphalt. Consequently, the man is ruined as in a demolished building. Calvin adds this comment: "The metaphor is taken from a building which is not merely destroyed in some part, but completely demolished so that there is no chance of its being repaired."¹²⁸ This is, indeed, the end for those who refuse corrective discipline. They know better (self-condemned) but

¹²⁷ William Hendriksen, *Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews*, bk. 2:395.

¹²⁸ John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, 388.

continue in their sin and, in doing so, lead others astray. He is, in effect, self-excommunicated.¹²⁹

In conclusion, Paul leaves no doubt that discipline is a major concern on his mind as he writes to the young disciple Titus. It is a similar theme which was communicated to Timothy (I Timothy 1:18-20; 5:19-20). If people forsake the world in turning to Christ through the gospel, then they must be held accountable for their professions of faith in acknowledging the Lordship of Christ (Romans 10:9-10). Lordship always carries with it the idea of submission and obedience. Moreover, men and women who profess Christ's lordship must be called to account for heretical teaching and ungodly living. Those who call them to account, ultimately, are the office holders (elders) of the church. The church must maintain truth in the face of false doctrine by convicting heretics of their error while at the same time it must build up its members through teaching and encouragement and, when necessary, exclude the wayward from the commonwealth (church). Thus, Barrett remarks about the discipline motif found in the pastoral epistles. He writes, "It is primarily, though not exclusively, through those who hold office within the church that the gospel is proclaimed, taught, and defended, and Christian discipline is administered."¹³⁰ The elder must do no less today than what was expected of Paul's young disciples Timothy and Titus. Elders must initiate oversight, and if necessary corrective discipline, concerning all who are a part of their charge.

¹²⁹ See Maximus of Turin's comments in Peter Gorday, ed. *1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, New Testament*, vol. 9, gen. ed. Thomas C. Oden, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000), 307.

¹³⁰ Barrett, 30.

It is quite evident that corrective discipline is, indeed, an important and vital biblical concern. This is why Jesus mentions corrective discipline most emphatically to five of the seven churches of Asia.¹³¹ One wonders how much ink would be used if a similar letter was written to the church of North America.¹³² Don Kistler of Soli Deo Gloria Publishing¹³³ laments about a pastor friend who attempts to challenge his church for the need of corrective discipline. He remarks:

When he first began to introduce the idea of discipline to his church, he was told by one man, “I don’t know of one church in America that does this.” One of his elders said, “You can’t do this. You will empty the place. They (the congregation) will never stand for it.”¹³⁴

Congregations may not stand, but ordained eldership must take its stand. Discipline must always be administered graciously. Yet,

¹³¹ Ephesus is praised for not enduring evil men and testing apostles (Revelations 2:1-7); Pergamon failed to correct the error of Baalam and Nicolaitan teaching (Revelation 2:14-16); Thyatira failed to discipline Jezebel for her false teaching and immorality (Revelation 2:19-21); Sardis was rebuked for *soiled garments*. This was an indication of uncorrected sin within the body (Revelation 3:1-4); Laodicia was rebuked for lukewarmness. Uncorrected sin made them *poor and blind and naked*. Jesus tells the church to repent; for whom he loves he will reprove and discipline (Revelation 3:14-19). The elders of each church would have been responsible for the correction of these doctrinal and moral errors.

¹³² In addition, also note Paul’s stern remarks to the Galatian church for doctrinal perversion (Gal. 1). Paul uses the strongest language, “Let him be accursed,” in correcting false teachers who have perverted “justification by faith alone.” The elders of the Galatian church would be responsible to set the doctrinal position of the church in order. To not do so would lead to great error.

¹³³ Soli Deo Gloria Publishing specializes in reprinting classical Reformed theological literature. It is widely known in Reformed and Presbyterian churches and recently was acquired by Ligonier ministries, another Reformed para-church ministry.

¹³⁴ Don Kistler, *Church Discipline* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Ministries, 1991), audio cassette.

graciousness should not stand in the way of its employment. The elders must take their stand.

The EPC has exemplary constitutional documents to provide guidance and direction on the methods of and reasons for church discipline. Yet, as chapter one of this discourse has shown, the church lacks the will to consistently exercise and employ corrective principles. These constitutional documents were crafted, in large part, upon the same biblical content that is examined in this chapter. Chapter three will examine the Reformed and Presbyterian heritage (also underpinned on this same biblical content) and reveal that it is resolute on the use of corrective discipline.

Chapter Three

Reformed and Presbyterian Heritage – Calvin & Knox

The Reformed Heritage and Corrective Discipline

Orthodox Presbyterianism breathes the teaching and influence of the Reformation Period (1500/1600). While it is true that all Protestant churches derive their genesis from this period of time, some Evangelical denominations rely more heavily upon the Reformation's theological and ecclesiastical doctrines. This is the case for Presbyterian bodies that remain orthodox and committed to the inerrancy of Scripture.

Many great Reformers may be cited, such as Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, and John Knox. Each, together with others, sought to correct errors through Protestant reforms that had crept into the Roman Catholic Church. Corrective discipline became part of the reforming agenda for many Protestant leaders. Both Zwingli and Luther were concerned with corrective discipline, but Luther did not develop nor employ a consistent form of corrective discipline. He frustratingly acknowledged people would not “. . . allow themselves to be disciplined.”¹ Yet, despite his hesitation to enact corrective discipline, “. . . he did sporadically and almost recklessly practice it [formal discipline] himself and called upon other Lutheran leaders to do the same.”² Luther viewed the keys of

¹ Cited in Marlin Jeschke, *Disciplining the Brother* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1972), 29.

² *Ibid*, 29.

Matthew 18 as a wonderful gift of Christ to His church. Both keys (opening the gospel door and closing the discipline door) are viewed by him as necessary for Christendom and thanks for them should be offered often.³ He more than understood the need for the church to use these keys regularly and not simply have them become lost in a deep pocket. He states:

For the dear Man, the faithful Bishop of our souls, Jesus Christ, is well aware that His beloved Christians are frail, that the devil, the flesh, and the world would tempt them unceasingly and in many ways and that at times they would fall into sin. Therefore, He has given us this remedy, the key which binds, so that we might not remain too confident in our sins, arrogant, barbarous, and without God, and the key which looses, that we should not despair in our sins.⁴

Even though this was his desire, corrective discipline was not as high on his reforming agenda as other Protestant concerns. As a result, the Lutheran Church did not develop a structured approach for the concern of church discipline. However, the Reformed were much bolder. For example, Zwingli believed that Christian magistrates functioned as elders with the power to enact corrective discipline over Christ's flock. "He left the right of excommunication to magistrates, as the First and Second Helvetic Confession point out."⁵ Zwingli, along with Calvin and Knox, were very much concerned with the development of a systematic and biblical approach to church discipline. Consequently, a contrast in regard to corrective discipline became apparent between the Reformed and Lutheran wings of the Reformation. John T. McNeill remarks:

³ Martin Luther, "The Keys," *Luther's Works* American ed., Vol. 40 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), 373.

⁴ *Ibid*, 373.

⁵ Jeschke, 31.

A comparison of the Reformed with the Lutheran cure of souls reveals some differences in practice to which the “activism” of the Reformed furnishes a clue. On the whole the insistence on an effective discipline has been much more constant in Reformed than in Lutheran churches, and the communion has been more watchfully protected against scandalous offenders. . . . Such an attitude is by no means absent from Lutheranism, but there less uniformly asserted. It is likely that visitation of families was usually more active in Reformed than in Lutheran churches, especially where the visitor was uninvited, since the Reformed books of discipline made the visitation of all explicitly the duty of ministers and lay officers of the local church.⁶

Reformed churches, of which Presbyterianism is a part, have historically been concerned for the need of corrective discipline. This is where the EPC derives its roots, and this is where a recapturing of zeal for discipline must be rekindled. The two Reformers who influenced Presbyterianism the most were John Calvin and John Knox. The quest for understanding corrective discipline’s place in the Presbyterian heritage now leads to these men.

John Calvin

John Calvin’s passion for God led him to gift the church with rich instruction from the Word of God. The Word of God is the preeminent driver of Calvin’s theology. “He was a man who did not try to develop a system of theology that complemented the Word of God; rather, he strove to derive his theology from the Word of God for the right worship, enjoyment, and love of God.”⁷ His understanding of the love of God from Scripture led him to develop a system of theology that included oversight of God’s sheep. His

⁶ John T. McNeill, *A History of the Cure of Souls* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1951), 216-217.

⁷ Burk Parsons, *John Calvin: A Heart for Devotion, Doctrine & Doxology* (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2008), 14.

influence upon Protestantism continues to be in evidence to the present day.

To say that Calvin's (1509-1564) impact upon the church and western culture in general is highly significant cannot be contradicted in view of the historical facts. His reforms, the result of a careful exposition of the biblical text, continue to impact the Protestant church and culture. This has led some to rightly say, "To omit Calvin from the forces of western evolution, is to read history with one eye shut."⁸ Indeed, his writings and instituted reforms within Geneva may be disputed, but cannot be ignored. He literally exhausted himself in service to Christ as he sought to make the church a beautiful bride (Ephesians 5:22-33). Even though contending with many diverse illnesses, he was prolific in his scholastic writing. Robert Godfrey observes:

He wore himself out for the Gospel. He suffered with a malaria-like fever and kidney stones. He was told to ride a horse to dislodge the stones, but could not because his hemorrhoids were so bad. He died at the age of 53, leaving 50 volumes of commentaries, 35 volumes of correspondence and 2,500 manuscripts used for sermons.⁹

Steve Lawson further remarks:

In his most prolific years, Calvin was generating half a million words annually. On average, he wrote about a thousand pages a year – all of it sound theology. Calvin stands as the premier example of the pastor-scholar in church history.¹⁰

⁸ John Morley, "Meet John Calvin," *Christian History Magazine*, Vol. V, no. 4, (1986): 2.

⁹ William Robert Godfrey, "Reformation Church History," *Institute of Theological Studies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Outreach, Inc., 1988), Tape 10.

¹⁰ Steven J. Lawson, *Pillars of Grace: A Long Line of Godly Men*, Vol. Two, AD 100-1564 (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2011), 511.

It is from these many volumes, including his magnum opus, *the Institutes of the Christian Religion*, that Calvin's views on corrective discipline are made explicit. While Calvin was careful to point out early the abuses of church authority in his first edition of the *Institutes*,¹¹ he nonetheless, also made clear that the true church possesses great authority over Christ's fold.

Calvin's thought and development of corrective discipline is intertwined with the Protestant development of the City of Geneva. In 1536, he was given pastoral responsibilities by William Farel, who served as a leader of the Protestant community at Geneva. By 1538, he and Farel were banished from the city because of their refusal to obey the civil government. City officials demanded that they accept the liturgy of Berne, and remained obstinate in regard to the employment of church discipline. The great Princeton theologian, Geerhardus Vos, notes in this regard:

The Reformer John Calvin at Geneva regarded church discipline as so important that when matters came to a head between himself and the city council and assembly of Geneva, he absolutely refused to compromise on this issue. He was willing to yield on several other matters which did not involve vital matters of principle, but with regard to church discipline he absolutely refused to yield . . . Calvin would not compromise and neither would the citizens yield. Instead, they voted to banish Calvin from their city.¹²

Calvin retired to Strasbourg where he labored as a pastor and scholar. However, in 1540 a delegation from Geneva sought his return to assist in the Protestant reforms of the city. The Protestants were concerned for the city's need for orthodox theology, and seeking

¹¹ See "Ecclesiastical Power," John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1536 Edition, translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 184-207.

¹² Johannes Geerhardus Vos, "John Calvin on Church Discipline," *Blue Banner of Faith and Life*, vol. 11 (1956): 151.

remedy for its wide-spread ungodliness and licentious living. The City of Geneva “. . . had a Europe-wide reputation for immorality, would be no easy community to reform, [yet] Calvin set about his task immediately.”¹³ In 1541 he returned, and in the same year he instituted his *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*. *The Ordinances* were adopted by the Genevan government and eventually became the model for subsequent Presbyterian polity. His goal was to make Geneva “. . . a holy city, conformed to the will of God. This meant a strict . . . discipline [that] . . . had the effect of changing Geneva’s character and of making it a power in the world of the sixteenth century.”¹⁴

Ecclesiastical Structure

The *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* entailed four organizational categories for church administration and oversight. First was *worship*. The practice of the collective adoration of God by His people was to be overseen by the pastors. Their responsibilities included the preaching of the Word and careful administration of the sacraments. Second, *education* was to be overseen and taught by the doctors. These men were highly trained theologians. The Geneva Academy was established in order to carry out the task of education. The roots of public education in Europe and the United States trace back to this effort. Third, *purity* was delegated to elders who served on the Consistory.¹⁵ This board of elders was charged to oversee the

¹³ W. S. Reid, “Calvin, John (1509-1564),” *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, J. D. Douglas, general editor (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Corporation, 1974), 178.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ The term “Consistory” is still used in Dutch Reformed branches of the Protestant church such as the Christian Reformed Church, Reformed Church of

morality of the people, including the clergy, and to monitor the clarity and accuracy of doctrine. It is this third ordinance that concerned all aspects of corrective discipline. Fourth, *love and mercy* were to be carried out by the deacons which included care of the infirm and distribution of Communion to those not able to attend services. In addition, administrative articles were drawn up and enacted in order to provide structured governance, yet “. . . the Ordinances proved good enough to guide the Church of Geneva through a difficult period. As Calvin said, it was not perfect but it was the best available under the circumstances.”¹⁶

The ordinance to maintain purity, a charge laid before the elders’ feet, concerned Calvin’s belief in the rigorous practice of corrective church discipline. Even though Calvin did not discuss discipline as a mark of the church in the same way as the *Belgic Confession*,¹⁷ he nevertheless, made it an integral part of his theological system. For Calvin, discipline’s place within his ecclesiology was to maintain purity in Christian conduct, the precise preaching of the word, and careful administration of the sacraments, all of which are marks of the church. He believed that discipline is so interrelated to the other two that it should not be separate from them

America, and the Protestant Reformed Church. The “Consistory” functions in a similar way to the “Session,” the ruling designation within Presbyterian bodies. The Consistory of Geneva “. . . was composed of six ministers and twelve elders, to supervise the theology and morals of the community and to punish when necessary the wayward members of the church by excommunication.” Earl E. Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), 338.

¹⁶ E. William Monter, *Calvin’s Geneva* (Huntington, New York: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1975), 127.

¹⁷ For Belgic Confession, see Chapter 1, 9 of this study. For Calvin’s usage of the term “Marks of the church” see *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion 2*, edited by John T. McNeill, Trans. Ford Lewis Battles. The Library of Christian Classics, vol. XXI (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 1023-1026.

so as to constitute a third mark. The preaching of the word and administration of the sacraments are central to the church's existence, yet without discipline, its continuance is in question:

Calvin concludes that a church may exist without discipline; however, he is also convinced that without discipline a church has no guarantee that it will exist for long. He writes Sadolet, "There are three things upon which the safety of the church is founded and supported: Doctrine, discipline and the sacraments." Discipline for Calvin, while not a mark of the church, serves to preserve the marks of the church. To remove or hinder discipline contributes to the ultimate dissolution of the church.¹⁸

Consequently, discipline is seasoned into Calvin's ecclesiastical structure as a good cook uses salt to enhance the flavor of a favorite recipe. Discipline is foundational to the church's function and very existence. Calvin clearly understood that discipline is as much a requirement for the church as it is for society in general and the home. In making his case for discipline being integral to the church, he employs perhaps his chief metaphor – the sinews of the body.

... because some persons, in their hatred of discipline, recoil from its very name, let them understand this: if no society, indeed, no house which has even a small family, can be kept in proper condition without discipline, it is much more necessary in the church, whose condition should be as ordered as possible. Accordingly, as the saving doctrine of Christ is the soul of the church, so does discipline serve as its *sinews*, through which the members of the body hold together each in its own place. (emphasis mine)¹⁹

¹⁸ Stephen M. Johnson, "The Sinews of the Body of Christ – Calvin's Concept of Church Discipline," *Westminster Theological Journal*, v. 59, #1 (Spring '97): 91-92.

¹⁹ *Institutes*, 4:1229-1230.

Indeed, without sinews the body literally falls apart. The integrity of the church is overwhelmingly compromised when discipline is relegated to the sidelines of church life.

To understand corrective discipline's place in Calvin's ecclesiastical structure of church order, a comprehension of his high view of Christ's bride is necessary. In Calvin's view, the visible church is the *mother* over God the Father's children. The metaphor *mother* is a useful term in his understanding of Christ's bride. Calvin lovingly writes:

For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast . . . Furthermore, away from her bosom one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins or any salvation.²⁰

The *mother* is to be holy as God himself (Matthew 5:48, Ephesians 5:1). Consequently, those who are adopted as children (Galatians 3:26; 4:4-7) into the *mother's* care are themselves to be holy (Leviticus 19:2; I Peter 2:9). The root of holiness is to be different from the world, and this must be demonstrated in *practice* as much as in *belief*. The children, who are in effect living within the church, *must live their lives differently than their neighbors within the world*. They are to be out of step with the world's spiritual gait. They are to be reflections of holiness as they learn from their *mother* the holy standards of *God the Father*.

Disobedient children often bring disgrace upon their earthly parents. They commit acts which call into question how they were taught and disciplined by their earthly mothers and fathers. In the same way, those who claim Christ as Lord, but live like the world,

²⁰ *Institutes*, 4:1016.

bring disgrace upon their spiritual mother (the church) and, in turn, God as Father. With regard to corrective discipline, Calvin remarks:

. . . that they who lead a filthy and infamous life may not be called Christians, to the dishonor of God, as if his holy church [cf. Eph. 5:25-26] were a conspiracy of wicked and abandoned men. For since the church itself is the body of Christ [Col. 1:24], it cannot be corrupted by such foul and decaying members without some disgrace falling upon its Head. Therefore, that there may be no such thing in the church to brand its most sacred name with disgrace, they from whose wickedness infamy redounds to the Christian name must be banished from its family.²¹

This is the heart of the Calvinistic concept of corrective church discipline as it underpins ecclesiastical structure. Erring children (members) must be corrected because their sinful behavior ultimately brings about disgrace to the church's head. Christians must practice holiness and restrain dishonorable actions to the church and ultimately to God himself. Therefore, discipline must be employed by elders who must uphold the honor of the mother and holiness of God the Father. Calvin's burden over this point is reflected in the EPC's own *Book of Discipline*. Instructions regarding indictments of those accused of a disciplinary offense state: "Every indictment shall begin: 'In the name of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church,' and shall conclude, 'against the peace, unity, and purity of the church, and the honor and majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the King and Head thereof.'"²² Each time a member sins, the church itself is disgraced and in turn brings dishonor to God. Consequently, indictments begin in the name of the church and end by noting that God's honor has been tarnished. For Calvin, there can be no

²¹ *Institutes*, 5:1232.

²² Evangelical Presbyterian Church, *Book of Order, Book of Discipline* (Evangelical Presbyterian Church, July 2015), Section 7-3, 86.

compromise on this point, and the EPC's disciplinary document echoes his sentiments.

The Elder's Mantel in Calvin's Ecclesiastical Structure

The elders' responsibility to oversee is paramount in Calvin's view of oversight. If dishonor has become known within the church, then the elders and the pastor must, in tandem, take steps to reestablish purity. The Reformer remarks during one of his sermons:

Those that are in public office ought to be diligent in their duty, that justice may not be violated. Those that are appointed ministers of the Word, should have a zeal to purge out all filthiness and pollution from among the people.²³

It is thought provoking to contemplate what the church of North America would look like today if such a mandate were carried out. Jesus is clear in saying that an effort to expunge every single tare from among the wheat, at present, is not useful (Matthew 13:24-30). Therefore, a spiritual inquisition on holiness is not in order. Nevertheless, oversight by ruling and teaching elders²⁴ is called for in order to protect God's holy honor, the bride's purity, (church) as well as to lovingly correct the erring brother.

Having noted Calvin's charge to oversee, his view on the *power of the keys* must also be highlighted. A detailed discussion on the keys to the kingdom is expounded upon in chapter two.²⁵ Calvin's

²³ John Calvin, *The Mystery of Godliness and other Selected Sermons* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1999), 125.

²⁴ Presbyterian polity views the term "teaching elder" as synonymous with the terms "minister" and "pastor." *EPC Book of Government*, 2-1, (Evangelical Presbyterian Church, 2015), 9.

²⁵ The power of the keys is covered in the exegesis of Matthew 16:18-19. See Chapter 2, 59-70.

understanding of the power of the keys is revealed in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. His position is that the officers of the church do not actually have a divine endowment of the keys, but rather maintain authority from the whole congregation as they exercise them in the church's behalf. Calvin writes:

When Christ gave the command to the apostles and conferred upon them the power to forgive sins [Matt. 16:19; 18:18; John 20:23], he did not so much desire that the apostles absolve from sins [and] reconciliation has been entrusted to the ministers of the church and that by it they are repeatedly to exhort the people to be reconciled to God in Christ's name [II Cor. 5:18,20]. Therefore . . . our sins are continually forgiven us by the ministry of the church itself when the presbyters or bishops to whom this office has been committed strengthen godly consciences by the gospel promises in the hope of pardon and forgiveness.²⁶

The sense is that the elders, collectively in behalf of the church, use the power of the keys. There is clearly a breaking with the Roman church on this point. The "hope of pardon and forgiveness" comes through the regular preaching of the word by those who hold the office of teaching.²⁷ Because the collective action of the church is required to appoint ministers,²⁸ the clear implication is that Calvin did not intend to give church elders any sort of direct authority from Christ. They are representatives of the collective church, which ultimately possesses the keys. Elders are pivotal in the use of the keys as they represent the power entrusted to the church. H. R. Percy notes this point as he writes on the Calvinistic sense of giving representative authority to elected elders to administer discipline in

²⁶ *Institutes*, 4:1035.

²⁷ John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels, Vol. II, Matthew, Mark, Luke*, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries. Editors David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 187.

²⁸ *Institutes*, 4:1064-1065.

the church.²⁹ The execution of judicial authority is necessary in the hands of representative officers, but the practice of it lay with all the members and not simply the elders.

In addition, corrective discipline is not to be administered by any one man but by a lawful assembly.³⁰ This tenet contradicts Roman Catholic bishops as well as papal authority. Plurality is central to the use of the keys. Individuals do not possess such authority. Only ordained elders acting in plurality can exercise the authority of the church. A plurality of governing elders is observable throughout the New Testament. No New Testament letter is addressed to a single elder who solely oversaw a congregation. When dissention arose in the church over the Judaizer assertion regarding circumcision or gentiles, the matter is brought before the “apostles and elders” (Acts 15:2, 4, 5, 22, 23). Regarding *Binding and Loosing* in Matthew 16:19, Calvin understood it as reception into membership as well as excommunication. In dealing with excommunication, he presupposes that the church is a collective entity with the power to discipline. A plurality is apparent as opposed to power vested in a sole person such as a bishop. He writes:

[T]he church binds him whom it excommunicates – not that it casts him into everlasting ruin and despair, but because it condemns his life and morals, and already warns him of his condemnation unless he should repent. It looses him when it receives into communion, for it makes him a sharer of the unity which is in Christ Jesus.³¹

²⁹ H. R. Percy, *The Meaning of Church in the Thought of Calvin* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1941), 7.

³⁰ Calvin makes the point that corrective discipline must be administered by a plurality of Elders and not by one man. *Institutes*, 4:1217.

³¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4:1214.

How Discipline was Done

Calvin does not use the terms formative or corrective discipline; however, he refers to concealed and open sins.³² Sins done in private, but made known to some must be rebuked in private. But sins flagrantly committed in the open must be rebuked in the presence of all, for Calvin notes, based upon Matthew 18:15, I Timothy 5:20, and Galatians 2:14, “This, then will be the right sequence in which to act: to proceed in correcting secret sins according to the steps laid down by Christ; but in open sins, if the offense is indeed public, to proceed at once to solemn rebuke by the church.”³³ The corrective side of discipline, the burden of this investigation, is seen in Calvin’s injunction for public rebuke by the church. Yet, pastors and elders are to be active in private admonishment as well.³⁴ He lays great emphasis upon visitation within homes so that there is a clear understanding of godly teaching being carried out privately.

Calvin believes that private admonition is the first stage in church discipline. If stubbornness or rejection of correction is apparent, then a second admonition in the presence of several witnesses is in order. If the second admonition fails to bring about repentance, then . . .

