

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn about the practical life of the Christian community. Today's teaching is: TRAINING CHRISTIANS TO EXERCISE DISCIPLINE AND TO RESTORE REPENTANT SINNERS. *Discipline* means the control exercised over the life of church-members. This control is limited to the area of wrong-doing and may not be extended to the whole life of Christians. We will learn about the reasons for exercising discipline, the procedure of exercising discipline and the approach to exercising discipline.

(S) **POINT 1. THE REASONS FOR EXERCISING DISCIPLINE**

**First. The Bible commands Christians to exercise discipline.**

Christians are *saved sinners*. Because they believe in Jesus Christ, they have been *justified*, that is, all their sins have been forgiven and will not be counted against them in the Judgement Day. Although Christians are continually *sanctified* by the work of the Holy Spirit in them and the work of other Christians around them, they still fall into sin (1 Jn 2:1). Most of the times, Christians confess their sins and again receive forgiveness and cleansing (1 Jn 1:9). However, there are times when they have not yet repented of their sin or do not want to repent. Sometimes they try to justify themselves and other times they blame others for their sin. In Matthew 18:15, Jesus commands Christians, "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault". And in 1 Corinthians 5:12-13, the apostle Paul teaches, "What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. 'Expel the wicked man from among you'."

(T) **Second. The different types of discipline.**

One. There is divine discipline. God disciplined Israel when they turned away from him and he disciplined the nations for their idolatry and immorality. Jesus Christ disciplines the churches. For example, in Revelation 2 and 3 he says, "I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love (2:2)". "I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught .. " idolatry and sexual immorality (2:14). "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot ... Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline" (3:15,19).

Two. There is governmental discipline. Romans 13:3-4 teaches that the governmental authorities should hold terror for those who do wrong and that they have authority to bear the sword. They are God's servant to punish the wrongdoer.

Three. There is parental discipline. Proverbs 13:24 teaches that he who loves his son will be careful to discipline him. And Proverbs 29:17 teaches, "Discipline your son and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul."

Four. There is self-discipline.

Five. There is mutual discipline.

Six. There is church discipline.

And finally, there is apostolic discipline. In Galatians 1:9, the apostle Paul says, "If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned."

(S) **Third. The value of exercising discipline.**

One. Discipline avoids the spreading of sin. Ecclesiastes 8:11 warns, "When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong." And Proverbs 10:17 warns, "Whoever ignores correction leads others astray." Therefore, discipline is needed in the family, in the church and in society in order to avoid the spreading of sin and to combat crime.

Two. Discipline promotes holiness. Proverbs 15:5 teaches that discipline promotes wisdom. And Hebrews 12:10-11 teaches, "Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." Therefore, discipline becomes indispensable for spiritual growth. Christians who are disciplined become wiser in their planning, more holy in their character and more fruitful in their actions.

Three. Discipline leads to experiencing love and life. Proverbs 6:23 teaches, "The corrections of discipline are the way to life." And Proverbs 3:11-12 teaches that a Christian should not despise the Lord's discipline, because he disciplines

those he loves. Therefore, discipline is one way in which God expresses his love to you, because he desires only the best for you!

**(T) POINT 2. THE PROCEDURE OF EXERCISING DISCIPLINE**

**First. How should every Christian exercise self-discipline.**

Every Christian has a personal responsibility to exercise self-discipline.

One. Every Christian is responsible to remove personal sin or bad habits himself. In Luke 6:42-43, Jesus teaches, “How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye. ‘No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit’.”

Two. Every Christian is responsible to never cause others to fall into sin. In Matthew 18:7-9, Jesus says, “Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!”

Three. Every Christian is responsible to turn away from divisive persons and false teachers. Romans 16:17-18 teaches that Christians should keep away from people who cause divisions and who teach false teachings (2 Jn 9-10).

**(S) Second. How should Christians exercise mutual discipline.**

Every Christian has the responsibility to exercise mutual discipline. It does not matter if the other Christian sins against God or against you.

One. Every Christian is responsible to discipline other Christians who fall into any kind of sin. Galatians 6:1 teaches, “If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.”

Two. Every Christian is also responsible to discipline other Christians who sin against him. They should try to resolve problems between themselves, before involving the elders or the whole church in their problem. In Matthew 18:15, Jesus teaches, “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.”

