

NORTH HILLS CHURCH

Church Discipline/Restoration Policy

What do we do when brothers and sisters claim to follow Jesus but choose to disobey the commands of Jesus? How do we respond when one follower of Jesus sins against another? How do God's people respond to ongoing sin within the church?

These questions drive us to the heart of Jesus's words in John 14:15, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Obedience to Jesus is one of the primary evidences of being a disciple.

We also know that we are not yet perfect. We will continue to struggle with sin. Paul writes of this tension in Romans:

"So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin" (Romans 7:21-25).

Paul describes a clash of desires within us. What we must do, through the power of the Spirit, is to practice doing what Jesus calls us to do. In the words of John, "whoever practices righteousness is righteous." We practice righteousness and wage war against sin.

Jesus anticipated that in this life, his followers would still sin against one another. The clash of desires within us will lead to collateral damage in the lives of God's people. When this happens, what do we do?

Jesus says,

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Matthew 18:15-20).

We go. We pursue our brother who hurt us. We want our brother back, so we tell him what he did.

Approaching our brother is a step of faith, believing that correction is valuable rather than hateful. The writer of Proverbs bluntly writes, “Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid” (Proverbs 12:1).

Going to our brother is an act of love, not judgment. Again, the writer of Proverbs states, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy” (Proverbs 27:6).

We begin by going to our brother alone, hoping for a quick reconciliation so that no one else needs to know what occurred.

What if our brother doesn’t listen? We go and bring friends. This is not an attempt to gang up on someone, shame our brother, or force a response. Rather, these friends provide accuracy and clarity to what is being said.

What if our brother still doesn’t listen? We go and tell the church. We implore the community of faith to be part of reconciling two estranged family members.

What if our brother still doesn’t listen? The church must act. The brother we have been pursuing is no longer considered a brother.

This process has become known as church discipline. However, as one reads Jesus’s commands, the term is insufficient. Church discipline is never the goal. It is the means. The goal is reconciliation. At every step, we want our brother back.

Church discipline and restoration is applicable to the members of North Hills Church. The end result should be to restore an erring member, to purify the church, to deter sin, and to demonstrate the reality of righteous living to the unsaved world (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

The heart attitude of the church in discerning and dealing with erring members, through the means of church discipline, must therefore demonstrate the following:

- Patience – 1 Thessalonians 5:14. Jesus gives us no timeline for the process.
- Avoid both vengeance and arrogance – Galatians 6:1. The goal is always restoration.
- View the individual as an erring brother and not a bitter enemy – 2 Thessalonians 3:15. Love drives us to pursue those who have wronged us.
- Approach them with sorrow and not sarcasm – 1 Corinthians 5:2; 2 Corinthians 2:4. When a brother sins, our hearts break.

- Be ready to forgive them when repentance occurs – 2 Corinthians 2:7; 7:10-11. Jesus taught us to, “forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matthew 6:12).

The following are some scriptural examples of sin that can result in the process of church discipline and restoration:

- Divisiveness – 2 Thessalonians 3:11; Titus 3:10-11; Romans 16:17-20
- Unruly, disorderly, and undisciplined living – 2 Thessalonians 3:6,11,14; 1 Thessalonians 5:14
- Conflict between members – 1 Corinthians 6:5; Philippians 4:2-3; Matthew 18:15-18
- Sins of the flesh – 1 Corinthians 5:11
- Denial of the great doctrines of our faith – 1 Timothy 6:3-5; 2 Timothy 2:16-18; 2 John 1:10-11; Revelation 2:14

The above are merely examples. The key issue is not only what the member has done, but his unwillingness to repent and bring his will and life into subjection to the Word of God.

One of the most difficult decisions a church must make is to take the final step of faith in Jesus’s plan for dealing with a sinning brother. When all pursuit is exhausted and repentance has not happened, then what do we do?

A member who will not turn from his sin after the biblical steps are followed must be considered an unbeliever and removed from the fellowship and protection of their church.

If the erring member refuses to heed the warning and correction of the Board of Elders and the church, he shall be dismissed from North Hills Church, removed from the membership roll, denied Christian fellowship, and delivered over to Satan, which means he is taken out from under the protective care of God’s Holy Spirit ministering in and through God’s people.

This denial of Christian fellowship is described with very strong language in the Scriptures:

- “Avoid them” – Romans 16:17
- “Keep away from” - 2 Thessalonians 3:6
- “Have nothing more to do with him” - Titus 3:10; 2 Thessalonians 3:14
- “Not even to eat with such a one” - 1 Corinthians 5:11

The heart of these descriptions seems to highlight that the relationship has changed due to sin. The family dynamic has changed. These commands are not judgmental acts of shunning. Interactions with someone removed from fellowship are now characterized by a call to repent rather than casual acceptance.

Even this step of denying fellowship maintains the goal of the original one-on-one meeting: the hope and prayer for repentance and reconciliation.

This process is not a checklist. Pursuit, as found in Matthew 18:15-20, is not necessarily the letter of the law, consisting of only three potential meetings, and then someone is kicked out. Rather, this pursuit is marked by prayers for wisdom, persistence in pursuit, and patience in response.

Individual situations vary. The heart is always the same: loving Jesus by obeying his commands.