Christ commands that he be called to the tribunal of the church, that is, the assembly of the elders, and there be more gravely admonished as by public authority, in order that, if he reverences the church, he may submit and obey. If he is not even subdued by this but perseveres in his wickedness, then Christ commands that,

³² *Institutes*, 4:1231.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Institutes*, 4:1230.

as a despiser of the church, he be removed from the believers' fellowship (Matt. 18:15,17).³⁵

These discipline stages have become standard for most Presbyterian discipline manuals. The EPC is similar in this regard.³⁶ The heritage begun by men like Calvin is clearly reflected in the Presbyterian polity.³⁷

Calvin is also concerned that the church makes discipline appropriate to the offense. Those who believe Calvin to be too austere and cold over discipline's use do not understand his writing or his heart. He remarks:

For such great severity is not to be used in lighter sins, but verbal chastisement is enough – and that mild and fatherly – which should not harden or confuse the sinner, but bring him back to himself, that he may rejoice rather than be sad that he has been corrected.³⁸

The goal of discipline is always to lead the offender back to a proper place in Christ's fold. Calvin's writings do not reflect a harsh tone with regard to church discipline. A loving shepherd's care is in view.

Having noted Calvin's pastoral concern and shepherd's heart for those disciplined, he is not without his critics, who believe he was overly severe concerning Geneva's employment of corrective discipline.³⁹ The strict discipline of Geneva is cited by some to be too

³⁵ Ibid, 4:1231.

³⁶ See *EPC, Book of Discipline*, Chapter 10, "Disciplinary Sanctions," 93.

³⁷ Historian Will Durant adds in regard to the ecclesiastical ordinances which include discipline that "their essential features are still accepted by the Reformed and Presbyterian churches of Europe and America." Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization, The Reformation*, vol.6 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 472.

³⁸ *Institutes*, 4:1234.

³⁹ Calvin was quite forceful in implementing his ecclesiastical reforms. His main avenue for change was through regular preaching that afforded him a public forum to confront and silence his critics. He resisted critiques of his own

rigid and abrasive. It is said that Calvin's discipline was too harsh: "of which most people, even Calvinists would not approve of today."⁴⁰ This is true, but the penal areas of the discipline code, including capital punishment carried out by the magistrate, must be examined in view of fifteenth century sentiments. Both Protestants and Catholics employed rigorous corrective discipline in the face of serious sin or heretical error.⁴¹ For Calvin, followers of Christ must pursue the Christian life, and rigorous discipline is a means to this good end. Consequently, upon his arrival at Geneva, he sought the power to institute a discipline code. "Above all, he insisted he must be permitted to do something to establish 'discipline,' to control behavior throughout the city, to see to it that Genevans lived a truly Christian life."⁴²

The centerpiece to Calvin's discipline was the Consistory's power to excommunicate⁴³ people who were stubborn and unwilling

preaching, but welcomed the silencing of those Bernese ministers who attacked him. William G. Naphy notes: "It is also worth noting that while Calvin was opposed to being told what he could preach about he had no such qualms about other ministers. He repeatedly demanded that Geneva ask the Bernese authorities to curb attacks on him by their ministers, especially those in the parishes near Geneva. Obviously he accepted, when it suited him, magisterial control over sermon content. Further, Calvin clearly understood the important role the pulpit had as a propaganda tool for shaping and controlling public opinion. Calvin himself came in for specific censure on two occasions, in 1548 and 1552. In each he was asked to explain his sermon and warned against attacks on the magistrates." William G. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 160.

⁴⁰ W. S. Reid, "Calvin, John (1509-1563)," 178.

⁴¹ Earle Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), 338.

⁴² Robert M. Kingdon, *Adultery and Divorce in Calvin's Geneva* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 11.

⁴³ Excommunication entailed a barring of participants in at least the quarterly celebrated communion service. This penalty was much feared at the time, for the

to mend their ways. The use of excommunication was heavily resisted and controversial in Protestant communities. The term itself [excommunication] reminded many people of Roman Catholic judicatories who excommunicated people for avoiding taxes and engaging in poor business practices. Nevertheless, Calvin, along with many pastors, was resolute that the Consistory be empowered with the authority to excommunicate those who were hardened in rebellion. Robert M. Kingdon notes:

For more than a decade there was rising opposition within the Genevan community to the use of excommunication . . . Consistorial excommunication was strenuously defended by Calvin and his fellow ministers. They felt that it was an absolutely necessary tool for the maintenance of social discipline, and they threatened to leave the city if they were not permitted to use it.⁴⁴

It is plain to see why Calvin persists in the Consistory's power to discipline in this manner. Excommunication is the ultimate rod of consequence behind the shepherding admonitions of caring elders who are charged to oversee. It is in effect the rod of discipline which brings about pain within the conscience of those who have persisted in a sinful lifestyle.

Calvin notes three purposes for such drastic, but sometimes necessary action. The first purpose of excommunication is that the church herself will not be linked in any way to those who lead infamous or licentious lives. To restate Calvin, nothing can be permitted in the church to malign or disgrace her precious name;

ritual of communion was understood by many as necessary for the person's salvation. Calvin's stalwart position on excommunication was also in evidence in the earlier 1536 edition of the Institutes. In regards to the Lord's supper, Calvin notes that the minister ". . . should excommunicate all who are debarred from it by the Lord's prohibition." John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, 1536 edition*. Translated and annotated by Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), 122.

⁴⁴ Kingdon, 18-19.

furthermore, people whose wicked reputations overwhelm Christianity must be removed from its family.⁴⁵ As noted earlier in this chapter, Calvin holds the church's holiness in great esteem. The second purpose for excommunication is to preserve the spiritual lives of those who have not been corrupted by such sin. If sin is tolerated, its corruption may begin to take hold and affect others within Christ's body. In this regard, he notes the incestuous problem in Corinth by remarking that "a little leaven . . . ferments the whole lump."⁴⁶ Sometimes holiness among the saints can slip to the lowest common denominator. Calvin's over-arching concern is to not see this happen. The third purpose concerns his burden for the brother overtaken by sin. The goal is to bring him back into the mother's arms (church) and honor God the Father. Therefore, the church's use of the rod is to bring about repentance. "They who under gentler treatment would have become more stubborn so profit by the chastisement of their own evil as to be awakened when they feel the rod."⁴⁷ The awakening will lead the sinner back home, and home is the place of safety and forgiveness.

The repeated care for the sinner, as noted in Calvin's third purpose for corrective discipline, is a major concern when excommunication is employed. For Calvin, discipline is to be administered in a spirit of gentleness. He is concerned that gentleness be maintained in both private and public rebukes because ". . . there is danger lest we soon slide down from discipline to butchery."⁴⁸ Calvin's ecclesiology of discipline is built upon moderation

⁴⁵ *Institutes*, 4:1232.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1233.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 4:1238.

according to the severity of the sin. The church must “. . . judge how far severity ought to go and where it ought to stop.”⁴⁹

A final evidence of Calvin’s concern that gentleness be employed when speaking about excommunication is seen in this simple remark:

This gentleness is required in the whole body of the church, that it should deal mildly with the lapsed and should not punish with extreme rigor, but rather, according to Paul’s injunction, confirm its love toward them (II Cor. 2:8). . . . However, if they also display more stubbornness than gentleness, we should still commend them to the Lord’s judgment, hoping for better things of them in the future than we see in the present. Nor should we on this account cease to call upon God in their behalf.⁵⁰

God is the one who is ultimately in control of each person’s life. There is a finite limitation of all human judgment. Hence, Calvin’s injunction for the church to pray for the unrepentant once again reflects his shepherd’s heart in caring for the Great Shepherd’s people. However, many people of Geneva greatly feared the prospect of excommunication and as a result did not always see Calvin’s concern for the use of gentleness in discipline. “Excommunication could and did drive some people completely out of Geneva.”⁵¹

It must be further noted that Calvin’s enforcement of corrective discipline distinguishes between *excommunication* with its disbarment from the Lord’s Supper and from the ultimate curse of *anathema*. The point of excommunication is to lead the wayward to repentance via shame (II Thessalonians 3:14) in order that the

⁴⁹ Ibid., 4:1236.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 4:1237.

⁵¹ Kingdon, 18.

disciplined individual may be saved (I Corinthians 5:5). The curse of anathema is far graver. Calvin remarks:

By this those who are excommunicated are not cast into everlasting ruin and damnation, but in hearing that their life and morals are condemned, they are assured of everlasting condemnation unless they repent. Excommunication differs from anathema in that the latter, taking away all pardon, condemns and consigns a man to eternal destruction; the former, rather, avenges and chastens his moral conduct. And although excommunication also punishes the man, it does so in such a way that, by forewarning him of his future condemnation, it may call him back to salvation. But if that be obtained, reconciliation and restoration to communion await him. Moreover, anathema is very rarely or never used.⁵²

Excommunication, therefore, is a gracious and healthy means of drawing back the wayward. To do less is not proper care of the brother. The apostle Paul is willing to turn someone over to Satan in order that he might be saved (I Corinthians 5:5). Consequently, excommunication was employed in Geneva among both men and women who refused to repent.⁵³

Moreover, Calvin was adamant that the power of excommunication was to be in the hands of the church and not civil authority. Williston Walker notes, “No right seemed to Calvin so vital to the independence of the church as this of excommunication, and for none was he compelled so to struggle until its final establishment in 1555.”⁵⁴ Hence, Calvin fought tirelessly for the need of excommunication as well as its removal from civil magistrates;

⁵² *Institutes*, 4:1238.

⁵³ For a detailed listing of types of offenses and occurrences among men and women of Geneva, see Appendix E.

⁵⁴ Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, 4th ed. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1985), 477.

additionally, the latter put him at odds with the Geneva city council as well as other noted Reformers such as Zwingli of Zurich.

The Consistory and Civil Authority

Calvin's view of the use of discipline began with the oversight of the Consistory. It is this council that had the authority to bar unrepentant individuals from the table of communion. However, some offenses were beyond excommunication and were deserving of some form of secular punishment. In such cases, the Consistory referred the matter to a secular council for further action. Calvin considered this proper. It is in this division between the secular and church authority where much criticism is leveled at the Reformer. While the Consistory had the power of excommunication, the civil court had the power to invoke much harsher treatment, even capital punishment. Civil court confessions were often brought about through torture, including trussing people upward as hands were tied behind the back and then dropped just short of the floor, while others were recipients of the painful use of thumbscrews.⁵⁵ Other crimes were accompanied by whipping or the threat of capital punishment. This certainly is disturbing for Christians today. However, these practices were enacted with the blessing of the Consistory and were typical for the day. While remarking on capital punishment, Robert M. Kingdon notes:

To a degree that would appall us today, however, the punishment for a serious crime was a death penalty. In Geneva, as in almost all of western Europe, the frequent and public execution of criminals

⁵⁵ Kingdon, 25.

was regarded as absolutely essential for the maintenance of public order.⁵⁶

Such discipline situations were rightfully and completely removed from today's church mindset, and rightly so, but the norms of the time period must be kept in mind.

The harshness of the civil council's authority to invoke sanctions against individuals who were referred by the Consistory because of serious or unrepentant sin has been cited and debated for hundreds of years. Calvin remains a magisterial Reformer, one who advocates the blending of state and church, each with separate powers, for the betterment of society. It is due to this blending, as opposed to separation, which led to thorny discipline situations such as that of Michael Servetus (1511-1553). Servetus “. . . demanded that Calvin be arrested as a false accuser and a heretic.”⁵⁷ Calvin did accuse him in regard to heretical teaching over the doctrine of the Trinity. Servetus was condemned in absentia by both Catholic and Protestant Europe. Unfortunately, Calvin is remembered, by some, for his prosecution of Servetus who was burned at the stake by the Geneva council. Yet, Calvin always desired to see his retractor repent of heresy and be saved. Calvin even visited “. . . Servetus in jail and earnestly sought to persuade him of his errors . . . [Calvin wrote years later] I was even willing to risk my life to win him to our Lord, if possible.”⁵⁸ However, Servetus would not repent, and Calvin, in keeping with the times, prosecuted the heretic and agreed with the civil court's judgment. “In spite of Calvin's plea for a more merciful form of execution, Servetus was burned at the stake (October 27,

⁵⁶ Ibid., 97.

⁵⁷ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity, Reformation to the Present* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1975), 759.

⁵⁸ *Christian History Magazine*, Vol. V, no. 4, 1986: 29.

1533), crying through the flames, ‘O Jesus, Thou Son of the Eternal God, have pity on me.’”⁵⁹ It is, indeed, true that this was Calvin’s Geneva. Discipline was employed in all facets to hold high God, protect the church’s honor, and lead sinners back to Christ. The story of Servetus remains a difficult aspect of Calvin’s life to reconcile with his pastoral heart; yet his was “. . . the only case, but at the same time, an extremely significant case, of a man put to death for his religious opinion in Calvin’s Geneva.”⁶⁰ Civil authority had the right and obligation to enforce such disciplinary actions.

In summary of Calvin’s purposes for discipline, when excommunication is employed, the following is to be remembered: The church’s honor is to be maintained, the welfare of the Christian body at large is to be protected, and great concern is for the spiritual reconciliation of the erring brother. These three goals of church discipline are included in the EPC’s own purpose statement for discipline. The constitutional document reads:

The exercise of discipline is highly important and necessary. The purpose of discipline is to maintain the honor of God, to restore the sinner, and to remove offense from the church.⁶¹

Once again, Presbyterian documents, such as the *EPC Book of Discipline*, were not created in a vacuum. The heritage is clearly in view when Calvin’s remarks on the topic are examined. This document or similar ones employed by other evangelical congregations should not be ignored.

⁵⁹ Latourette, 759.

⁶⁰ Monter, 83.

⁶¹ *EPC, Book of Discipline*, 1-5, 77.

Discipline and Ministerial Conduct

The heritage is also seen in Calvin's concern that sinning office bearers are overseen and disciplined when necessary. Calvin believed that ministers must be accountable with respect to godly doctrine, scandalous behavior, or perfunctory service. To this end he maintained that delegations of appointed ministers visit countryside parishes (which were dependent upon Geneva) once each year ". . . to inquire whether the ministers of the place have accepted any doctrine in any sense new and repugnant to the purity of the gospel."⁶² Calvin notes in his draft order of visitation of the county churches dated January 11th, 1546, as his fourth and fifth points of concern:

Fourth, to know whether the Minister is diligent not only in preaching but also in visiting the sick, and particularly in admonishing those that need it, and to prevent anything that might be for the dishonoring of God.

Fifth, to discover whether he leads an honest life, and show a good example, or if he commit any dissoluteness or frivolity which renders him contemptible, or if he get on well with his people and likewise with all his family.⁶³

Such investigations were not empowered to take jurisdiction in dispensing discipline. However, they were to make a report to the congregation and the Council of Geneva on their findings. The desired result was a careful oversight of those who oversee. The Reformation *ethos* upholds a constant reform through careful preaching and administration of the sacraments and demands discipline over each. Ministers were not exempt. Calvin summarizes:

⁶² J. K. S. Reid, editor, *Calvin's Theological Treatises*, Library of Christian Classics, vol. 22 (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1954), 74.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

Such has always been the order in the ancient church from the time of the apostles; and today is observed in the churches reformed according to the pure doctrine of the gospel.⁶⁴

Once again, such oversight is seen in the *EPC Book of Discipline* opening chapter. Section 1-2 states that “no minister should be shielded from discipline or lightly sanctioned on account of his office.”⁶⁵ Calvin’s influence continues through the constitutional documents of the EPC and other orthodox Presbyterian bodies.

Calvin carefully listed ministerial conduct that merits discipline in the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances of 1541*. Some sinful acts require immediate ecclesiastical judgment while others may be dealt with by a private admonition. Calvin’s listing of both crimes and faults among ministers are sober words of wisdom for today’s clergy. They are worth noting. Calvin writes:

Of the first sort are:

heresy, schism, rebellion against ecclesiastical order, blasphemy open and meriting civil punishment, simony and all corruption in presentations, intrigue to occupy another’s place, leaving one’s church without lawful leave or just calling, duplicity, perjury, lewdness, larceny, drunkenness, assault meriting punishment by law, usury, games forbidden by the law and scandalous, dances and similar dissoluteness, crimes carrying with them loss of civil rights, crime giving rise to another separation from the church.

Of the second sort are:

strange methods of treating Scripture which turn to scandal, curiosity in investigating idle questions, advancing some doctrine or kind of practice not received in the church, negligence in studying and reading the Scriptures, negligence in rebuking vice amounting to flattery, negligence in doing everything required by

⁶⁴ Ibid, 75.

⁶⁵ *EPC, Book of Discipline*, 1-2, 77.

his office, scurrility, lying, slander, dissolute words, injurious words, foolhardiness and evil devices, avarice and too great parsimony, undisciplined anger, quarrels and contentions, laxity either of manner or of gesture and like conduct improper to a minister.⁶⁶

John Calvin was not only burdened for the purity of the church, but also care used when ministers were to be corrected. Ministers are mere men and able to fall into all manner of sinful practices. Some are more serious than others, but aspects of conduct are subject to oversight with none being exempted from it. Some grievances should remain private while others require a wider audience for inquiry and judicial action. In a letter to the ministers of Neufchatel in 1544, he remarks:

In some ministers, particular faults are to be corrected: others are to be warned before hand, when we see them in danger, lest they fall into imprudences: some are to be excited to greater zeal: others must be checked in their impetuosity: and concerning others, we must make inquiry, when any unfavorable and yet doubtful report about them goes abroad. Again, it is asked, “Whether, in general, it is necessary, that the individual delinquent should be admonished privately by each of the other ministers? Or whether it may sometimes be expedient, that a deliberation be held among them and the admonition be given by the whole meeting?” ... These precautions in discipline, as much as possible are to be taken at the threshold, so that the door of contention may be closed, lest any creep in craftily; and if they should peradventure overreach, in this way, their progress must be stopped. The discipline of the church is not only of divine authority, but we find, by experience, that it is necessary, and by no means to be neglected or omitted.⁶⁷

It is plain to see that Calvin believes discipline to be a part of the entirety of life. Its relevance to all of life applies to the minister

⁶⁶ J. K. S. Reid, *Calvin's Theological Treatises*, 60-61.

⁶⁷ John Calvin, *John Calvin's Writings*, Letter 9. Accessed April 4, 2014 Available online. <http://www.godrules.net/library/calvin/143calvin15.htm>.

as well as the church member. All are Christ's disciples and as such require a disciplined life.

Care Required When Enacting the Use of Discipline

The practice of discipline within Geneva's oversight was done in a careful manner. There was an orderly process to the employment of corrective discipline. Innuendo and superfluous charges were not entertained by the Consistory of Geneva.

Calvin believed there must be some formalized mechanism for investigation and decision making in discipline cases. As he said, "admonitions and corrections cannot be made without investigation of the cause; accordingly, some court of judgment and order of procedure are needed."⁶⁸

There are no haphazard admonitions found in Calvin's writings with respect to discipline. He believes in process and proper procedure. Paul exhorts Corinth that "all things be done decently and in order" (I Corinthians 14:40). Paul's admonition, coupled with Calvin's ecclesiastical concern for order, has always been taken seriously in Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed polity. Presbyterian constitutional documents tend to be very thorough for this reason. Consequently, because discipline is such a serious matter, one entire section of the *EPC Book of Order* is devoted to it. The *Book of Discipline* is located within the *EPC Book of Order*, in addition to the *Book of Government* and the *Book of Worship*, all of which contain extensive, well thought out, procedures. Discipline is perhaps the most detailed because of its serious nature.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Ronald R. Stockton, *Decent and in Order: Conflict, Christianity, and Polity in a Presbyterian Congregation* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), 75.

⁶⁹ The *EPC Book of Discipline* entails thirty-three pages, but in addition, it is followed by twenty-three pages of procedural forms.

The Results of Calvin's Discipline

Having noted the short-comings of Geneva's zeal to enforce discipline among God's people, the overall health of the church and culture must be cited. Geneva was a very immoral city when the Protestant reforms were beginning to make their way across Europe. When Calvin instituted his ecclesiastical ordinances in order to bring about holiness, his concern was for God's honor and the spiritual health of God's people. In so doing, Calvin was unique among all of the Reformers to initiate a community wide effort for spiritual change. Philip Schaff, the great church historian, remarks in this regard:

[Calvin] wanted every Christian to be consistent with his profession, to show his faith by good works, and to strive to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. He was the only one among the Reformers who attempted and who measurably carried out this sublime idea in a whole community.⁷⁰

Geneva was indeed a remarkable city that became a beacon for other Reformers who were tutored under Calvin. The totality of his *Ordinances* would be impossible to initiate today, but at the very least, Geneva remains as an example for churches to teach and maintain corrective discipline over their people. Calvin not only taught the call to holiness, but instituted a way that Christians would be accountable for their actions. North American culture is far removed from making adultery a capital offense, yet little to no accountability may be more damaging to the church's well-being in the long run.

⁷⁰ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol.8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 484.

There were certainly problematic laws and questionable enforcement,⁷¹ but the order and well-being of the city has been attested to by many who visited the city. One of the eye-witnesses, Bernardino Ochino, an Italian Protestant who sought out Geneva as a refuge, provides a very enthusiastic report of the city's Protestant character and general well-being. He writes:

Cursing and swearing, unchastity, sacrilege, adultery, and impure living, such as prevail in many places where I have lived, are here unknown. There are no pimps and harlots. The people do not know what rouge is, and they are all clad in seemly fashion. Games of chance are not customary. Benevolence is so great that the poor need not beg. The people admonish one another in brotherly fashion, as Christ prescribes. Lawsuits are banished from the city, nor is there any simony, murder, or party spirit, but only peace and charity. On the other hand, there are no organs here, no voice of bells, no showy songs, no burning candles or lamps [in the churches], no relics, pictures, statues, canopies, or splendid robes, no farces or cold ceremonies. The churches are quite free from idolatry.⁷²

Others made similar claims concerning the overall health of Geneva.⁷³ Calvin's influence throughout Europe and later in North America was largely due to his prolific writing and his restructuring of Geneva as a theocratic state through rigorous discipline. Geneva's success as a Reformed beacon benefited Protestant advances throughout Europe and North America. Its discipline initiatives

⁷¹ Regulations extended to the quantity of clothing, number of dishes permissible at a meal, types of jewelry and some women were jailed for an unapproved hair style that was too high. Disciplines ranged from reprimands, fines, imprisonment, or banishment. See Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization, The Reformation*, Vol. 6 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 474 and Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 489-491.

⁷² Cited in Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, 476. Nearly fifty years after Calvin's death, people were still attesting to the saintly vitality of Geneva due to its discipline code. See Schaff, 518-19.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 476.

became a model for Christian conduct and the root system for the Puritans. E. William Monter adds:

The historical importance of Calvin's Geneva lay primarily in her value as a model to zealous Protestants in other parts of Christendom, including the British colonies of North America. To them, Geneva was a city set on a hill; she represented a nearly perfect model of Christian discipline. This is why there are seven Genevas in the United States today, as compared with only one Zurich and eight Parises. . . . To most scholars and to nearly all laymen, Geneva has come to be recognized as the soil where Puritanism first took root.⁷⁴

There can be no doubt of the value that came to Christ's church because of the teaching and discipline emphasized in Protestant Geneva; moreover, Christians need to be made aware of its influence, and more specifically, Calvin's influence, in order to maintain historical truth.

Calvin's discipline initiatives within Geneva must be judged by the standards of the time period in which he lived and labored. Modern age thinkers have censoriously criticized Calvin because of Geneva's lack of tolerance. However, tolerance, whether for small infractions or devious heresy, was not common in Europe during Calvin's tenure. Regarding the judgment of Calvin's work, Schaff adds:

He must be judged by the standard of his own, and not of our, age. The most cruel of those laws – against witchcraft, heresy, and blasphemy – were inherited from the Catholic Middle Ages, and continued in force in all countries of Europe, Protestant as well as Roman Catholic, down to the end of the seventeenth century. Tolerance is a modern virtue.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Monter, 225.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 493-494.

Calvin's efforts, particularly in view of the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, were laudable. Protestant advancement and, more importantly, the emerging Presbyterian wing of the Reformation, owe a great debt to Calvin that cannot be denied.

