

CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE: LEGALISM or COVENANT RESPONSIBILITY

by

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Submitted to the Faculty of Theology, Acadia Divinity College,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Ministry

Acadia Divinity College,
Acadia University
Spring Convocation 1997



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0-612-22040-0

ABSTRACT

The author argues that Christian discipline is a ministry of covenant responsibility. In establishing this view, the concepts of “discipline” and “covenant” are examined in their biblical content and in Church history, to determine the nature and practice of discipline. A survey of several Atlantic Baptist Churches shows an affirmation of the relevance of discipline among believers, despite certain reservations. Having established his case, the author then proposes guidelines for the practice of safe and effective discipline. The Bible, the Church Covenant and the Constitution feature as valuable resources for the establishment and revitalization of Christian discipline in the Church.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Sincere appreciation go out to my ministry supervisor, Rev. Joseph Manchester, for his patience, insights and support, to my thesis supervisors, Dr. Robert Wilson and Rev. Glenn Wooden, and Dr. Andrew Irvine the Director of Doctoral studies for their invaluable guidance, rigorous criticisms and patient encouragement throughout this process. Special thanks to my wife Jemell and our children for their love, sacrifice, patience and encouragement in allowing me the freedom to pursue this project when other interests beckoned, and responsibilities demanded attention. I am also deeply indebted to the pastors, deacons and members and adherents of the select Baptist Churches in the St. John River Valley, New Brunswick, and the Annapolis Valley, Nova Scotia, for participating in the survey. Your invaluable help made it possible for me to complete this project successfully. Finally, my gratitude is sincerely expressed to the leaders, members and adherents of the Morristown-Lake Paul Baptist Church and the Cornwallis Street Baptist Church for graciously permitting me the time to begin and complete this program. The hope is that all of us will benefit from the fruits of this research by attaining a clearer vision for the work of God, and a more eager enthusiasm for His glory in all things. Indeed to Him belong the credit and glory for the enlightened interest and gracious experience in this area of ministry.

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INTRODUCTION

CONCERN FOR DISCIPLINE

The issue of Christian discipline is not an easy one for most congregations. With our strong individualism we do not like the concept of being responsible to others for our actions or beliefs. Moreover, congregations often do not want to sit in judgment of others or enforce standards for their members. However, the evidence of Scripture and the precedence of Church history show that this ministry is important both for the glory of God and the credibility of the Church's mission. In this thesis project the writer intends to show that Christian discipline is a ministry established on solid biblical and historical foundations and is important for the Church today. The following parable based on ministry experience illustrates the value and necessity of discipline and how its lack only serves to further complicate life's relationships.

A. Parable

The prospects and possibilities seemed endless to the new pastor as she settled into to her new charge with great enthusiasm and lofty vision. All went well until a critical issue of moral failure, previously unaddressed by the Church, surfaced and more or less demanded attention. Since it occurred prior to the arrival of this new

pastor, it seemed a matter which might be resolved through pastoral care and counsel with a view to repentance and restoration.

However, the matter was not that simple. Initially, Clarke responded quite positively to both pastoral and professional counselling over a two year period with apparently remarkable and promising progress. It was learned from the Church records that the only action taken after the initial moral failure was the acceptance of his letter of voluntary resignation from a position of leadership. This seemed to be an admission of guilt and a recognition that it disqualified him from holding office. There was in the correspondence, however, an expressed hope of return to active fellowship following proper resolution of the situation.

The counselling seemed to have been effective since Clarke began attending worship and taking an interest in the business meetings despite the fact that the problem relationship was still unresolved. Things came to a head when there was interest in him joining the choir, voting at business meetings, and aspiring to take communion. Following a requested meeting with the pastor, he was advised to make a clear stand of repentance before the congregation, express his desire for God's forgiveness as well as the forgiveness of the congregation, and then break off the relationship with the involved party. Furthermore, it was recommended that he attend a Bible study group to facilitate spiritual growth and, if necessary, pursue further professional counselling. Unfortunately, he chose to reduce contact with the Church and to continue his sinful life style.

Subsequently, the individual again became involved in another moral indiscretion resulting in the breakup of a family. Efforts to address this issue included pastoral counsel, as well as discussions with the current leadership, some of whom categorically rejected the biblical principle of Christian discipline with its ramifications which run from restoration to exclusion from Church membership according to the response of the one being admonished. There were also clear signs that some preferred the pastor's resignation above the individual's removal from the fellowship should it come to a choice between the two. This latter group would rather the conduct be ignored than addressed. There were those of course who agreed that the situation be addressed in light of biblical principles and precedence.

At the next quarterly business meeting the issue was circumvented after the individual submitted a letter of withdrawal from the fellowship of "God's church" until his life was in order. The attempt to impart some biblical knowledge by the interpretation of Scripture appropriate to the situation was either rejected or ignored. Yet, evidence that it was lacking and sorely missed for its formative and reformatory qualities was discernible in Clarke's own expressed wish that someone had approached him earlier with such counsel.

It may be evident from this scenario that an understanding of both the formative and reformatory aspects of Christian discipline are indispensable to the growth and spirituality of both the Church and para-church organizations. Discipline, however, is evidently not a popular subject in such contexts. This experience sparked

interest in researching the theme of Christian discipline resulting in this specific thesis project. The major thrust of the project has been the design and distribution of a questionnaire to several congregations in two major areas of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. The intent was to discover the personal views of members and adherents of the local congregation regarding this important ministry of Christian discipline. Several possible questions to be considered include the following: a) Is it a generally held view by the majority of Church members that discipline which leads to excommunication is too judgmental? b) Are there specific instances when this action has to be taken? c) Does a firm grasp of Scripture or limited knowledge of the Bible make a difference in one's conclusions and disposition towards this ministry? d) In short, how do personal, social and theological factors impinge upon one's decision about the relevance of discipline in the modern Church? The prior question, however, might be whether there is or can be any valuable purpose in pursuing the issues concerning Christian discipline.

B. Purpose

The initial interest of this writer was in exploring the possibilities of preaching as counselling from the pulpit with a view to providing preventive constructive help for people and to fortify them for the challenges, responsibilities and privileges of Christian living in a confusing, decadent and permissive age. Subsequent to this was the desire to explore the reasons for the obvious disparity between believers'

confession and action or belief and behaviour. However, because of the potential difficulty in verifying results in the latter, and the desire to explore an area which will render more concrete results but yet be measurable and practical, both were abandoned. Consequently, the contents of this thesis project represents a third concern of the writer, Christian discipline in congregational life, which grew out of ministry experience and observation.

This project is designed to explore the foundations, value and implementation of Christian discipline. First its biblical sources shall be examined with a focus on such major passages as Matthew 18:15-21; I Corinthians 5; II Corinthians 2; Galatians 6:1-4 ; and Hebrews 12:7-10; showing the ramifications of such discipline for Church membership within a covenant community. Second, a selection of historical sources must be perused to uncover the value and practices of this ministry to the Church. Third, the results of a survey will reveal some of the general trends in attitudes as seen from a representative group of Christians towards the concept of discipline. The results of a questionnaire developed for this purpose provides a profile of how Baptists in a variety of congregations look at Christian discipline. Fourth, possible avenues for either its revitalization or institution as part of the believers' covenant responsibility to one another will be discussed. Fifth, a consideration on the means of determining what conditions necessitate the exercise of the extreme consequence of discipline -excommunication - will be reviewed. Is it the gravity or magnitude of the sin that matters most ? Is it only for sins that are

obvious, affecting the reputation of the Church? Or is it the attitude of the individual after repeated admonition? Is response to admonition or the lack thereof the main criterion which determines the extent of disciplinary procedures? Resolutions to these questions would hopefully be provided in the course of the ensuing discussion.

The term "Christian discipline" was chosen above "Church discipline" because the latter seemed to have assumed negative implications which often conjure up images of categorical dismissal from the congregation for any of a number of major or minor misdemeanours. Charles Deweese attests, for example, that historically Church covenants have been associated so heavily with corrective discipline that it subsequently gave a negative image to discipline.¹ In some instances this might have occurred with no reference to the positive and reformative aspects of discipline as a way of enabling believers to attain God's highest and holiest for them.

Church history reveals that there have always been concerns about the disparity between the profession and performance or belief and behaviour of Church members. Consequently, several questions may be posed. Should the Church strive to apply biblical principles of holiness in an absolute or literal way irrespective of societal attitudes, and the risk of marginalization or the accusation of being Puritanic, legalistic and Philistine? This danger of liberalism which militates against Christian discipline and its value for Church membership is illustrated in the encounter with an

¹Charles Deweese, The Origin, Development and use of Church Covenants in Baptist History (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Th. D. Thesis, 1973), 157.

organist and choir director who contended that the current standard for membership in the choir be dropped so as to allow any interested person to enter. Presently, aspiring choristers are required to be baptized Church members. M a n y congregations seem to have little or no consensus in dealing with this issue of Christian discipline, thereby raising the question of the relevance of biblical teaching and historical precedence for today in this area. Perhaps some consensus among congregations should be arrived at in order to avoid complications in clear disciplinary situations, or even relieve some aggravations and strained relationships between them? This might even minimize or halt the incidents of members under corrective discipline of one congregation being casually accepted into another fellowship without any communication with the former as to the reasons for a member "jumping ship". Discipline at some level seems to be a necessity for the Church, and this thesis project will explore some ways in which this issue was dealt with in the past and its possible value for today.

C. Personal Struggles

Admittedly, this writer wrestled with the concept from beginning to end, often wondering whether it was worth the bother. As a matter of fact, there were times when it appeared that any attempts at renewal of the ministry were futile, particularly since so many more capable and erudite Christian thinkers have addressed the issue. The following journal entries bear witness to this personal struggle.

July 28, 1994- Still wrestling with shape and direction of my thesis ... (originally I was interested in exploring the reason for general variance but felt inclined to attempt something that will yield more tangible results). The area of church discipline seems attractive ... Areas such as covenant, community, discipline, commitment, play on my mind as possible emphases. Possible approach: I) discipline in historic Christianity - advantages and disadvantages in biblical and church history for practice and precedents. II) Method: i) Trace the implementation, execution, demise and restoration of discipline and the causes and effects of ... liberalism, conservatism, fundamentalism. ii) Argue for or against its value to healthy church life as a motivation to holiness in life. iii) Recommend renewal steps in covenant relationships, in light of legal ramifications regarding human rights.

October 7, 1994 - Reflection on Dmin. Thesis. I) Eventually narrowed my topic to Discipline; 6-10 churches to be surveyed: 3-5 in the Annapolis Valley; 3-5 in St. John River Valley. II) Dr. Robert Wilson possible supervisor.

January 24, 1995 - Having begun research on my thesis and in reflection on my continuing experiences as pastor, I feel increasing timidity about addressing this whole issue of discipline in the context of an increasingly secularized church. Indeed it becomes ... difficult to be obedient to the observed principles of the gospel.

