

Feature Article One

Recovering The Third Mark Of The Church

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It is safe to assume that the majority of people who read this journal are in sympathy with its aspirations: to promote the work of reformation and revival in the church of Jesus Christ. But how will this work be accomplished? Many of these readers would readily affirm that a return to the faithful exposition of the Scriptures is essential to the accomplishment of this task. Repentance and prayer, both on an individual and corporate level, would also be recognized as a prerequisite to a fresh visitation of the Spirit of God.

However, as foundational as is preaching and prayer to these holy objectives, the people of God are in dire need of recovering yet another gospel ordinance¹, an ordinance that is inextricable to the ministry of proclamation and intercession and at the same time indispensable to the experience of reformation and revival. It has been referred to by one as “Christ’s great law of corrective discipline.”² More commonly, it has been known by the simple phrase “church discipline.”

Though many contemporary Christians may indeed recognize this terminology, very few could define its meaning and set forth its purposes. Most have never witnessed its proper implementation. For all of their efforts in the area of pastoral care most seminaries fail to instruct their students in the procedures of this ministry ordained by Christ Himself. Its neglect has contributed greatly to the present condition of the church.

Today the church faces a moral crisis within her own ranks. Her failure to take a strong stand against evil (even in her own midst), and her tendency to be more concerned about what is expedient than what is right, has robbed the church of biblical integrity and power. 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.³

Ironically, the great Protestant Reformers resoundingly advocated the practice of church discipline, with Calvin making the most significant contribution. The confessions of the Reformation and Puritan eras clearly articulated the necessity of disciplining unrepentant sin in the church. The *Belgic Confession* (1561), deeply rooted in Reformational soil, identified three characteristics “by which the true church is known.” These marks are: (a) The preaching of the pure gospel; (b) The proper administration of the sacraments; and, (c) The exercising of church discipline.⁴

The contemporary church would do well to listen to the confessors of its heritage. To be sure, the church must insist that her proclamation of the gospel be passionately orthodox. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper must be celebrated in all of their proper theological fullness. But if the prayers of the people of God for reformation and revival are to be legitimized with genuine integrity, they must also insist upon the immediate recovery and implementation of this third mark of the true church: the discipline of sin in the life of a Christian.

A Theological Underpinning

Misunderstandings abound regarding the practice of church discipline. Visions of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* and the Salem Witch Hunts arouse anxiety among the people of God for whom this ministry is foreign. How can these confusions be eliminated? Certainly a simple examination of the procedures of discipline outlined in the New Testament can clarify many of the common misconceptions from which people suffer. However, if the Christian is to transcend a mere cognitive understanding of this ministry, and thus become convinced of its wisdom and loveliness, some theological reflection will be required. Particularly, one theological fact must be recognized and embraced: *that God's discipline is nothing less than a manifestation of His glory.*

To begin with, the discipline of the church is grounded in the reality that God Himself disciplines His children. No true Christian is apart from the chastening hand of the Lord. **“My son, do not reject the discipline of the Lord, or loathe His reproof, for whom the Lord loves He reproves, even as a father, the son in whom he delights” (Pr 3:11-12).**¹

Moreover, this chastisement grows out of God's own inherent holiness. Of the temple of old the psalmist writes, **“Holiness befits Thy house, O Lord, forevermore” (Ps 93:5).** Under the new covenant God has graciously joined Himself to His people, the church, which has become the new temple of God (1 Co 3:16). As such He comes to the church as the Holy One, demanding the reflection of His character in His temple: **“You shall be holy, for I am holy” (1 Pe 1:16).** It is this commitment to His own holiness that draws out His chastising hand. **“He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness . . . afterwards it yields to peaceful fruit of righteousness” (He 12:10-11).** When the church, then, fails to carry out the ministry of discipline mediated to her by Jesus Christ, she manifests a lack of regard for the holiness of God and His desire to reflect that excellency in her midst.

Divine chastisement also emerges as a revelation of God's filial love. Contrary to the misunderstanding of many, God's discipline of His children is never of a penal nature. It is always remedial, and motivated by His love. **“For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives . . . God deals with you as with sons” (He 12:6-7).** For a person to boast of evading the chastisement of God is to raise a question regarding one's spiritual paternity. Loving chastisement is the mark of sonship. In fact, this connection between love and discipline is again mentioned by the Lord Himself to the church at Laodicea: **“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent” (Re 3:19).** The world often views discipline as a manifestation of anger and hostility. God's discipline of His children is an outworking of His love.