Three. Every Christian is responsible to immediately resolve a problem, when he hears that another Christian holds something against him. In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus teaches that if you remember that your brother has something against you, then you should take the initiative to get reconciled with him. Mutual discipline should be exercised in private, under four eyes, and it should be done in a gentle way.

**(T) Third. How should the church exercise discipline of sin of a more private nature.**

Church discipline usually begins where personal and mutual discipline fails. In Matthew 18:16-17, Jesus teaches, “But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony 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, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.” The prescribed order of action should be:

One. Rebuke a brother or sister in the presence of only one or two other Christians, so that there will be sufficient witnesses.

Two. Report to Board of elders. If rebuking fails, “tell it to the church”. It would be most appropriate not to tell it to all the church members in public, but to tell it to the elders in private, because they represent the church. The elders should then discipline the brother or sister.

Three. Cut off from membership. If the offender still refuses to accept correction, then the elders must officially cut this member off from membership of the church (excommunicate). The other church members should be notified and they should treat this person as a pagan. This does not mean that they should shun (avoid) him, but they should treat him like they should treat all other non-Christians.

**(S) Fourth. How should the church exercise discipline of sin of a more public nature.**

Certain sins may develop to a point where only public discipline can be exercised. According to 2 Thessalonians 3, this is necessary in the case of a brother or sister who does not live according to the Christian teaching, but instead is idle and a troublemaker (busybody, meddlesome). Titus 3 says that this is necessary in the case of a brother or sister who causes divisions in the church. 1 Corinthians 5 teaches that this is necessary in the case of a brother or sister who commits sexual immorality, is greedy, an idolater, a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. The procedure of discipline is as follows.

One. Warn the sinner. The elders should warn (admonish) the sinner in the presence of those he sinned against. Titus 3:10-11 teaches that Christians should warn a sinning brother or sister at least two times.

Two. Notify the whole church about the sinner's conduct. If the sinner does not repent, then 3 John 9-10 says that the elders should call the attention of the whole church to the sinner's conduct.

2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 teaches that they should warn all the Christians to take special note of the sinner and his conduct. The whole church should be aware of the danger. However they should not treat the sinner as an enemy.

Three. The whole church withdraws from associating with the sinner. If the sinner still does not repent, then 2 Thessalonians 3:6 and 14 says that the whole church should withdraw association on intimate terms with the sinner. They should keep away from him, that is, shun or avoid him, in order that he may feel ashamed.

Four. Finally the church cuts the sinner off from membership. If the sinner still does not repent, then Titus 3:10-11 and 1 Corinthians 5:4-5 teaches that the church should drive the sinner out of the church, that is, they should exclude him from membership and treat him as a non-Christian. Without spiritual fellowship with the Church, he is exposed to Satan and the destruction of his sinful nature. To be cut off from church membership is a serious matter. In the case of a weak church like Corinth, they should have nothing to do with him anymore. However, Christians are forbidden to take revenge (Rom 12:17-19).

**(T) Fifth. How should the church exercise discipline of sin of an elder or any church-leader?**

In 1 Timothy 5:19-20 is written, "Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning." Elders or any Christian leader is not exempt from Christian discipline! All ordinary Christians should watch the teaching and conduct of their leaders. And if they teach false teachings or do not live according to the Christian teachings, then they should be disciplined. In Galatians 2:11-16, the apostle Paul did not hesitate to publicly rebuke another apostle for hypocritical conduct.

**(S) Sixth. How should the church restore a repentant sinner?**

Discipline is a kind of punishment. However the purpose of the punishment is not to cool our anger, but to *restore* the sinner. The purpose of discipline is to *bring the sinner back to obedience* to the Lord Jesus Christ. The purpose is to bring him to his senses, to repentance and to changing his conduct. At any time, when the sinner repents of his sin, then the Christians and the church must restore him. In Luke 17:3, Jesus commands, "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him." In 2 Corinthians 2:5-11, the apostle Paul commands the church how to restore a repentant sinner. The offence of the sinner grieves the whole church. By exercising discipline, the Christians or the whole church punishes the offender. When he repents, then the Christians and the church should forgive him, comfort him and reaffirm their love for him. A person who feels very guilty or deeply ashamed about the sin he has committed, has a great need to accept total forgiveness from God and from the person he offended. When Christians forgive, then they should never speak about the offence any more (Heb 8:12). Christians should comfort the repentant sinner, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. And Christians should reaffirm their love to him by restoring him to membership of the church and by again having fellowship with him (Lk 15:17-24). Christians should forgive one another as Christ forgave all of us. Christians should treat the repentant sinner as Christ treats all of us when we repent from our sins.