Responses from clergy and deacons were particularly interesting and perhaps reflect the same struggles indicated above. In one instance the pastor had agreed to institute the survey pending favourable support of the board of deacons. However, at a deacons meeting the consensus was to do it among board members or selected members only. The general congregation was regarded as too risky an arena for such a survey. The fear seemed to be that the survey subject had the potential for creating controversy in the wider fellowship. It was even expressed that such an activity might have a negative impact on Church growth or be discouraging to adherents or prospective members. The following journal entry illustrates the probable general attitude toward the ministry of discipline. Approximately three months after the questionnaires were distributed there was considerable difficulty in getting prompt returns; to say the least this was both perplexing and discouraging:

September 26, 1995 - Without being judgmental, I must admit a sense of dissatisfaction and disillusionment regarding the pastoral ministry and spiritual leadership. Specifically concerning the responses to the survey on church discipline. It seems that there is a great amount of insecurity among pastors

and significant lay leaders. No one seems too eager in dealing with issues of consequence to the church's welfare. Rather than allowing the general membership to respond, pastors/ deacons are more inclined to hand pick people to respond. A situation that cannot be allowed since it would prejudice the results. The questions I struggle with are : i) Is it fear of unleashing the unmanageable? ii) Is it insecurity? iii) Is it ignorance? iv) Is it simply resistance to the implications of one's call? Perhaps it is some of each. For even as I write there are issues of great proportions that are challenges. Only God knows the eventual impact this will have on ministry as they are dealt with.

The most critical issue in all of this is the ambivalence of the present writer toward the subject, prompting a deliberate quest to discern whether such a thesis project would be beneficial to the spiritual state of the Church. It was necessary to resolve this tension in order to move to an amicable position of assurance about God's will and a peace of mind for all. The following entry reflects this:

November 11, 1995 - Problem of discipline rears its ugly head again. I am amazed at the apparent ignorance and unabashed shamelessness of many. Two things disturb me about this: i) Did they choose to be disobedient in spite of teaching or was there no teaching? ii) Am I the object of a cosmic joke? Is God telling me that my quest (DMin.) and understanding of this issue is not valid or relevant? Therefore leave it alone!

I wish I had the opportunity of settling down some more (i.e as new pastor) without facing such issues so quickly. God knows best. Talk with the organist (regarding standards for choir membership) revealed the common sentiment (Satanic?): "If you take such a stand you will empty the choir loft." Continued discussion revealed an almost callous disinterest in God's glory. More and more I see the need of discipleship programs.

Others, however, saw it as an indispensable and most desirable facet of ministry dealing with the covenant privileges and responsibilities of believers, and therefore needed to be courageously revived and faithfully practised. Such indications of desirable change or recognition of need to be different from the world,

provided timely inspiration to pursue the present course of action. The next two excerpts from journal entries intimate this settled state of mind.

December 14, 1995- Yet for all this (apathy, hesitance, resistance) I have been heartened in my pursuit of thesis topic on Christian discipline. by a letter (though anonymous) pointing out evils in the Christian church. At least there are still those who desire purity in an imperfect church!

January 4, 1996 - Discipling The Church by Marlin Jeschke, has been another stimulant on the subject of corrective discipline. Affirming though it has been, it has left me feeling uneasy about delay in a particular situation. Presently, I am struggling with the need to wait and teach before implementing or initiating the ministry of corrective discipline. Indeed upon reflection on the churches I pastored (former and current), it is interesting to see the attitudes. Whereas in the former I was accused of “putting the church on the chopping block”, in this situation on the same subject of discipline I am told, anonymously, to “get with it” against moral lapses within the church.

March 23, 1996 - ... The overall pressing concern is timing in the implementing of disciplinary measures. My hesitance is in the area of desiring to teach more, prior to any such action, despite pressures from some areas to act now.

Even the small number who saw the positive value and formative aspect of it was still more concerned about the financial and numeric impact of discipline on Church membership where they dared to implement it as part of ministry. The value of it for the spirituality of the Church was of little or no discernible concern to respondents to the survey. One respondent to the questionnaire contended: “Churches would be virtually empty and pastors would be looking for work. Then again perhaps that’s the way it should be. Only the truly righteous in church?”

Overall, a general sense of hesitancy was observed even at the leadership level in promoting the survey to any degree. There existed an apparent fear of dealing with

difficult issues or those that are potentially contentious. If this assessment is true, then there also exists an unhealthy unity, a quasi consensus, an uneasy truce that undermines a healthy openness in covenant relationship which may foster discussion of issues vital to the spiritual welfare of the community of faith. Moreover, are leaders perhaps inhibited by their context of ministry in providing sufficient vision for morality through preaching and teaching based on biblical authority in order to achieve a full and effective ministry.

Considering the dual nature of Christian discipline, it might even be contended that establishing preventative measures instead of corrective ones, is definitely easier and more advantageous to effective discipline, just as it is for the gardener to keep his plot weedless by preventing the growth of weeds. The farmer's action is necessary since desirable plants are at greater risk of damage when weeding is delayed. As a matter of fact, other more resourceful gardeners plant their crops so closely there is little room for weeds. Similarly, it seems more advantageous to establish good solid preventive disciplinary principles based on sound biblical teachings which Church members will hopefully embrace for mutual benefit. This atmosphere may serve to alleviate or diminish the number of moral and spiritual lapses that necessitate the application of reformatory discipline.

Ultimately, however, one has to determine when sin deserves disciplinary action. The repeated reading and meditation on the Matthean pericope on discipline (Ch. 18:15-21), provided convincing proof that the attitude of the person should

determine the extent of disciplinary action. The following entry displays the resolution of this difficulty:

June 25, 1996 - Just completed rough draft of chapter 3. Feel I have a fairly good grasp of the methodology necessary for a compassionate yet firm revitalization of this ministry.

The more I read Matthew 18 in context, the more I appreciate the mood and tone implying restoration. This is so foreign to the general conception of discipline. It is also liberating that the pericope lays stress not on the "sin" but on the attitude of the sinner. Consequently, there is no need for grading sins, in terms of the degree of gravity, but rather the responsiveness of the individual to "admonition."

Another significant factor in the Matthean text is the time frame between admonitions leading up to possible excommunication. It is apparent that this might involve indefinite periods of time according to the responsiveness of the individual as discerned by those seeking his or her repentance and restoration. Consequently, much sensitivity and patience would be needed. The following journal entry concerning a currently unresolved situation indicates the slow progress sometimes made in reformative discipline. The situation began on September 1, 1996 and has stalled due to the accused person's continuous denial of guilt throughout the admonition process. Approximately seven weeks later during a private counselling session, the following observations were made.

October 22, 1996 - Interesting meeting with ... although he continues to deny (deed) some openings appeared in which he offered to "assist" in repaying missing amount, along with others . Hope to meet again a mutual feeling.

October 28, 1996 - (reflection) This state of affairs surely underlines the issues of discipline, namely, the procedure is not always immediately effective. It also points out the possibility of indeterminate time spans of admonition leading up to the resolution.

The ministering party or parties need to be discerning and patient throughout the process of reformatory discipline with a view to reconciliation.

D. Procedure

This thesis will take the following structure in examining the principle of Christian discipline as an indispensable ministry within the Church.

The first chapter will be given to the discussion of the biblical concepts of “discipline” and “covenant”. This approach is designed to show the implications of these two terms in the original context of Old Testament and New Testament practice of discipline within the nation of Israel and the Church as God’s covenant communities. In doing so a diachronic evaluation of the terms in the contexts of the Old Testament and New Testament will be done to extrapolate their meanings and implications for ministry. The main thrust, however, is intended to demonstrate the relational connotations of *covenant* in association with *discipline*. Works of particular value to this exercise include that by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek - English Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature, H. Baltensweiler’s “Discipline” in The Dictionary of New Testament Theology, D. Furst’s article “Teach” in Dictionary of New Testament Theology, and Walter Liefeld’s “Luke” in Expositor’s Bible Commentary. In the area of the relation between covenant and discipline several other works have been insightful including J. Behm’s “Diatheke” in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament; John Bright’s

History of Israel which is a comprehensive survey of God's choice and formation of the Hebrew people into the nation of Israel. Thomas E. McComiskey's The Covenants of Promise is an exploration of God's promise in its Old and New Testament settings with particular emphasis on the teachings of Jesus and Paul. W.J. Dumbrell's Covenant and Creation examines God's dealings with humanity through various covenants that ultimately are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Charles Deweese's The Origin, Development, and Use of Church Covenants in Baptist History, provides insight into the critical value of the covenant for membership within the Believers' Church.

The second chapter will explore the Biblical and historical practices of discipline in the New Testament and Church history. Thus the relationship of Christ and the Church will be examined to uncover the value of the covenant concept within a faith community. These are examined also with the intention of elucidating the ubiquity of the theme of discipline as an indispensable requirement for the perpetuity of the covenant relationships between God and His people as well as between the people of God throughout the ages.

The emphasis in chapter two will be upon the formative nature of this discipline as well as the consequences upon both the individual and community when lapses due to disobedience occurred. Subsequently, Church history will be examined for cases of implementation of discipline and its impact upon the mission of the Church. Works providing this historical perspective include A History of

Christianity by Kenneth Scott Latourette, which provide a broad sweep of Christian history from the beginnings to modern times. Early Christian Documents by Henry H. Bettenson is valuable as a resource to some original documents of the early Church. Highlights of Church History by Howard F. Vos serves as a summary of what Latourette details. Roman Catholicism by Lorraine Boettner is a bold discussion of the doctrine and development of the Roman Catholic Church and its place in Church history, with particular emphasis on the Inquisition as an extreme form of discipline.

In chapter two attention will be given also to such texts as Matthew 18:15-17; I Corinthians 5; II Corinthians 2; and Galatians 6:1-4. Of particular significance in formulating the view point of this chapter is Marlin Jeschke's Discipling the Church. This noted Mennonite theologian argues for the indispensability of corrective Church discipline in the context of evangelical ministry. It is seen as part of discipling which implies both formative and reformatory discipline among Christians.

Ken Blue & John White, Healing the Wounded, is another book of great value to the discussion, particularly providing illumination on the methodology and effect of discipline on the nature and mission of the Church. The authors examine the method of implementing or reinstating Church discipline as a regular or normal part of its ministry. Overall, it is a refreshingly bold and candid look at the Church's state due to the lack of this ministry. The authors are very realistic, however, about the probable difficulties in restoring it in the modern Church. Therefore, the principle of

education, small group ministries, and the value of *koinonia* in accountability and admonition are emphasized. Works by earlier theologians such as some Church Fathers, and Martin Luther, John Calvin, *et al.*, are germane in the discussion.

Chapter three moves the discussion into the contemporary and local congregation of the United Baptist Churches of the Atlantic Provinces in the effort to discover the attitude and views of Baptist Church members and adherents concerning Christian discipline. Surprising conclusions surface in this pivotal chapter as the writer strives to interpret the responses to a series of questions designed to explore people's feelings about Christian discipline. The writer's desire is also to provide or at least illuminate factors that may be resourceful for implementing or restoring Christian discipline within the "Body of Christ".