Calvin's Discipline and Relevance for Today

There are four conclusions that may be drawn from the study of Calvin's disciplinal initiatives within Geneva. The first concerns the fact that much of Calvin's teaching on corrective discipline is basic to the EPC's own discipline policy. Ministers may not be aware of his influence, but nonetheless his concerns have been demonstrated to be reflected in several places within the *EPC Book of Discipline*. The lack of awareness may be from poor training or perhaps forgetfulness due to the advance of time and weight of responsibilities. However, all EPC ordained teaching elders should know that the denomination's theological and ecclesiastical basis dates back to the writing of Calvin. In fact, the *EPC's Leadership Training Guide* makes the case clear:

Calvin is the father of that branch of Protestantism called the Reformed Church from which we Presbyterians come. The Reformation had two main branches, the first was Lutheranism; the second was the Reformed Church, of which we Presbyterians are a part. A characterization of Presbyterians requires a description of both (1) our form of government, and (2) our doctrinal stance. If you describe us by the way we govern ourselves, we are called Presbyterians. The word "Presbyterian" is derived from a Greek word meaning "elder," and we are ruled or governed by elders. But if you describe us by what we believe, we are called Reformed. So we are Presbyterian in government and we are Reformed in faith. Our spiritual forefather then is John Calvin.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ *EPC Leadership Training Guide*, Christian Education and Publication Committee of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, June 2015, 19.

The disciplinal section of the *EPC Book of Order* was not created in a vacuum. It shares great similarity with other Presbyterian denominational administrative manuals. The reason for this is clear. The heritage, created by men like Calvin, underpins Presbyterian and Reformed polity.

Secondly, of all the magisterial Reformers, he took most seriously the discipline motif found in Scripture. His writings surely make this point. Moreover, his discipline initiatives at Geneva display the passion behind his writings on the subject. His quest was to “. . . make Geneva a ‘holy city.’”⁷⁷ It was because of this quest that he instituted the disciplinary oversight of the Consistory. Behind the power of the Consistory lay a careful exposition of Scripture. Consequently, the entire Protestant church benefited and not just denominations such as the EPC. The Reformation period was a turbulent season of significant change within the church’s history. Calvin’s exegesis and initiatives helped underpin all of Protestantism.

Thirdly, Calvin’s purposes for discipline, as particularly noted on the subject of excommunication, are highly beneficial for the church’s remembrance. Once again, the three entailed maintaining God’s honor, protecting the saints from a slide into ungodly behavior and the recovery of the sinning believer. These are three good scriptural reasons for the church, the EPC, and Evangelicals in general, to recover Calvin’s passion for elder oversight. If congregations desire biblically based reasons for practice and administration, then Calvin’s remarks should be taken to heart by all who exercise authority within Christ’s fold.

⁷⁷ W. S. Reid, “Calvin, John (1509-1564),” 178

Fourthly, there is also no doubt that the discipline code of Geneva did go to excess and was further complicated by the social governance of church and state. The debate between the church and state interface is beyond the scope of this inquiry. However, the church is subject to great error when ecclesiastical enforcement is commingled with the power of the state. Such power in the hands of any sinful man (secular or ecclesiastical) is always cause for concern. Nonetheless, the zeal and passion for godliness is laudable in all of Calvin's writings. There is fertile soil here for churches to grow a root system of moral depth among their members. Why not teach discipline and loving care of God's flock? Calvin faced opposition from adversaries who abhorred his scheme of discipline.

They hated him worse than the pope. They abhorred the very word "discipline." They resorted to personal indignities and every device of intimidation; they nicknamed him "Cain," and gave his name to the dogs of the street; they insulted him on his way to the lecture-room; they fired one night fifty shots before his bed chamber.⁷⁸

Nevertheless, he followed through on discipline because of his belief in its importance to Christ's bride. There is relevance here for the EPC and all orthodox Reformed congregations. Opposition or fear of repercussions can never be cause to sit back with regard to oversight. Calvin's zeal and passion for a disciplined church must be recaptured by all Reform-minded churches. It is part of their heritage.

John Knox

The other significant figure of history to greatly influence Presbyterian thought was John Knox (1514-1572). The great Scottish Reformer was known for his uncompromising initiatives for change and fiery exhortations from the pulpit, as well as for his

⁷⁸ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 496.

confrontational preaching style. In fact, his life as a preacher began as he stood up during a sermon within a Roman Catholic church and challenged the priest in “. . . saying that the Roman church was no bride of Christ, but a harlot!”⁷⁹ R. Tudur Jones further remarks on the incident:

The congregation loudly demanded that Knox justify his remark in a sermon on the following Sunday – which he did. It was the commencement of the public career of one of the most powerful preachers of the Reformation era.⁸⁰

His public career was marked by great courage to speak the truth no matter what the cost and earned him the title *The Thundering Scot*. His confrontations with Mary, Queen of Scots, an ardent Catholic, are legendary. Whether confronting dignitary or potentate, Knox “. . . feared none except God.”⁸¹ Such courage would be needed because of the great task that God was about to set before him. His call would eventually lead him to Scotland, a land in need of reform and a place of danger. In looking back over his life, Alidair MacLeod-Mair remarks:

With such a man as John Knox active in so many areas and locations as the Lord directed him, a brief summary of his character and work needs to address many factors. He was the man suited to the hour. The fear of God motivated his life and work. He was firstly a preacher of the Word of God. He was called by God to be a Reformer. The Church that Knox and his fellow Reformers established in Scotland returned to the Bible as the supreme rule of faith and morals. They asserted the principle of the right of private judgment. They emphasized the priesthood of all believers. They strongly maintained that nothing should be introduced into the worship or doctrine of the Church if it is not expressly authorized

⁷⁹ R. Tudur Jones, “Preacher of Revolution,” *Christian History Magazine*, Issue 46, vol. xiv, no.2: 10.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Cairns, 345.

by Holy Scripture. The Scottish Reformers returned to the apostolicity of the early Church.⁸²

The Reformed faith spread across Europe through men like Luther and Calvin, but Protestant initiatives were slow in coming to the land of Scotland. Due to political considerations and the Roman Catholic leadership of the time, Scotland needed the breath of reform. There was no strong ruler in Scotland. An anarchic political environment existed as local clan chieftains exercised control over their territory. This led to a deterioration of both morals and religion, of not only the people, but also of many within the Roman church leadership. “Concubinage, drunkenness, simony, greed for wealth coupled with disregard for the people characterized the leaders of the Roman church in Scotland.”⁸³ The bleak nature of Knox’s mission field is in evidence from this very old biographical account of his life. The author notes in regard to the state of affairs:

“The form of popery which prevailed in Scotland,” says Dr. Robertson, “was of the most bigoted and illiberal kind. Those doctrines which are most apt to shock the human understanding, and those legends which farthest exceed belief were proposed to the people without any attempt to palliate or disguise them; nor did they ever call in question the reasonableness of the one, or the truth of the other. The nature of the functions of the popish clergy gave them access to all persons, and at all season. They haunted the weak and credulous; they besieged the beds of the sick and of the dying; they suffered few to go out of the world, without leaving marks of their liberality to the church, and taught them to compound with the Almighty for their sins, by bestowing riches on those who called themselves her servants.”⁸⁴

⁸² Alisdair MacLeod-Mair, *The Man Who Changed a Nation: The Life and Influence of John Knox, 1514-1572* (London: Protestant Truth Society, 2014), 26.

⁸³ Ibid, 345.

⁸⁴ American Sunday School Union, *The Life of John Knox, the Scottish Reformer* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1833), 13.

The region needed theological and ecclesiastical reform. It is in the ecclesiastical sense that Knox's influence is important for the present discussion on church discipline.

Knox's tutoring came from both Calvin, and to a lesser extent, Johann Heinrich Bullinger of Zurich. Calvin's impact upon the older man,⁸⁵ Knox, was significant. The Reformer of Geneva impressed Knox greatly. Calvin's discipline code, as enforced by the Consistory, brought about clear evidence to Knox that Geneva's character made it a city apart. In 1556, Knox wrote to a friend:

In my heart I could have wished, yea, I cannot cease to wish, that it might please God to guide and conduct yourself to this place where, I neither fear nor am ashamed to say, is the most perfect school of Christ that ever was in the earth since the days of the Apostles. In other places I confess Christ to be truly preached; but manners and religion to be so seriously reformed, I have not yet seen in any other place besides.⁸⁶

Knox clearly embraced Calvin's teaching on church polity, doctrine, and of course, discipline. Consequently, the Presbyterian Church of Scotland is the daughter of the Reformed Church of Geneva⁸⁷ and far exceeded its mother by becoming the most vibrant national Reformed Church in Europe.

Discipline Initiatives

The ministry of John Knox is intertwined with the turbulent political wrangling which raged between potentates and local lords. However, his relentless fervor to see the church reformed never

⁸⁵ Knox studied several years in Geneva under Calvin's tutorage though he was five years Calvin's senior.

⁸⁶ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 518.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 818.

wavered. In December of 1560, the First General Assembly⁸⁸ of Scotland met to organize itself for future development. Knox was the key figure in spearheading the assembly's work. Parliament received the *Book of Discipline*, co-authored by Knox, the following January. The document set forth a very thorough Presbyterian polity. Walker adds:

It was a most remarkable document, attempting to apply the system worked out by Calvin to a whole kingdom, though the "Presbyterian" system was far from thoroughly developed as yet.⁸⁹

In reading the document, Knox's tutelage from Calvin is in evidence. Calvin's disciplinal concerns are carefully integrated into how the developing Presbyterian Church of Scotland would administrate itself. Walker's summary highlights Calvinist themes of oversight coupled with the power of excommunication. He writes:

In each parish, there should be a minister and elders, holding office with the consent of the congregation. Minister and elders constituted the disciplinary board – the later "Session" – with power of excommunication. In the larger towns there were to be meetings for discussion, out of which the "presbyteries" would grow; over groups of ministers and congregations were synods, and over all the "General Assembly."⁹⁰

Furthermore, in addition to the *Book of Discipline's* articulation of ecclesiastical structure, it set forth schemes for approaching national education and concerns for the impoverished. For example, the *Book of Discipline* ". . . proposed that every Scottish child receive elementary and high school education – an idea centuries ahead of its

⁸⁸ Within Presbyterian polity, the General Assembly is regarded as the third court of the church that is above Presbyteries and Sessions.

⁸⁹ Walker, 499.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 499.

time.”⁹¹ The document’s concern for the poor is reflected in Knox’s own words:

Every several kirk [a Scottish term for church] must provide for the Poor within itself – whom not only God the Father in His law, but Christ Jesus in His evangel, and the Holy Spirit speaking by St. Paul, hath so earnestly commended to our care – are universally deposited.⁹²

The citing of the need for education and care of the poor are concerns reflected in Calvin’s *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*.

At this point it is helpful to clarify that the document Knox co-authored is now known as the *First Book of Discipline*. This book was the genesis for the later revision that became highly influential for today’s Presbyterian polity. Andrew Melville, another Scottish Reformer, and staff, produced the later version. The Banner of Truth’s footnote within Knox’s *The Reformation in Scotland* clarifies this point:

The Second Book of Discipline, under which Presbyterian Church Government as it now exists in Scotland was almost fully matured, was not adopted till 1581, nine years after Knox’s death, when the Church of Scotland was led by Andrew Melville.⁹³

Nevertheless, Knox is credited with blazing the trail to bring Protestant structure and godly behavior to the Church of Scotland during the Reformation Period.

Like Calvin in Geneva, Knox encountered opposition to the notion of discipline and oversight. Knox colorfully writes about such opposition as he laments:

⁹¹ Kevin Dale Miller, “Did You Know,” *Christian History Magazine*, Issue 46, vol. xiv, no.2: 2.

⁹² John Knox, *The Reformation in Scotland* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 250-251.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 249.

Perceiving their carnal liberty and worldly commodity somewhat to be impaired thereby, grudged, insomuch that the name of the Book of Discipline became odious to them. All things that were repugnant to their corrupt affections, were termed in their mockage, 'devout imaginations.' The causes we have before declared, -- some were licentious; some had greedily gripped to the possessions of the Kirk; and others thought that they would not lack their part of Christ's coat.⁹⁴

There is an ominous recurring theme apparent in Knox's comments. Opposition to discipline is to be expected from within the church itself. Like children who resist the disciplinal codes of their parents, so too, the people of God often resist the discipline of Christ's church.

Linkage Between Church and State

Like other magisterial Reformers, Knox believed in a cooperation between civil and ecclesiastical authority. From Knox's perspective, the ". . . Church and State should be twin pillars of God's house on earth, twin aspects of the government of God's people."⁹⁵ This position was rejected by the Anabaptist wing of the Reformation, which held to a strict separation between the state and church. Within the 1560 edition of the *Book of Discipline*, Knox and others see the cooperation between the secular government and ecclesiastical power as an expression of true religion. Within Knox's *Brief Exhortation to England*, he exhorts his fellow Scots by noting that if true religion takes hold in society, then discipline is necessary to prevent decline, and it is the responsibility of both the minister and

⁹⁴ Ibid, 234.

⁹⁵ Richard G. Kyle, "The Christian Commonwealth: John Knox's Vision for Scotland," *The Journal of Religious History*, vol. 16, no. 3 (June 1991): 252.

the magistrate to cooperate in all oversight.⁹⁶ The commonwealth is envisioned as a place in which civil authority must advance and maintain Protestantism according to Scripture. This would naturally lead to the removal of Roman Catholic loyalists. Regarding the *First Book of Discipline*, Richard Kyle writes:

Knox and his colleagues defined a Christian commonwealth as a country in which both the civil and ecclesiastical powers cooperated in the cultivation of what they perceived to be “true religion.” The book’s authors accepted the notion that government had a responsibility for establishing “true religion” and for abolishing all held to be contrary to it. In effecting such a religious reformation the civil power was, nevertheless, strictly limited. The rulers had no power to admit anything not approved by Scripture. In the eyes of the Reformers, such a submission to the Word of God would act as a guiding force upon the exercise of civil power and require cooperation between the secular government and ministers as the interpreters of Scripture.⁹⁷

Cooperation between the civil and ecclesiastical powers was essential in Knox’s view for the proper oversight and discipline of society. Civil authority, with its power of capital punishment was a means to govern God’s people and enforce God’s law. It was, in the view of Knox and other magisterial Reformers, necessary for the ordering of society. However, power of this kind led to abuses. Anabaptist concerns for political and spiritual connection between the state and the church were warranted.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ See John Knox, *The Works of John Knox*, vol. 5, David Laing, editor (Edinburgh, 1846-1864), 81ff.

⁹⁷ Richard Kyle, “John Knox: A Man of the Old Testament,” *Westminster Theological Journal* (Spring 1992): 78.

⁹⁸ The Sixth Article of the *Schleitheim Confession* (1527), an Anabaptist Confessional document, notes a prohibition on all Christian involvement with secular government. The document states: “. . . it [secular government] will be asked concerning the sword, whether a Christian shall pass sentence in worldly disputes and strife such as unbelievers have with one another. This is our united

Specifics on Discipline

The First Book of Discipline contains nine heads or subsections, including doctrine, sacraments, abolishing of idolatry, various concerns for ministers, elders, election, and church polity. The seventh head is entitled “Of Ecclesiastical Discipline”. This section, together with the *Scot’s Confession*,⁹⁹ sets forth the initial development of discipline in Scotland. The final paragraph notes the authority of civil power and the church in dealing with various types of crimes. The more serious crimes, those requiring capital punishment, are the state’s responsibility to enforce. In surveying the document, various offenses and discipline procedures are similar to Calvin’s Geneva. The original document reads:

As that no commonwealth can flourish or long endure without good laws, and sharp execution of the same, so neither can the church of God be brought to purity, neither yet be retained in the same, without the order of ecclesiastical discipline, which stands in reprovng and correcting of those faults which the civil sword does either neglect, either may not punish. Blasphemy, adultery, murder, perjury, and other crimes capital, worthy of death, ought not properly to fall under censure of the church; because all such open transgressors of God’s laws ought to be taken away by the civil

answer: Christ did not wish to decide or pass judgment between brother and brother in the case of the inheritance, but refused to do so. Therefore we should do likewise The government magistracy is according to the flesh, but the Christians’ is according to the Spirit; their houses and dwelling remain in this world, but the Christians’ are in heaven; The worldlings are armed with steel and iron, but the Christians are armed with the armor of God, with truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation and the Word of God. In brief, as is the mind of Christ toward us, so shall the mind of the members of the body of Christ” The Schleithem Confession of Faith, trans. by J. C. Wenger, Section 6, 5-6.

⁹⁹ “The dominant figure in [its] preparation was undoubtedly Knox” W. S. Reid, “The Scot’s Confession,” *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 891. The document, when ratified in 1567, became the doctrinal standard of the Scottish Reformed Church until the ratification of the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1647.

sword. But drunkenness, excess (be it in apparel, or be it in eating and drinking), fornication, oppression of the poor by exactions, deceiving of them in buying or selling by wrong mete or measure, wanton words and licentious living tending to slander, do properly appertain to the church of God, to punish the same as God's word commands.¹⁰⁰

The powers of the church and state work in tandem but remain in different spheres of authority. Each becomes one of the *twin pillars* which uphold society.

The procedures for discipline, once again, resemble the same process that Calvin used in Geneva. The document makes a distinction between public and private sins. In the case of private sins made known to few, the offending believer should be admonished (the same terminology Calvin uses as well as the *EPC Book of Discipline*) in private by other elders or believers. If the sinner is obstinate, the minister becomes involved with the possibility of church-wide correction.¹⁰¹ In the case of public sins such as fornication, drunkenness, and even swearing, the offender is called before the minister, elders and deacons for correction. If repentance occurs, the matter will remain only known to the officers of the church. However, if a stubborn spirit is apparent, then excommunication must be invoked and made known to the entire church.¹⁰² In this case, all conversation with the impenitent is cut off except for his family. Disciplined individuals may hear the word preached, but not participate in fellowship, collective prayer, or the

¹⁰⁰ *The First Book of Discipline, 1560* [book on-line] (Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1993, accessed 17 June 1994); available from http://www.swrb.com/newslett/actualNLS/bod_ch03.htm; internet.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 20.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 21.

sacraments.¹⁰³ If the offender has a change of heart, then the minister is assigned to investigate the sincerity of the confession. “The minister must examine him diligently whether he finds a hatred and displeasure of his sin, as well of his crime as of his contempt: which, if he confesses, he must travail with him, to see what hope he has of God’s mercy.¹⁰⁴ If true repentance is apparent, then the church will welcome the believer back at a public service where the elders “. . . shall take the penitent by the hand, and one or two in name of the whole shall kiss and embrace him with all reverence and graciousness, as a member of Christ Jesus.”¹⁰⁵ Again, this is similar to Calvin’s remarks and the *EPC Book of Discipline*. Section 11:3 notes the restoration process for a person who has been excommunicated by an EPC congregation. It is the Session’s decision whether the reinstatement be private, come before the Session itself, or in a public church service. Four specific questions are asked of the disciplined person in regard to the sincerity of his repentance. Question number one conveys the penetrating soberness that both Calvin and Knox articulate over the serious nature of offenses to God and His church. “Do you, from a deep sense of your great wickedness, freely confess your sins in this rebelling against God and in refusing to hear His church?”¹⁰⁶ The essence of the question is similar to both Calvin’s and Knox’s. Their influence continues within the EPC today.

Additionally, like Calvin, ministers are not to be exempt from discipline because of their office. The poorest among the

¹⁰³ Ibid, 22.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ *EPC, Book of Discipline*, 11-3, 110.

membership, as well as the preachers themselves, are all subject to discipline. In fact, the *1560 Book of Discipline* states that all sin is significant but “the life and conversation of the minister ought most diligently to be tried.”¹⁰⁷ It is because of the minister’s high office that no insulation from discipline shall be accorded. This, too, is similar to Calvin’s tenets and the *EPC Book of Discipline*.¹⁰⁸

Excommunication

The rod of discipline beyond warnings of admonition is the pronouncement of excommunication. Commensurate with Calvin, Knox holds that disbarment from the Lord’s Table is necessary to bring the impenitent to a state of mourning over his sin. A lengthy process of warning precedes the sanction of excommunication. Then the offender is shunned in conversation, business, and barred from the Communion Table. In such cases, the goal for the sinner is the same when compared with Calvin and EPC disciplinary documents. The concern is for repentance to be achieved within the heart of the believer, which ultimately leads to healing within the soul (II Corinthians 7:8-10). *The First Book of Discipline* is emphatic on this point. The goal is that the sinner “. . . by such means confounded, seeing himself abhorred of the faithful and godly, may have occasion to repent and be so saved.”¹⁰⁹ Such discipline is the force of consequence that lay behind warnings of admonition when not heeded. Like all forms of discipline, there must be consequences for ungodly actions.

¹⁰⁷ *1560 First Book of Discipline*, 23.

¹⁰⁸ See this chapter, 133-136.

¹⁰⁹ *1560 First Book of Discipline*, 21.

Procedural forms for excommunication were later added to Knox's liturgy (1567)¹¹⁰ and provide for both interesting and excessive practices. At the time, a low state of public laws existed, particularly in cases of murder. Knox believed that even if the magistrate fails to act, the church must act through excommunication. The discipline process for this case, as well as others, provides that “. . . restoration is delayed until the culprit has stood three Sundays in front of the church, barefooted and bareheaded and in base apparel, bearing the weapon used in his crime, and pleading for reconciliation.”¹¹¹ Like Calvin's Geneva, the Scottish Church adopted strategies to bring about repentance that are not only foreign to postmodern minds, but also beyond injunctions for charity (I Corinthians 15:1-8). Other severe practices included physical punishments such as iron collars chained to walls, bridles for scolding women, and a mainstay, the stool of repentance, which was positioned in a prominent place in the church while the sinner stood upon it during at least three Sunday's sermons. Excommunication was ordered for absenteeism from worship, witchcraft, drunkenness, slander, Sabbath-breaking, and fornication. These were all common offenses.¹¹²

The Lord's Supper was central to the enforcement of discipline because of its withholding in cases of excommunication. However, the mere threat of not being able to participate was apparent in church members' minds who were not adequately prepared to eat the elements due to family squabbles and quarrels. Calvin believed that

¹¹⁰ Knox's liturgy, also called the *Book of Common Order*, was another one of the Reformer's works which was approved by the General Assembly in 1564. It was largely modeled on the work of Calvin.

¹¹¹ McNeill, 250.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 251.

ministers must make regular home visits to inquire about the spiritual state of homes within the congregation. Knox believed in the same practice, which in Scotland also entailed the use of fitness tokens being issued before participation in the Lord's Supper. Eugene P. Heideman notes in this regard:

In the Reformed tradition, discipline and pastoral care have always been related to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. All those who had been baptized were declared to be subject to discipline. Prior to the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the elders in Knox's Scotland were expected to visit the homes of the people, to inquire whether there were any quarrels and to reconcile people to each other before they came to the Sacrament. Only those members who received the metal tokens of fitness could be allowed to approach the Table of the Lord. Announcements were made a week prior to the celebration in order to warn the people of the solemnity of the Lord's Supper.¹¹³

The emphasis upon home visitation was essential in order to oversee problems over discipline early, before sin hardened the heart and excommunication was needed. The practice of home visitation carried forward among the Puritans¹¹⁴ who came to North America from Ireland, having migrated earlier from Scotland.

The practice of excommunication remained an essential in Knox's Scotland. In 1569 he became the principle author of a document entitled *The Order of Excommunication and of Public Repentance*. This procedure manual outlines a more extensive overview of excommunication, including events that lead to its

¹¹³ Eugene P. Heideman, "Discipline and Identity", *Reformed Review* 35 (Fall 1981): 18.

¹¹⁴ The great Puritan, Richard Baxter, exhorts men in ministry to be present in family homes. "Visit the families when they are at leisure and find out if the head of the family prays within his family, reads the scripture, enters into worship in other ways. Labor to convince those who are negligent about the vitality of such duties . . ." Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, abridged and edited by Richard C. Halverson and James M. Houston (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1982), 79-80.

implementation and necessary confession, how repentance is done in public before excommunication is pronounced, the pronouncement of excommunication itself, and procedures of restoration. Care is in evidence with regard to prayer for the wayward believer.