The implications of this fact are significant then for those who find themselves in the position of needing to confront a brother or sister in sin. Redemptive love must prevail: a love for the believer which seeks above all else the manifestation of the righteousness of Christ in his or her life. More specifically, the tenor of the confrontation must be characterized by gentleness (Ga 6:1), it must be preceded by self-examination (Ma 7:5; Ga 6:1), the admonishment must be brotherly (2 Th 3:15), and the willingness to forgive and restore when confession and repentance are displayed must be predominant (2 Co 2:6-8). These attitudes define the expression of love which is to encompass the entirety of the disciplinary process. Often quoted out of context, the Apostle Paul urges believers to a mutual responsibility of love within the framework of confrontation: **“Brethren, even if 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 be too tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ” (Ga 6:1-2).** Of course, the law of Christ is the law of love.

This attitude of benevolence, which is to permeate the confrontation of an erring brother, is in direct imitation of and in harmony with the purposes of God Himself. Christians need to understand that divine chastisement occurs as a manifestation of the glory of God in general, and as a revelation of the holiness and love of God in particular. It is for this reason, among others, that Jonathan Edwards refers to this process as “Gospel discipline.”⁵

¹ Scriptural quotations in this article are taken from *The New American Standard Bible*. Copyright 1977, The Lockman Foundation.

The Prescribed Methodology

Church discipline may be defined as “the confrontive and corrective measures taken by an individual, church leaders, or a congregation regarding a matter of sin in the life of a believer.”⁶ As a broad definition this is as clear and concise as any. However, a significant concern remains at the heart of this issue: how is such a ministry implemented? In other words, what are the specific procedures to follow in carrying out this important work? These questions are answered by Jesus Himself in Matthew 18:15-17.

Step one: A confidential meeting between two people. **“And if your brother sins⁷, go and reprove him in private” (Ma 18:15a).** The confrontation of sin begins with a confidential meeting initiated by one who has observed or experienced the iniquity of a brother. The sin of this errant brother is not to be a topic for conversation with anyone else, nor is it to be the subject of discussion at a church prayer meeting. At this point the confrontation is to be of a private nature, though it must be remembered that no guarantee of absolute confidentiality can be given at this point.

Once the meeting begins, and the possibility of misunderstanding ruled out, the emphasis becomes one of gentle reproof. The word “reprove” means “to bring to light, to expose.” One lexicon translates this phrase “Show him his fault while you are with him alone.”⁸ As has been mentioned earlier, this is to be done in a manner that is never retaliatory but always redemptive: **“if he listens to you, you have won your brother” (Ma 18:15b).** The aim of the private confrontation is to lovingly win a brother from his erring ways and the harmful consequences associated with them.

Step two: A confidential meeting with witnesses. When a brother continues in unrepentant sin the process of loving confrontation must continue as well. However, the number of the parties involved at this point is to expand to involve one or two additional people. For what reason are these additional people to be included? Not primarily to intensify the reproof or multiply the display of loving concern, though in fact these may be some of the additional benefits garnered. These additional people are to serve as witnesses, not of the sin itself,⁹ but of the confrontation process. **“But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be conferred” (Ma 18:15b).** These witnesses are to observe the confrontation so that an accurate representation of it can be insured should the brother remain unrepentant and his sin be brought before the church.

It is for this reason that a guarantee of absolute confidentiality must never be given to a sinning brother in the first step of the confrontation process. To keep such a promise would force a believer to disregard the clear command of Jesus Christ. Such a promise could only be detrimental to the unrepentant believer.

Step three: A public explanation and exhortation to the church family. **“And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church” (Ma 18:17a).** While the work of confrontation is a ministry given to the entire congregation, it is obvious that at the point of public announcement the leadership of the church has become involved in this process. But what is the purpose of this public announcement? Why is it necessary to identify the name and sin of this unrepentant person? In order to exhort the entire assembly to pursue their brother and urge him to cease from his sin.