In order to facilitate this the questionnaire found in Appendix A, was designed to explore the thoughts of two sample groups of Christians from the Annapolis Valley, Nova Scotia and the St. John River Valley, New Brunswick. While the number forbids a quantitative analysis, these responses are the views embraced by many Church members in United Baptist Convention of the Atlantic Provinces. In designing the questionnaire, the writer is indebted to such resources as Asking Questions by Seymour Sudman and Norman M. Bradburn, which provided invaluable insight into the substance and reason for asking specific questions. Their companion guide, Improving Interview Method and Questionnaire Design, proved a good resource on how to arrange questions for best results in given kinds of surveys.

Similarly, Questions and Answers in Attitude Surveys, by Howard Schuman and Stanley Presser provided insight on possible methods used to gain credible responses about people's feelings on certain subjects. Handbook of Congregational Studies, edited by Jackson W. Carrol, Carl S. Dudley and William Mckinney and sample questionnaires from the "Center for Social & Religious Research", Hartford Seminary, Hartford Connecticut, also provided guidelines in designing the questionnaire.

Possible sociological factors impinging upon the Church's exercise of the ministry of discipline must be taken into consideration by identifying the impact of cultural and social contexts upon the Church. One writer convincingly advances the argument that the Church is always at the crossroads of human history either as a captive of its surroundings or as a catalyst of change within it: "A congregation - its theology and ethics, its worship, its style of operation, and what it does, or does not do with reference to mission - is profoundly shaped by its social context."²

Consequently, the expression of the Church's faith in beliefs, programs, organization and behaviour, is influenced by its social location - the people, politics, economic life, values, and class interests present in its setting. The optimistic position is that the Church can allow its religious or faith tradition to initiate change through ideas and inspiration, beliefs and experience, thus transcending any negative or evil

² Jackson W. Carrol, Carl S. Dudley & William Mckinney, Handbook of Congregational Studies, eds. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 48.

influences.

In the past, there were basic aids in the quest to produce disciplined and law-abiding citizens who were decent and respectful. The same was true of Churches, but now they are finding the once generally accepted procedures of internal discipline within their membership challenged on the basis of the Canadian Charter Of Rights. Today it seems that some Churches do not want to stand against culture and fear action under the Canadian Charter Of Rights. But should there not be a limit to this interpretation of human rights ?

This survey will attempt also to determine the degree to which age and cultural context, social status, religious knowledge, Christian conviction, and geographical location do influence attitudes in Christian living, if at all. For example, does one's residence in the so-called "Bible belt" make the individual more conservative in religious decisions? Alternately, does one's residence in the so-called "liberal belt" move one to make more humanistic decisions regarding Christian living?³

Chapter four examines the possible barriers or hindrances in implementing this ministry in the local congregation. The major problem in doing so seems to be ignorance of the value and meaning of discipline according to the teachings of Scripture. Also the spectre of legal suits by those whom the Church may have excommunicated because of unrepentance is also a threat and hindrance to discipline.

³The terms "Bible belt" and "liberal belt" describe the alleged theological perspectives of certain regions of the Atlantic Provinces. In this case they refer to the Saint John River Valley in New Brunswick and the Annapolis Valley in Nova Scotia, respectively.

Terrance Carter's book To Be or Not To Be: Incorporation Of Autonomous Churches in Ontario, provides excellent guidelines on Constitution writing as well as briefs on congregations that have survived legal suits and the protective measures necessary to have in place.

Chapter five explores the proposals for the revival of the practice of Christian discipline within the Church. It is posited that the Christian life and, subsequently, Church membership involves a commitment by those who become involved in an implicit or explicit covenant relationship constituting both privileges and responsibilities. Furthermore, do these privileges entail the mutual satisfaction of formative Christian discipline involving a positive instruction on obedience, growth and spiritual maturity? Do members regard responsibilities as that which includes the commitment to care for and motivate one another to excel in Christian life and service? Is this also understood to involve often reaching out to and dealing with those who have experienced serious moral lapses that compromise the integrity of the Church? What should be the attitude, method of approach and goal of the individual believer and the congregation to the "sinning" believer who either responds to admonition or rejects it in favour of the particular habit condemned by Scripture? Moreover, would excommunication or exclusion from the congregation be regarded by many as extreme or archaic? On the other hand, could it be seen, perhaps, as a last resort in the form of "shock therapy" reminding the individual of the seriousness of sin and disobedience and the importance of repentance and restoration?

Emphasis is made both on the formative and reformatory measures that are necessary in this ministry for it to be practised faithfully, gently, lovingly, fearlessly and obediently by the congregation. Within the community of faith, or covenant community, they can be seen as intended for the benefit of all and the glory of God in particular. Recommendations include a serious study of the Bible, an intentional use of the Covenant and a careful application of the Constitution. Principles have been drawn from the writings of Bill Cram, Harry Blamires, Terrance Carter, and Charles Dewese's A Community of Believers with a design to provide recommendations for improving and making membership more meaningful in the Believers' Church. Other writings have been a formative influence on the propositions recommended in this chapter.

Finally, chapter six will reiterate the perceived implications of the findings of this research for future emphasis in ministry and the restoration or initiation of Christian discipline as a needed exercise of covenant responsibility within the Church. It is also hoped that interest will be stimulated for continuing research in several areas referred to in the survey results for the overall benefit of the Kingdom of God.

CHAPTER 1

THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE CONCEPTS OF “DISCIPLINE” AND “COVENANT”

Although several words are used to describe *discipline* in the Bible, the present writer proposes that any discussion of biblical discipline must be understood in the context of relationship. This relationship would be referred to as *covenant* wherein God pledges Himself to various groups of people over periods of time with the requirement that they obey Him and be blessed or disobey Him and be punished. This chapter entails a discussion of both *covenant* and *discipline* in their varying contexts showing that covenant people are those who are guided by formative and reformatory discipline in order to maintain their relationship with God and each other.

The modern word “discipline” has at least nine shades of meaning as detailed in The World Book Dictionary :

- i) training of the mind or character; ii) the training effect of experience, misfortune, or other happenings; iii) a trained condition of order and obedience; iv) order kept among pupils, soldiers, or members of any group; v)

a particular system of rules for conduct; vi) punishment, chastisement; vii) branch of education or instruction; viii) method or rules for regulating the conduct of members of a church; ix) control exercised over members of a Church.⁴

Discipline as described in sections i), iv) and viii) above, reflects the teaching referred to as "chastise" in the canon of Scripture. The word appears in several forms in both the Hebrew texts of the Old Testament and Greek texts of the New Testament. For the sake of consistency however, and the purposes of this thesis, it shall be called *discipline* throughout the discussion.

A. DISCIPLINE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT⁵

In the context of Old Testament teachings on the meaning and importance of discipline, God is seen as the initiator whose goal is the welfare of his children. Therefore, in Scripture discipline involving teaching is seen in a relational context which also entails punishment of the recalcitrant individual. D. Furst emphasizes:

The OT [sic] bears witness to God's self revelation to Israel and intervention in his [sic] life. In response to his love and care for the chosen people, he expects in turn trust and obedience. The priestly nation is stamped with God's nature, and to become increasingly fitted for the sphere of his holiness. The trouble that God has with his people forces Him to severe disciplinary measures, or chastening (*yasar/musar*).⁶

Furthermore, God's disciplinary measures are seen as intended to mould His

⁴The World Book Dictionary, 1991 ed., s. v. "Discipline."

⁵Credit is due partly to the Hebrew/Chaldee supplement of the Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible for the Hebrew words used in this section.

⁶D. Furst, "*Paideuo*" in The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, ed. Colin Brown (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1978), vol. 3, 776.

people in a life of faithfulness and obedience motivated by love. Whereas the Greek approach to such discipline was basically anthropocentric, the Hebrew system was theocentric. God Himself initiated the process and effect of discipline; the process being instruction and obedience to secure the salvation of His people. Such a process may include punitive discipline to secure their salvation. According to Brown, Driver and Briggs⁷ *musar* and *yasar* both connote formative and reformatory aspects of discipline.

It is crucial at this point to emphasize again that the act of discipline is God-centred and initiated for the benefit of all who are in relation with Him as children. Thus all who truly belong to Him should submit gladly to His plan which is "to lead his people to the realization that they owe their existence to the saving will of Yahweh alone, and therefore owe obedience to their divine instructor" (Deut.8:1-6)⁸. The foregoing Deuteronomic passage teaches that God's goodness and love demand that He permit suffering as a providential discipline in order to "keep us in line". Shires and Parker argue that such divine action is an expression of God's love for his people enough to correct them when necessary.⁹

In ancient Israel, such education and training were mediated to children by

⁷Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906) , 416.

⁸ D. Furst, 776.

⁹Shires and Parker Interpreter's Bible Commentary, v.2, ed. George A. Butterick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1953), 387.

informal yet deliberate parental example and through the exercise of the father's priesthood in the home where children listened, observed and questioned parents about the past dealings of God with his people (Deut.6). Succeeding passages such as Deuteronomy 11:2, and Leviticus 26:11-13, support this concept of discipline in Israel's history. Although the Wisdom Literature allegedly reflects a "moralizing and humanizing tendency", the central focus is still God and His just dealings with his people.¹⁰ Similarly, Palestinian Judaism promoted education as that which was intended to "produce the [person] who lived in obedience to the will of God" or to produce character formation based on the standard of the law.¹¹ The Hebrew word *musar* defines discipline as "reproof, warning, instruction, restraint, check, bond, correction, discipline, doctrine, instruction, rebuke". According to the Deuteronomic context, discipline mediated by the Lord presumes personal knowledge of Yahweh whereby Israel's past experience was moulded by His educative influence.¹² His omnipotence is also intimated in such terms as "greatness", "mighty hand", and "outstretched arm". God's nature and deeds, when properly understood, seem to elicit reverential fear from His people. Similarly, Moses reflected on the value and intent of God's dealings with His people within the confines of the family relationship of

¹⁰Furst, 777.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Deuteronomy" in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, eds. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmeyer & Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1990), 109.

parents and children and the wider faith community. Such a community, through its elders, was requested and empowered to support the family in executing discipline on those whose conduct threatened its harmony, holiness and distinctiveness. Indeed both the life and prosperity of Israel were now dependent upon obedience to Yahweh who revealed Himself as a strong deliverer and stern disciplinarian.¹³ Discipline therefore evidently secures and preserves distinctiveness as well as exemplifies God's parental providence and love rather than display divine hostility toward the prodigal.¹⁴ The ultimate goal was the preservation of both the family heritage and national reputation, as well as the deterrence of the spread of evil.

Further, under the casuistic laws (Deut. 8:5; 21:18-22; 22:18), the principle of obedience is paramount. The child is required to be respectful to both parents who in turn have the support of the community through the elders. In the event of disciplinary measures, the latter made the final decision thereby ensuring justice. They even exposed the corpse of the disobedient one which, while revolting to modern minds, served as a warning to others,¹⁵ much like a wrecked car is strategically placed near a highway to warn reckless drivers. This principle of visual admonition might be equated to excommunication today - a dramatic lesson on the eternal consequences of sin for the unrepentant which serves as a deterrent to others.

¹³Frederick Carl Eiselen, Edwin Lewis, David G. Downey, eds. Abingdon Bible Commentary, (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), 328.