The harsh tones of the discipline codes of Scotland must be balanced with the required prayers for the impenitent. Lengthy prayers for the believer under discipline and the church's attitude of heart are clearly articulated. One of the required prayers states:

We most humbly beseech thee, that thou wilt so effectually move his heart, and ours also, that he and we without hypocrisy, damning that which thy law pronounces unjust, may attain to some sense and feeling of thy mercy, which thou hast abundantly shown unto mankind in Jesus Christ our Lord.¹¹⁵

Additionally, there are prayers offered for the obstinate, that they will return to their senses and remember their allegiance to Christ. Passionate love and care for the wayward are also present in such prayers. Another states:

We most humbly beseech thee, for Jesus Christ thy Son's sake, pitifully to look upon this thy creature, who once was baptized in thy name, and hath professed himself subject to thy religion and unto the discipline of thy church, whom Satan, alas, now so blinds, that obstinately he condemns the one and the other. We have followed, O Lord, the rule prescribed unto us by thy dear Son our Lord Jesus Christ, in admonishing and threatening him; but hitherto have profited nothing concerning him and his humiliation . . . O Father of mercies, first so to pierce his heart with the fear of thy severe judgments, that he may begin to understand that, thus condemning all wholesome admonitions, he provokes thy wrath and indignation against himself. Open his eyes.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ John Knox, *The Order of Excommunication and of Public Repentance*, 1569 (Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1993), 6.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, 9-10.

Consequently, the weight of enforcement and occasional harshness of Scotland's discipline must be balanced with the Christian burden for those lost in sin. This, too, is found in Calvin and the EPC constitutional documents.

The enactment of excommunication and the encouraging of the state to rigorously enforce capital offenses reflect the severe intolerance of the time. For example, the laws enacted after 1560 state that there was a prohibition of hearing or being present at a mass, under penalty of confiscation of goods and bodily punishment at the discretion of the magistrates for the first offense, banishment for the second, and death for the third.¹¹⁷ Yet, it must also be stated that these penalties were not rigidly enforced. Few were imprisoned and none were put to death.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, excommunication for Knox and other Scottish Reformers was the ultimate rod of consequence for those brethren who became entrapped by their own sinful desires. Knox, together with Calvin, believed that excommunication was a discipline that would set them free.

Stern Penalties

As noted above, there were many obscure penalties in use throughout Europe's Reformation period for various crimes. These penalties were apparent in both Calvin's efforts in Geneva and Knox's efforts to reform Scotland. While it is true that such excessive penalties were the norm of Europe in the 1500's, Knox's principles uphold a more meaningful standard than today's cultural norms of tolerance with regard to church and state. Knox was a man

¹¹⁷ T.M. Lindsey, *History of the Reformation* (Edinburgh, England: T and T Clark Publishing, 1908), 301.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

of Old Testament law. He was, foremost, a man who depended solely upon the Word of God as the rule for life. However, he was most passionate over the Old Testament. It is within the Old Testament that Knox found answers to the problems of Scotland. Richard Kyle remarks:

While the entire Bible was important to Knox, he was primarily a man of the Old Testament. Knox's theological trademark bore the imprint of the Old Testament. The sources of his radicalness and uniqueness came largely from the Old Testament and the way he interpreted it. In all probability such an emphasis governed Knox's approach to Scripture because the Reformer was preoccupied with issues that are more readily addressed by the Old Testament, namely, the purification of religion, the covenant, the reformation of corporate religion on a national scale.¹¹⁹

Old Testament law reflects the character of God's holiness and complete intolerance of sinful behavior. Yet it must be kept in mind that the Old Testament church (Israel) is presented within Scripture as a theocratic state. Most, if not all Evangelicals of today, hold that the civil law,¹²⁰ as given by God to Israel, no longer applies to church/state enforcement. The rationale for this view is that the state of Israel has ceased to exist since the exile of both the Northern and

¹¹⁹ Richard Kyle, "John Knox: A Man of the Old Testament," *Westminster Theological Journal* 54:1 (Spring 1992): 66.

¹²⁰ A necessary distinction between the types of law revealed within the Old Testament facilitates understanding. There are three categories of law revealed in the Old Testament. 1) The Moral Law as summarized in the Decalogue (Ex. 20:1-17; Deut. 5:1-22), is eternal and continues within the hearts of men. 2) The Levitical Law which pertains to the Old Testament tabernacle and priestly ministry found in Leviticus is fulfilled in the ministry of Christ. 3) The Civil Law, specifically given to Israel on governance of itself and found in Numbers and Deuteronomy ends with the destruction of Israel as a theocratic state. Theonomists will differ on this point. They hold that there is an application of Old Testament civil law to all societal laws of men throughout the ages. See R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institute of Biblical Law* (The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1983), 1-14.

Southern kingdoms by Assyrian and Babylonian Empires. The state of Israel is a commonwealth today, but certainly not a theocracy. Nevertheless, many men, such as Knox, believe that the Old Testament reveals the pattern for subsequent societal law. This view led Knox to extreme with respect to the enforcement of discipline and societal order. Will Durant explains:

Knox took the thirteenth chapter of Deuteronomy as still in force, and interpreted it literally. Every heretic was to be put to death, and cities predominantly heretical were to be smitten with the sword and utterly destroyed, even to the cattle therein, and every house in them should be burned down.¹²¹

It is easy to understand how a literal interpretation of Old Testament law coupled with its necessary enforcement in the present led Knox to extremes within his civil and ecclesiastical reforms. The Reformer notes his own questioning of God in regard to such rigorous enforcement, but finds that human wisdom cannot question the divine. He states:

To the carnal man this may appear a rigorous and severe judgment, yea, it may rather seem to be pronounced in rage than in wisdom And yet we find no exception, but all are appointed to the cruel death. But in such cases God wills that all creatures stoop, cover their faces, and desist from reasoning when commandment is given to execute His judgments wherever God put the sword into the hands of His elect, they were bound to remove enormities. In such places, I say, it is not only lawful to punish to the death such as labour to subvert the true religion, but the magistrates and people are bound to do so¹²²

The present study of the Presbyterian and Reformed heritage reveals that the reform and enforcement of corrective discipline in both Geneva and Scotland are similar to other cities in Europe during this

¹²¹ Durant, 614.

¹²² Edwin Muir, *John Knox: Portrait of a Calvinist* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1920), 142-143.

period of time. Knox saw valid rationale from the Old Testament for the coercive enforcement of discipline, including a severe penal system. While some Evangelicals of today may balk at such practice and are right to do so, Knox at the very least sought out biblical reasoning for his faith and practice.

Like Calvin, Knox has received criticism from his contemporaries as well as from the writers of today.¹²³ His severity is typically cited. For some, Knox's severity led the Reformer outside of Christian orthodoxy. In a stinging polemic, the Catholic Encyclopedia asserts its position:

As to Knox's religion, it is sufficient to say . . . that the reaction from the Catholicism of his youth seems to have landed him outside the pale of Christianity altogether. Permeated with the spirit of the Old Testament and with the gloomy austerity of the ancient prophets, he displays neither in his voluminous writings nor in the record of his public acts the slightest recognition of the teachings of the Gospel, or of the gentle, mild, and forgiving character of the Christian dispensation.¹²⁴

Yet, Knox responds to the censorious in remarking: "I know that many have complained much and loudly, and do still complain of my too great severity, but God knows that my mind was always free from hatred to the persons of those against whom I denounced the heavy judgments of God."¹²⁵ Knox's response to criticism over his severity is revealing of his heart. He states clearly that he desires no ill will of any because of personal hatred. His motivation in being severe is the result of a healthy reverence of God, Himself. His

¹²³ David F. Wright, "Prophet Without Honor," *Christian History Magazine*, Issue 46, vol. xiv, no.2:40.

¹²⁴ *The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume VIII* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910); available from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08680a.htm>.

¹²⁵ Mark Galli, "The Prophet Pleads Guilty," *Christian History Magazine*, Issue 46, vol. xiv, no.2: 17.

hermeneutic may be in question, but his motivation for purity is not an issue. His life's work reveals far more good for the advancement of the kingdom of God than hindrance to it. He and his work should not be tried “. . . by our own frail standards of tolerance. He voiced with hard consistency the almost universal spirit of the time.”¹²⁶ He is hardly outside the pale of Christianity or the gospel. His tough nature and obsessive enforcement of discipline are as much a reflection of the time period as they are of his nature. The Reformation period of Scotland's history demanded a combative Old Testament prophetic spirit, and Knox remained as God's choice for that task.

Relevance for Today Found in Knox and Calvin

Each of the four conclusions asserted to be true of Calvin also apply to Knox. As with Calvin, Knox's initiatives are the germinating seed for Presbyterian bodies such as the EPC. In fact, American Presbyterian bodies such as the EPC are more closely connected to Knox's polity than Calvin's. Earle Cairns summarizes this point well, as he writes:

Indirectly, the Scottish Reformation affected America because many Scottish Presbyterians migrated to Northern Ireland early in the seventeenth century, and from there, thousands migrated to America in the first half of the eighteenth century. Thus Presbyterianism in America is a lineal descendant of Scottish Presbyterianism.¹²⁷

Indeed, Calvin's influence is present as well, for the Reformer of Geneva is present within Knox's mind; inasmuch as, Knox stood on

¹²⁶ Durant, 6:614.

¹²⁷ Cairns, 348.

the shoulders of Calvin, shaping his form of polity, he carried the story of Geneva to Scotland.

Secondly, Knox was a magisterial Reformer like Calvin. This led to excess in both of their thinking in regard to civil and ecclesiastical authority. Church and state interface has been a question of debate throughout the centuries. This debate continues today as Evangelicals contend with the secular spirit now blowing across North America. Richard Niebuhr outlines the longevity of the debate well in his 1951 critically acclaimed, *Christ and Culture*. The force of the state and the sphere of influence of the church are not easily reconciled. Niebuhr writes: “In this situation it is helpful to remember that the question of Christianity and civilization is by no means a new one; that Christian perplexity in this area has been perennial, and that the problem has been an enduring one through all the Christian centuries.”¹²⁸ Knox certainly made Scotland realize his vision of the *twin pillars* working in tandem for the ordering of society. Nevertheless, the blending of the pillars led to problems and confusion over the church’s true mission: to influence society through the preaching of the gospel as men’s hearts are changed from within, as opposed to external state enforcement. Today’s church (and a secular world) continues to grapple with issues raised by this dichotomy: the Christian heart versus state enforcement.

Thirdly, Knox parallels Calvin in his purposes for discipline, although they are not as succinctly stated as those of the Geneva Reformer. For Knox, the Commonwealth of Scotland was polluted by sin found in the masses, but also by the corrupt Roman clergy. Consequently, the seventh head of the first *Book of Discipline* (1560)

¹²⁸ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins Publisher, 2001), 2.

on Ecclesiastical Discipline notes both the Church of God and the Commonwealth both needing ecclesiastical discipline. The honor of God is laced throughout the document but not listed first as in Calvin.¹²⁹ The honor of God, concern for purity within the church, and passionate concern for the impenitent, are all apparent within Knox's writings. These same concerns are all found in Calvin and commensurate with EPC disciplinary instructions. Both men's views are imbedded in the EPC's constitutional documents. Churches outside of the Presbyterian wing of the Reformation will be served well by adding Calvin's and Knox's disciplinary concerns to their constitutional documents.

Fourthly, Calvin's zeal for discipline is echoed repeatedly in Knox's efforts to reform his native land of Scotland. There is no doubt that both Reformers were excessive in the administration of discipline. Nevertheless, the EPC and all churches who espouse Reformed doctrine must recapture the Reformers' passion and zeal to present the bride of Christ in purity by resisting the tendency to be non-confrontational. If one wishes to argue that both men were excessive, there are clear examples, nevertheless, the biblical grounds expounded by both Reformers remains the rationale for the employment of discipline. If Calvin and Knox are key forefathers of Presbyterian and Reformed thought, a nagging question is raised: why are their discipline passions not foremost in training, membership, and enforcement in today's church?

Some within the USA believe that judicatories within the land, including the Supreme Court, have used excessive legislated power

¹²⁹ See Knox's view in *First Book of Discipline 1560*, page 20, and Calvin's in *Institutes*, 4:1233-1234.

that should only be enacted by Congress.¹³⁰ Consequently, constitutional conservatives are in search of judges who will interpret the U.S. Constitution with the original intent in mind instead of the norms of today's society. Some believe it is time to appeal to the forefathers' original intent because of the danger of the USA becoming what it was not intended to become. It is a valid point to consider for today's political landscape and holds relevance for the question of discipline employment today in view of the Presbyterian and Reformed heritage. The original documents found in both Calvin and Knox must be rediscovered.

Calvin and Knox are the most significant figures in the development of elder-based polity. Consequently, the EPC and those churches aligned with Reformed theology must recapture their *reasons* for zeal regarding the necessity of discipline usage within Christ's church. The *EPC's Book of Order*, including its *Book of Discipline*, clearly reflect the concerns of Calvin and Knox, and the challenge is to rethink why both men viewed corrective discipline as such an essential mechanism of ecclesiastical function. A review of their passion for discipline should reveal why the EPC constitutional documents feature corrective discipline so prominently. The structure is in place. What is needed most is the will to use it.

For congregations who are Reformed in theology but not in polity must consider corrective discipline's place in the proper administration of the church. There is no shortage of constitutional documents, such as the EPCs, that may be adapted and augmented to fit into baptistic and congregational churches. Yet, the warning is the same for Baptists as well as Presbyterians. Having the structure in

¹³⁰ See David Barton, *Original Intent: The Courts, the Constitution, and Religion* (Aledo, TX: WallBuilders Press, 2000).

place is only part of the challenge. Once set in the bylaws of a church, there still remains the challenge to use it when the circumstance arises.

Chapter Four

Presbyterian Heritage – The Westminster Confession Chapter 30

The Westminster Confession (WCF) was the crowning achievement of the Westminster Assembly. The Assembly had been called within England by an ordinance of both Houses of Parliament. It met for the first time in July of 1643. The Assembly produced several notable works, including *The Form of Presbyterial Church Government*¹ and *The Directory for Public Worship of God*². However, the *WCF* was the most significant contribution by the Westminster Assembly. The labor of those who worked on this last great creedal statement of the Reformation has led many scholars to extol its significance. The following comments are typical: “The *Westminster Confession* and catechisms . . . have always ranked among the most notable expositions of Calvinism.”³ It remains . . . “one of the most influential creeds of Calvinism, a creedal standard for all Presbyterian churches.”⁴ It needs to be understood in its original broader context being one of several confessional documents that emerged during the Reformation period. R. Scott Clark,

¹ Found at <http://www.covenanter.org/Westminster/formofpresbyterialgovernment.htm>.

² Found at <http://www.covenanter.org/Westminster/directoryforpublicworship.htm>.

³ Williston Walker, Richard A. Norris, David W. Lotz, and Robert T. Handy, *A History of the Christian Church*, 4th Ed. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1985), 555.

⁴ Dirk Jellema, “Westminster Confession,” *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, J. D. Douglas, general editor (Grand Rapids, MI: The Zondervan Corporation, 1974), 1039.

professor at Westminster Seminary California and minister in the United Reformed Church in North America, remarks:

By “confession,” I mean narrowly the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed confessions, which we might call the six forms of unity (i.e., Belgic Confession [BC], [Heidelberg Catechism] HC, Canons of Dort [DC], Westminster Confession of Faith [WCF], Westminster Larger Catechism [WLC], and Westminster Shorter Catechism [WSC]).⁵

Consequently, the Westminster Confession is one of the six great statements of faith which assert Protestant orthodoxy and a clear dividing point with the Roman Catholic church. The men who gave themselves to this project were highly skilled and knowledgeable of the Scripture. They were individuals of high integrity. Richard Baxter, the great Puritan scholar, states:

The Divines there congregated were men of eminent learning, godliness, ministerial abilities, and fidelity; and being not worthy to be one of them myself, I may the more freely speak the truth . . . that as far as I am able to judge by the information of all history of that kind, and by any other evidences left us, the Christian world, since the days of the Apostles, had never a synod of more excellent Divines.⁶

Affirmations such as these lead Philip Schaff to remark, “Whether we look at the extent or ability of its labors, or its influence upon future generations, it stands first among Protestant Councils.”⁷ In addition, the *WCF* had a profound effect upon British colonists in New England as well as Presbyterian, Baptists, and Congregationalist churches located throughout the world.

⁵ R. Scott Clark, *Recovering the Reformed Confession: Our Theology, Piety, and Practice* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2008), 3.

⁶ Richard Baxter cited in Egbert Watson Smith, *The Creed of Presbyterians* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1960), 33.

⁷ Philip Schaff cited in Egbert Watson Smith, *The Creed of Presbyterians* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1960), 33.

Most of the British colonists until 1776, and most American churches through much of the nineteenth century, were significantly influenced by the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF). Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Baptists all subscribed to the WCF with slight variations. Presbyterians, beginning with the Adopting Act of 1729, differed only on the WCF state-over-church posture, which was changed after the Revolution. Congregationalists, in their 1648 Cambridge Platform, excepted only matters of church government and discipline; the Baptists, following the London Confession of 1677, took issue only with church government and infant baptism.⁸

Moreover, the *WCF*'s development was noteworthy: It took two years and three months to complete as committees and sub-committees of the Assembly labored to develop a creed that was originally envisioned as a revision of *The Thirty-Nine Articles*.⁹ The revision plan was later suspended as Parliament mandated a confessional document that was “. . . most agreeable to God's Holy Word and most apt to procure the peace of the church at home and abroad.”¹⁰ The *WCF* was first printed in December of 1646 with proof texts being added to the second printing in 1647. When the *WCF* was completed it became one of the most scholarly pieces of

⁸ J. H. Hall, “Westminster Confession of Faith,” in *Dictionary of the Presbyterian and Reformed Tradition in America*, gen. ed. D.G. Hart, consulting ed. Mark A. Noll (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1999), 276.

⁹ *The Thirty-Nine Articles* defined the Church of England during the sixteenth century. They were never thought of as a complete theological system. This doctrinal statement is still in use by orthodox parts of the Anglican Church.

¹⁰ *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), Part One: The Book of Confessions*. (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, 2004), 118. In addition the PCUSA's preface on the *WCF* reports the following: Five Scottish clergymen were in attendance and participated in discussion, but did not have the right to vote. Churches in Holland, Belgium, France, Switzerland, and the American colonies were invited to send delegates but none came. The Assembly met in 1,163 sessions and concluded its work in 1649. Eventually, the *Westminster Confession* replaced the *Scots Confession of 1560* and the *Heidelberg Catechism*. The *Confession* came to New England with the Puritans (independents) and to the middle Atlantic states with the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians.

literature to have been birthed during the Reformation period. R. J. Gore, of Erskine Theological Seminary, correctly observes, “The Confession is clearly a Calvinistic document, representing the high-watermark of Puritan and Federal Theology.”¹¹ Its Puritan¹² and Federal¹³ influences make it the perfect doctrinal standard for Reformed churches that remain orthodox and faithful to the Scripture. The Christian church in general and, in particular Presbyterians, owe a great debt to those who produced the *WCF*.¹⁴ The late John Murray, formerly of Westminster Theological Seminary, insightfully remarks:

The amount of work and time expended on the *Confession of Faith* will stagger us in these days of haste and alleged activism. But the influence exerted all over the world by the *Confession* can only be understood in the light of the diligent care and prayerful devotion exercised in its composition.¹⁵

This “diligent care” and prayerful devotion were further appreciated by the original framers of the EPC constitution. The *WCF* is the

¹¹ R. J. Gore, *Outline of Systematic Theology*, Fourth Revised Edition, Systematic Theology I and II, “Creeds and Confessions” (Newburg, IN: Trinity College and Theological Seminary), 28.

¹² Puritan influence includes emphasis upon personal regeneration, sanctification, and high standards in morality. The point of morality concerns the focus of this study and the *Westminster Confession’s* addressing of discipline in Chapter Thirty.

¹³ Federal or Federal Theology (Covenant Theology) describes God’s relationship to man in the form of covenants. Adam stood as the federal head of the human race while Christ became the second Adam and representative for the elect. The subject of God’s covenants with man is addressed in the *WCF*, Chapter Seven.

¹⁴ For the actual minutes of the assembly, see Alexander Ferrier Mitchell, John Struthers, eds., *Minutes of the sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines while engaged in preparing their directory for church government, confession of faith, and catechisms* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1874). BiblioLife reprint edition.

¹⁵ John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, Vol. 1, *The Claims of Truth* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 316-317.

doctrinal standard of the EPC and is featured in the denomination's constitutional documents. L. Edward Davis, the original Stated Clerk of the EPC, remarks:

The Constitution of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church consists of the doctrines as set forth in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, along with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, together with its **Book of Order**, composed of the **Book of Government**, the **Book of Discipline**, and the **Book of Worship**.¹⁶ [Italics mine]

This inquiry has noted the *EPC Books of Order and Discipline*. This study will now focus upon the EPC's doctrinal standard, for like other historical creeds, it too includes an entire chapter on the subject of corrective discipline.¹⁷ Chapter Thirty of the *WCF*, "Concerning Condemnation by the Church,"¹⁸ will now be examined.

The Erastian Problem and the *WCF* Chapter 30.1

Chapter Thirty begins by affirming that the Lord Jesus is head of the church.¹⁹ He is the supreme authority over all ecclesiastical polity. It is from Him that church officers are empowered with authority to oversee.²⁰ These points are made based upon a similar exposition of Scripture noted in Chapter Two of this study.²¹ Church officers (elders) now exercise authority over Christ's flock as they administrate the collective power of the church. Plurality is in view,

¹⁶ L. Edward Davis, Preface to *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, Revised EPC Edition (Signal Mountain, TN, Summertown Texts, 1985), v.

¹⁷ See Chapter One, 13.

¹⁸ Appendix F provides a reprint of Chapter Thirty of the *WCF*.

¹⁹ *WCF* 30.1.48.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ See Chapter Two, 49-59.

once again, as reference is made to *officers*.²² Corrective discipline must always lie within the hands of the Session or Board of Elders and not an individual.

Plurality verses autocratic dispensing of church discipline was not a cause for debate among the Westminster Divines. However, there was great debate over the corrective power exercised by elders at the local church level verses the Presbytery level. Congregationalists²³ were represented in the committees who labored over *WCF*. Nevertheless, the Presbyterian concept of church government prevailed and is reflected in the *WCF*. Mark J. Larson clarifies this point:

It is important to note that the emphasis of the *Confession* is not upon what the Form of Government calls “Congregational Assemblies,” which is made up of “the ruling officers of a particular congregation” and which has limited ecclesiastical jurisdiction over only one congregation. The *Confession* has in mind “synods or councils” (31:1) composed of “ministers . . . with other persons, upon delegation from their churches” (31:2; emphasis added). Obviously, since these officers are delegated from their respective churches, the jurisdiction of these ecclesiastical assemblies is over multiple congregations.²⁴

There remains great debate within the Christian church as to the most scriptural form of church government. The Bible is not explicit on the topic, and Calvin’s writings are not exhaustive of the topic either. However, the Westminster Divines defined presbyterial

²² *WCF* 30.1.48.

²³ Congregationalists, also known as independents during the Westminster deliberations, believed in the autonomy of the local church. Consequently, they held that there should not be ecclesiastical authority above each congregation such as a presbytery.

²⁴ Mark J. Larson, “John Calvin and Genevan Presbyterianism,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 60:1 (Spring 1998): 47.

oversight as the most biblical and is reflected in Chapter Thirty of the *WCF*.

Moreover, this section of the *WCF* makes a distinction between civil and ecclesiastical spheres of authority. The problem of the blending of church and state authority is present in the work of Calvin and Knox.²⁵ The Westminster Divines were very conscious of this problem when this section was written. During the writing period, there was a growing problem over Erastianism.²⁶ The late professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton Seminary, A.A. Hodge summarizes the problem:

The principle designated Erastianism, which has been practically embodied in all the State Churches of the Old World, includes the following elements: 1. That the church is an organ of the State to accomplish one of its general functions; and consequently that there is no government of the Church independent of that of the State, but that its officers, its laws, and their administration, are in all things subject to the civil government. 2. That all the subjects of the State are, *ipso facto*, members of the church, and entitled to all its ordinances. 3. That the duties and prerogatives of church officers include simply the functions of teaching and administering the ordinances, and do not include discipline, because, according to this view, to exclude a man from church ordinances is to deny him his civil rights as a citizen.²⁷

Indeed, the problem of church and state unification within England led to the bride of Christ becoming subordinated to the power of the

²⁵ See Chapter Three.

