

# Biblical Prescriptions For Dealing With Sin In The Church

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God's people are involved in a variety of organizations in their everyday life. Everything from family, work, civic organizations, schools, as well as charitable organizations. In every organization there are membership standards that ensure that organization carries out its purpose. Those standards provide an environment that keeps it heading in a good direction and helps prohibit things that would derail its mission. God's house works in similar ways.

God says that His people are often "destroyed because of a lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6). This is true individually as well as corporately. One area that churches are greatly hindered because of a lack of knowledge is in regard to Biblical membership standards and discipline.

The Protestant Reformers named "three marks by which the true church is known: the preaching of the pure doctrine of the gospel, the pure administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of church discipline to correct faults." Unfortunately in much the Protestant churches today discipline is a lost subject.

Over the years I have been amazed that God's people are surprised by any sort of discipline in the church. Some mistakenly think that because it is a voluntary society then there are no standards in membership. Somehow there is a subtle thought that the church is a standard free zone.

The same people usually belong to organizations in the community that have standards and requirements of membership and they have no problem with that. Why would one think such things should not exist in the church? After all God's house is identified in Scripture as "the body of Christ, light of the world, holy temple, pillar and support of the truth" etc., and there are numerous Scriptures that speak of active steps in discipline.

We must give heed to it because without discipline the wonderful "city of God" will become a ghetto of sin. Early in my walk with Jesus I was faced with an example of this. One of my relatives had a neighbor who was married with three children. They were good friends but the wife caught the husband in an ongoing affair. My relative, who himself was a new believer tried to appeal to the man but it continued.

They were church goers so my relative ended up going to some of the board members of the church. To his shock they replied, "we can't deal with him because if we did we would have to deal with a bunch of other people in the church over their sins as well." They did nothing. The

man left his wife, ended up marrying the lady he had the affair with, and they continued to go to the same church while the lady and her three kids had to watch it every Sunday. Out of anguish they left the church because they couldn't take the pain of it all.

I once read a great perspective on church discipline by John Ortberg, "Maybe the most fundamental dynamic in church discipline is also the simplest: Sin happens. It happens in big churches, it happens in little churches. It probably happens at roughly the same per capita rate no matter what the congregation's size. It should sadden everyone, but it shouldn't shock anyone. So the question is not how to respond if it happens. The question is how to respond when it happens." The Bible is very clear, continual or serious sin is not to be ignored but addressed.

I remember reading a quote from the Museum of the Diaspora in Tel Aviv. On a wall section devoted to the Jewish community's government and its affairs a word of wisdom attributed to Rabbi Israel Salanter, "A rabbi whose community does not disagree with him is not really a rabbi; and a rabbi who fears his community is not really a man."

Leaders can't fear the people to the point they avoid dealing with the issue of continual or serious sin. *Proverbs 29:25, TEV "It is dangerous to be concerned with what others think of you. NASB The fear of man brings a snare, But he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted.* All levels of leadership will end up dealing with sin issues that require some form of challenge.

Church discipline is a broad category that entails various steps such as challenge, restriction, avoiding, removal, and forgiving/restoring. Some parts of discipline entail challenging behavior and attitudes. Some involve restricting certain aspects of people's fellowship and activity. Other more severe parts of discipline have more severe consequences, the most ultimate is the complete removal of the offender and treating them like a gentile (outside of God's people Mt 18:15-17). Obviously the goal of any type of dealing with sin is restoration. If someone is unwilling to stop their sin there also needs to be steps taken to protect His people from it.

I remember a time when a sexual offender who had served time in prison started coming to our church and reaching out to God. People began to connect relationally with him and he started the process of discipleship. He continued to have sexual confessions. We drew him close and obviously didn't allow him around any children. At one point we found a place that specializes in helping people with his type of sexual dysfunctions. At first he was open to go but backed out at the last minute indicating he didn't want to leave his lifestyle and then left the church. He went to a church in a nearby town that didn't inquire where he came from. We found out later put him in with children's work and you can guess what happened. He molested children there, the church came under scandal, and that church no longer exists today. This is why we the Biblical prescription for dealing with sin.

## Systematic study of all the New Testament passages (30 passages) that mention different aspects of discipline in the local church.

### They fall into six categories: Challenge, Exposure, Restriction, Avoiding, Removal, and Restoration

As you read what God has said about this important topic it will help you hear what He is saying in any particular situations you face. What He is saying about anything should never conflict with what He has already said. "Forever O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven" (Ps 119:89).