¹⁴Ibid, 327.

¹⁵Blenkinsopp, 114.

The same concept of parental concern evidenced in previous references is further reflected in God's persistent dealing with His people through instruction designed for their happiness and rest. Such punishment within His family is intended for salvation from potentially destructive forces (Psalm 94:10, 12; 118:18).

This concept of God's gracious dealings with his people must be seen in the context of a relationship either previously existing and now being renewed or else just being initiated. The record of the prophet Amos puts this into perspective through Yahweh's declaration: "You have I known above all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." (Amos 3:2). In the following section this relationship will be discussed under the concept of a covenant since *discipline* involves life in a relational context, comprising an intimate family setting wherein members have chosen to subscribe to its demands. In the present chapter that association shall now be described as a *covenant* relationship.

B. 2 COVENANT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Thomas McComiskey discusses three uses of covenant in the Old Testament. First, it is understood as Yahweh's unilateral promise which required no reciprocal response from the objects or beneficiaries of the *covenant* (Genesis 9:9).¹⁶ This usually appears as an agreement between two unequal parties such as a king and his vassal or, in the context of this thesis, God and His people. Second, *b'rith* may

¹⁶Thomas E. McComiskey, The Covenants of Promise (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 62.

assume the form of explicit terms within a mutual agreement (Gen. 21:27,32;26:28-29; I Kings 5:12).¹⁷ A third facet, revealing a combination of the previous ones, specifically describes Yahweh's relationship with a chosen people who have become objects of His sovereign grace. On their behalf, He acted in self-imposed obligation in order to deliver them from sin through "a sovereign administration of grace and promise", and then demanded from them certain requirements. It stipulates principles of obedience and the conditions under which the terms are established for mutual benefit of blessing and obedience.¹⁸ It is this third relational concept that this chapter is designed to explore in order to show that *covenant* stipulations were initiated due to a prior level of relationship which was subsequently strengthened and formalized.¹⁹ Ronald Youngblood,²⁰ B. S. Childs,²¹ and John Bright²² agree to this view of covenant as the formalization of an existing relationship early in the history of Israel, while giving it concrete expression. It would seem advantageous then in the interests of this

¹⁷Tbid., 63. W. J. Dumbrell cites examples of covenant relationships during the patriarchal period between Abraham and Abimelech (Gen. 21:21 - 32) and Isaac and Abimelech (Gen. 26:26 - 33) [Covenant and Creation, 17,18] J. B. Payne points out the dipleuric nature of the covenants and their benefits and obligations to the parties.[Theology of the Older Testament, 79.]

¹⁸McComiskey, 62, 63.

¹⁹Tbid, 63.

²⁰Ronald Youngblood, Heart of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971), 42.

²¹Brevard S. Childs, Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 138.

²²John Bright, A History of Israel, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 150.

thesis project to examine the value of *b'rith* in Yahweh's dealings with humanity as reflected in His relationship with Israel.

R. E. Clements sees *b'rith* as a focus of the ministry of the Prophets, Psalmists and wisdom writers who appealed to Yahweh's covenant relationship with his people as a reason for obedience or repentance, even when the term was absent.²³ Bright also regards the covenant stipulations as binding, formative and authoritative to the nation hence their relevance in discipline.²⁴

These stipulations were probably peculiar to Israel and carried binding authority for the regulation of the actions of the covenant people toward Yahweh and toward one another.²⁵ Subsequently, the Decalogue is seen as the codification of expected ethical conduct for life in the covenant community in relation to Yahweh. It is this knowledge or conviction to which the prophets appealed in addressing the precarious, apostate condition of the nation in relation to Yahweh, calling them back to faithfulness.²⁶

The value of the covenant was also seen as distinctively monotheistic in

²³R. E. Clements, Prophecy and Covenant (London: SCM Press, 1965), 16, 17, 18.

²⁴Bright, 172.

²⁵Ibid., 172. Behm posits that such legal covenants exerted formative influences for nationhood, bound the people in "ideal state of fellowship" while guaranteeing security and peace or stimulating personal loyalty. Breach of covenant conditions brought exposure to divine wrath. J. Behm, "*Diatheke*" in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 111.

²⁶Clements, 25, 26.

contrast to other contemporary polytheistic religions.²⁷ As well it subscribed to the personal, religious character of the relationship which was administered by Yahweh to be maintained or severed by him, contingent upon Israel's obedience.²⁸

Ezekiel utilized marriage as a metaphor of Yahweh's relationship with Israel: "I plighted my troth to you and entered into a covenant with you ... and you became mine." (Ezekiel 6:8) The book of Hosea further advances this marriage theme, adducing Yahweh's persistent love. Commenting on the significance of this union, Youngblood asserts that "God himself initiated the relationship and ... He did so at a specific time in history.... The Lord wooed His people to Himself during the redemptive experience connected with the Exodus and sealed the resulting marriage by means of the Sinaitic covenant."²⁹

Moreover, the inviolable nature of the relationship from the divine side is clearly stipulated: "I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord".(Hosea 2:19,20) William J. Dumbrell contends that further examples of the relational aspects of the covenant are intimated in the familial terms of "marriage" and "sonship", which could possibly be disrupted

²⁷Delbert Hillers, Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea. Seminars in the history of ideas series. (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1969), 16, 92, 95.

²⁸Walter Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament, trans. J. A. Bakker (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), 41.

²⁹Youngblood, 55.

by idolatry and adultery. The basis of this relationship is Yahweh's unilateral action both as creator and kinsman redeemer - *go'el* - who rescues the beloved at great cost in order to restore them to primary status.³⁰ Other writers, like William La Sor *et al.*, have advanced on this marriage metaphor to stress the seriousness of the divine/human bond and states:

“Like the marriage covenant, the relationship between Yahweh and his people is a covenant of mutual love and trust. Like adultery, apostasy breaks the relationship by despising the love on which it is based, violating the trust, and treating the person as unworthy of exclusive and all-consuming commitment.”³¹

Thus the relational aspect of the covenant is further exemplified in the giving of the law or Decalogue which in itself is a framework of the ethical conduct expected of those in covenant relationship with Yahweh (Exodus 19:4). Though it was intended to translate faith into action, it also was designed for the enjoyment and maintenance of covenant experience: "The ultimate relationship in which the demand is to be set is the covenant relationship arising from creation. Within that relationship the particular Sinai covenant functions as a sub-set".³² Similarly, the meal which was commonly present at the ratification of a covenant relationship, symbolizes the closeness of that relationship, whereas the stipulations regulated that relationship.³³

³⁰William J. Dumbrell, Creation and Covenant (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1984), 99,100.

³¹William La Sor, *et al.*, Old Testament Survey (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 186.

³²Ibid, 91, 92.

³³Ibid, 94.

Consequently, Joshua's challenge for families to choose their loyalties, reflects a call to relationships. Israel's covenant with Yahweh is seen to be unique also due to the absence of any divine witnesses,³⁴ although clear stipulations of the responsibility of each party remained. Thus the mutuality of the covenant is seen in its "two distinct parties" having certain freedoms and initiatives in fulfilling the requirements of the covenant. Though Yahweh's initiative was in establishing and proposing the covenant it included an appeal to the willingness and freedom of Israel to choose obedience to it.³⁵ Consequently, the prophets are seen as Yahweh's spokesmen challenging the nation with covenant responsibility. Similarly, as Yahweh bound Himself to Israel at Sinai and subsequent covenant events, relationships were formulated and reestablished both between Himself and Israel and Israel and other new groups.³⁶ Probably, this continual covenant renewal and development also allowed later generations to gain first hand knowledge of the nature of relationship with Yahweh.

Walter Eichrodt contends that, even where *b'rith* is not specifically mentioned, the elements of the particular relationship will reveal its covenant base and the presence of a "powerful divine Guardian".³⁷ These include an explicitly divine

³⁴Hillers, 52.

³⁵Ibid, 65.

³⁶Ibid, 146.

³⁷Eichrodt, 36, 37.

initiative entailing a call to a "relationship of trust and security, based on demand and promise" as well as obedience.³⁸ McComiskey argues that the formative thrust of the covenant shows God's benign disposition towards His people even in the event of reformative discipline, the ultimate aim being the moulding of a people into Yahweh's likeness.³⁹

The present writer believes these covenant stipulations contained both formative and reformative principles for the preservation of Yahweh's relationship with his people. These principles, based on the love of God for his people and his desires for their best interest, are described as formative and reformative discipline in this thesis project. Upon the breakdown of such agreement to abide by formative discipline through the Israel's disobedience, other provisions like reformative discipline are implemented to correct the problem. Without that prior relationship and its formative component, however, calls to reformation would be useless.

It may be safely concluded then that biblical discipline is only comprehensible within the context of a relationship which had certain standards that were intended for the enjoyment and preservation of the relationship. In the Old Testament that relationship is described as a covenant. In the next section of this chapter the writer will show that the New Testament reflects similar principles concerning discipline which likewise derives its meaning and value from the relationship with God through

³⁸Ibid, 41.

³⁹McComiskey, 63.

faith in Jesus Christ (Matthew 26:26 - 30; Mark 14:24).

The contents of "covenant" in the New Testament, particularly bring out the relational component of the word. It is generally accepted that true membership in the family of God became a reality only after the establishment of the new covenant, since under the old covenant the people were only servants, but are now family members (John 1:12; Gal. 3:26, 27). Within this covenant relationship discipline is seen as an appropriate expression of love which seeks the formation and reformation of the beloved, namely family members in this case (Heb. 12: 7 -12).

A. 1 DISCIPLINE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

L. De Koster proffers a fourfold definition of the word discipline as: a) an ecclesiastical function mandated by the formative discipline commanded in the Great Commission -"teach them to observe all things." Matt.28:19-20; b) a practice requiring the disciples' voluntary submission to discipline of a master, as a learner preparing to do the master's will; c) becoming knowledgeable of such will as revealed through preaching and teaching (keys of the Kingdom Matt.16:19;18:18); and, d) also including supervision of the disciples' behaviour to encourage obedience and the formation of a life of good works. De Koster also argues that discipleship through discipline is characteristic of both the Old and New Testaments (Matt.5:17-20).⁴⁰ Having already examined the Old Testament accounts, the occurrences of these

⁴⁰L. De Koster, "Church Discipline," in Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, ed. Walter A. Ewell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 238.

concepts will be examined in their contexts within the New Testament to educe the value of discipline amongst the new covenant people of God.

Of the several word groups for discipline in the New Testament, *paideia* has been chosen for further examination in this thesis project because its meaning envelops the dual aspects of discipline. This dual aspect includes a formative or preventive and reformative or corrective focus. The context of the word shows that divinely administered discipline, though momentarily unpleasant, is directed to the ultimate good and best interest of believers paramourly “to make them sharers in the very holiness of God Himself.”⁴¹

Together with several cognates, the verb occurs three times in Hebrews where it has the highest concentration.⁴² As a noun *paideia* may be understood as intended to effect “Christian discipline that regulates character” through “instruction and nurture” or as a “divinely ordained training process” which may include teaching and reprimand.⁴³

Furthermore, just as childhood and youth entail trials and difficulties in growing to maturity, even so Christian maturing in relationship with God involves

⁴¹A.M. Stibbs, “*Paideia*,” in The New Bible Commentary Revised, ed. D. Guthrie, J. A. Motyer *et al.* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1970), 1214.