²⁶ Erastianism held to a blending of church and state authority. Its name came from Thomas Erastus (1524-1583) "The state has the right to intervene and overrule in church affairs . . . The Church of England is sometimes described as Erastian in that bishops are appointed by the Crown and major liturgical changes must have the agreement of Parliament." J.D.Douglas, *New International Dictionary*, 351.

²⁷ A.A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (reprint Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), 366.

state. The church was not solely authoritative over ecclesiastical affairs. The Swiss physician and Zwinglian theologian Erastus raised the question of the authority of the state over the church in regard to discipline cases within the Calvinistic party of Heidelberg. His remarks are clearly outlined.

In his book “Explicatio gravissimae questionis utram excommunication,” he contended that the punishment of Christians for their sins is not the function of the church, but rather the state. It was nothing new for England, for after the Reformation the state assumed responsibility for, and control over, church affairs, with both church and state standing under the authority of the monarch.²⁸

During the 1640s in England, disciplining power of any ecclesiastical authority was squarely within the purview of civil magistrates. In fact, “... no church government be of divine right, but all be a human institution depending on the will of the magistrate.”²⁹ The *WCF* is in opposition to any notion of Erastianism. On this point there is a pronounced disagreement with Calvin and Knox, though their views in this matter were not precisely that of Erastus. The Westminster Divines who had Erastian leanings favored parliamentary oversight because “... the power of excommunication had to be wielded by civil authority or else the unity of the nation would be undermined.” Nevertheless, the Assembly’s decision in regard to exercising authority remained with the ecclesiastical court and not the civil court.

The majority of the divines clearly saw a biblical mandate for a government of the church distinct from the civil authority, wielding

²⁸ Robert M. Norris, “The Thirty-Nine Articles at the Westminster Assembly” in *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century: Essays in Rememberance of the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly*, Vol. 3, J. Ligon Duncan, III, Gen. Ed. (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2009), 143.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

the power of disciplinary sanctions, despite what Parliament might say or fear.³⁰

The *WCF* succinctly notes that theocratic government found in the church is entirely independent from civil government. Church and state shall remain within the confines of their respective provinces.

Hodge adds:

The persons subject to the jurisdiction of the government of the church are also subject to the jurisdiction of the government of the State; but the ends, the laws, the methods and the sanctions of the two are so different, that the one never can any more interfere with the other than waves of colour can interfere with vibrations of sound.³¹

Consequently, the *WCF* does not provide for the abuse or excess of power previously noted in Calvin's Geneva and Knox's Scotland. Ecclesiastical enforcement of corrective discipline is limited to prescribed censures.³² Erastianism is rejected and separation of powers made clear.³³ This point is emphatic even though the Westminster Assembly was Erastian in make up with definite oversight by Parliament. The Assembly had no jurisdiction, power, or authority apart from Parliament.³⁴ Robert Letham clarifies:

³⁰ Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2009), 357-58.

³¹ Hodge, *The Confession of Faith*, 367.

³² Discipline is limited to 1) Warning, 2) Exclusion from communion, and 3) Excommunication from the church. See *WCF* 30.4.48.

³³ The *WCF* is unambiguous on the point of separation of powers. See *WCF* 23.1-4.38,39 and 30.1.48. This is true even though accusations were made during the formulation of this creed that the Assembly itself was Erastian in make up. See J. Ligon Duncan, ed. *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century*, vol. 3, 144-145.

³⁴ A. F. Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly: Its History and Standards: Being the Baird Lectures for 1882* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Work, 1897).

The Westminster Assembly was an Erastian body, even though only a handful of its members had Erastian convictions. However, this did not mean that the Assembly was constrained in its freedom of debate. Indeed, at times it came into some conflict with the prevailing sentiment of the Commons, particularly over discipline at the Lord's Supper and the freedom of the church to exercise discipline over its members.³⁵

The purview of discipline was clearly left in the hands of Christ's bride without governmental interference. Yet, there was not a clear break in total between church and state. Letham notes:

... the power of excommunication had to be wielded by the civil authority or else the unity of the nation would be undermined. ... The majority of the divines clearly saw a biblical mandate for a government of the church distinct from the civil authority, wielding the power of disciplinary sanctions, despite what Parliament might say or fear. Yet, according to WCF 23.3, the civil magistrate has the right to call synods, so there is no clear break between church and state. This follows the historic line of the church in both East and West.³⁶

The author's additional footnote on this point clarifies the complete shift from a church and state blend to complete separation with later developments in North America.

The later American developments, in which this position was changed and a clear separation between church and state was introduced, are a break from the historic position of the church.³⁷

The *EPC Book of Government* affirms this point.³⁸

American Presbyterianism, as well as all churches, have flourished in the United States because of the separation of powers.

³⁵ Letham, 35.

³⁶ Letham, 357,358.

³⁷ Ibid, 358.

³⁸ See *EPC Book of Order, Book of Discipline* (Evangelical Presbyterian Church, July 2015), 2-2, 80.

For example, within the United States, churches have been free of civil taxation, restriction of evangelism and censorship while the power of the sword (death penalty, Romans 13:1-4) has been reserved for the state. Mixing of powers always creates spiritual problems and complicates the church's prime objectives.³⁹ It is bewildering why some churches would desire the state of affairs to be different. The late Gordon H. Clark remarks:

In the United States, perhaps better than anywhere else in the world, the separation of church and state has been maintained. Whenever, as in the Middle Ages, and wherever, as in Spain and other Roman countries today, the church controls the state, the church has been corrupt; and why Anglicans and Scandinavian Lutherans want politicians to control the church is beyond the understanding of an American Calvinist.⁴⁰

Indeed, this investigation provides pertinent historical facts that lead this author to ponder the same question as noted by Clark. Separation is essential, and Christians must be very careful in efforts, no matter how well intended, to implore the state to enforce biblical dogma. The means may bring about unintended ends.

Power of the Keys

The keys referred to are two in number. The *WCF* notes them when it refers to the freeing of “*people from their guilt of sin*” and “*to open the kingdom to repentant sinners*” (the gospel key) and the closing of “*the kingdom of heaven to the unrepentant by word and condemnation*” (the discipline key). The scriptural support given for

³⁹ The liabilities of the blending of church and state powers are noted in reviewing the discipline codes of both Calvin and Knox. For Calvin, see Chapter three, 105-107 and for Knox, 121-123.

⁴⁰ Gordon H. Clark, *What Do Presbyterians Believe – The Westminster Confession: Yesterday and Today* (Philadelphia, PA: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1976), 252.

such power is highlighted in Chapter Two of this study.⁴¹ G. I. Williamson summarizes these points:

And the keys are the Word of God and church discipline. (1) The preaching of the Word of God is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Rom. 1:16). It is so, not because men have chosen it, but because God has ordained it (I Cor. 1:18). “For the preaching of the cross . . . unto us which are saved . . . is the power of God.” . . . (2) The administration of church discipline is the other key. By it “a man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition” is rejected (Titus 3:10). When a sinner will “not hear the church” he is authoritatively declared “as an heathen man and a publican” (Matt. 18:17). And when this discipline is administered according to the Word of Christ it is no mere form or a powerless pretense. It is an actual administration of the power of Christ by which the kingdom of heaven is actually closed unto him unless and until he repent.⁴²

Clearly, the *WCF* affirms both in the preaching of the gospel and corrective church discipline as a responsibility intrinsic to the offices of elders. Power is in force to open and close the kingdom by virtue of faithful preaching and, when needed, corrective discipline.

The second key of discipline is the basis for the *EPC Book of Discipline*, which limits a court’s authority only to those under its jurisdiction. “Discipline is the exercise of authority given the church by the Lord Jesus Christ to instruct and guide its members and their children.”⁴³ All of the constitutional disciplinary documents of the EPC interface well with the *WCF*. The tenets enumerated by *WCF* are recorded in the procedures for discipline found in the *EPC Book of Discipline*. The biblical basis for the discipline key is discussed in

⁴¹ See Chapter Two, 48-58.

⁴² G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1964), 234.

⁴³ *Book of Discipline*, 1-1, 77.

Chapter Two of this book.⁴⁴ The central texts include Matthew 16:13-18; 18:17-18 and John 20:23. The discipline key has the power to lock the unrepentant out of the confines, nurture and protection found only in the church. Chad Van Dixhoorn, Professor at Reformed Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C., highlights necessary sobriety for all who aspire to the office of elder in the church.

The message of these three passages is astonishing. It seems to be the plain point of these pronouncements in Matthew 16, 18, and John 20 that it is the responsibility of church officers to judge by the Word of God, as far as is possible, who is going to heaven and who is not. Church governors have power from Christ, ‘respectively, to retain and remint sins’. The elders of the church guide the body of Christ in determining whether someone is to be treated as a brother, as an erring brother, or as what Jesus called a Gentile or a tax collector. The elders ‘shut that kingdom against the impenitent, both by the Word and censures; and to open it unto penitent sinners, by the ministry of the gospel.’⁴⁵

Additionally, the *keys* are used in relationship to church members’ repentance or unrepentance.⁴⁶ This signifies that the heart of the sinner is the ultimate determinate in regard to the kingdom being opened or closed. Gordon H. Clark notes in this regard:

The Confession expressly makes penitence or impenitence the prerequisite of loosing or binding. The binding and loosing are ratified in heaven only if they accord with the Word.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ See Chapter 2, 57-66.

⁴⁵ Chad Van Dixhoorn, *Confessing the Faith: A Reader’s Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2014), 403.

⁴⁶ The 1647 edition of the *WCF* uses the terms *penitent* and *impenitent* while the Summertown text uses *unrepentant* and *repentant*. See *WCF* 30.2.48.

⁴⁷ Gordon H. Clark, *What Presbyterians Believe* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1956), 113.

The individual sinner is ultimately responsible for his own soul. The *WCF* merely follows the biblical injunctions for repentance (Acts 26:18; Ezekiel 14:6; II Corinthians 7:11).

It is important to note that the discipline key has limitations. It can be used in abusive ways, overbearing and without cause. There is a limit to church authority. Only the Word of God can bind the conscience, and a human court has no authority to do so above Scripture itself. All forms of church governance can err, but Scripture alone never errs. The *WCF*, Chapter 31, On Synods and Councils, clarifies the limits of ecclesiastical authority. Church courts may not bring members under discipline for conduct not clearly asserted within Scripture alone. Letham clarifies this point while commenting on the *WCF*, Chapter 31 in regard to synods and councils.

Scripture alone has the right to bind the conscience, since it is from God; no human court has that authority. Its decisions and edicts must simply reflect the teaching of Scripture, no more, no less (31.3). Even the greatest theologians and the most learned councils may err; the ecumenical councils are not exempt from this judgment. On the other hand, the Bible cannot err. Therefore, church synods cannot be made the rule of faith or practice. They can declare the teaching of the Word of God and exercise discipline over the church in accordance with the Word of God, but they cannot require a person to do this or that other than what the Word may specify. To contravene the Word of God is sin; to reject and edict of the church authorities is only sin if it has the support of Holy Scripture, for verdicts of ecclesiastical authorities made in their own name have no binding force whatever.⁴⁸

In contrast, the Roman Catholic position (in view of authority given to individual priests) is in disagreement to the authority vested in each Session as noted in the *WCF*. Roman Catholicism places great emphasis upon the individual sinner's responsibility to enter the

⁴⁸ Letham, 358.

confessional booth before participation in the Eucharist. Sins are confessed as part of the sacrament of Penance. Priests may confront a church member regarding sin at any time, but normally, the subject of personal sin is reserved for the privacy of the confessional booth because individuals are responsible to be in right relationship to the church, i.e. participation in the Eucharist.⁴⁹ Before weekly participation in the Eucharist, church members must make confession to the priest and follow the requirements of Penance. The clergy of the Roman Catholic Church are certainly concerned with the holiness of their church members. However, oversight outside of the confessional, often by one priest, is difficult if not impossible. Within Presbyterianism, there is greater emphasis upon an ongoing observation of a changed life within the sinner. Elders are charged with observing this change, as well as all conduct, while caring for those in their charge. It is far more effective to determine the state of repentance while monitoring a person's life outside the confessional booth. The *EPC Book of Order* makes clear that one of the responsibilities of elders is to observe the conduct of those within their charge.⁵⁰

Conversely, the *WCF* contradicts Roman Catholic dogma on the subject of penance. A.A. Hodge clarifies:

Romanists distinguished penance – (1.) As a virtue, which is internal, including sorrow for sin and a turning from sin unto God. (2.) As a sacrament, which is the external expression of the internal state. This sacrament consists of (a.) Contrition – i.e. sorrow and

⁴⁹ See John A Hardon, S.J., *The Catholic Catechism* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1975), 497-500.

⁵⁰ The *EPC Book of Government* lists disciplinary oversight fifth in listing duties of elders. “To monitor the spiritual conduct of the members and to take action when appropriate according to procedures set forth in the **Book of Discipline.**” *EPC Book of Order, Book of Government* 18-3 (Evangelical Presbyterian Church, July 2015), 16-10, 51.

detestation of past sins, with a purpose of sinning no more; (b.) Confession or self-accusation to a priest having jurisdiction and the power of the keys; (c.) Satisfaction or some painful work, imposed by the priest and performed by the penitent, to satisfy divine justice for sins committed; and (d.) Absolution, pronounced by the priest judicially, and not merely declaratively. They hold that the element of satisfaction included in this sacrament makes a real satisfaction for sin, and is an efficient cause of pardon, absolutely essential – the only means whereby the pardon of sins committed after baptism can be secured. *Cat. Rom.*, part ii., ch.v., qs. 12,13.⁵¹

The Roman Catholic view of repentance holds that the sinner must do penance for having ship-wrecked his faith and confuses the relationship between justification and sanctification.⁵² He, in effect, must find a way through repentance to win back the favor of God; however, the *WCF* refutes this view. Williamson adds: “It is no exaggeration to say that the biblical view of repentance is precisely the opposite of this.”⁵³ The biblical view maintains that there is no way that the sinner can satisfy the divine justice of God (Romans 3:19-28).⁵⁴

For the Roman Catholic, a visit to the confessional is only the beginning of spiritual restoration. In order for restoration to be achieved, the sinner must perform works of satisfaction. These works must be clarified. Roman Catholic dogma does not assert that sinners are saved by these works, although many Protestants believe this to be the case. During the Reformation, the point of debate between the Reformers and Roman Catholic scholarship was not over justification

⁵¹ A. A. Hodge, 214.

⁵² See R. C. Sproul’s discussion on Roman Catholic and Evangelical views of justification by faith alone. R.C. Sproul, *Getting the Gospel Right* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 153-165.

⁵³ G. I. Williamson, 99.

⁵⁴ See also *WCF* 15.1-6.24.

by works. Rome held and still maintains that justification is the result of faith, the grace of God and the work of Christ. On the other hand, the Reformers asserted that justification is by faith *alone*. R.C. Sproul clarifies:

The debate arose because Protestants said justification is by faith *alone*, whereas Rome said justification requires faith *plus* works, grace *plus* merit, Christ *plus* inherent righteousness. It was those pluses that became so problematic in the sixteenth century, particularly with respect to the works of satisfaction that were part of the sacrament of penance.⁵⁵

Works of satisfaction, a requirement of penance, produces merit and Rome makes a clear distinction between *two* kinds of meritorious favor. *Condign* merit is superior and is of such a nature that it requires a reward. Works of satisfaction done through penance do not rise to this level. Such works produce *congruous* merit, which is real but dependent upon a previous grace. Consequently, if such works of satisfaction are performed, it is fitting for a priest to restore the penitent to a state of justification.⁵⁶

Martin Luther took issue with any notion of merit whether it be condign or congruous. Consequently, the Reformation assertion, remembered in the Latin phrase *sola fide* (justification by faith alone), means nothing may be added.

The above comments clarify the difference between the Roman Catholic and Protestant positions in regard to justification. The Protestant view maintains a strict division between justification and sanctification as monergistic works of the Holy Spirit with no human work being added or required to maintain the spiritual position of

⁵⁵ R.C. Sproul, *Are We Together: A Protestant Analyzes Roman Catholicism* (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust Publications, 2012), 34.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

justification. Yet, Christians do fall into sin and must be corrected by overseeing elders. The *WCF* makes clear that elders (collective as in a session or board) have the power of the discipline key, but works of satisfaction do not affect a penitent person's spiritual state. Justification is a one-time event and fully dependent upon God and not the sinner. Yet, God does discipline His children for hardened or repetitive disobedience through censure or even expulsion by overseeing elders. Nevertheless, their salvation is completely dependent upon Christ's finished work on the cross.

Condemnation by the Church

The third section of Chapter Thirty concerns condemnation by the church upon obstinate sinners. The censures of condemnation are articulated in the final section of Chapter Thirty, section four. Section three provides concise reasons why condemnation is necessary. Six purposes are cited in this section for the exercise of corrective church discipline.

The first purpose cited for corrective action by the church is to reclaim and regain the believer who has fallen into sin. (I Corinthians 5:3-5; II Corinthians 2:6-8; I Timothy 1:20). The primary burden of the Westminster Divines was to see that those who had followed sinful passions regain their passion for Christ by repenting of their sin. Restoration to a proper relationship with Christ is cited by Reformation councils and theologians as sufficient reason to invoke corrective discipline.⁵⁷ The New Testament gives several examples

⁵⁷ See *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion 2*, edited by John T. McNeill, Trans. Ford Lewis Battles. The Library of Christian Classics, vol. XXI (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 1232-1233. In addition, see John Knox, *The Order of Excommunication and of Public Repentance*, 1569 (Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1993), 2-3.

of discipline being enacted for the purpose of reclaiming or gaining an offender. Van Dixhoorn cites several examples and notes the reason for such actions is for restoration purposes.

The Apostle Paul told Timothy that Hymenaeus and Alexander were ‘handed over to Satan’. Why? So ‘that they may learn not to blaspheme’ (I Tim. 1:20). The apostle urged the Corinthians to correct a man. Why? ‘So that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord’ (I Cor. 5:5). He warned them about their sinful conduct at what they called the Lord’s supper. Why? Because he did not want them to ‘eat and drink judgment’ on themselves (I Cor. 11:29). He later reminded them that ‘when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined’. Why? ‘So that we may not be condemned along with the world’ (I Cor. 11:32).⁵⁸

The second purpose of discipline concerns the deterring of others from sin (I Timothy 5:20). The Westminster Divines’ concern was “. . . insulation of others from the same offenses.”⁵⁹ The salient point is that a sinful model, within the church, not be sanctioned in any way. When church leadership fails to act in administering correction, a poor model is left to contradict the need for the holiness being preached from the pulpit. An unhealthy pattern is left for saints to model when corrective discipline is not invoked for sinful practice among Christ’s sheep.

The third purpose is for the purging out of leaven (I Corinthians 5:7). This point is connected to the previous one in that poor examples of holiness only lead others to follow a poor model in due time. Consequently, the second purpose concerns an ungodly example being corrected for the benefit of the godly, while the third purpose provides for the removal of the ungodly. An unrepentant

⁵⁸ Van Dixhoorn, 405-406.

⁵⁹ John H. Gerstner, Douglas F. Kelly, and Philip Rollinson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith Community* (United States of American: Faith Printing Company, 1992), 154.

lifestyle must not be tolerated within the church. The consequences of a habitual, ungodly lifestyle is removal from Christ's body. An ungodly lifestyle represents a germ of sin which must be addressed or greater infection may occur.

When Paul chided the Corinthians, who were reluctant to correct one of their own members, he used this third argument for church discipline with great force: 'Do you now know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened' (I Cor. 5:6,7). Discipline purifies the church.⁶⁰

The fourth purpose concerns the honor of Christ (II Samuel 12:14; Psalm 51:4). The Divines certainly knew Calvin's and Knox's writings which articulated similar themes for the employment of church discipline. The honor of Christ is central in both of the Reformers' thinking. The honor of Christ comes first in the *EPC Book of Discipline's* listing for purposes of discipline:

The exercise of discipline is highly important and necessary. The purpose of discipline is to maintain the honor of God, restore the sinner, and to remove the offense from the church."⁶¹

Calvin, Knox, the *WCF*, and the *EPC Book of Discipline* vary to a degree in the particular order of elements each lists for purposes of discipline. The *EPC* lists God's honor first, which is very commendable. Each of the purposes for discipline are significant, but notwithstanding God's righteous indignation upon lawlessness in the world, is not God's honor the most significant to keep within one's mind? After all, He is the great Sovereign who is deserving of all honor and worship (Psalm 22:28; 115:3; Daniel 4:34-35; Isaiah 6:1-4; I Timothy 6:15). There is much to ponder on this point: The *WCF* notes the honor of God within its purpose listing, coupled with the

⁶⁰ Van Dixhoorn, 406.

⁶¹ *EPC Book of Discipline*, 1-5, 77.

EPC Book of Discipline's first place listing. When all is said, taught, rebutted, and challenged is not God's honor sufficient reason alone to restore corrective discipline's place among the other two marks of the church (preaching and sacraments)? The *WCF* states elsewhere:

Natural understanding reveals that there is a God, Who is Lord and *sovereign over everything*, Who is good and does good to everyone, and Who is therefore *to be held in awe*, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served with all our heart, soul, and might.⁶² [Emphasis Mine]

The fact that God is sovereign and held in awe is more than sufficient reason for EPC sessions and all who desire to lead in Christ's church to recapture the discipline initiatives within their calls as elders.

What Christ offers to us is holy; it is a pearl of great price. We are to keep what is holy from those who act like dogs and pigs in the church (Matt. 7:6). Furthermore, God's people are called to be godly. Jude says we are to hate 'even the garment stained by the flesh' (Jude 23). We discipline for Christ's sake.⁶³

The vindication of the holy profession of the gospel key is noted in I Corinthians 6:1-7. If the gospel is tainted by impure doctrine, or if it is reduced to a simplistic message that appeals to the affections with no accompanying change of heart, then the key will simply not work. Turn as one might, the door will not open. This section reminds the church that the gospel message may not be diminished by those who have responded to the gospel call by profession, yet still live as the god of their own life. When this lifestyle is not confronted within the church, the gospel message becomes distorted and the holiness of God becomes eclipsed. John Murray insightfully writes:

⁶² *WCF* 21.1.34.

⁶³ Van Dixhoorn, 406.

One of the most appalling defects of much present-day evangelism is the absence of any consistent and sustained emphasis upon the holiness, justice and authority of God. This defect is illustrated very concretely in the failure to proclaim and apply the binding authority and sanction of God's law, summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments. It is as these commandments are brought to bear upon the hearts and lives of men . . . [that] . . . the sharp arrows of God's commandments can pierce the heart of the King's enemies and only these can lay low the self-sufficiency of human pride.⁶⁴

Murray is correct on this point. Evangelism without holiness, justice, and the authority of God is distortion. The good news is good because of God's provision for the forgiveness of sin through the atoning work of Christ. However, in order for the message to be fully grasped, there must be a baseline desire to repent⁶⁵ of sinful conduct (Joe1 2:12-15; Matthew 3:2; Acts 3:19; II Corinthians 2:11). In order for repentance to be understood, there must be a clear presentation of the moral law (decalog), which leads to a comprehension of personal sin. James Boice, while remarking on modern day evangelism notes:

The problem is that the evangelical movement in America in the twentieth century is shallow. It speaks of salvation, but it does not grapple with sin. And since it does not grapple with sin, there can be no true repentance. I am often asked whether we are witnessing a revival today, and I always answer that we are not. We are seeing many persons converted; to that extent I take the Gallup poll seriously. But there is no revival and will be no revival until there is an acute awareness of sin and a genuine turning from it. Until

⁶⁴ John Murray, *The Claims of Truth*, 129,130.

⁶⁵ *The Shorter Catechism of the WCF* states succinctly an excellent definition of repentance: "Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience." See also *The Shorter Catechism with Scripture Proof*, Question 87 (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust), 25.

that happens any national profession of faith will be hollow, and the country will continue to decline, just as Israel did.⁶⁶

The point of holiness, coupled with the presentation of the gospel, is critical for all Evangelical churches of North America to grasp. Scholars have, in recent decades, been admonishing the church to be careful over consumer-oriented presentations of the gospel. Presentations which reduce the need for repentance and elevate the need of personal self-esteem are increasing as post-modern thought infiltrates the church.⁶⁷ Consequently, large numbers of people have entered the church in recent decades who do not know or understand the gospel of Christ.⁶⁸ A gospel which offers salvation, the result of repentance being birthed in the heart, should produce love for God's holiness. This is, in many cases, a foreign concept today. Philip Delre insightfully writes:

To the twenty-first century, post-Judeo-Christian mind (and for the majority of church members), sin is an abstract concept – it's not connected to anything. The problem with many would-be soul winners is that they offer the solution (God's grace) before the impenitent sinner sees there is even a problem. To simply quote Romans 3:23 and 6:23 to an unregenerate person, and expect them

⁶⁶ Cited in Philip Delre, *Jesus Christ, the Master Evangelist* (Belvidere, IL: Voice Publishing, 2004), 25.