This is a step in the methodology of Jesus that is frequently overlooked by churches that seek to practice gospel discipline. When the confidential overtures to repentance continue to be spurned, it is often at this point that an unfortunately premature public announcement of disfellowship is made. This robs the erring brother of the most intensified form of loving confrontation. To be sure, the text does not explicitly say, “tell it to the church so that they all might pursue this brother.” Nevertheless, the next phrase makes this implication abundantly clear: **“and if he refuses to listen even to the church” (Ma 18:17b).** This presupposes the attempted reclamation of this brother on the part of the entire assembly. By means of personal visitation, telephone conversations, the writing of letters, or whatever means appropriate, the entire congregation is enlisted to lovingly seek out this brother and persuade him of the despicability of his sin to the Lord. As members of the body of Christ, they are to lovingly call him to repentance.

Step four: A severing of fellowship. In the event this brother continues in sin, a final and severe step is to be taken: disfellowship. **“And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer” (Ma 18:17b).** A Gentile was recognized as one external to the covenant community, and a tax-gatherer was regarded as an agent of the pagan government. Both were excluded from the religious life of the Jewish community.

Now at this point some clarification must be supplied. Jesus is in no way indicating that the people of God must disassociate with unbelievers. He Himself was notorious for regarding Gentiles and tax-gatherers as people of dignity and worthy of His message. The context is speaking of one whom Jesus refers to as a “brother.” To be sure, his impenitence may eventually reveal the spurious nature of his faith, but at this juncture he is regarded as a member of the covenant community. And for such a person, when all previous steps of confrontation have been exhausted and subsequently disregarded, the final act of discipline is to remove the “brother” from the protective benefits and sanctifying influences of the Spirit-indwelt assembly. He is to be placed in the demonically controlled domain of Satan. It is here that God may provisionally employ the Adversary and his wickedness as a means of bringing the brother to repentance. **“I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh” (1 Co 5:5).** **“Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered over to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme” (1 Ti 1:20).**

Since the sphere outside the church is the realm of Satan (1 Jn 5:9; cf. Co 1:13; Ep. 2:12), to deliver someone unto this realm is to put him out of the church, cutting him off from all Christian privileges. But this discipline is more than simple privation; it is “for the destruction of the flesh.” This term has had two interpretations. One which was current in the early centuries understood “flesh” as the lusts of the lower nature. But it is difficult to see how turning a person over to Satan would effect the destruction or the conquering of evil desires. It is better to take “the flesh” as a reference to the physical nature. Thus Satan is the instrument in God’s hand by which God inflicts some type of physical punishment. This corresponds with the physical effects of divine judgment upon those who profane the Lord’s Supper (1 Co 11:30). Here as in the case of the incestuous man and Hymenaeus and Alexander, the discipline was intended for spiritual gain so that the offenders would be ultimately found among God’s people (1 Co 11:32; 5:5; 1 Ti 1:20). No mention of physical infliction is made in the disciplinary instructions given by Christ (Ma 18:17). Therefore, it is not necessarily the inevitable concomitant of excommunication, but remains in the sovereign hand of God to use as He will.¹⁰

An important question must be asked at this juncture: How much time is to transpire before moving ahead to each successive step? Admittedly, great reliance must be placed on the Spirit of God for subjective wisdom. However, two factors should influence the decision to move ahead expeditiously: (a) The extent to which the sin has become public; and (b) The degree to which willful rebellion progresses in its intensification. Of course, repentance and confession at any point along the process should prompt immediate forgiveness on the part of the church. Even disfellowship is not irreversible. Throughout the entirety of the process the people of God should be praying for repentance and longing for the opportunity to restore the offending brother.

The Supporting Assurances

When these steps of discipline are properly employed, is a church operating solely on the basis of its own inherent and collective wisdom? Or, is it possible for a church to be assured of an approval that comes from heaven itself? At the very least one can observe that many of the verbs used by Jesus are in the imperative mood (“go,” “reprove,” “take,” “let him be”). To be sure, the authority to exercise discipline is grounded in the commands of the Lord of the Church. Assurance and strength can be gleaned from recognizing that the church is operating in obedience to Jesus Christ when it carries out the ministry of discipline. But more particularly, in Matthew 18:18-20, Jesus provides the people of God with even greater assurances of support for this difficult work.

“Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 18:18). At first glance this may appear to be a

promise of some significance; that as a consequence of the disciplinary process heaven will endorse the decisions of the church. But such is not the meaning of this text. God does not subject Himself to the authority of the church. He exercises sovereignty over it.