⁴²Sakae Kubo, Reader’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Andrews University Press, 1975), 283.

⁴³ H. Hegermann, “Diatheke,” Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Horst Belz and Gerard Schneider (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978-80), vol. 1, 299-301. [cf also English-Greek Dictionary, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1932).

hardships that need not be seen as a sign of abandonment or displeasure. Rather they are to be regarded as indicators of His love and part of His uniform discipline to which all true "children"[sons] are subjected. The meaning and context of the word in Hebrews 12:6 is understood to show that the emphasis here is on *agape* - love, the characteristic which motivates God to relate to "those whom He takes to Him as a veritable son, receives in His heart and cherishes". Subsequently, discipline in this wider framework is to be seen as a positive experience which inclines believers toward a greater understanding of the consequences of sin, instilling a fear of God's judgment and propelling the offender to repentance and restoration in the event of incurred guilt. Such an understanding prompts the Christian to reflect (I Corinthians 11:28-32) on his or her distinctive character and privileged position in God's fatherly care.⁴⁴

In the book of Hebrews the link of discipline within the covenant relationship is intimated in the Old Testament quoted in the text (ch. 12: 5ff). God is portrayed in this New Testament text as Father who reaches out to his children in order to preserve or restore them in a relationship of love, peace and holiness.⁴⁵ Thus discipline is God's intention directed toward genuine sons and daughters in the family

⁴⁴G.G. Findlay, "St. Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians" in The Expositor's Greek Testament, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910), vol. 2, 883. Other writers refer to this formative aspect of discipline as "intellectual and moral" training. J. H. Moulton & G. Milligan, The Vocabulary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1963), 473 - 4.

⁴⁵D. Furst, 778.

of faith. Therefore the individual who rebels against such discipline is declaring one's self an illegitimate child. Similarly, it is stated that the congregation which rejects or refuses to interpret trials and sufferings as forms of discipline in Christian experience is also admitting they do not truly consider themselves God's children, since they rejected family rules.⁴⁶

This two-fold aspect of discipline is indicative of both teaching and chastening in the training of children. The teaching aspect is seen specifically in several New Testament passages (Acts 7: 22; 22: 3; I Timothy 1:20; Titus 2:12). Walter Bauer states that although other aspects of discipline (Luke 23:16,22; II Timothy 2:25; Hebrews 12:7,10) refer to human effort, divine action is occasionally implied (I Corinthians 11:32; II Cor. 6:9; Hebrews 12:6; Revelation 3:19), even salutary discipline which can be mediated through Satan (I Tim. 1:20).⁴⁷

Paideia is similarly viewed as educational training with a view to the mental culture in learning and accomplishments which nonetheless includes correction and punishment.⁴⁸ Georg Bertram, with reference to the verb *paideuo*, regards it as an

⁴⁶Nicoll, 367.

⁴⁷Walter Bauer, "Paideia," in A Greek -English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature, translated and adapted by W. F. Arndt & F. W. Gingrich (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 603-04.

⁴⁸Henry George Little & Robert Scott, A Greek - English Lexicon, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1889), 1107.

intense, professional involvement with children.⁴⁹ Emphasis is again on the nature of discipline in the context of relationship with God as His spiritual children (John 1:12:3:3,5). Hebrews 12:9,10, contrasts the superior nature and eternal benefit of God's altruistic and infallible discipline with human discipline which, selfish and fallible, is administered only to foster respect.⁵⁰ Moreover, unlike the inevitable cessation of earthly discipline often due to physical maturity of children, spiritual discipline continues throughout life.⁵¹

Although Nicoll propounds God's discipline as intended solely for His people's advantage, it might be better understood to be both for God's glory and esteem, as well as His people's good and well being, and the attainment of "His holiness". It is well stated that "When people subject themselves to God, accepting life's sufferings as discipline from His Fatherly hand, they enter the life that is alone worthy of the name."⁵² The Greek construction *eis to*, (Heb. 12:7), which involves a purpose clause, forcefully points to God's purpose of the full outcome of discipline in His children - the production of a godly character in them.⁵³ Moreover, suffering produces the right harvest, such as peaceable fruit in the lives of God's people. This is only possible as

⁴⁹Georg Bertram, "Paideia," in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Translated by G.W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), vol. 5, 596.

⁵⁰Morris, 137.

⁵¹Nicoll, 368.

⁵²Morris, 137.

⁵³Ibid., 138.

they continuously submit to the yoke of discipline allowing themselves to be trained (an athletic word) by God.⁵⁴

The same note of the positive effect of suffering as discipline is corroborated by A. Oepke in his discussion on I Corinthians 11:32. In Judaism, sickness was linked with retribution and seen as God's loving discipline of His children to whom He remained near while others appropriately responded through prayers and visits.⁵⁵ Similarly, in the New Testament era, sickness is treated as a consequence of sin and malevolence. Jesus therefore corrected the disciples on the cause for the blind man's condition (John ch. 9), stating that it was not necessarily due to retribution. Some cases though might be directly related to an individual's disobedience or presumption. Nonetheless, Jesus proffered both healing and forgiveness to the sick, thereby revealing hope against retributive justice. At the same time He exemplified a ministry which included prayer, miraculous healing and natural means together with reverent and patient submission to God's will. Even so the believer is encouraged to accept suffering as "a salutary discipline used by God's fatherly love against sin, especially presumption (I Cor. 11:32; II Cor. 4:17; 12:7).⁵⁶

Nicoll suggests that Paul's assessment of the Corinthian situation - weak,

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵A. Oepke, "Sickness and Sin" and "The Church and Sickness," in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. G. W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), vol. 4, 1094-98.

⁵⁶id, 1095.

sickly, asleep - is due to both revelation and observation of unusually high incidence of these "many" sicknesses, and therefore probably resulted from the lack of conformity to Christian principles of godly living. Since the Church seemed to have failed in applying corrective discipline to its errant members, God directly deals with them, then allows Paul through his letter to interpret their dilemma by specific references to an incestuous situation (I Cor.5), as well as historical references to the old covenant people, Israel (I Cor.10), and the implication of their experiences for the current situation.

Nonetheless, these chastisements may be averted by obedience. Even when they do come by disobedience, the consequential discipline is intended for restoration and not rejection. On the other hand one can avoid the negative effects of corrective discipline by "rightly appreciating his own status and calling, and realizing his distinctive character [as remembered in] the *kuriakon deipnon* - the Lord's Supper."⁵⁷ Oepke reasonably concludes that the incidence of suffering and sickness within the body of Christ reflects both the individual's relationship with Christ and his/her continued relation with mortal existence prior to the full advent of the new aeon. It is seen as identification with the innocent sufferings of Christ and therefore may not always have a logical explanation or be a cause/effect of sin and suffering.⁵⁸

The whole context shows two options for the Church, one of self-discernment

⁵⁷Nicoll, vol. 2, 368, 369.

⁵⁸Oepke, 1097-98.

and judgment to be practised amongst believers (I Cor. 11:33,34), the other of exposure to the judgment of God when self-examination fails (I Cor. 11:32). Perhaps this is an example of how God may act directly in situations such as the Corinthian one, or else use prophetic preaching to expose the reasons for spiritual crises within the congregation.

Hence discipline tests our obedience as true children of God, particularly during times of intense suffering, while bringing about maturity in us according to God's design. Beyond this concern for suffering lies the evidence that Christian discipline, inherent in the use of the word *paideuo* and its cognates, does involve both instruction and punishment or formative and reformatory consequences directed to members of the family of God.

The same form of the word appears in Revelation (1:5; 3:9; 3:19) where it is linked with love as its motivation. God's professed love climaxes each condemnation of the Churches' wickedness, whereby He commands repentance under threat of severe corrective discipline. Discipline is seen therefore as an act of love directed to those for whom God desires the very best. Acknowledging its uniqueness in this context, Nicoll further attests that the passage reveals that divine love sustains and safeguards the beloved even to the point of inflicting painful wounds upon the unworthy with a view to "regain their loyalty".⁵⁹

This is precisely the very concern which seems to be missed by most

⁵⁹Nicoll, vol. 5, 372.

opponents of corrective discipline. Yet genuine love explores every avenue in the quest to preserve the beloved. Evidently then, sound exegesis and faithful teaching and proclamation must ultimately expose this seemingly unpopular but indispensable aspect of pastoral care.

The particular objective in this section has been to educe the two-fold aspects of discipline in Scripture. The first and foremost being the formative aspect which is designed to elicit obedience and attain blessings and divine favour for those living within its parameters. The second reformative aspect is then directed to the restoration of those who have transgressed these parameters, thereby exposing themselves both to the just punishment of God and the assaults of Satan in their individual lives as well as on the fellowship of faith to which the person belongs. Nonetheless, it must be noted that this trust is motivated by God's patient and steadfast love for transgressors and His desire for their rehabilitation.

It is the present writer's view that this critical area of formative discipline for informing self-discipline in God's family is mediated through human support systems within the family of faith and in the corpus of Scripture. Perhaps this might be seen as an area of application of the Lord's incarnation; God acted in *love* through human nature to address the sin problem, "leaving us an example to follow his steps". It cannot be over-emphasised that *love* is the ultimate and only valid motive to accomplish this vital ministry in an age when "right seems wrong and wrong seems right" and "everyone does what is right in his/her own eyes."

New Testament discipline like that of the Old Testament may also be seen to assume its validity and effectiveness within the context of a divine - human relationship. The covenant concept is the fabric of that relationship. Moreover, this relational emphasis is even stronger since believers are now children of God by virtue of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

B. 2 COVENANT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Unfortunately, the imperfection of humanity compounded by an endemic sinfulness did not augur well for a problem free relationship with Yahweh. Subsequently, this made a new system of covenant relationship necessary, giving rise to both the foreshadowing and eventual institution of what is now the "New Testament (Covenant)". Although the germinal Scripture of covenant theology is recorded in Hebrews 9:15-28, there have been many and varied interpretations of its meaning and value in the attempts at making a homogeneous link with the Old Testament. The word used, *diatheke*, took on some of the uses of *b'rith* - "covenant", and therefore embraces similar meanings. In the LXX, the word appears approximately two hundred and seventy times, and refers to a variety of legal and religious relationships. On the religious level there are allusions to God's relationship with humanity, hence, the translation *diatheke* to mean a divinely instituted fellowship, involving such terms as "faith", and "religious feelings".⁶⁰

⁶⁰ J. Behm, "Diatheke," in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), vol. 2, 106-134.

According to McComiskey, the link between Israel as the Old Testament people of God and believers as the New Testament people of God is their basic similarity founded on Yahweh's gracious choice of them as his people of the covenant. These are described as His "treasured possession, kingdom of priests, holy nation" (Exodus 19:5-6), titles that set them apart from other nations. Peter cites the passage in reference to New Testament saints (I Peter 2:5, 9).⁶¹ Noticeably, both the character and the conduct of the elect are stipulated, evincing the purposefulness of the call. Thus it is at this level that obedience and submission to a certain standard is intimated.