**(T) POINT 3. GUIDELINES FOR DISCIPLINE**

**First. Learn to discern between surface problems and root problems.**

In order to rebuke or to correct the sinner, you should first acquire the necessary facts and try to understand the real problem. You should especially distinguish between the *surface problem* and the *root problem*. The *surface problem* is the *visible* action or reaction accompanied by expressed words, attitudes and feelings of the sinner. For example, he gossips about a brother, because the brother wronged him. The *root problem* is the *invisible* action or reaction accompanied by the hidden thoughts, attitudes and feelings of the sinner. For example, he is bitter against that brother or even angry against God. Here are some examples from the Bible concerning surface problems and the real root problems, which lie at the bottom of these problems.

In 2 Chronicles 33, we see that a person gets involved with the wrong kind of people. What we should realise is that he comes out of a broken home (22,2).

In Psalm 32, we see that a person cannot sleep, has no energy or gets sick of worrying. What we should realise is that he feels guilty about some sin (3-4).

In Luke 8, we see that a person remains immature and unfruitful as a Christian. What we should realise is that he loves the riches and pleasures of this world (14).

In Romans 1, we see that a person is morally depraved. He commits sexual immorality, indulges in idolatry or commits crimes. What we should realise is that he is suppressing or exchanging God's truth for lies (18-32).

In 2 Corinthians 4, we see that a person is a free-thinker and approves of evil practices in society. What we should realise is that he has some secret sin, which he tries to cover up (2).

In Ephesians 4, we see that a person is easily misled by false teachings. What we should realise is that he is not growing to maturity as a Christian and he is not developing his own biblical convictions (13-15).

Finally, in 1 Timothy 1:19, we see that a person is beginning to lose his faith. What we should realise is that he is rejecting a good conscience (19).

**(S) Second. Exercise discipline in truth, fairness and love.**

The Bible teaches several principles for exercising discipline.

One. Discipline the sinner in truth. Matthew 7:1-2 teaches that Christians may not make assumptions or unfounded judgements about other people. John 7:24 teaches that we may not judge another person according to his appearance or on the basis of just hearsay (gossip). John 18:23 teaches that we should have some specific evidence or a witness. Proverbs 18:17 teaches that we should hear the case from the point of view of both sides. 2 Timothy 3:16 teaches that the Bible is the only standard of what is the truth.

**(T) Two. Discipline the sinner fairly.** Leviticus 19 and Deuteronomy 16:18-19 teaches that Christians must judge the sinner in fairness and righteousness. We may never show partiality against one person and favouritism to the other person. Proverbs 17:8,23 teaches that it is absolutely forbidden for Christians to receive or give bribes in order to distort justice or for any other reason! 1 Corinthians 6:11 teaches that we should rather take our case to Christian brothers to judge, than to the worldly court, because unbelievers do not know the biblical principles and have a different value system.

**(S) Three. Discipline the sinner firmly.** Proverbs 27:5 says, "Better is open rebuke than hidden love". To rebuke consists of several possible aspects of correcting: According to Ephesians 5:11-13, we should begin by *exposing* the specific sin the sinner has committed. The sinner must know very clearly what his transgression was. We should *convince* the sinner why his conduct is wrong in God's eyes. We should *convict* the sinner of the seriousness of his transgression, so that he feels guilty or ashamed of his transgression (Jn 16:8). Then we should *rebuke* the sinner by disapproving of his conduct. If necessary, we should *refute* the arguments of the sinner who tries to justify himself without reason. Finally, we should *correct* the sinner by helping him to go in the way he ought to go. And if the sinner persists in disobedience by being foolish, arrogant or rebellious, hardening his heart against his brothers or sisters or challenging the authority of the elders, then we should *punish* the sinner in the appropriate way.

**(T) Four. Discipline the sinner in love.** The whole purpose of discipline is to *restore* the sinner. Christians should love the sinner by disciplining his sin and by disciplining him in the biblical way. By remaining quiet and doing nothing about the sin, the sinner will eventually be destroyed and God will be dishonoured. When the sinner repents, Christians should love him by forgiving him and by restoring him to the Christian fellowship.

**(S) ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Teach new believers what the Bible teaches about discipline and restoration. Encourage every Christian to take responsibility for self-discipline, mutual discipline and church discipline.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and build Christ's Church" and Internet on [www.dota.net](http://www.dota.net)

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".