⁶⁷ See Michael Scott Horton, *Made in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), 39-114 and John H. Armstrong, general editor, *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, Part II, *The Crisis of Gospel Authority* (Chicago, IL: Moody Bible Institute, 1996), 107-174.

⁶⁸ The gospel of Christ is better understood after confessors have entered the church and are taught the catechisms previously adopted by the congregation or denomination. Authors J.I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett have made a very convincing case for reinstating catechism in the church. The Westminster divines, in addition to the *WCF*, also produced the *Shorter and Larger Catechisms*. See, J.I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old-Fashioned Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010), 21-94.

to be convicted by the word *sin*, is like telling someone they are under arrest without telling them what they are charged with!⁶⁹

The situation is made far worse when churches do not practice discipline over professing believers. However, the problem can be avoided among churches that have similar doctrinal statements on discipline as the EPC. Corrective discipline must be enforced concerning evangelistic techniques which diminish the “holy profession of the gospel.”

A great moral crisis in the Corinthian church precipitated Paul’s first letter. Yet, Paul did not begin his letter of rebuke by noting the church’s problem with immorality. Serious immoral conduct is not raised by the apostle until Chapter Five. Paul’s first inclination is to begin by offering a defense of the gospel which contains a wisdom beyond this world (I Corinthians 1:18; 2:2,6). It is a wisdom that may not be dulled by faddish approaches to winning the lost. The Westminster Divines knew that gospel pollution was so serious that it warranted corrective discipline. Michael Horton clarifies the wisdom of the gospel that Paul discusses in chapter two of First Corinthians:

... it is not the sort of “wisdom” you get from passing fads or that you are likely to see on daytime talk shows. It is a wisdom which completely misses the most sophisticated moralists and philosophers because the religion of the natural man is this: “I’m basically a good person. Give me a plan, a strategy, a program for spiritual growth.” The Gospel, on the other hand, says, “You are not a good person. You need someone else’s righteousness to cover your unrighteousness, someone else’s holiness to cover your shame, someone else’s sacrifice to satisfy the demands of a just God.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Delre, 25.

⁷⁰ Michael S. Horton, *Beyond the Culture Wars* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1994), 108.

The first mark of the church (preaching)⁷¹ is diminished when the moral law of God is not taught as a matter of first principles to new converts, as well as encouragement to older Christians who are in need of reenergizing their responsibility to be holy (I Peter 1:13-17). The Westminster Divines desired that the message of the gospel not become denigrated by poor communication or loose moral living of brethren who should be called to account. This may be one of the reasons why Calvin said that if the church loses the enforcement of discipline it will in short order cease to be the church.⁷² On this point, one need not look any further than the deplorable state of spiritual affairs which exists in the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America (PCUSA). North America's largest Presbyterian denomination jettisoned the *WCF* years ago.⁷³ The proud doctrinal standard was set aside for more progressive thinking. Today, *The Layman*, a monthly news publication of the Evangelical remnant still existing within the PCUSA, reports on stories throughout the denomination concerning the fight to maintain remnants of orthodoxy and the exclusive claims of Christ. One such article, entitled the "New Wineskins Initiative," is representative of the

⁷¹ Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper and Row, 1931), 419-420.

⁷² *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1536 Edition, translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 4:1229-1230.

⁷³ In 1967, the United Presbyterian Church USA (Northern Church) adopted a supplemental *Book of Confessions*. In 1983 the Presbyterian Church U.S. (Southern Church) gave up the *WCF* as its only doctrinal standard when it merged with the United Presbyterian Church USA in becoming the PCUSA. This larger Presbyterian denomination now holds to eleven creedal statements. Since the *WCF* is only one of many confessional documents, its significance is drastically weakened. See *The Book of Confessions* (Louisville, KY: The Office of the General Assembly, 2004), 204. Ordinands are required to "receive and adopt essential tenets" which means different things to different individuals desiring to be ordained.

church faithful fighting to remain a church even though theological liberalism controls most, if not all, of the denominations' positions of authority. John H. Adams of *The Layman* writes about the "Wineskins Initiative":

The New Wineskins Initiative does not advocate a separate denomination, but it does envision a new way of being a Christian church in the 21st century. New Wineskins leaders have declared that mainstream Presbyterians should no longer remain silent in a denomination that has abandoned its essential tenets; embraced moral relativism; and diluted the role of Scripture in faith and practice.⁷⁴

The *new way of being a Christian in the 21st century* is really not new, if the Bible and the lordship of Christ are held in esteem. These lay and clerical Evangelicals are scrambling to develop a new doctrinal statement⁷⁵ for the remaining conservative churches within the PCUSA who believe, at least, in the remnants of Reformed Theology. The acceptance of homosexual ordinations continues to be a threat as the denomination's position on sexuality standards deteriorate. Witches have been admitted to some PCUSA affiliated seminaries, presbyteries have sponsored Wicca workshops on "self" and "nature" worship⁷⁶ and at least one presbytery in California has sanctioned a reading from the Koran and prayers to "Allah".⁷⁷

⁷⁴ John H. Adams, "A Convocation for the Faith and Future," *The Layman*, vol. 38, no. 2 (June 2005): 1.

⁷⁵ See "Essential Tenets of our Reformed Faith" and "Declaration of Ethical Imperatives", *The Layman*, vol. 38, no. 2 (June 2005):11.

⁷⁶ Wicca advancement within the PCUSA has been growing since 1990. See John H. Adams, "Wiccan Priestess Studies at Presbyterian Seminary," *The Layman Online*, 28 October 2003 [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.layman.org/layman/news/2003-news-articles/wiccan-priestess-studies.htm>; Internet; accessed 15 July 2005.

⁷⁷ Parker T. Williamson, *Presbyterian Lay Committee Newsletter* (Lenoir, NC: PLC Publications), 30 June 2005, 2.

All of this theological and moral erosion could have been avoided if the *WCF* was the only doctrinal standard and required to be followed within the PCUSA. Additionally, Chapter Thirty's injunctions regarding discipline would have purged out the leaven (I Corinthians 5:7), maintained Christ's honor, and held high the profession of the gospel. All of the above are cited in Chapter Thirty as purposes of discipline.

This leads to the final awe-inspiring purpose, which is for the preventing of the wrath of God (Revelations 2:14-16). This part of section four reads: “. . . and to avoid the wrath of God, which might justly fall on the church, should it allow His covenants and sacraments to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders.”⁷⁸ Neither Calvin nor Knox developed this point as a purpose for discipline nor is it listed in the *EPC Book of Discipline*. However, it is a tenant of the *WCF*, which remains the EPC's constitutional doctrinal standard. This point must be soberly considered in regard to the plight of the PCUSA decline now so apparent throughout the USA.⁷⁹ The EPC has only one insulation from the disease of theological ambiguity afflicting its churches. The *WCF* itself remains as the protective wall. Without it or obedience to its tenets, the way

⁷⁸ *WCF*, 30.3.48.

⁷⁹ The decline began in the PCUSA in 1923 with 1293 ministers signing the *Auburn Affirmation*. In 1925 the UPCNA adopted the *Confessional Statement*. Both actions signaled the jettisoning of the *WCF*. In the eighties, the Northern Presbyterian body UPCNA and the Southern Presbyterian body PCUS merged into the most liberal Presbyterian denomination in North America. The moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Brazil lamented the theological liberalism so rampant within its mother church, the PCUSA. The Rev. Ludgero Morais remarks: “We loved the Gospel when it came from the lips of your early missionaries, but when others came from the United States preaching politics and liberation theology, we could not allow it. This was not the Gospel, and we did not want it in our country.” Parker T. Williamson, “Message from the world church: ‘Stop the infection,’” *The Layman*, vol. 38, no. 3 (August 2005): 21.

of the PCUSA may become the way of the EPC in the future and the remainder of Evangelicalism will not be far behind. The PCUSA has lost nearly 50,000 members per year since 1967.⁸⁰ This is one of several markers which may indicate God's curse upon a church that has ceased to be a church. The concern for the consequence in failing to correct the *notorious* and *obstinate* was within the minds of the Westminster Divines as they wrote Chapter Thirty of the *WCF*. I am not implying that no sincere Christians or orthodox congregations exist within the PCUSA. The faithful are making their voices heard, but the battle for theological integrity was lost years ago as the *WCF* was confined to the shelves of libraries for casual historical inquiry. The PCUSA is under siege. More than one hundred and fifty years ago, Reverend David McDill provided a sober warning to the church that loses discipline. He observes:

A church without government and discipline, is like a besieged city without walls; or a field with a fence. And in such a church (could it exist), the kingly office of Christ would be totally rejected.⁸¹

His warning is, indeed, the realized state of affairs within the PCUSA. Its descent from theological integrity to postmodern ambiguity could have been avoided if its historic doctrinal standard

⁸⁰ John H. Adams, "A Convocation for the Faith and Future," *The Layman*, vol. 38, no. 2 (June 2005): 1. Additionally, the Presbyterian Lay Committee of the PCUSA reports: "Since 1965, our denomination has lost almost two million members, nearly half its membership. In recent years, the decline has accelerated, forcing the General Assembly Council into making spending cuts, choosing drastically to slash mission spending (from \$144 million in 2001 to \$114.4 million in 2005)." The Presbyterian Lay Committee, *Can Two Faiths Embrace One Future?* (Lenoir, NC: PLC Publications, 2005), 18. In addition, most of the Evangelical congregations with the PCUSA who were part of the New Wineskins have transferred into the EPC. The Evangelical status of the PCUSA is now worse than when this work was first published in 2006.

⁸¹ David McDill, *Exposition and Defense of the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Cincinnati, OH: Moore, Wiltach, Keys & Co., 1855), 233.

(*WCF*) would have been heeded. Judging faithfully and rightly in the church will mean that we do not fall under God's judgment.⁸²

However, this is not the present case within the EPC. The *WCF* is present, but it must be used throughout its congregations in catechismal instruction, and employed in discipline cases when necessary. Not to do so will eventually lead to what has already been cited in regard to the PCUSA. Moreover, some denominations from within the Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist, and mainline Baptist traditions have all experienced similar declines. Authors Gerstner, Kelly, and Rollinson lament the loss of disciplinary correction of which Chapter Thirty was written to uphold. They write:

Since today church censors are almost everywhere non-existent, it is sobering to contemplate the reclamation, insulation, purgation, vindication, and salvation that are lost thereby. As candlesticks are being steadily and regularly removed from erstwhile Christian churches (Rv 2), no one need wonder why. Most churches which have lapsed into apostasy have done so without even noticing it, because no counter measures to prevent the fatal lapse have been made in the form of church censures. An uncensored church may quickly become no church at all.⁸³

The references to Jesus' removal of a church's candlestick is terrifying, yet it does happen (Revelation 2-3). Section three of Chapter Thirty was written as a sober warning to the church not to become lax in disciplining moral and doctrinal sin. Consider Jesus' final words known as the *great commission* in Matthew 28:19-20: "19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Jesus instructs the church to

⁸² See Van Dixhoorn, 407.

⁸³ Gerstner, *etal.*, 154-155.

make disciples. Clearly, “disciples” are men and women who have become pupils or learners of Christ. Yet, much more is involved. William Hendriksen remarks:

The term “make disciples places somewhat more stress on the fact that the mind, as well as the heart and the will, must be won for God Mere mental understanding does not as yet make one a disciple. It is part of the picture, in fact an important part, but only a part. The truth learned must be practiced. It must be appropriated by the heart, mind, and will, so that one *remains* or *abides* in the truth. Only then is one truly Christ’s “disciple” (John 8:31).⁸⁴

The author is correct in this matter. Indeed, the truth must be learned correctly and practiced correctly. Chapter Thirty of the *WCF* asserts that discipline is for all who number themselves as disciples. *The great commission* ends with Jesus’ promise to continue his presence with the church, but His presence is not guaranteed if the church fails to preach, instruct and oversee (Revelation 2-3).⁸⁵ The *WCF* does not marginalize corrective discipline as do many Evangelical congregations today. Presbyterian bodies are foolish to do so, given the fact that their doctrinal standard is the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. Baptist congregations must take note as well. Erosion of orthodox doctrine and morality are not problems confined to a Presbyterian denomination. They are trans-denominational blights in the universal church.

⁸⁴ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1973), 999-1000.

⁸⁵ Carson remarks, “. . . the gospel ends . . . with the promise of Jesus’ comforting presence, which, if not made explicitly conditional on the disciples’ obedience to the great commission, is at least closely tied to it.” D.A. Carson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew*, vol. 8, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 599.

Specific Censures

The fourth section of Chapter Thirty presents the Westminster Divines' listing of censures that should be administered, depending upon the nature of the offence. These specific censures are the “. . . best way to accomplish these purposes”⁸⁶

Section four lists three censures. They are the same three listed in the *EPC Book of Discipline*.⁸⁷ The first is the warning of the offender or admonition (Titus 3:10). The language and procedure is similar to that of Calvin. Such a warning may be done either publicly or privately, depending upon the circumstances surrounding the offence. Concern to not be excessive is in evidence as punishment must fit the crime. Hodge wisely states, “The discipline should be wisely and justly proportioned to the nature of the crime and demerit of the person.”⁸⁸ The discipline of admonition should be considered as serious by those who receive such reproof. Their conduct or beliefs have caught the attention of the seated elders. Consequently, they are being warned that change must be forthcoming. It is the type of rebuke that the Apostle Paul urged the Thessalonians to receive from their elders (II Thessalonians 3:6, 14, 15).⁸⁹ If change is not forthcoming, then a graver censure will follow.

The second censure involves a suspension from the Lord's Supper for a season. *The EPC Book of Discipline* also includes suspension of office⁹⁰ for those who are serving in such a capacity

⁸⁶ WCF, 30.4.48.

⁸⁷ *EPC Book of Discipline*, 10.2-6, 93-94.

⁸⁸ A.A. Hodge, 371.

⁸⁹ Van Dixhoorn, 407.

⁹⁰ *EPC Book of Discipline*, 10-4, 93.

prior to the offense. Sometimes, this censure is called the *Lesser Excommunication*⁹¹ as opposed to formal excommunication. The latter refers to complete rejection by the church (Matthew 18:17; II Thessalonians 3:14).

Suspension from the ministry of the Lord's Table may be very helpful in returning spiritual sense to the fallen believer. Each time communion is served, the person under discipline must pass the plate knowing full well that he/she is pushing away the sign of grace which is true spiritual food. Paul warns all saints to carefully partake of God's table by adequately examining one's own heart. Not to do so could bring about detrimental health (I Corinthians 11). However, the Christian who willfully pushes the communion plate away, whether because of private transgression or because of disciplinal suspension, is in a state of spiritual anorexia.⁹² Such a believer is denying him/herself the very spiritual food which nourishes his soul. Of course, this food, though physically eaten, offers no magical infusion of spiritual health, but it does offer spiritual health and vitality to the Christian whose conscience is cleansed by the Holy Spirit after confession of sin is made. When a Christian regularly does not participate in communion, he/she is in a grave position. From a spiritual perspective, he/she will resemble the emancipated teenager who refuses food for months because of a defective view of self. Spiritual health demands regular thoughtful participation in the Lord's Supper. Not to do so, for any reason, reflects spiritual anemia.

⁹¹ Robert Shaw, *An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Rose-shire, IV20 ITW, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1998), 364.

⁹² Anorexia is a physical condition experienced when a person refuses food in order to control or lose weight. The communion elements represent spiritual sustenance for the Christian as the gospel is signed to the senses of taste, touch and eye. To push the communion elements aside for any length of time, because of sin, creates a spiritually starved situation for the wayward believer.

This believer will grow spiritually weaker day by day until the sin that caused the passing of the elements is rectified. This was certainly the case of David prior to his repentance, and the Apostle Paul warns that participation in communion without repentance leads to ominous results (Psalm 51:1-13; I Corinthians 11:25-30).

To be suspended from communion is a very serious censure which may only have been sanctioned because of great concern for the believer in question. In such cases, the offending believer remains a member of the church, but is clearly under discipline of the Session. The hope is always that his/her spiritual hunger will drive him/her back to a state of repentance which paves the way to a proper relationship to God.

The third censure is the most grave. It entails the excommunication of the offending believer from the fellowship of the church. Rowland S. Ward clarifies: “Excommunication in its highest sense (I Cor 5:4-5; 1 Tim 1:20) is for grave and flagrant sins, and involves the public pronouncing of the sentence of excommunication upon the impenitent person.”⁹³ It is understood within the context of Chapter Thirty that excommunication is the last step taken by church authority in ministering to a wayward believer. This sanction is for, in the words of Ward, “grave” and “flagrant” sins. This is the *EPC Book of Discipline*’s sentiments as well. “Excommunication shall be administered only in cases of offenses *aggravated by a continuing refusal to repent*”⁹⁴ [Emphasis mine]. The prior steps of admonition and suspension from the sacraments would have been administered long before the sanction of

⁹³ Rowland S. Ward, *The Westminster Confession for the Church Today* (Melbourne, Australia: Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, 1992), 211.

⁹⁴ *EPC Book of Discipline*, 10-6, 93.

excommunication. To ignore multiple warnings is very serious. Church leadership must lovingly confront while demonstrating restraint, but there is a limit for the offender's own benefit. This final action may be the only way for some wayward souls to be restored or to clarify that some who are reported to be sheep are in fact goats. Officers of the church, who are truly called of God, always feel the pain of carrying out such a foreboding form of discipline. McDill comments on this section of the *Confession*:

There is nothing punitive, nothing vindictive in the censures of the church. The church knows nothing of civil pains and penalties in her censures. No, ecclesiastical power is of Christ, and is spiritual only. It is called in Scripture, a bewailing or lamenting over the offender. And it is certain, that church officers never pass censure, in the spirit of their office, without much grief of heart.⁹⁵

The concerns for the offending brother, the church as a whole, and positive motivator for the congregation in general are all noted in the *EPC Book of Discipline* with respect to excommunication.

Once again, EPC constitutional documents interface well. The *WCF* is intrinsically integrated into the *Book of Discipline*. Consequently, a proper foundation for the implementation of discipline exists for Sessions and Presbyteries to utilize when necessary. Independent Baptist congregations, who employ plural elder oversight, will also benefit from a carefully crafted statement similar to Chapter Thirty of the *WCF*.

The *WCF* is known for its precision and clarity in articulating the Christian faith as expressed in “. . . orthodox Calvinism, in scholastic formulation.”⁹⁶ Chapter Thirty is no exception and is only

⁹⁵ David McDill, *Exposition and Defense of the Westminster Confession of Faith*, 242.

⁹⁶ Jellema, 1040.

four section heads long, but all that is pertinent is covered. The Westminster Divines had the benefit of being the last assembly to develop a doctrinal standard during the Reformation period. A wealth of theological reflection was available to them. In addition, the writings of Knox and Calvin were well known. A part of their great task became Chapter Thirty with its concern for discipline among the people of God. The Divines understood that a church without discipline is a church in the path of God's wrath. The implementation of discipline is resisted and feared today, but it must be utilized every bit as much as preaching and the sacraments. G. I. Williamson warns:

When church discipline is avoided, a very great price is paid. The supposed evil that is feared and avoided is nothing to the evil that is sure to follow. Christ cares not for the reputation of a church when it is spiritually dead. Church discipline may result in a smaller church, but it will be a true church.⁹⁷

Williamson is correct. The call upon the EPC, as well as all orthodox churches, is to be consistent in overseeing those in their charge. Not to do so will lead to evil and distort the witness of the church within the world. Chapter Thirty of the *WCF* is designed not to allow the church to slip into such evil.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ G. I. Williamson, 238.

⁹⁸ The Baptist Confession of 1689 does not include a chapter on corrective discipline even though it is based upon the *WCF*. It specifically states in regard to communion that "the denial of the cup to the people ... [is] contrary to the nature of this ordinance and the institution of Christ," section 4. However it does note a warning for cavalier participation in the Lord's supper. "All ignorant and ungodly persons, as they are unfit to enjoy communion with Christ, so are they unworthy of the Lord's table, and cannot without great sin against Him, while they remain such, partake of these holy mysteries or be admitted there onto; yea, whosoever shall receive unworthily, are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, eating and drinking judgment to themselves. Section 8. (www.rblast.org/1689.pdf). Clearly, the framers of this document saw the need for corrective discipline, at least in regard to participation in communion, even though a discipline section was omitted.

The following must be remembered: First, Chapter Thirty of the *WCF* represents a thorough consolidated form of the biblical exegesis expounded upon in Chapter Two of this study as well as the underlying principles of Calvin's and Knox's writings as noted in Chapter Three. Chapter Thirty is brief. Therefore, the Divines essentially consolidated all of the learning expounded before them, as well as their own exhaustive studies. Secondly, there is a clear linear descendent line flowing from the Scripture, expounded by men like Calvin and Knox, and summarized in the *WCF*, Chapter Thirty. The Presbyterian heritage is alive today in the *WCF*. This is true in all manner of faith and practice, but more specifically in the present study of corrective discipline. The EPC's constitutional book on corrective discipline is succinct, precise, and further interfaces well with the *WCF* itself. The abusive or excessive parts of discipline, so notable in Calvin and Knox, were all filtered out by the Westminster Divines labor. What has been left to Presbyterians, around the globe, are unambiguous mandates to maintain corrective oversight of Christ's fold by the *keys* He entrusted to it. Finally, the purposes and censures of discipline are clear, concise and are easily understood. Nevertheless, the question remains: will Chapter Thirty be appreciated and fully utilized within the EPC? Authors Gerstner, Kelly, and Robinson lament:

The church knows what to do, but she is today not doing it. Frequently in books of church order disciplinary procedures are spelled out in complete detail, but almost never taken in practice.⁹⁹

It is true that the *EPC Book of Discipline* and *WCF* are written well, but purposeful will is needed to use that which the heritage has provided. What will the future hold?

⁹⁹ Gerstner, *etal.*, 155.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

The EPC is, indeed, part of the broader Evangelical Christian community. In some ways, it carries within itself the assets and deficiencies found throughout North American Evangelicalism. There are many assets, but the most significant are zeal in preaching the gospel message and holding high the Word of God as the only source for faith and practice. Deficiencies vary on numerous issues according to scholars' viewpoints. Yet, the review found within this study highlights Evangelicalism's most significant deficiency. The eclipse of church discipline affects godly practice among the saints, and also the way the gospel message is understood and applied. If church practice and behavior resembles the world, then the light of the "called out" (*ekklesia*) becomes hidden (Matthew 5:13-16). Therefore, this eclipse diminishes Christ's body within the world and fundamentally disables the church from accomplishing its tasks (Matthew 28:19-20).

Moreover, the EPC is not only Evangelical, but also Reformed in theology and heavily identified with the Reformation because of its linear descent from men such as John Calvin and John Knox. These men and others made the practice of church discipline an integral part of church reform and polity which carries forward to today. This is particularly true in conservative Presbyterian and Reformed denominations including particular Baptists. However, the survey data of Chapter One¹ indicates deficiency in teaching elders' (pastors) preparation and steadfastness to employ corrective church

¹ See Chapter One, 35-42.

discipline. The many biblical injunctions on discipline, coupled with the Reformed heritage found in Calvin, Knox, and the *WCF* do not appear in the forefront of most pastors' thinking. A course correction is in order.

Tools for Now and the Future

The EPC is blessed to have fine constitutional documents. Both the *Book of Order* and the *Book of Discipline* are clear, concise, readily accessible, and they interface well with each other. In particular, the *Book of Discipline* is as thorough and complete as any theologically conservative Presbyterian denomination.² Sessions and Presbyteries of the EPC should not be wary of using the wisdom expressed in the *Book of Discipline*. This is true of other Reformed denominations who possess similar tools. Corrective discipline must always be approached with a sense of caution and diligence to be certain of all pertinent facts. Orderly instruction found in the *Book of Discipline* serves to waylay fears over questions of procedure. The questions of how to begin, how to continue, and how to end are all answered within this functional constitutional document.