Similarly, both Jeremiah and Ezekiel promulgated a new principle to be initiated in the "heart of flesh" or "new heart". The Lord Jesus Christ later defined it as the "seat of obedience"(Mark 7:1 - 23), while the Apostle Paul defined it as "faith in Christ". Together they describe both the source and foundation of the new covenant with obedience as the means to its blessings (Romans 3:21-22; Galatians 3:12).⁶²

Dumbrell promulgates that the above-mentioned prophets along with Isaiah promote the new era as one in which God would captivate and regulate the human heart through the residence of the Holy Spirit in order to effect obedience to the new covenant and ensure the blessings thereof. The resultant benefits of this would be the

⁶¹McComiskey, 69.

⁶²Ibid, 82.

forgiveness of sins and the indwelling continuous ministry of the Spirit of God.⁶³ The major shift at this juncture is from an external to an internal motivation toward righteousness.

Consequently, a spiritual relationship with God is initiated, resulting in a new spiritual nature foreshadowed in the prophecy of Jeremiah (31: 31 ff), which included : i) a change in nature of those included in the covenant; ii) the establishment of a divine-human relationship; iii) a new relationship with God by participants; and , iv) God's gracious plan to forget our sins. This new state in turn secures an inward motivation to obedience.⁶⁴ Ezekiel on the other hand emphasized the importance of the Spirit's presence in the hearts of those in covenant with God, identifying the new divine-human relationship as the fundamental difference between the two covenants. It is a relationship that "facilitates obedience by the gracious work of God which it expresses and guarantees".⁶⁵ In order that His people might keep the covenant God provided the ministry of the indwelling Holy Spirit to effect the "forgiveness of sins which was to be so complete that sin would no longer be remembered".⁶⁶ Various writers, however, interpret the term *diatheke* differently. Some see it as inferring the concepts of covenant, others as testament or will, and still others see both principles -

⁶³Dumbrell, 169.

⁶⁴McComiskey, 84, 85.

⁶⁵Ibid., 92.

⁶⁶Dumbrell, 200.

covenant, will/testament - as its meaning. In the following survey it will be shown that whatever the position settled on, the foundation is a relationship with God. It is this relational element with which this part of the present chapter is concerned, to extrapolate an understanding and appreciation of the *covenant* as the valid context for discipline. *Diatheke* appears predominantly in the book of Hebrews where it is interpreted as "last will and testament" (Ch. 9:16ff; Gal. 3:15) and less so in the Gospels and Pauline Epistles where its basic meaning is covenant. The latter meaning of the word derives its theological significance from the Lord's Supper.⁶⁷

In his discussion, Hillers adduces that the implications of the new covenant are combined in the term *diatheke* which includes the concepts of both *covenant* and *last will and testament*. Similarly, he sees both of its associations in the ministries of Jesus and Paul, while also linking the Old and New Testaments which he understood as providing "a binding order of things established by God and based on forgiveness of sins ..." in order to establish a community reflecting the characteristics of love and obedience.⁶⁸

Nonetheless, the major connection of the New Testament with the Old Testament is the prophecy/fulfilment motif. J. Behm states that

In both form and content the New Testament use of *Diatheke* follows that of the Old Testament. The only difference is to be found in the step from prophecy to fulfilment.... *Diatheke* is from first to last the "disposition" of God, the mighty declaration of the sovereign will of God in history, by which

⁶⁷ Hegermann, "Diatheke," Belz and Schneider, 299-301.

⁶⁸Hillers, 182,186.

He orders the relation between himself and men according to His own saving purpose, and which carries with it the authoritative divine ordering, the one order of things which is in accordance with it.⁶⁹

The presence of the covenant in both Testaments is based on the relationship initiated by Yahweh who both secures and regulates that relationship. In the Old, Yahweh instituted a relationship of his own sovereign choice in order to elect a people for his very own (Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:12; Jeremiah 7:23; 11:4; 30:22; 32:38; II Corinthians 6:16; Hebrews 8:10; Revelation 21:3). Although it is admitted that *covenant* is found a mere thirty-three times in the New Testament as opposed to three hundred in the Old Testament, yet the concept is explicit in the doctrines outlined by the Lord Jesus Christ and the writer of Hebrews.

The first evidence of covenant continuity resides in the Lord's Supper, with reference to *diatheke* (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; I Corinthians 11:25), where the terms "new", "blood of the covenant", "shed" or "poured out (for others)", point back to the Old Testament, that is Exodus 24:5-8, Yahweh's covenant with Israel, and Jeremiah's prophecy (31:31-34).⁷⁰ Similarly, the common meal associated with the Lord's Supper is evidently linked with the Old Testament covenant meal as well as the Jewish *seder*, later subsumed in the Christian communion rite (I Corinthian 10:16b,17; Acts 2:46). Moreover, even as *b'rith* entailed penalties for disobedience, neglect or rebellion, so *diatheke* and other synonyms of the New

⁶⁹ J.Behm, 134.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 368-69.

covenant concept included blessing and curse (I Corinthians 11:27-32; 12:3). Hence the commandment to remember Christ in the celebration of communion, may be regarded as having the same value and intent as the periodic reading of the covenant agreement by the people of God in the Old Testament.

As stated above, *covenant* was introduced by the Lord Jesus Christ to describe the implications of the Last Supper to His own Messianic ministry (Mat. 26:26-30). These words of Jesus also find their parallel in "Luke" and "Mark", giving credence to the generally accepted interpretation of His own conscious self-understanding, and the Synoptists' belief about Jesus' Messianic mission which culminated in His vicarious death.

The action of Jesus at the Passover meal, attributed unique redemptive significance to both the "bread" and "cup" (vs.27,28), former emblems of Old Testament redemptive terminology of the Exodus from Egypt (Exodus 12:15; 13:3,7; Deuteronomy 16:3). Subsequently, this forges a link with the Old Testament *covenant* teachings (Exodus 24:8; Zechariah 9:11), whereby Messiah's ministry serves the dual task of ratifying the covenant being inaugurated with a new race through the shedding of blood as in the Sinaitic covenant, and pointing to prophetic fulfilment of Jeremiah (31:31-34).⁷¹

⁷¹D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), vol. 8, 536-37. Walter W. Wessel links *diatheke* with *b'rith* and concludes that God established a relationship with humanity based on the death of Christ - "the blood of the covenant". "Mark," in The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), vol. 8, 761.

Paul describes *diatheke* as a perfect manifestation of the will of Yahweh to be gracious to His people. The newness of the covenant rests on the fact of Jesus' death for its effectiveness thereby superseding the earthly imperfect priesthood. It points to the declaration of Yahweh's will in effecting eternal salvation. The most decisive link between the Old and the New is educed in Jesus's application of the bread and cup to himself, expressive of God's ultimate will which also links the dual concepts of "Kingdom of God and New Covenant" as essentially similar. The former represents "God as absolute Lord of the Age of salvation, the latter the divine will which sets the goal."⁷²

Allusions based on Jesus' words "my blood of the covenant" have been identified also with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, a statement that identifies him with the one destined to be "a covenant for the people" (Isaiah 42:6; 49:8) in order to reestablish and give ultimate fulfilment and effectiveness to the covenant. Similarly, "poured out for many" probably reflects the goal of the Servant's ministry (Isaiah 53:13 -53:12).

The reciprocity of this relationship of divine-human self-giving must be seen in the context of Christ's sacrifice in the " blood of the covenant" which demands no less than the total submission of the human will as the only appropriate response. It is a response which entails loving obedience and thankfulness.⁷³ Gerhardus Vos

⁷²J. Behm, 132, 134.

⁷³Alexander Maclaren, The Epistle to the Hebrews and the General Epistle of James. Expositions of Holy Scripture Series (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910), 46, 52.

affirms this evident relational aspect of *Diatheke* as implied in *covenant*, whereby God brings us into fellowship with himself : "God gives Himself to man and man gives Himself to God for that full measure of mutual acquaintance and enjoyment of which each side is capable."⁷⁴

Moreover, in line with Paul in Galatians 3:6 - 9, Philip E. Hughes contends that the institution of a new covenant should be seen in light of God's foreordained plan being executed at the appropriate time. Thus it is not an emergency measure to salvage a divine fiasco, but rather the ultimate goal of which all previous ones were mere figures. Therefore, the New Covenant must be seen as both antecedent and superior to its predecessors, with the common factor being the sacrificial death of an innocent victim. In essence, the new covenant differs in its perfection and permanence.⁷⁵

J. Guhri traces the use of *diatheke* to the classical era wherein the middle voice *diatithemai* referred to the "control of persons and things" by way of a will. In this context it is to be understood as a binding unilateral action of the initiator and as "an irrevocable decision, which cannot be cancelled by anyone".⁷⁶ This continuity of the Old with the New is said to be germane to the theology of Jeremiah later fulfilled

⁷⁴Gerhardus Vos, "Hebrews, Epistle of the Diatheke," Princeton Theological Review, 13 (1915), 622, 624.

⁷⁵Philip E. Hughes, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 365, 366.

⁷⁶J. Guhri, "Diatheke," in Dictionary of New Testament Theology, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), vol. 1, 365.

through the ministry of Jesus, as well as particularly prevalent in the covenant concept inherited in *b'rith*. Thus the basic construct of a covenant relationship has filtered down into the New Testament thereby preserving the unity with the Old.⁷⁷

Vos contends that *diatheke* is a deliberate and conscious choice of the author of Hebrews, precisely for its flexibility and rich associations with the sovereignty of God and the unilateral nature of the covenant, while, simultaneously, remaining faithful to its Old Testament implications.⁷⁸

Perhaps the author of Hebrews also desired to capture the comprehensive nature of the redemptive event by utilizing both shades of meanings. James Moffatt favours this dual concept by pointing to Paul's understanding and use of the word in Galatians 3:15 - 17.⁷⁹

B. F. Westcott, although contending for the consistent sense of *diatheke* as covenant in the LXX, and arguing against a dual meaning which included "will", concedes that there is a link of the "Hebrews" context with the Old Testament covenant-teachings which required death for its ratification. This sacrificial death resulted in a drawing "nigh to God".⁸⁰

⁷⁷Ibid, 366-67.

⁷⁸Vos, 624.

⁷⁹James Moffatt, Epistle to the Hebrews (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1963), 127-128.

⁸⁰Brooke Foss Westcott, Epistle to the Hebrews (London: Macmillan & Co., Limited, 1909), 304. It is argued that the sacrificial death of Christ satisfies the demands of both covenant and testament, while simultaneously affirming that "God is the sole author of the covenant which he appoints for his people, while their obedience to its terms is

This drawing "nigh to God" mentioned by Westcott effects the new covenant which is understood by F. F. Bruce as the "inheritance" of those who have become heirs through faith in Christ based on "a covenant graciously bestowed by God upon His people, by which He brings them into a special relationship with Himself".⁸¹ Perhaps the happy compromise regarding the essential meaning of *diatheke* in the Hebrews epistle is satisfied in Bruce's postulation that the majestic nature of Christ and the superior efficacy of His sacrifice over the Old Covenant within God's redemptive plan, rightfully defies definition in a singular meaning of the word. Thus Christ "is testator and executor in one, surety and mediator alike",⁸² making valid both the testamentary and the covenant application of *diatheke*.

