

# CHURCH DISCIPLINE AND RESTORATION PROCESS

You demonstrate biblical love when you take steps to restore a fellow-believer overtaken in sin. This not only encourages a fallen believer to return to his/her first love of Jesus Christ, but it also gives others involved in the restoration process on-going opportunities to examine the depth of their love to the Lord (based on Galatians 6:1-2, 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15, Matthew 7:1-5, John 14:15, 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a, Colossians 3:12-13, Hebrews 10:23-25, Revelation 2:4-5).

## I. INITIAL STEPS TO TAKE IN RESTORING A FELLOW BELIEVER WHO HAS BEEN OVERTAKEN IN SIN

- A. Remember that the biblical restoration process is for fellow-believers who sin in direct violation of God's Word. The restoration/discipline process is not to be used for you to "reprove" others who have different preferences or opinions than yourself. In matters of preference or opinions, God's Word directs you to regard others as more important than yourself (Philippians 2:3-4) and not to judge another (Romans 14:10-13).
- B. You, along with every believer, are able to admonish (reprove, counsel, instruct) others (including leaders) in the body of Christ who may sin (Romans 15:14). Remember that your adequacy is from God (2 Corinthians 3:5-6) and that His Spirit and His Word provide sufficient resources for you to respond obediently in this, as well as any other, area of spiritual life.
- C. In order to admonish a sinning believer, you are to use only God's Word and not your own "common sense" or the "wisdom" of any other (based on Psalm 19:7-11; Psalm 119:49-50, 92, 104; Proverbs 6:23; Isaiah 55:8-11; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12). In your obedient attempt to restore a fallen brother, you are to:
  - 1. Privately point out to him the sins that he needs to forsake (the "put-offs") and direct him to the portions of God's Word that show him his deeds are sin (based on Romans 6:1-2, Colossians 3:5-8).
  - 2. Be ready to teach him God's plan for restoration, which involves repentance, confession, reconciliation, and beginning again to live in a manner, which pleases the Lord (the "put-ons") (based on Romans 12:18; Colossians 1:9-12, 3:10-24; James 5:16; 1 John 1:9; Revelation 2:4-5). Biblical counseling from mature believers is often needed at this point to help in the complete restoration of a fallen fellow-believer (based on Proverbs 11:14, 15:22; Galatians 6:1).
- D. Regardless of a fellow-believer's response to you or to his sin, you are to do the following:
  - 1. Examine (judge) yourself in a biblical manner before approaching another believer about his sin(s) and take appropriate biblical steps to overcome any and all sins in your own life to please God and avoid being a hypocrite (based on Matthew 7:1-5, 1 Corinthians 11:31, Galatians 6:3-5).
  - 2. Before God, forgive the sin(s) of your brother in your heart (Matthew 18:35, Mark 11:26) and be ready, at all times, to grant forgiveness when your brother repents (Luke 17:3-4).
  - 3. Seek faithfully to win your brother back to a right relationship with the Lord and with the rest of the body of Christ (Matthew 18:15, Galatians 6:1-2) as you continually examine yourself by God's Word (Matthew 7:1-5).

4. Remain in a spirit of gentleness in your dealings with your brother who has sinned. Look to yourself to be alert to any temptation while you are trying to restore your brother (based on Galatians 6:1-2, James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:8), remembering at all times that discipline is sorrowful (Hebrews 12:11).
5. Speak words that edify, according to the need of the moment, in order for your words to provide grace to those who hear (Ephesians 4:29, Colossians 4:6). Do not gossip about another's sins (relating information to anyone not biblically involved in the restoration process) (based on Leviticus 19:16; Psalm 15:1-3; Proverbs 16:28, 17:9, 20:19; 1 Peter 4:8).