Rather, the phrases translated “shall be bound” and “shall be loosed” are perfect participles with action antecedent to that of the simple aorists “bind” and “loose.” Thus, this should be translated, “Whatever you bind on earth shall already have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose in heaven shall have already been bound in heaven.” Viewed in this way, it becomes apparent that this is not a *carte blanche* promise that heaven will ratify the decisions of the church, but more significantly, that when the church carries out this work on earth her decisions will reflect the will of God in heaven. This is an assurance of no small comfort for those who will take up this ministry. *When discipline is carried out properly, the church has accomplished on earth what has already been accomplished in heaven.*

Jesus then supplies a second assurance: **“Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 18:19).** Extracted from its context, this verse is frequently quoted as an all-inclusive prayer promise for two people agreeing about anything before God. However, the context requires the Christian to see this promise in relationship to the process of church discipline.

Jesus is assuring gathered believers, even in the smallest of numbers,¹¹ that God will provide wisdom and guidance for the church when she is united in her prayers regarding church discipline. Certainly this work of confrontation, and disfellowshipping when necessary, is an awesome task that demands the rare combination of delicacy and strength, patience and zeal. Yet the church need not fear attempting this work in her own resources. *When discipline is carried out properly, the church has the direct support of God the Father.*

In providing an explanation for the effectiveness of united prayer, Jesus supplies a final assurance for those who carry out this ministry of discipline: **“For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst” (Matt. 18:20).** The context necessitates that these “two or three” be understood as the aforementioned witnesses in the disciplinary process. And here they are promised, in addition to the direct support of God the Father, the manifest presence of God the Son in whose name they have gathered. *When discipline is carried out properly, the church can be assured of the presence of Jesus.*

When the disciplinary process becomes a public concern (the arrival at steps three and four) the effect upon the individuals in a congregation can be significant. In the Christ Community Church assembly, disciplinary concerns are made known on Sunday evenings at the Lord’s Supper. Whenever such announcements have been made, an overwhelming sense of the holiness of God has pervaded the meeting. Feelings of humility have been aroused in everyone present as a result of the self-examination that discipline precipitates. Many have wept at the manifestation of unrepentant sin in the life of a brother. Most in the congregation would agree that these have been the occasions when the sensible presence of the Lord Jesus Christ has been most readily felt.

The Practical Implications

In the execution of any ministry activity, spiritual leaders ought not to be compelled by expediency but by their allegiance to the Word of God. Such must be the case with church discipline. Implicit faithfulness to the Chief Shepherd, who Himself has instituted this ministry, ought to remove all hesitation in one’s commitment to its implementation. Nevertheless, important practical implications do stem from a faithfulness to this necessary work.

Discipline undergirds the ministry of the Word. Many Bible-believing churches resoundingly affirm Christlikeness as an essential aim of their fellowships. Faithful pastors share the aspiration of the apostle Paul: **“for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin” (2 Co 11:2).** This is made evident as these pastors labor diligently to proclaim righteousness and denounce

sin. However, when their ministry of exposition is not reinforced with personal work much of their efforts can be undermined.

Consider many evangelical churches today. From their pulpits a message sounds forth: sin must not be tolerated. But what happens in these same congregations when over a period of time the *apparent* intolerance toward sin from the pulpit is combined with an *actual* tolerance of sin in the lives of people? The acceptance of a devastating disparity emerges: a disparity between what one believes and how one behaves. In effect what is communicated is that there is no essential need for consistency between creed and conduct. Orthodoxy is important only as an affirmational issue. Whether or not this conclusion is arrived at consciously or unconsciously, it is the logical and inevitable consequence of a ministry that, while faithfully expounding the Scriptures, fails to lovingly confront sin on a personal level. Stated simply, the authoritative nature of the Word of God is eroded when a congregation is trained to conclude that preaching can, in actuality, be divorced from living.

All who desire to remove discipline or to hinder its restoration, whether they do this deliberately or out of ignorance, are surely contributing to the ultimate dissolution of the church. For what will happen if each is allowed to do what he pleases? Yet that would happen, if to the preaching of doctrine there were not added private admonitions, corrections, and other aids of this sort that sustain doctrine and do not let it remain idle.¹²

Personal confrontation is essential to the ongoing effectiveness of a faithful pulpit ministry.

Discipline deepens the church's commitment to self-purification. Those churches which take up the responsibility to deal with sin according to the New Testament pattern will soon discover that their commitment to this process will actually diminish the need for its implementation. Consider the words of Jesus:

And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, "Let me take that speck out of your eye," and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye (Matt. 7:3-5).