Meredith Kline suggests that the double metaphor used by the author of Hebrews probably also indicated the affinity of Jesus's death with Old Testament "dynastic -testamentary aspects of the ancient suzerainty covenants especially ... seen in Deuteronomy". Within this system, the death of one leader opens the way to another to receive the inheritance on the people's behalf, as with Moses and Joshua.

required if they are to enjoy its benefits." Hughes, 369.

⁸¹F. F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews, New Testament Series (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.), 210.

⁸²Ibid, 213. R. McL. Wilson propounds that, barring the attendant difficulties of the text, the significant point being made by the writer of Hebrews is "the conviction of the saving power of the death of Jesus that controls the argument, rather than any considerations of logic." Nonetheless, it is acknowledged that the writer displays an informed understanding of the necessity of a new covenant based on Old Testament typology. The New Century Bible Commentary: Hebrews, ed. Matthew Black (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1987), 158.

In the case of Jesus, His death and resurrection, accomplishes both, thereby making the inheritance of "sonship" a possibility for the faithful.⁸³

Bishop William Neil avers that the enthusiasm of the author of Hebrews to declare the affinity of Christ's mediatorial role with the Old Covenant penitential practices, resulted in several overstatements. However, the main argument was the necessity of a third party, the life of which was given (blood shed) in a mediatorial role in order to effect a relationship. Similarly, to effect the eternal relationship of God and humanity, Christ gave His life.⁸⁴

One of the significant comments made by Bishop Neil that directly relates to the concern being addressed in this thesis is the effect of sin on the covenant relationship. He claims that sin definitely affects the covenant relationship, both individually and corporately, thereby demanding some form of redress in order to correct the problem and repair the relationship. In Israel's schema, the Day of Atonement as well as individual acts of penitence respectively dealt with sin.⁸⁵ This was necessary to preserve the relationship by formative discipline or else restored it

⁸³Kline, 14.

⁸⁴William Neil, The Epistle to the Hebrews, New Testament Series (London: SCM Press, 1955), 96,98. The allusions to cultic rituals and priestly consecrations of the Old Covenant (vs. 17-19) respecting purifications are declared to be "a conflation of practices that were superficial, though provisional, now replaced by a better system. Harold W. Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, The Hermenia Series, ed. Helmut Koester (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989). 256, 257.

⁸⁵Ibid, 97.

through reformatory discipline.

SUMMARY

It is probably evident that views vary on whether the divine-human relationship of Yahweh with Israel was initiated or enhanced by the establishment of the covenant. Perhaps it is not as greatly significant whether one works backward or forward to determine the initiation point of the formal covenant relationship as it is to agree that it was conceived in the context of a relationship and brought into being by Yahweh's own sovereign commitment of Himself to humanity. Relationship is the thing! It is in that intimate context, that stipulations about conduct, faith, trust, love and obedience assume the highest significance. These stipulations referred to discipline which becomes a relevant issue in both its formative and reformatory elements.

Further examination of the covenant adduces the formative and reformatory elements contained therein. Although the stipulations were particularly designed to hold Israel to account, Yahweh's condescension may be seen in the binding of Himself to be accountable in both promises and warnings. In keeping with the approach of this thesis the formative or preventive aspect of the covenant is paramount, followed by the reformatory or corrective conditions wherever the former is breached. Hence both the New Testament writers and Old Testament prophets emphasized the need for obedience and holiness among the covenant people who would be blessed or cursed depending on their response to covenant stipulations to

which they had pledged themselves. The following chapter will examine the fortunes of the New Covenant people in relation to the ministry of Christian discipline in the Church age.

CHAPTER II

**EXAMINATION OF BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL PRACTICES OF
DISCIPLINE**

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND CHURCH HISTORY

Perhaps the cause for, practise of , and the effect of discipline is best illustrated in the following biblical accounts from both Testaments.

Heady with their conquest of Jericho, the covenant community of Israel launched its eager assault on the neighbouring city of Ai. Probably over-confident of victory, they reduced the size of their frontline forces for a mission that seemed far less formidable than the previous one. Soon, however, a band of bedraggled warriors was scampering for safety and beating a hasty retreat with the enemy in hot pursuit. Israel's army had been routed by the enemy.

Angry, confused and perhaps embarrassed, they accosted Joshua, demanding an explanation for such humiliation in the military fiasco. Joshua's response revealed that their main problem was a tactical spiritual blunder - the failure to fulfil their covenant responsibility which was crucial in securing God's promises of safety, security and success. Of particular significance, was the disobedience of Achan, wherein is seen the personal and social impact of sin within a faith community.

The Lord said to Joshua, "Stand up! What are you doing on your face? Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions. That is why the Israelites cannot stand before their enemies; they turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction. (Joshua 7:10-12)

Tragic and harsh though this event may appear, the context and juncture of its occurrence are crucial to an appreciation and understanding of covenant relationships. First, it must be noted that Achan was the beneficiary of preventive discipline in order that he might develop self-discipline. Evidently, he was aware of his covenant privileges and responsibilities, and most likely, the consequences of each:

I am the Lord your God. Observe my Sabbaths and have reverence for my sanctuary. I am the Lord. If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands ... I will grant peace in the land, you will lie down and no one will make you afraid... You will pursue your enemies, and they will fall by the sword before you. Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall by the sword before you. I will look on you with favour and make you fruitful and increase your numbers, and I will keep my covenant with you. (Lev. 26:1,2,3,6-9)

Unfortunately, Achan probably never considered the social impact of his action. The destruction of his own family, the deaths of other soldiers and the defeat of the nation, were the dire results of a selfish act by one who perhaps reasoned individualistically or, at best, clannishly rather than communally. Because preventive, formative discipline had been ignored, corrective and reformatory discipline had to be applied:

But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands, and if you reject my decrees and abhor my laws and fail to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant, then I will set my face against you so that you will

be defeated by your enemies; ... you will flee even when no one is pursuing you. I punish you for your sins seven times over ... if in spite of these things you do not accept my correction but continue to be hostile toward me, I myself will be hostile toward you. But if they confess their sins and the sins of their fathers... I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham... for their sake I will remember the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their God. I am the Lord (Leviticus 26:14ff).

Israel was given a visual lesson of the awesome responsibility to obey God by abstaining from evil and eschewing any alliance with or being involved in the practices of pagan nations. They were to be holy, that is, set apart for God. Anyone daring, therefore, to charge that such discipline does damage to the grace of God, need also take into account the holiness of God which sets the seriousness of sin in bold relief alongside human responsibility. Moreover, Achan's punishment served not only as a lesson on the need to warn the people of God's future plans for them, but also as a foil of God's expectation for the new nation in a new land. Significantly, the Leviticus section showed that God's discipline is designed for correction and restoration rather than condemnation and rejection. The latter only becomes effective at the adamant refusal and stubborn impenitence of His people. Similarly, the biblical author carefully shows the perpetuity of the covenant and thereby the faithfulness of the God whose covenant it is (v.15) as well as His desire to fulfil its promises (Joshua 7:10 - 12; NIV).

The account proceeds to reveal the systematic discovery and destruction of Achan and his entire family, in fulfilment of God's command to eliminate from their midst that which was under *cherem*, "the ban". In effect, it seems that Achan's

contact with what was devoted to destruction also made him, his family and the entire nation unclean and therefore exposed to God's judgment. The crisis vividly shows the organic close-knit concept of community life for the people of God, and the relationship network which is vulnerable to the sin of any one member. Subsequently, the military campaign suffered a devastating defeat, only to be recouped after disciplining the disobedient member of the community through a public event.

One close New Testament parallel is the account of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). Evidently colluding to deceive the Apostles regarding a certain business transaction and benevolent offering, the couple brazenly lied, thereby disobeying covenant stipulations on truthfulness. Death was swift and sure as in the case of Achan, an example to the fledging congregation of God's discipline and design for holiness. It is very important for us to understand this situation in terms of a covenant community and not in terms of individuals. Hence, the incident was intended for the benefit of all rather than two. Corrective discipline was necessary where self-discipline had failed, thus serving to remind the members of the covenant community of their responsibility to obey.

Three principles of Christian discipline deduced from New Testament teachings include admonition, excommunication and restoration. They will be treated in some detail in the ensuing discussion in this chapter. First will be a brief survey of the applicable word form selected for consideration in this thesis project. Second, the biblical data will be examined to show the authority and methodology for the

practise of Christian discipline in relation to the teachings of Jesus and its place in the subsequent practices of the Church.

A. ADMONITION

This ministry might be aptly defined as Christian love in action and the same word used for it may be translated in a variety of ways. By definition *noutheteo* means “to admonish”, “advise”, “correct”, “warn”; or “put in mind”.⁸⁶ The word also means “to exhort” or “bear influence” upon the feelings, mind and will of another with the intention of prompting the individual to conform to accepted behaviour, to observe certain instructions or to return to a previously abandoned code of faith and conduct.⁸⁷

Its predominant use in the LXX point to “warn” in reference to the plague of serpents unleashed against the disobedient Israelites in the wilderness (Numbers 21). In the book of Job it is used in the active voice (verb) as “instruct” (4:3), and in the passive voice “of being taught”, “learning” or “gaining insight and understanding” from others (23:15;36:12;37:14;38:18).⁸⁸

Besides the first reference from Acts (20:31), an excerpt from the words of Paul, all other New Testament uses of *noutheteo* are confined to Paul. Each reflects

⁸⁶Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 398.

⁸⁷F. Selter "Exhort," in Dictionary of New Testament Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), vol. 1, 567.

⁸⁸Ibid. 568.

the pastoral concern for the well being and safety of the people of God. As well, they provide examples showing the appropriateness of the exercise of Christian discipline (Acts 20:31; Romans 15:14; I Corinthians 4:14; 10:11; Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:16; I Thessalonians 5:14; II Thessalonians 3:15; Titus 3:10). Paul's expression of genuine pastoral concern for the welfare of the believers in Corinth and other places, pervades the context. However, the Corinthian passage to be considered also reflects the attitude required of both the admonisher and the admonished to maintain humility and tractability so that unity might be preserved.⁸⁹ Perhaps Paul cites the historic example of God's corrective discipline of Israel (I Corinthians 10) as precedent of God's holding His people to account for their behaviour.⁹⁰ F. Selter postulates that "admonish" is inseparably linked with teaching and indicates the importance of knowledge and action as a dual thrust in motivating "maturity in Christ (Col.1:28) through a combination of teaching and warning."⁹¹

Titus 3:10 is probably a direct reference to the teaching of Jesus on the issue

⁸⁹W. Harold Mare, "I Corinthians," in The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), vol. 10, 214. Calvin acknowledges Paul's pastoral concern for the Corinthians enough to deal with them firmly yet gently "with paternal affection he admonished them as to what he saw to be defective in them"; identifying this as an exemplary disposition: "Hence if we are desirous to do any good by correcting men's faults, we must distinctly give them to know, that our reproofs proceed from a friendly disposition." Commentary on the Epistles of Paul The Apostle to the Corinthians, (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1578), 168.