**E. When your brother repents at any time in the restoration process, you (and all others who may be involved) are to:**

1. Openly grant full (complete, total) forgiveness from your heart (Matthew 18:35, Luke 17:3-4) and continue to speak graciously (Colossians 4:6).
2. Provide biblical instruction (which usually involves the help, support, and counsel of other believers) to help him overcome the immediate sin(s) in his life and help him develop a biblical pattern of living (based on Proverbs 11:14, 15:22; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).
3. Help him to be restored to full fellowship and useful service in the body of Christ, as far as is biblically possible (based on 1 Corinthians 12:24-27, Ephesians 4:16, Hebrews 10:23-25, 1 Peter 4:10).
4. Continue to judge yourself in a biblical manner (Matthew 7:1-5).

## II. CONTINUING STEPS TO TAKE WHEN A FELLOW-BELIEVER REFUSES TO REPENT

- A. If a fellow-believer refuses to repent after you have urged him to do so (Matthew 18:15), you are to bring one or two others with you to witness his persistent refusal to repent (Matthew 18:16).
  1. It is essential that the witnesses be mature believers who understand the biblical principles associated with the restoration process (*see I. C. above*). The witnesses are to have a reputation for impartiality so that none of the witnesses are perceived as "taking up one side of the argument" (based on Leviticus 19:15, Proverbs 24:23, 1 Timothy 5:21).
  2. To prepare for possible further steps of restoration/discipline that may involve many others in the church, it is advisable that one witness be a church leader who could institute the next step in the restoration/discipline process (based on Hebrews 13:17, 1 Peter 5:1-7).
  3. Each witness should review and follow the above guidelines under: **I. Initial steps to take in restoring a brother who has sinned.**
- B. If a professing believer's persistent un-repentance must be brought before the church (i.e., the known believers, not simply those attending a public meeting where both believers and non-believers might be present), all steps in the biblical restoration process should be reviewed (based on Matthew 7:1-5, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, James 4:17). Then, these believers, under the supervision of church leaders, are to encourage the one in sin to repent (based on Matthew 18:17, Galatians 6:1, Hebrews 13:17, James 5:19-20).

- C. To withdraw fellowship from an unrepentant professing believer (1 Corinthians 5:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15; Titus 3:10-11), remember the following:
1. To withdraw from fellowship (keeping aloof) does not mean to self-righteously avoid or ignore the unrepentant person. Conversations with an unrepentant believer may occur in the course of everyday living. However, communication should only consist of admonishing him to put off the old sinful pattern and to return to the Lord and be obedient to God's Word (based on Romans 6:1-2, Colossians 3:3-14, Revelation 2:4-5).
  2. To "take special note" of an unrepentant person means to note that those involved in the restoration process (which could include an entire church family) must make a prayerful effort to restore that individual. It does not mean to gossip about the person who is choosing to remain unrepentant (based on Proverbs 17:9).
- D. If an unrepentant professing believer must be treated as one who does not belong to the family of God (Matthew 18:17), remember the following:
1. You and the others involved in the restoration/discipline process are not to unlovingly ignore the unrepentant person, but you are to avoid speaking with him freely in unhindered fellowship as you would with other fellow-believers.
  2. An unrepentant person may choose to attend church functions (as unbelievers do); but, like an unbeliever, he may not minister, is advised not take communion (not forced), or otherwise pretend that he has no problem with which he must deal.
  3. Believers in the church must continue to admonish him. However, the reality of his salvation must now be brought up for him to consider, since he is persistently choosing (just like an unbeliever) not to be obedient to the Word of God (1 John 2:3-6, 3:6-9) and is living like one who has no supernatural power to overcome sin (Romans 8:5-8).
- E. At all times, remember that discipline is sorrowful (Hebrews 12:11), not only for the one being disciplined; but God the Father and the Holy Spirit are also grieved by the sin of the individual (based on Ezekiel 18:23, 30-32; Ephesians 4:30).
- F. Believers who choose not to be diligent and faithful in the complete process of restoration/discipline toward sin in another believer's life face the corrective discipline of the Lord because:
1. They are sinning in their own lives by failing to obey God's Word, which states that believers are to restore a brother caught in sin (based on Galatians 6:1-2; James 4:17).
  2. They are sinning as a group by minimizing sin in the body of Christ and choosing not to deal with it (based on 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; James 4:17).