Secondly, the EPC's doctrinal standard, also a constitutional document, clearly articulates the theological basis for discipline. *The Westminster Confession's* Chapter Thirty provides a concise statement on corrective discipline and, once again, interfaces well with

² When compared and contrasted, the EPC Book of Discipline, including forms for discipline, is as thorough as other denominations such as The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, <http://www.arpsynod.org/discipl.html>, The Presbyterian Church in America, <http://www.pcanet.org/BCO/BCO27-34.htm>, and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, <http://www.opc.org/BOCO.BOD.html>.

the *Book of Discipline*. Scriptural warrant is provided by a thorough listing of proof texts.³

These two documents, the *WCF* and the *Book of Discipline*, are efficient tools to do the job of corrective oversight. Having noted Evangelicalisms discipline plight, the EPC is on much firmer ground because of foundational documents located within its constitution. Many broader-based Evangelical churches must create their own procedural policies and theological framework in order to, at least initially, begin the process of restoring the church's third mark. This is not the case with the EPC, and Teaching and Ruling Elders should give thanks for the tools God has provided.

Thirdly, the EPC has two other manuals that are of great help. Deficiencies and assets of both *The Youth Membership Curriculum*, 2005 Edition, and *The Leadership Training Guide*, are noted in Chapter One.⁴ *The Youth Membership Curriculum* has been improved with a more thorough explanation of corrective discipline. It can still be sharpened with information from this study. In particular, there is a need to demonstrate how scriptural authority and submission are basic to the Christian life.

The Leadership Training Guide is also a tool for the present and the future. However, textual additions are needed within this critical training manual for Ruling Elders who desire office within the EPC. Much more must be covered if Ruling Elders are to fulfill their first duty according to the *EPC Book of Order*.⁵ Additional information

³ See Appendix F.

⁴ See Chapter One, 38-41.

⁵ Duty number five in a list of sixteen states: "To monitor the spiritual conduct of the members, and to take action when appropriate according to procedures set forth in the Book of Discipline," Section 18-3. Evangelical

that should be provided are the EPC's heritage, scriptural warrant and reference to the *WCF* Chapter Thirty. Other evangelical and Reformed denominations can benefit as well. To this end the following must be considered.

First, candidates for the office of Ruling Elder must become acquainted with Calvin's and Knox's view on corrective church discipline. These Reformers' shortcomings and obsessiveness must also be included, but failing to make a connection to their level of concern for discipline is counterproductive. Corrective discipline was an integral part of their instituted reforms. Consequently, discipline must be on the minds of Ruling Elder candidates. Oversight and correction are both intrinsic to the office of elder and the EPC as well as other Reformed churches have a rich heritage to explore and derive guidance.

Secondly, the manual offers no scriptural warrant for the use of corrective discipline.⁶ Chapter Two of this inquiry provides numerous texts that may be used by Ruling Elders for study. Both the injunctions of Scripture for discipline, as well as examples of its implementation by the first century church must be included.⁷ When the Scripture is studied, the importance of discipline being maintained within the church, becomes clear as to why it is number one on Sessions' duty roster.

Presbyterian Church, *Book of Order, Book of Government* (Evangelical Presbyterian Church, July 2015), 51.

⁶ *EPC Leadership Training Guide*, Christian Education and Publication Committee of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, June 2012, 116, 157-158.

⁷ For injunctions see Matthew 16:18-19; 18:15-20; for implementation see I Corinthians 5:1-13; II Corinthians 2:5-11; II Thessalonians 3:6-15; I Timothy 1:18-20 and Titus 3:9-11.

Thirdly, all EPC candidates for Ruling Elder status must become familiar with the *WCF*. Indeed, it remains as the doctrinal standard of the church. Ruling Elders must understand that the *EPC Book of Discipline* stems from the *WCF*, Chapter Thirty. Furthermore, the salient points of Knox and Calvin, with respect to discipline, are summarized in the four sub-categories of Chapter Thirty. It is a valid concern that the study material required for the candidate to be cognizant is voluminous. Nevertheless, discipline must not be allowed to be marginalized or set aside due to the amount of information to be taught, learned, and understood.

Baptist and independent congregations should consider utilizing the language of the *WCF*, Chapter Thirty, in their own bylaws and doctrinal statements. This chapter may be adopted as a whole or perhaps parts may be formulated into a document, created from within the congregation, and inserted into the church's constitution. The precise language of Chapter Thirty, which asserts the rationale for corrective discipline, is an excellent resource for congregations who desire to formalize the need and implementation for corrective discipline among their church members.

The *Leadership Training Guide*, though deficient, as well as the *Youth Membership Curriculum* remain tools for use within the EPC. Both publications are useful and will be improved through future revisions. Many Evangelical churches do not have such tools and would be grateful for such useful assets. Church members of other Reformed denominations should become familiar with their own education resources for elders and youth membership. Inquiry must be made in regard to their usage and effectiveness within the church.

Concern for Teaching Elders

One of the most sobering points, in view of the survey data, is that Teaching Elders lack preparation for the implementation of corrective discipline.⁸ Teaching Elders are key to the function of corrective discipline. Pastors have much on their minds as they shepherd God's flock. Their list of responsibilities is quite long, including the overall growth of the church. Increasing the size of a congregation may become an all-encompassing concern which works against the use of church discipline. The decrease that may occur if discipline is rightly employed is reason, in the mind of some, to subtly sideline discipline while preaching and sacraments gain in function and prominence. Nevertheless, discipline must be elevated within seminary curriculum.⁹ Chapter One notes that seminaries are covering the topic of discipline, but its essential nature as a third mark of the church and helps for implementation appear to be deficient.

Seminary instruction remains the baseline preparation for ministers within the EPC and the same may be said of many Baptist churches as well.¹⁰ If the required seminary training does not

⁸ See Chapter One, 36-38. In addition, during a recent meeting of the Midwest Presbytery, the first question of the survey was asked of a candidate for ordination by the writer. The same response was given. Little to no preparation was acknowledged by the candidate who was subsequently approved for ordination. The problem of preparation continues. Midwest Presbytery Meeting, oral examination of candidate. Knox Presbyterian Church, Ann Arbor, Michigan. September 9, 2005.

⁹ See Chapter One, 36-38.

¹⁰ Seminary instruction is an expectation of all candidates for Teaching Elder office. However, extraordinary status does exist for candidates who have been unable to follow the traditional track of seminary instructions. These individuals must be sensitized and prepared for the office of pastor which includes instruction on church discipline. See *EPC Book of Order, Book of Government*, 12-5, 36.

thoroughly cover church discipline and its implementation, then all Evangelical churches will continue to experience an eclipse of the third mark. Many fine Reformed theological schools are trying to prepare its students as completely as possible. However, it appears that corrective church discipline, with its importance to Knox and Calvin, must be highlighted more in seminary curriculum. Once again, the concern at hand is not that discipline is being covered during the three years of seminary training. Rather, it appears over time that preaching and sacraments have become so focused upon that discipline does not receive the attention it should in the curriculum.¹¹ Discipline may be covered during an elective taught by denominational representatives. However, this does not provide for the scope of material that must be taught regarding the biblical injunctions, Calvin's and Knox's passion, and the meaning of Chapter Thirty of the *WCF*. In addressing churches about church discipline, Ken Sande, President of Peace Makers Ministries, notes: "Provide your members with *thorough preaching and teaching* on the biblical basis and process of church discipline" [emphasis mine].¹² Pastors will not have the passion, knowledge, and drive to carry out Sande's admonition if they have not been thoroughly taught about church discipline during seminary.

Pastors set the pace and agenda for church development. They have an enormous amount of influence through their leadership and instruction opportunities. Few pastors are unaware of the pulse and progression of their congregation. Consequently, if church discipline is to be raised in the consciousness of church members, then Teaching Elders will play a vital role. Unless their sensitivity and

¹¹ See Survey and Curriculum data, Chapter One, 35-38.

¹² Ken Sande, "Keeping the Lawyers at Bay," *Christianity Today* (August 2005): 34-35.

preparedness is raised regarding the subject in question, then church discipline will continue to be eclipsed by other concerns. To avoid this calamity, seminary instruction which highlights the *power of the keys* and their usage in both preaching the gospel and discipline must become elevated within seminary core curriculum. Mere electives and individualistic dispositions of professors who teach ecclesiology will not do.

Stumbling Blocks to Avoid

EPC congregations and all evangelical congregations as well must continue to encourage membership of those who attend each particular church.¹³ Officially acknowledging the authority of the church over one's life and family is essential if discipline is to be dutifully implemented. Reticence and ambiguity over discipline must be avoided when the EPC induction questions are asked of prospective members. Question number five is quite specific on the requirement to submit to the local church Session.¹⁴ Broader-based evangelical Reformed churches should create their own wording for a similar question to be asked of new member inductees. However, this is not enough. This question must be asked of prospective members only if they have had thorough instruction on the benefits, procedures and requirements of church discipline in a new members' class. Asking a prospective member to submit to church leadership, with little or no instruction, will lead to affirmative answers with no meaning behind them. This problem leads Mark Dever, author of "Nine Marks of a Healthy Church," to state: "With most Evangelical

¹³ The reasons for the need for membership are presented in Chapter One, 15-20, and Chapter Two, 65-69.

¹⁴ Question number five for EPC membership is noted in Chapter One, 20.

churches today, the membership is fairly meaningless.”¹⁵ EPC Congregations must strive to make well-informed members of those who attend their services.

The need for membership also highlights some of the problems caused by the legitimate desire for the numerical growth of congregations. All Evangelical churches desire to grow numerically. The implementation of a thorough church membership preparation class that includes the topic of corrective discipline may cause anxiety. The fear is that fewer people may wish to become members or, much less, may not even wish to attend, if oversight by a board of Elders has the right to question conduct. Dever continues:

Many want their antinomian liberty, their freedom to have a life that’s not known by others. They don’t want to be open and honest with others; they don’t want people inquiring about their lives. It’s not just our modern, affluent, individualistic American culture; it’s the sinful human heart. We desire to discipline ourselves only for those ends that we like. And we do not want other people to have that kind of authority in our lives.¹⁶

Dever is correct in this matter. The “antinomian liberty” he speaks of is typical of the unregenerate heart. EPC churches, and in particular individual Sessions, must remember their Reformed Theology on this point. Concerning the fall of man, the *WCF* states: “. . . original corruption completely disinclines, incapacitates, and turns us away from every good, while it inclines us to every evil.”¹⁷ Once again, distortion of the gospel as presented in the gospel key will lead to uninformed members or at worse unregenerate confessors filling the

¹⁵ Mark Dever, interview by Mark Galli, “Shaping Holy Disciples,” *Christianity Today* (August 2005): 32-33.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, Revised EPC edition (Signal Mountain, TN: Summertown Texts, 1979), 12.

pews on Sunday mornings. There is a psychologizing of the gospel which has decreased repentance while elevating one's self-esteem. David Wells remarked in 1993 that:

The psychologizing of life cuts the nerve of evangelical identity because the common assumption beneath the self movement is the perfectibility of human nature, and this assumption is anathema to the Christian gospel. ... It is precisely this sort of assumption that neither evangelical theology nor evangelical piety should be making. The biblical gospel asserts the very reverse – namely, that the self is twisted, that it is maladjusted in its relationship to both God and others, that it is full of deceit and rationalizations, that it is lawless, that it is in rebellion, and instead that one must die to self in order to live. It is this that is at the heart of the biblical gospel, this that is at the center of Christian character.¹⁸

It should be expected that education of potential members, with proper instruction on the true gospel, accountability and discipline, may lead to fewer attendees and perhaps, people desiring membership. Casual attendees and even those who desire membership may be unregenerate. Both the gospel key and the discipline key must be taught, appreciated and utilized when necessary. Some congregations may shrink in size after implementing proper discipline. This concern is counter to most church growth quests that are so prevalent within Evangelical circles. Nevertheless, meaningful church membership must be encouraged, and in some cases, restored, among all evangelical congregations. Meaningful membership will honor and uphold the integrity of the gospel. While lamenting the lack of church discipline, John Ortberg, formerly of Willow Creek Church, Barrington, IL, remarks:

I believe churches try to cover up sin even more than people outside the church do, and larger churches are more prone to this

¹⁸ David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 179-179.

temptation than smaller ones. Maybe it's because we are apt to confuse "bigger" with "more blessed," and mistakenly confer spiritual maturity. Maybe it's because we erroneously think that covering up sin in a highly visible ministry will *protect the reputation of the gospel* (emphasis mine).¹⁹

Ortberg's observation, concerning larger congregations is applicable to small congregations as well. Whether it be the reputation of the gospel or the reputation of the church is a matter of speculation. Yet, the discipline key will add to the reputation of the gospel key. Becoming a member must have meaning, which fundamentally includes willingness to submit to church authority.

In addition, the quest for church growth can become a significant stumbling block. Desire for numeric growth is certainly good. All Christian churches should be concerned with the advancement of the gospel message with the hope that new believers will be added to Christ's fold. If the "third mark" is restored to prominence, there will be a major positive effect upon the church. Yet, this positive effect will, at least in the short term, result in lower attendance within many evangelical congregations. As noted in chapter one,²⁰ many evangelical and Reformed congregations have acquiesced to a diluted gospel by adopting marketing techniques from the corporate world. It is believed that these adaptations will result in greater attendance. Self-gratification is replete in North America and churches have accommodated this mindset into worship services, ministry and education. Corrective church discipline remains antithetical to this means (felt needs) for ministry. Philip D. Kenneson and James L. Street write:

¹⁹ John Ortberg, "Spheres of Accountability," *Christianity Today* (August 2005): 33.

²⁰ Chapter One, 21ff.

All emphasis on market orientation and felt needs would insist that something be considered relevant, valuable, and desirable only to the extent that it is deemed such by those consumers we are attempting to engage in exchange. However, such a view is completely antithetical to the message of the gospel ... The discipline of the marketplace encourages people to view the entire world (including the church) as a venue for self-gratification. ... [The] heavy emphasis on felt needs all but drowns out the central teaching that the Christian life calls for a radical transformation and reorientation of one's whole way of thinking and behaving.²¹

In brief, corrective discipline is bad business. It will drive mere church attenders out of the pews which may be what some congregations need. Membership must not be de-emphasized, but rather clarified as essential with its chief benefit being corrective oversight. This cannot happen if marketing strategies, with their stress on consumerism, hold the high ground in some church growth models. David Neff, Editor of *Christianity Today* magazine, laments:

. . . . evangelicalism's eagerness to reach the lost has taken a cue from a different economic model: discount retailing, where prices are low and the customer is king. In some corners, a radically abstracted doctrine of justification by faith has been used to marginalize any concern for renewed and reoriented lives. Dietrich Bonhoeffer called this "cheap grace."²²

Neff's reference to Bonhoeffer is germane to the thrust of this inquiry. Cheap grace was a central concern to Bonhoeffer as the Lutheran Church capitulated to the Nazis. Today's impediment to the gospel and discipline is not the Nazis, but there is a capitulation to the gospel of self-esteem and church growth strategies which are rooted in consumerism tactics of business rather than the Bible.

²¹ Philip D. Kenneson and James L. Street, *Selling Out the Church: The Dangers of Church Marketing* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 1997), 75.

²² David Neff, "Healing the Body of Christ," *Christianity Today* (August 2005): 35-36.

Pastor Timothy Keller, while writing the foreword for Eric Metaxas' book on Bonhoeffer, remarks:

How could the “church of Luther,” that great teacher of the gospel, have ever come to such a place? The answer is that the true gospel, summed up by Bonhoeffer as *costly grace*, had been lost. On the one hand, the church had become marked by formalism. That meant going to church and hearing that God just loves and forgives everyone, so it doesn't really matter much how you live. Bonhoeffer called this *cheap grace*. On the other hand, there was legalism, or salvation by law and good works. Legalism meant that God loves you because you have pulled yourself together and are trying to live a good, disciplined life. ... Anyone who truly understands how God's grace comes to us will have a changed life. That's the gospel, not salvation by law, or by cheap grace, but by costly grace. Costly grace changes you from the inside out. Neither law nor cheap grace can do that.²³

Indeed, a changed life is evidence of a proper use of the gospel key and correct use of the discipline key when warranted. Grace should be expensive, and the enforcement of corrective discipline through loving accountability upholds its priceless nature. Discipline of the membership is not compatible with growth techniques which strive only for the comfort-level of attendees and members.

Some churches may fear that the presence of church discipline will diminish attendance and affect the congregation's witness within the community. These concerns are only valid if church leadership is committed to church growth at all costs. The cost of not teaching and enforcing accountability is far greater.

Moreover, churches may not become as large or even maintain large numbers of lost people who in the past filled up theater seats or pews. Each week, it must be kept in mind, that the central attraction

²³ Timothy J. Keller, foreword to Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), xv-xvi.

in church growth must be Christ as forgiver and Christ as Lord. The Lordship dimension demands accountability. If this is not understood or much less preached, then cheap grace will plague all evangelical congregations including the EPC even though attendance figures remain high. Pastors must do the heavy lifting while endeavoring to maintain orthodoxy of the local congregation. Christian leaders must be captivated by the Scripture and not what is in vogue within the evangelical world. Once again, Wells, remarks:

The fundamental requirement of the Christian leader is not a knowledge of where the stream of popular opinion is flowing but a knowledge of where the stream of God's truth lies. There can be no leadership without a vision of both what the Church has become and what, under God, it should be.²⁴

Becoming sensitized to discipline's place within Presbyteries, Sessions, and local congregations poses soul-searching questions in regard to the cost of implementation. Are churches willing to lose both members and attendees if accountability and enforcement comes to the fore? This is a question that should not be answered lightly by Teaching and Ruling Elders. Buildings and programming may not be sustainable if large numbers of attendees or members resist such oversight. However, in the final analysis, discipline must be considered a priority because it is a part of the power that lay behind the keys to the kingdom (Matthew 16:17-19; 18:18-20). Size and numbers must not be allowed as a cause for the eclipse of church discipline. If attendance numbers are a cause, then great courage will be required to rebalance the gospel key with the discipline key.²⁵

Another stumbling block is the fear of civil law-suits if corrective discipline is employed. The fear is reinforced when

²⁴ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 215.

²⁵ For a further discussion on the power of the keys, see Chapter Two, 59ff.

churches have utilized discipline and were subsequently coerced into civil court. However, in most of these cases, intrusion by civil authority can be easily avoided. Moreover, the EPC has the tools in place now to avoid such litigation while waylaying the fears of wary elders. As North America becomes more secularized, intrusions by state authority into church practice will be on the rise. While highlighting a lawsuit against an Oklahoma church for disciplining a woman for fornication, David A. Lanphear warns:

While the Oklahoma case will apparently be appealed and possible set aside, the fact that the law tolerates such a claim is as perplexing as it is dismaying. It is significant however, that this is not an isolated case inasmuch as at least two similar lawsuits are pending in other states. As a result, elders and congregations must be aware of and prepare for the legal dangers posed in matters of discipline.²⁶

Such legal cases are a cause for prudence, but not rejection of church discipline. If corrective discipline is clearly stated in a church's bylaws and taught to all prospective new members, then there is no need to fear litigation.

No one desires to be sued in a court of law. This sentiment more than includes evangelical congregations. Lawsuits are always a concern, but most may be avoided with good planning and proper execution of membership induction. Yet, the fear that some may be initiated should not be justification for the setting aside of corrective discipline. David Lanphear soberly warns:

There is no substitute for thoughtful deliberation, careful consideration and the exercise of sound judgment in matters of church discipline, both from the standpoint of obeying God and in

²⁶ David A. Lanphear, "Legal Dangers from Church Discipline," *Truth Magazine*, Vol. 28 (Guardian of Truth Foundation, XXVIII:19, Oct. 4, 1984), 590-591. Online archive accessed March 20, 2014 at <http://truthmagazine.com/archives/volume28/GOTO28307.html>.

order to avoid, to the extent possible, the pitfalls which could lead to liability in a civil claim. None of these suggestions will prevent someone from filing a lawsuit against a congregation or its elders, but they may in some degree prevent its successful prosecution. In no event, however, should a fear of the law or lawsuits impede one from fulfilling his scriptural obligations regarding church discipline. In the words of the Apostle Peter: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).²⁷

The EPC possesses excellent constitutional documents in its *Book of Discipline* and doctrinal standard, the *WCF*. It was previously noted that much of Evangelicalism today does not have such foundational material for the enforcement of discipline. These documents are sufficient insulation from litigious church members. However, Sessions must do an efficient job in teaching new members why these documents are in place and the meaning behind the fifth membership induction question which requires submission to the Session.²⁸ Churches have many threats on the horizon. One of these concerns is the safety of young people. A growing threat for all churches is the concern that pedophiles become a part of a church and prey upon young people through the congregation's youth ministry. Once again church membership can be a barrier to people who desire sinful contact with children. Deepak Reju remarks:

Church membership can be a firewall for children's ministry. If church membership is only for genuine believers, and if a genuine believer is much less likely ever to abuse a child, the combination of these two factors should lower the risk of abuse to our children. When pastors are careless about whom they allow into church membership, the removal of this firewall increases the risk to our kids.²⁹

²⁷ David Lanphear, 591.

²⁸ For a review of the fifth membership question, see Chapter One, 20.

²⁹ Deepak Reju, *On Guard: Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse at Church* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2014), 71-72.

Church membership can quell the specter of many threats, including the one listed above. One of its many benefits is that it helps in identifying the grain from the tares (Matthew 13:24-30). This study has shown that there is biblical warrant and church law requirements for the use of corrective discipline. However, if it can be demonstrated that members were not made aware of such documentation or the true meaning behind induction questions for membership, then civil lawsuits will become a possibility. Yet, if the documentation is in place, taught thoroughly, and the congregation reminded through instruction from the pulpit, then churches need not fear. Ken Sande states:

A church that has done its work both biblically and legally will not have to look over its shoulder fearfully as it seeks to restore wandering sheep. Instead, it will be able to minister confidently and boldly as it works to guard its people³⁰

Litigation need not be a fear if church leadership does its homework in knowing the biblical reasons for discipline, the EPC procedure for handling discipline or similar documents, and following these same procedures when discipline is needed.

Steps for Greater Discipline Awareness and Employment

The following points should be implemented within the EPC if the third mark of the church is to be revered as much as sacraments and preaching. Broader-based Reformed congregations will also benefit from a review of each one of these concerns. 1) Presbyteries of the EPC are the supervising body over congregations within their

³⁰ Ken Sande, "Keeping the Lawyers at Bay," *Christianity Today* (August 2005): 35.

jurisdiction, and they oversee ministerial ordination of candidates.³¹ Consequently, if Presbyteries are sensitized to the need for discipline, as well as pastors who believe they are ill-equipped to employ it, then they have the power to inform the schools from which graduating candidates are received. This communication should articulate the need for greater instruction on corrective discipline before graduates receive their diplomas. Seminaries want to do a good job in preparing their graduates for ministry. If these same schools receive extensive communication on the need for greater instruction on the church's third mark, adjustments in curriculum will follow. This may represent one of the most productive changes in remedying the eclipse of discipline.

2) Presbyteries meet several times each year in order to conduct their business.³² They often include some continuing education opportunities for both ruling and teaching elders. In the past, the Midwest Presbytery has devoted one meeting per year to theological reflection and invites a special speaker to address a particular topic over several sessions. Moderators and Presbytery committees responsible for setting agendas must consider instructional time on the topic of church discipline. This will help keep attention focused upon the third mark.

3) The review process for candidates desiring ordination is quite thorough within the EPC.³³ Candidates must pass written examinations administered by the General Assembly office, oral

³¹ See *EPC Book of Government*, Section 16-16, 59.

³² Other regional Reformed denominational meetings are typical during a given year. Even independent Baptist congregations are often a part of an association.

³³ Many other Reformed bodies also maintain rigorous testing of potential pastors.

examinations by the Presbytery Candidate Care Committee and final examination during a meeting of the Presbytery, which is comprised of both ruling and teaching elders. The written polity exams, administered by the General Assembly office, do include several questions on the *EPC Book of Discipline*.³⁴ However, it is an unknown factor as to how thorough oral questioning is accomplished by Presbytery committees and Presbyteries in general before ordination is approved.³⁵ There is cause for concern over this point. If discipline is not at the forefront of most ruling and teaching elders, then how thorough is the oral part of the polity questions asked during an examination? In order to insure that oral exams thoroughly cover discipline and why it is essential, Presbytery Candidates Care committees must be sensitized to the need for greater inquiry on the need and usefulness of corrective discipline. The General Assembly of the EPC may be of help on this concern by reminding Presbytery Candidates Care committee chairmen on discipline questions which should be included in a candidate's oral exam.