- **(Challenge, Removal) Matthew 18:15-17** NASB *"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. (16) "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 CONFIRMED. (17) "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile (one outside the people of God), and a tax collector (one who takes advantage of his own people for gain).*
- **(Challenge) Rom 15:14** *And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and **able also to admonish one another***
- **(Exposure, Avoiding) 1 Corinthians 5:1-13** NASB *(1) It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife.... (9) I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; (10) I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. (11) **But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler--not even to eat with such a one.** (12) For what have I to do with judging outsiders? **Do you not judge those who are within the church?** (13) But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.*
- **(Exposure, Restriction) Romans 16:2-20** NASB *that you receive her in the Lord in a...(16) Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you. (17) **Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.** (18) For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting. (19) For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil. (20) The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.*

- **(Removal) 1 Corinthians 5:1-5** *It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. (2) You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst. (3) For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. (4) In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, (5) I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*
- **(Restriction, Avoiding) 1Co 5:9-12** *I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; 10 I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. 11 **But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler--not even to eat with such a one.** 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church?*
- **(Exhortation to Judge Self at Communion over relational sins) 1Co 11:29-32** *For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. 30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. 31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. 32 **But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.***
- **(Avoiding) 1Co 15:33** ***Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."***
- **(Removal leading to Restoration) 2Co 2:5-7** *But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree--in order not to say too much--to all of you. 6 **Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority,** 7 so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.*
- **(Restriction, Avoiding) 2 Corinthians 6:14-17 NASB** ***Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? (15) Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? (16) Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. (17) "Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE,"** says the Lord. "AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; And I will welcome you.*

- **(Restoration) 2Co 7:8-12** *For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it--for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while-- 9 I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. 10 For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. 11 For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter. 12 So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the offender nor for the sake of the one offended, but that your earnestness on our behalf might be made known to you in the sight of God.*
- **(Restoration with gentleness) Gal 6:1-2** *Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.*
- **(Restricting, Exposure, Avoiding) Ephesians 5:2-11** *NASB and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. (3) **But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints;** (4) and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. (5) For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. (6) **Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. (7) Therefore do not be partakers with them;** (8) for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (9) (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), (10) trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. (11) **Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them;***
- **(Avoiding) Phi 3:2-19** ***Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers,** beware of the false circumcision; 3 for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh...15-19 Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; 16 however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained. 17 **Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. 18 For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of***

*Christ, 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.*

- **(Challenge) Col 3:16** *Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all **wisdom teaching and admonishing one another** with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God*
- **(Challenge) 1Th 5:12-15** *But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. 14 **We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.** 15 See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.*
- **(Avoiding) 2 Thessalonians 3:6 NASB** *Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life** and not according to the tradition which you received from us.*
- **(Restriction, Avoiding to shame) 2Th 3:10-16** *For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: **if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either.** 11 For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. 12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. 13 But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good. 14 **If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame.** 15 Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish (Gk keep admonishing) him as a brother. 16 Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all!*
- **(Challenge, Restore) 1Ti 5:1-2** *Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather **appeal to him as a father**, to the younger men as brothers, 2 the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity*
- **(Challenge, Exposure) 1Ti 5:19-20** *Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. 20 **Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning.***
- **(Challenge, Exposure) 1 Timothy 6:3-5 MSG** *If you have leaders there who teach otherwise, who refuse the solid words of our Master Jesus and this godly instruction, (4) **tag them for what they are: ignorant windbags who infect the air with germs of envy, controversy, bad-mouthing, suspicious rumors.** (5) **Eventually there's an epidemic of backstabbing, and truth is but a distant memory.** They think religion is a way to make a fast buck.*

- **(Challenge, Avoiding) 2Ti 2:16-18** *But **avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness**, 17 and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, 18 men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some.*
- **(Avoiding) 2 Ti 3:1-6** *But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. (2) For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, (3) unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, (4) treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, (5) holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; **Avoid such men as these**. (6) For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses,*
- **(Challenge) 2Ti 2:24-26** *The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, 25 **with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition**, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.*
- **(Challenge) 2Ti 3:16-17** *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable **for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness**; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*
- **(Challenge, Restriction) Tit 1:10-16** *For **there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, 11 who must be silenced** because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain. 12 One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." 13 This testimony is true. For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith, 14 not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth. 15 To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. 16 They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.*
- **(Challenge, Avoiding) Titus 3:9-11** *NASB But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. (10) **Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, (11) knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.***
- **(Challenge, Restriction, Avoiding) 2 John 1:9-11** *NASB Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. (10) If anyone comes to you and does not*

bring this teaching, **do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting;**  
**(11) for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.**

- **(Challenge, Exposure) 3 Jo 1:9-11** I wrote something to the church; but **Diotrephes**, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. 10 **For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words;** and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church. 11 **Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good.** The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God.
- **(Challenge, Exposure, Removal) Rev 2:2-20** 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and **that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not,** and you found them to be false ...12 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write...14 **'But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. 15 'So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 'Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly...18 "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write...20 'But I have this against you, **that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess,** and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.**