His point is profoundly clear: confrontation of another must be preceded by self-examination and appropriate repentance and confession if necessary. A commitment to corporate holiness begins with the self-purification of each person in the congregation.

Paul's exhortation is similar: "**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**" (Gal. 6:1). When a church takes seriously the injunction to confront sin, its very commitment to the process will engender a deeper holiness within the assembly. It has the beneficial effect of prompting continual self-examination, of reminding all members of their own propensity toward sin, and warning them of its consequences if left unconfessed.

This is also a particularly important consideration for those occupying positions of spiritual leadership. High profile ministry does not exempt a man from accountability. Quite to the contrary, the temptations inherent to leadership necessitate it. Moreover, dealing with unrepentant sin in the life of a spiritual leader will have a remedial effect on the entire leadership of a local congregation. Speaking of the elders, Paul writes, "**Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning**" (1 Ti 5:20; cf. Ga 2:11-14).

One must wonder to what extent a neglect of this ministry has contributed to the moral failure of such a great number of ministers in recent years. A commitment to biblical discipline promotes a greater purity among the people of God.

A body of soldiers may be said to be well disciplined, not when the court martial is constantly busy in repressing acts of insubordination among them, but when they are so generally observant of the orders of their commander, and all of the military regulations under which they are placed, that there are few such acts to be repressed . . . In like manner, a family may be said to be well disciplined, not when punishment is frequent, but when parental authority is so habitually regarded that the necessity of punishment is rare . . . We may say of a Christian church, that it is well disciplined, not when perpetually engaged in efforts to reclaim offenders, but when there are few offenders to be reclaimed. That notion of church discipline, which regards it as pertaining entirely, or chiefly, to the settlement of difficulties, and the treatment of cases of delinquency, is altogether too limited. It takes a far wider range. It embraces such a judicious administration of the laws of Christ in His visible kingdom, and such a training of His subjects to habits of active obedience, that difficulties and delinquencies shall scarcely be known.¹³

Discipline reinforces the true nature of body life. Evangelistic methods which stress “a personal relationship to Jesus” have taken their toll on the church. The concept of the local church as a living organism has been lost and an atomistic view has taken its place. Gone is the idea that Christians are **“one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (Ro 12:5)**. Church members have little regard for the fact that they are a part of a whole. When a present-day Christian reads of the chastening of Israel for the sin of one man, Achan (Jos 7), he is horrified at what appears to be gross injustice on the part of Yahweh. This reaction reveals a failure to grasp the principle of corporate solidarity, a principle which takes on even greater meaning in the New Testament revelation of the body of Christ.

When rebuking the Corinthians for their tolerance of blatant immorality Paul justifies his action by asking rhetorical question, **“Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?” (1 Co 5:6)**. In other words, the power of the influence and effect of sin is significant and extensive, permeating the whole body. The unrepentant sin of an individual affects not only himself but stains the entirety of the assembly. Accountability then, and even confrontation when necessary, affirms the important fact that members of the body are one with each other.

For this reason the discipline of one church should be respected by other churches. Often it is asked, “Why continue with the disciplinary process if the unrepentant person has already left the church?” While several answers to this question could be forthcoming, it must be said at this point that the body of Christ extends far beyond any one congregation. Therefore, a local fellowship has the duty to other Christian churches not to allow a person to leave its membership in apparent good standing when it is known he is living in sin. To do so is to contribute a defiling influence upon any subsequent fellowship with which the unrepentant person associates.

No Christian church has the right to forsake its responsibilities to other Christian churches. If another church, knowing that a certain person is under discipline, proceeds to receive that person into fellowship, their sin will be upon their own heads. On the other hand, if one church allows an unrepentant sinner to withdraw quietly, and then that person joins another church, the first church (which failed to discipline) is responsible for allowing the corruption of another church.¹⁴

New Testament *koinonia* means that Christians must pray for one another, love one another, serve one another, even weep and rejoice with one another. However, the unity which binds Christians together necessitates an additional kind of mutual ministry. As a result of the leavening influence of unrepentant sin, the nature of the Body of Christ demands that Christians lovingly confront one another as members of the family of God when necessary.