4) The General Assembly, the annual meeting of commissioners from all EPC congregations, meets once a year. Each General Assembly has a particular theme which is emphasized throughout the meeting.³⁶ Keynote speakers address the theme topic in the evening sessions and sometimes during worship times in morning sessions.

³⁴ The writer has served for many years as a grader for written ordination exams. Discipline questions are covered in the Polity exam. There are few questions asked on the Biblical Content exam and nothing asked with regard to *WCF* Chapter Thirty within the Theology and Sacraments exam.

³⁵ Assistant Stated Clerk, Ed McCallum, reports that there are no directives from the EPC General Assembly on salient points to be covered in Presbytery oral exams. Phone interview by author, 2 September, 2005. In addition, no subsequent directive has been issued through 2014.

³⁶ General Assembly meetings are conducted over four days.

Discipline could easily be featured in a General Assembly which focused upon the three marks of the church as noted in the *Belgic Confession*. It was previously noted that the *EPC Book of Government* does not use the language “three marks of the church,” neither does the *WCF*. Yet, “the three mark” designation is used in the EPC’s own *Leadership Training Guide*.³⁷ Discipline could neatly fit into an Assembly theme which focuses upon all three: preaching, sacraments, and discipline.

5) In addition, the annual General Assembly is often accompanied by pre-assembly workshops on practical topics related to ministry. Corrective Discipline could be covered periodically in some of these workshops.³⁸ Of course, there is need for greater awareness of both formative and corrective discipline.³⁹ This paper does not diminish the need for formative discipline among Evangelical and EPC congregations. However, formative discipline does not involve the acceleration of sanctions that are possible by the overseeing session which collectively and representatively hold the keys to the Kingdom. Having noted this, corrective and formative discipline topics may be offered side by side or featured separately. The main point is that they be featured, especially corrective discipline.

Moreover, since General Assemblies and Presbytery meetings are the most visible gathering of EPC congregations, these same meetings would be excellent places to highlight churches which are

³⁷ *EPC Leadership Training Guide*, 2012, 116.

³⁸ Peace Maker Ministries was invited to present a pre-assembly workshop in 2004 on “Responding to Conflict Biblically.” This workshop touched upon church discipline. Additional workshops should follow.

³⁹ For a description of both formative and corrective discipline, see Chapter One, 6-7.

implementing corrective discipline properly. The EPC has several bright spots, but none brighter than the work of Second Presbyterian Church of Memphis, Tennessee.⁴⁰ Second Presbyterian is a large congregation of more than 3000 members. The session of Second Presbyterian has taken corrective discipline very seriously by implementing a thorough indoctrination of their members regarding why corrective discipline is needed and how such discipline is accomplished within their church. Church discipline is part of the administrative pastor's formal responsibilities. Prospective church members are taught about Second Presbyterian's discipline policies and practices within new member classes. The church has developed its own pamphlet explaining the process of restoration if persistent sin is apparent in one of its members.⁴¹ The church's development of a discipline policy, particularly for a large congregation, should be held as a fine model for other EPC churches.

In conclusion, the EPC has a very rich heritage in its Reformation roots which date back to men like Calvin and Knox. Their labor, together with others, brought forth the Presbyterian concept of church polity. Reformation roots run deep within the EPC's understanding of ecclesiology and function of Christ's church. Consequently, the heritage should be fully appreciated, including these men's exegesis of biblical texts and subsequent calls for corrective discipline's presence within the church. Discipline is as

⁴⁰ Second Presbyterian is a member church of the Central South Presbytery. This Presbytery was not a part of the survey.

⁴¹ Second Presbyterian's discipline pamphlet (*Restoration and Peacemakers Ministry*) covers the following questions: "What is the restoration ministry?", "What are typical problem areas?", "How does restoration work?", "What if restoration fails?", "What can I expect from restoration teams?", and "What about confidentiality?" The pamphlet encapsulates this church's commitment to oversee its members with loving accountability. See *Restoration and Peacemakers Ministry* (Memphis, TN: Second Presbyterian Church). <http://www.2pc.org/>.

needful as faithful preaching and properly administered sacraments. Although these three are not listed uniquely as “marks of the church” within the *EPC Book of Order* or the *WCF*, the *Confession* does devote an entire chapter to the need and use of corrective discipline. There must be a fresh sensitizing to discipline’s place among the other two marks within Evangelicalism as a whole and especially the EPC. In addressing the need for church discipline, English Puritan pastor Richard Baxter places discipline on par with preaching in noting the duties of pastors. “I believe the tempter has gained as great victory in getting but one godly pastor of a church to neglect discipline as he has in getting the same pastor to neglect preaching.”⁴² Indeed, preaching, as well as the administration of the sacraments must stand on equal footing if the church is to fulfill its duty in educating the faithful on the pattern of holiness. John MacArthur adds: “It is an illusion to think that you can just preach against sin and never do anything about it in the lives of the people and yet expect them to conform to the pattern of holiness.”⁴³ Doing something about sin involves both formative and corrective discipline. This corrective oversight is as vital as the other two marks of the church: preaching of the gospel and right administration of the sacraments.

The great Reformed theologian, John Owen (1616-1683), knew very well how much discipline was needed within Christ’s church. Sinclair B. Ferguson summarized Owen’s remarks thusly:

Since the authority of the church includes admission to the fellowship, it also includes the power of exclusion from it. Owen

⁴² Richard Baxter cited in Mark Lauterbach, *The Transforming Community* (Carol Stream, IL: Reformation and Revival Ministries, Inc., 2003), 185.

⁴³ John MacArthur cited in Mark Lauterbach, *The Transforming Community* (Carol Stream, IL: Reformation and Revival Ministries, Inc., 2003), 79.

taught that the act of excommunication involves the whole church and is administered by the elders. The church has a duty to exclude those whose offences bring scandal to the name of Christ, who obstinately persists in sin, despite both private and public admonition, and also those who disrupt the peace and unity of the church.⁴⁴

However, to make discipline work within the church will require patience, labor and great willingness to deal with personal issues among the sheep. Many would say the results are not worth the labor and disruption to the body. However, Owen knew better. Ferguson summarizes: “Owen argues that this discipline is necessary to the health of the body of Christ, *even if at times it seems to cause more trouble than it cures*” [emphasis mine].⁴⁵

No matter what the nature of trouble, being faithful to Jesus’ mandate to use both keys is central to the call upon all Christian leadership. To lose sight of one or both can only end in a church without integrity and a diminished witness within the world. The people of God and the world can not afford such an eclipse.

Finally, the negative fallout from enforcing church discipline must be counter-balanced with its nurturing benefits. A father who loves his children will correct and punish wrong-doing. This is certainly the biblical view of God (Hebrews 12:4-10). Discipline often brings sorrow, but the goal is always restoration and nurture. The writer of Hebrews states (12:11): “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.” There is much to ponder in this brief quotation from the New Testament. When discipline is employed, sorrow may follow for the

⁴⁴ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 181.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

correctors and the corrected. Nevertheless, it will produce *the peaceful fruit of righteousness*. All who are a part of Christ's church must hunger for this righteousness (Matthew 5:6).

All who are concerned for the Reformed faith must desire the peaceful fruit of righteousness to be apparent within the congregations that constitute this part of Christ's church. Discipline is a part of the nurture, and such nurture will result in peace and righteousness. To this end, this book is humbly presented.

Appendix A

Occurrence of Church Discipline in Seminary Catalogs

Individual professors may cover church discipline, but a review of course offerings by significant Reformed Seminaries, at least, reveals that discipline is not a significant enough topic to be featured in the course title or description. Yet, sacraments and preaching are titled topics. Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, 2004-2005 school catalog devotes one entire course to sacraments, ST857, while church discipline is covered as a much smaller topic in “Themes in Ecclesiology”, ST991, p. 105. Sacraments are covered in its own topical course, ST851 “Theology of the Sacraments”, p. 104. As of 2013, Westminster has strengthened the occurrence of church discipline. The topic is covered in PT211 “The Doctrine of the Church” and PT311 “Church Dynamics and Pastoral Practice.” Gordon Conwell Seminary does not mention church discipline in any of its course offerings, but sacraments are listed in its “Systematics III,” #607, class. See Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary catalog, 2003-2005, p. 95. Nothing is stated on church discipline in its newest catalog as of Dec. 6, 2013. Erskine’s Seminary, 2002-2004 catalog is similar. Its “Systematic Theology #23” titles the course “Church and Sacraments.” Discipline is not mentioned, though “contemporary marks” of the true church is part of the course description, p. 85. The 2014 edition notes for ST603 Systematic Theology III that Church and Sacraments are in the heading and the three marks are each listed in the description. Fuller Theological Seminary highlights worship, prayer, and sacraments, but says nothing of church discipline in its ST503 Systematic Theology III: Ecclesiology and Eschatology

course (http://www.fuller.edu/catalog2/05_school_of_theology/11_church/). There are no changes as of its 2016 catalog. Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary has ST42: Ecclesiology and Polity. Nothing is said on church discipline in the course description. No elective or applied theology offering lists church discipline as an addressed topic (www.gpts.edu). Calvin Theological Seminary does not list an ecclesiology designation in its theological course offerings. Under its elective section “Church Polity 603” is listed, but its description says nothing on the topic of discipline. There are two required pastoral care courses, “Introduction to Pastoral Care 701” and “Pastoral Care II 702,” but once again, nothing is said of discipline. See Calvin Theological Catalog, 2005, pp. 129, 137. Calvin’s 2015 course offerings do not feature discipline. Multiple offerings are listed for sacraments and preaching, but nothing is said of discipline. The topic may be touched upon in courses on John Calvin, other reformers and creeds, but none of the course descriptions note discipline. The only catalog reviewed to list all three – word, sacrament, and discipline on equal footing was the Reformed Presbyterian Seminary catalog, 2003-2005. This seminary was an exhibitor at the EPC 2004 General Assembly held in Virginia Beach, VA. Its catalog lists ST33 “Doctrine of the Church” which clearly notes all of them, p. 52 The newest addition of their catalog maintains the presence of all three marks as of Dec. 6, 2013. *However no EPC pastor from the surveyed Presbyteries attended this institution.*

Appendix B

Topics Addressed in a New Member Class

Topic	Percentage of churches
1. Doctrine of the Church	100
2. Expectations of members after joining	96
3. Explanation of the church's mission and/or vision	92
4. Tithing/financial support of the church	88
5. Method and meaning of baptism	86
6. Polity and government of your church	84
7. Requirements for membership	82
8. Plan of Salvation	80
9. Purpose of the Lord's Supper	78
10. History of your church	75
11. Current opportunities for service in the church	69
12. Structure/support of mission through the church or denomination	65
13. Introductions to church staff and leadership	61
14. Structure, history, and polity of the denomination	61
15. Examination of the church covenant	57
16. Training in spiritual disciplines (prayer, study, etc.)	51
17. Inventory of spiritual gifts	50
18. Training for witnessing/evangelism	42
19. Tour of the church facilities	28
20. Examination of the church constitution	26
21. Policies for disciplining/excluding members	25

From: Chuck Lawless, *Membership Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 65 (Emphasis mine).

Appendix C – Survey Results

This appendix consists of a phone survey of senior or solo pastors who minister within the Mid-Atlantic and the Midwest Presbyteries of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. The Survey was conducted during the summer of 2004.

Survey Results

1. Did your seminary training prepare you for the implementation and confrontation necessary for the exercise of church discipline (both corrective and formative)?

	<u>Midwest Presbytery</u>	<u>Mid-Atlantic Presbytery</u>
No Preparation	22	19
Seminaries Represented:	Calvin College 1 Trinity Theo. Sem. 4 American Chr. Sem. 1 Gordon-Conwell 2 RTS 6 Dallas Seminary 1 Princeton Seminary 4 Western Seminary 1 Denver Seminary 1 Asbury Seminary 1	Erskine 1 Trinity Theo. Sem 1 Duke 1 Gordon-Conwell 5 RTS 3 S.E. Baptist 1 Fuller 1 Union 1 Columbia 1 Regent 2 Covenant 1 Austin 1
Somewhat Prepared	2	7
Seminaries Represented:	Gordon-Conwell 1 MTS 1	Gordon-Conwell 1 Princeton 1 RTS 2 Grace 1 Southern Ev. 1 Goldengate Baptist 1

2. Does your church instruct Ruling Elders on discipline and the Book of Discipline?

	No	Yes	Somewhat/Little
Midwest	13	9	5
Mid-Atlantic	6	17	3

3. Does your church discuss church discipline in new member classes? To what extent?*

	No	Yes	Somewhat/Little
Midwest	13	9	5
Mid-Atlantic	6	17	3

* The extent was typically very little. The Mid-Atlantic was slightly higher.

4. Has the pastor preached on the topic in the last five years? How many times?*

	No	Yes	Only Mentioned/ Matthew 18
Midwest	16	5	5
Mid-Atlantic	17	6	4

* The most common response on frequency was “infrequent”.

5. Have any Sunday School classes or Bible studies been offered on the topic of church discipline in the last five years?

	No	Yes	Mentioned in different classes
Midwest	23*	1	2
Mid-Atlantic	27	1	0

* A Ruling Elder from the Midwest Presbytery said, “We should drop discipline from our vocabulary.”

6. How many discipline cases have occurred where the Book of Discipline was employed in the last five years?

	None	One	Two-Three	Four-Five
Midwest	16	5	5	0
Mid-Atlantic	14	2	8	4

7. Is the level of discipline or accountability high, average, average-low, or low among the congregation?

	High	Average	Ave/Low	Low
Midwest	3	9	5	9
Mid-Atlantic	8	8	6	5

8. Does your church have a reputation in the community as being committed to church discipline?

	No	Yes	Somewhat	Unknown
Midwest	19	3	2	2
Mid-Atlantic	10	10	5	2

9. Do the attendees view discipline as a priority as much as preaching or the sacraments?

	No	Yes	Somewhat
Midwest	26	0	0
Mid-Atlantic	23	2	2

10. How many corrective discipline cases were handled without the use of the Book of Discipline?

	None	One-Two	Three-Four	Five+	Unknown
Midwest	0	8	10	4	2
Mid-Atlantic	8	4	5	9	1

11. Was there a good end when discipline was exercised?

	Yes, all times	Mostly	50%	No, all times
Midwest	8	7	10	3
Mid-Atlantic	8	6	8	5

12. How many times did people submit?

	Yes, all times	Mostly	50%	No, all times
Midwest	0	7	10	9
Mid-Atlantic	1	2	18	5

13. Do you have fears over the utilization of discipline in your congregation? Why?

	Yes	No	Some
Midwest	16*	12	1
Mid-Atlantic	9*	17	0

* Most common remarks: Disruption to church, People leaving, Fear of confrontation

14. Do you or the Session have legal fears?

	Yes	No	Minimal Concern
Midwest	7	18	2
Mid-Atlantic	12	13	2

15. Have you been sued or threatened over a discipline case?

	Yes	No
Midwest	0	26
Mid-Atlantic	3	24

16. How confident is the leadership of its knowledge of transgressions by members?

	Low	Low-Ave.	Above Ave.	High
Midwest	8*	8*	5	5
Mid-Atlantic	2	1	5	19

* Of the 16 in the Low to Low-Average, nine were by churches above 200 in attendance. Of the nine, eight were in the low category.

17. Do you have confidence in your presbytery's ability to handle discipline cases?

	Low	Medium	High
Midwest	17	5	4
Mid-Atlantic	2	2	22

Appendix D – Youth Membership Curriculum

The Revised 2002 Edition did not include church discipline in the curriculum. The Approved 2005 Edition now includes the following on the marks of the church with a lengthy discussion on discipline.

Marks of the Church:

Historically, there are three marks of a true church. A true church consists of men, women and children where the pure Word of God is preached, where the Sacraments (more commonly known as baptism and the Lord's Supper) are duly administered and where church discipline is faithfully exercised.

It is obvious with regard to our previous discussion concerning the Word of God, that it is imperative to proclaim the truth of the gospel as it is found in the testimony of Scripture. We have also seen the Sacraments as a means of grace whereby God pours out His grace unto His people and seals them into fellowship with one another and with Himself. The third mark of the church is church discipline.

“The purpose of discipline in the Church is twofold. In the first place, it seeks to carry into effect the law of Christ concerning the admission and exclusion of members; and in the second place it aims at promoting the spiritual edification of the members of the Church of Jesus Christ. Both of these aims are subservient to a higher end, namely the maintenance of the holiness of the Church of Jesus Christ.”¹

Church discipline is concerned about the holiness of the Church of Jesus Christ. We want the members of the church to live a life in keeping with the gospel of Christ, and when they sin willfully and without repentance, they need to be led back to Christ from their wayward path. Church discipline is

never to be punitive, but rather restorative. When someone who is a member of a church sins willfully and remains unrepentant, it is the duty of the officers of that church to seek to restore that individual's relationship with any offended parties as well as restore that individual to Christ through faith and repentance. What's more, it is the spiritual obligation of all Christians to love their brothers and sisters enough to confront them lovingly when they have fallen into a pattern of sinful behavior. This imperative to love lies at the heart of Matthew 18:10-35 (a passage often looked to for direction in administering discipline).

Excommunication or the removal of an individual from a church is the last step, not the first step in church discipline. Different churches use a variety of forms of discipline. An outline of what type of Church discipline the Evangelical Presbyterian Church uses can be found in the Book of Discipline which is part 2 of our Book of Government.

Other related Scriptures on church discipline:

Matthew 18:7; Acts 20:28-31a; Romans 16:17-18a; 1 Corinthians 5:1-5,13; 14:33,40; Galatians 6:1; Ephesians 5:6,11; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15; 1 Timothy 5:20; Titus 1:10-11; Titus 3:10; Revelation 2:14-16a; 2:20.

1. Berkof, Louis, Systematic Theology, 599.

Publication of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Student & Young Adult Ministries Committee, *Youth Membership Curriculum*, approved 2005 edition.

Appendix E
Types of Offenses and Occurrences
Among Men and Women of Geneva

TABLE 21 Crimes in Geneva per year, 1551-57

Crime	Year							Total
	1551	52	53	54	55	56	57	
Sexual immorality	26	8	7	14	7	12	76	150
Theft	19	8	6	7	6	13	23	82
Slander magistrates	3	7	0	0	2	5	6	23
Domestic trouble	8	0	4	11	5	5	35	68
Attacks on ministers	3	7	4	0	0	2	8	24
Blasphemy	5	0	0	0	1	8	16	30
Treason	0	1	0	0	23	5	10	39
Personal slander	5	0	0	4	2	2	6	19
Assault	6	2	5	1	3	2	2	21
Public rioting	1	0	0	0	2	6	6	15
Catholic views	3	0	2	1	0	0	22	28
Anti-French acts	2	0	0	0	1	1	1	5
Counterfeiting	4	3	2	3	3	2	0	17
Disobey authority	3	0	1	2	0	1	0	7
Fraud	0	0	0	1	0	3	2	6
Murder	2	1	3	2	0	5	7	20
Official corruption	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2
Dueling	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	4
Perjury	2	0	0	2	1	1	4	10
Religious violations	4	1	4	5	0	1	13	28
Witchcraft	2	0	0	0	0	2	16	20
Gambling	0	0	0	1	0	0	4	5
Rape	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	4
Dancing	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	3
Usury	1	1	0	1	0	0	5	8
Attempted murder	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	3
Business disputes	1	0	1	2	2	7	4	17
Suicide	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Anabaptist views	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	3
Drug-related	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Hiring mercenaries	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4
Immorality	4	0	1	0	0	0	10	15
Prison escape	0	1	0	0	0	1	3	5
Smuggling	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Vandalism	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	3
Spying	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	3
Sodomy	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	3
Vagrancy	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total cases known	111	42	40	60	63	83	294	693
Total cases unknown	6	3	1	5	5	12	6	38
Total cases	117	45	41	65	68	95	300	731
From Consistory	38	0	18	30	4	2	206	298
Known cases (%) referred by Consistory	34.2	0.0	45.0	50.0	6.4	2.4	70.1	43.0

Table 22 Punishments in Geneva per year, 1551-57

Sentence	Year							Total
	1551	52	53	54	55	56	57	
Death	3	3	4	3	10	5	7	35
Jail	9	1	0	0	2	9	53	74
Banishment	9	4	7	10	10	17	39	96
Beating	3	3	3	4	3	7	5	28
Fine	4	2	0	3	5	5	9	28
Public contrition	1	2	0	0	3	7	13	26
Warning	2	0	2	4	7	4	17	36
Release	3	2	0	1	2	0	6	14
Acquittal	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	5
Loss of office	0	1	1	1	3	3	2	11
Loss of rights	0	0	0	0	2	4	2	8
Summary:								
Total known	34	18	17	26	47	62	157	361
Total unknown	77	24	23	34	16	21	137	332

Table 23 Major Crimes as a percentage of total crimes, 1541-57

Crime	Year								
	1541	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49
Sexual immorality	0.0	16.7	11.3	7.7	7.9	36.4	9.7	14.3	20.0
Theft	16.7	17.7	11.3	0.0	14.9	17.1	9.7	14.3	24.0
Slandering Magistrates	12.5	7.8	9.4	15.4	6.9	2.3	6.6	21.4	0.0
Domestic Troubles	4.2	2.0	0.0	15.4	5.0	4.6	0.0	3.6	0.0
Treason	0.0	5.9	11.3	0.0	4.0	0.0	16.1	3.6	4.0
Attacks on ministers/French	4.2	7.9	5.7	7.7	3.0	9.1	22.7	7.2	0.0
	1550	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	
Sexual immorality	31.7	23.4	19.1	17.5	23.3	11.1	14.5	25.9	
Theft	11.0	17.1	19.1	15.0	11.7	9.5	15.7	7.8	
Slandering Magistrates	1.4	2.7	16.7	0.0	0.0	3.2	6.0	2.0	
Domestic Troubles	10.3	7.2	0.0	10.0	18.3	7.9	6.0	11.9	
Treason	1.4	0.0	2.4	0.0	0.0	36.5	6.0	3.4	
Attacks on ministers/French	5.8	4.5	16.7	10.0	0.0	1.6	3.6	3.4	

Tables Reprinted from William G. Naphy, Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 179-181.

Appendix F
Westminster Confession of Faith – Chapter 30
Concerning Condemnation by the Church

1. As king and head of His church, the Lord Jesus has directed the establishment of church government, separate from civil authority, which is to be administered by officers of the church.

(Isaiah 9:6,7; I Timothy 5:17; I Thessalonians 5:12; Acts 20:17,28; Hebrews 13:7,17,24; I Corinthians 12:28; Matthew 28:18-20; Psalm 2:6-9; John 18:36)

2. To these officers are committed the keys of the kingdom of heaven, which empower them: to free people from the guilt of sin or to bind them to it; to close the kingdom of heaven to the unrepentant by the word and condemnation; and to open the kingdom to repentant sinners by the ministry of the gospel and by withdrawing condemnation as the occasion demands.

(Matthew 16:19; Matthew 18:17,18; John 20:21-23; II Corinthians 2:6-8)

3. Condemnation by the church is necessary in order to reclaim and regain spiritual brothers who have committed some serious offense; to deter others from committing similar offenses; to purge that leaven which might contaminate the whole lump; to vindicate the honor of Christ and the holy profession of the gospel; and to avoid the wrath of God, which might justly fall on the church, should it allow His covenant and the sacraments to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders.

(I Corinthians 5; I Timothy 5:20; Matthew 7:6; I Timothy 1:20; I Corinthians 11:27-34; Jude 23; II Samuel 12:14)

4. The best way to accomplish these purposes is for the officers of the church to act in accordance with the severity of the offense and the guilt of the offender by: (1) warning the offender; (2) excluding him from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper for a time; or (3) excommunicating him from the church.

(I Thessalonians 5:12; II Thessalonians 3:6,14,15; I Corinthians 5:4,5,13; Matthew 18:17; Titus 3:10)

From: The Westminster Confession of Faith, Revised EPC Edition (Signal Mountain, TN, Summertown Texts, 1985), 48.

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