Concluding Comments

It can never be doubted that He who **“loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her . . . that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle,”** still feels deep interest in her purity. It is for this reason that a recovery of the “third mark of the church” is essential to the work of reformation.

This article has attempted to make clear that Jesus Christ has given direct instructions to His church regarding the implementation of church discipline. He has supplied her with great assurances to attend to this serious work. The practical benefits of this ministry are obvious to the honest student of the New Testament. And most importantly, discipline is nothing less than a manifestation of God's holiness and love mediated through His people.

How, then, can the church continue to disregard the clear command of her Lord? To neglect so significant a ministry can only result in the church falling into even greater peril. Though numbers expand, the church today is riddled with powerlessness because unrepentant sin reigns in the temple of God. Unless pastors and church leaders awaken to the importance of church discipline, the spiritual slumber of the people of God will deepen. It is for this reason that the discussion of reformation and revival must never omit this indispensable aspect of church life.

I believe the tempter has gained a 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. As the impure used to reproach the diligent by the name of "Puritans," so do they reproach the faithful pastors by the name of "Disciplinarians." If only it were understood how much of pastoral authority and work really consist of church guidance. Then there would be so much less prejudice against the proper exercise of discipline. For to be against discipline is to be against the pastoral ministry; and to be against the pastoral ministry is to be against the Church; and to be against the Church is to be against Christ . . . Was not Christ Himself the leader of these Disciplinarians? Did He not institute discipline, and make His ministers the rulers and guides of His church? What would these men have said if they had seen the practice of the ancient church for many centuries after Christ, who exercised a discipline so much more rigorous than any among us do? . . . I know that the word "discipline" has been corrupted by legalism and by such austere impositions as: "Touch not, taste not, handle not." But it is that ancient and truly Christian discipline which is being contended for here.¹⁵

Endnotes

¹ The term "ordinance" has been used historically to refer to the rites of baptism and communion. However, one contemporary theologian refers to it more generally: "A practice established by Jesus Christ with the command that it is to be carried out" (Millard Erickson, *Concise Dictionary Of Christian Theology*). It is with this emphasis that John Owen wrote, "That excommunication is an express ordinance of our Lord Jesus Christ in his churches is fully declared in the Scriptures." John Owen, *The Works Of John Owen*. (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1968) 2:159.

² Warham Walker, *Harmony In The Church: Church Discipline* (Rochester: Backus Book Publishers), editor's note.

³ Daniel E. Wray, *Biblical Church Discipline* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1981), 1.

⁴ "The marks by which a true Christian church is know are these: if the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if the church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin; in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church" (*Belgic Confession*, chap. XXIX).

⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works Of Jonathan Edwards* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1974), 2:121.

⁶ J. Carl Laney, *A Guide to Church Discipline* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1985), 14.

⁷ Much debate has transpired as to whether the words “against you” are a part of the original text. They are absent in several important manuscripts (*Codex Vaticanus* and *Codex Sinaiticus*). Metzger marks the Greek with a “C” indicating there is a considerable degree of doubt whether or not the apparatus contains the superior reading (*A Textual Commentary On The Greek New Testament*, 45). Whether the words are in the original or not, it is clear from Galatians 6:1 that believers have a responsibility to confront sin in general, not just when it is a direct offense experienced against one’s person.

⁸ Walther Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament*. Translated by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 24.

⁹ Some have interpreted this to mean “witnesses of the sin in question.” To suggest this would imply two things: (a) That the church could never proceed on to the additional steps of confrontation unless at least two people had observed the sin; and (b) That somehow the witnesses would need to discover that they each possessed the same information. However, this would be an impossibility because the first step of confrontation demands confidentiality. It is better to view this as “witnesses to the confrontation itself” in light of the forthcoming justification: “so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact (more literally, “word”) may be confirmed.”

¹⁰ Robert L. Saucy, *The Church In God’s Program* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 123.

¹¹ “The assurance is given that even though at a certain place the fellowship of believers consists of only two persons, even these two, when in agreement with each other, can definitely figure on the guidance for which they have made request.” William Hendriksen, *The Gospel Of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 702.

¹² John Calvin, *Institutes Of The Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960 edition), 4.12.1.

¹³ Warham Walker, *Harmony In The Church: Church Discipline* (Rochester: Backus Book Publishers, 1981 reprint), 22-24.

¹⁴ Daniel Wray, *Biblical Church Discipline* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1981), 15.

¹⁵ Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1982), 84.