⁹⁰Mare, p. 250. Calvin contends that these pictures of God's dealings with Israel are specifically recorded for the benefit of the Church that they might discern the dire consequences of disobedience and thereby eschew any conduct that is contrary to the word of God. (Calvin's Commentary, p. 228.)

⁹¹Selter, 568.

of Christian discipline, outlining the methodology for dealing with delinquent brothers or sisters in the faith. Furthermore, the combined instruction of the verse reveals the importance of a solid biblical foundation for Christian living. It is to this knowledge that all true admonition points, illustrating the importance of formative Christian discipline for godly living. Selter appropriately contends that this is a mutual responsibility of the fellowship whereby the leadership admonishes members who in turn recognize and accept the ministry in love. The author states further that such admonition is the spiritual task of the entire Church directed to individual members who must be corrected from sinful ways or removed from the fellowship if they reject such admonition.⁹²

JESUS' TEACHING ON DISCIPLINE

Apart from setting the New Testament precedence for discipline, the teachings of Jesus also seem to bear out the methodological principle of Christian discipline according to the record of Matthew 18:15-20. He taught that discipline was indispensable for the ordering of right relationships within the covenant community with every member exercising it in care of the other. In this context, discipline is seen as a process rather than an event (Matthew 18:15-18).

Following D. A. Carson's outline of Matthew, the disciplinary passage under consideration fits into the sections (Matthew 13:54 - 19:2) entitled "The Glory and the

⁹²Ibid, 569.

Shadow: Progressive Polarization" Matthew 13:54-19:2. In it the Synoptist shows Jesus' interest in the ongoing ministry of the Church. In Chapter 18 Jesus describes the divine perspective of life under kingdom authority - a) humility and greatness (18:1-9); b) Parable of the Lost Sheep (10-14); c) treatment of a sinning brother (15-20); and d) Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (21-35). Matthew's pastoral concern is further seen in his blend of such topics as rebellion and holiness, and sin and restoration within the same context.

This pivotal text (Matthew 18:15 - 18) may be used to discern both the method and motive in which the ministry of Christian discipline should be exercised. The first part of the passage reveals the private approach which may eventually lead to the public level, depending upon the response of the one who has sinned (cf 15-18). The last part delineates the desired end for which the particular individual should be approached (vs. 19-22).

Unlike Rudolf Bultmann⁹³, G. B Caird sees the pericope as exceeding the concern with inner Church conflict alone and applicable to the whole Church as it acts under the authority of Christ.⁹⁴

Verse 15. " If your brother sins against you" and " If your brother sins ..." are two variants of this verse used by commentators to express two different

⁹³Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, trans. Kendrick Grobel (London: SCM Press, 1952), vol. 1, 48.

⁹⁴G. B. Caird, New Testament Theology, compl. & ed. L. D. Hurst (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 217,232.

interpretations. The first, which includes the words "against you", purportedly points predominantly to the responsibility of the injured party to initiate reconciliation within the covenant relationship. The second, is interpreted as a more general instruction to the community on ways of dealing with sin among its members. Both, however, emphasize the importance of a systematic methodology for the crisis, beginning with a private approach which may proceed to a public resolution (vs.16,17) depending on the response of the errant party - "if he listens to you ...", or "if he refuses to listen".

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The Lord also provided the rationale for exercising this particular ministry, that is, to effect repentance and restoration in the relationship and fellowship and the maintenance of a particular standard - "you have won your brother". It is evident that the paramount pursuit and purpose is redemptive in nature, showing the Scripture as the standard of conformity for God's people everywhere. Thus a theological link or continuity between the two testaments regarding biblical ethics is seen in the reference "every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses" (Deuteronomy 19:15), which affirms a common form of jurisprudence appropriate for both periods. Subsequently, failure to meet its demands, because of indifference, resistance or rebellion, could result in excommunication from the protection and benefits of the covenant community.

⁹⁵Marlin Jeschke, Discipling in the Church , 3rd ed. . rev. (Kitchener: Herald Press, 1988), 402.

D. A. Carson posits that the singular form of the personal pronoun "you" "suggests that each member of the Church is to abide by the corporate judgment, and reminds the reader of the individual responsibility each believer has toward the others, already presupposed by the singular 'your brother' in v.15."⁹⁶ This corporate responsibility and authority mediated through the Church is further elucidated in the succeeding verses.

The teaching of v.18, for example, could be seen as a recapitulation of a proposition mentioned earlier within the same sub-section. Therein Jesus states "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." The parallel text which expresses the same principle is Matthew 16:19,20: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Most of the exegesis on these texts involve grammatical and syntactical concerns as well as theological conclusions.

First, Carson proposed that the "whatever" in the two verses be seen as a reference to persons and not rules as stipulated in Rabbinic interpretations. The logical nature of this decision flows out of the contexts themselves which evidently imply people - my Church; your brother. Second, as to the extent and locus of the authority, Jesus applied "keys" to the teachings of Jewish leaders, denouncing them for hindering kingdom growth by "taking away the key of knowledge" through false

⁹⁶Ibid, 403.

teaching (Matthew 23:15ff). Therefore, the power of the Church rests in the deposit of the gospel as the keys bequeathed to it as the representative of Christ on earth and the designated means of kingdom entry. Just as the captain or MVP of a victorious team might receive the trophy on behalf of the team, so did Peter, on behalf of the Church, receive the mandate of the gospel proclamation with its potential privileges and endemic responsibilities.

Carson rightly views it as an inescapable and effectually relevant ministry to be exercised among the Parousia-expectant community; one which is "more than an audience, [but] a group with confessional standards, one of which here precipitates Jesus' remarks regarding the 'keys'. The continuity of the Church depends as much on discipline as on truth. Indeed, faithful promulgation of the latter both entails and presupposes the former."⁹⁷ Reformation theology understood "keys" and "bind and loose", as terms that allude to the reception or rejection of the Gospel. Jesus' mandate to Peter is also seen as implicit of an Apostolic succession whereby the entire Church, as His earthly representative, mediates the authority to effect deliverance or bondage. Therefore, obedience to the word results in freedom, while disobedience results in bondage.⁹⁸ The Church's mission then is to proclaim that word, rightly and

⁹⁷Carson, 374.

⁹⁸Eduard Schweizer, Church Order in the New Testament, translated by Frank Clarke. Studies in Biblical Theology Series (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1961), 58, 59. In his article "Binding and Loosing", John Howard Yoder contends that Christ mandated the Church with the same authority he received from the Father. This authority was effected by the Holy Spirit, Christ's presence and power, among them "to guide in discernment, with prophecy, testimony, inward conviction, and empowerment for obedience ..." This

faithfully, for the benefit of community life.⁹⁹

Joachim Jeremias argues that the term "bind and loose" is essentially a Semitic linguistic principle which expresses totality, hence in this instance the "authority of the messengers includes both the communication of salvation and the imposition of judgment ... in their loosing and binding, God's grace and power is being realized even now".¹⁰⁰

Jesus' teaching in the "discipline" pericope (Matthew 18:15ff) recommends that the issue be dealt with by congregations. This bestows upon them the authority to mediate God's love, grace and forgiveness in kingdom matters in this world as they are empowered by the Holy Spirit, and operative through apostles, elders and members.

John Stott interprets Jesus' words as ecclesiastical discipline which gives the Church authority to excommunicate and restore offenders depending on the presence or absence of repentance.¹⁰¹ Nonetheless, a significant part of that function is seen as restoration or the bringing back of errant devotees to their reconciled position in the fellowship of the Church. It is to this positive end that the recurrent statement "if he

would then enable believers to "speak to one another in God's name" in John White & Ken Blue, Healing the Wounded (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 215-17.

⁹⁹Jeschke, 25, 27, 28.

¹⁰⁰Joachim Jeremias, New Testament Theology, translated by John Bowden. New Testament Library Series (New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1971), 238.

¹⁰¹John Stott, Confess your Sins: The Way of Reconciliation (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1964), 59.

listens to you" apply. Admonition is the first determined step to restore the fallen. Should this approach be rebuffed by the individual right through to the congregational level, then the only other alternative will be the removal of the recalcitrant member from fellowship based on Jesus' words : "If he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector" (v.17). This recommendation is generally understood to be a reference to excommunication or the removal of the unrepentant sinner from the fellowship, and is the next subject of this chapter.

B. EXCOMMUNICATION

This second principle of the ministry of discipline might be described as radical compassion; a "shock therapy" or "tough love" policy intended as a last resort to attain the same end as admonition. De Koster describes this action as the second recourse to be taken when repeated admonition encounters stubborn refusal to acknowledge sin and repent.

The ultimate disciplinary act of excommunication aims at both i) etching out the awesome issue involved, leading still to restoration of the severed membership; ii) maintaining the integrity of the church - for the body not only risks spreading rebellion when instances of it are ignored (I Cor.5:7), but is blemished before the world by sins winked at (Jude 5-13). Moreover, God himself is blasphemed by the Christian's unrepented misbehaviour (Rom.2:23-24). Discipline due but ignored is not love but sentimentality, love's counterfeit.¹⁰²

Even excommunication then should be motivated by a desire for the ultimate

¹⁰²De Koster, "Church Discipline", 238.

restoration of the wandering member and eventual ecclesiastical and celestial rejoicing (Luke 15:7).

The practice of this level of discipline was not unique to the New Testament as is evident from several Old Testament texts (Exodus 12:15; 30:33; Leviticus 7:20; 17:9; 23:29; Numbers 9:13). The term "cut off" used in these texts is probably equivalent to excommunication which may be incurred for a number of offences committed against community standards.

Evidently, there were several types of infractions in ancient times that might have incurred the disciplinary measure of excommunication from the faith community. However, it is probably safe to conclude that the particular penalty was directed mostly at the unresponsive, uncooperative and evidently unrepentant attitude of the individual. It is the due penalty meted out to those who choose to reject admonition and efforts of reformation from evil conduct that was contrary to community discipline.

According to Paul's letter to the Corinthians, formative discipline and reformatory discipline are necessary because they indicate Christians are other-worldly, and God's dealings with them is intended for their preservation from inevitable judgment with an already condemned world. For this reason Christians are to subject themselves gladly to discipline which has a beneficent purpose for those

who "do not belong to the world", namely, the *ekklesia*.¹⁰³

Many Christian leaders affirm the value of this facet of discipline for the Church today. Marlin Jeschke, a Mennonite theologian, contends most stridently for a revival of this ministry which he deems to have become obsolete. He argues that corrective Church discipline is indispensable in the context of evangelism and missions. It is part of discipling which has the dual aspects of formative discipline with emphasis on worship, Bible study, prayer, and fasting (personal and corporate), and corrective or reformatory discipline. He asserts that discipline involves "the ministry of discipling a Christian brother or sister whose spiritual health and life are endangered by a particular act or attitude". It is appropriately described as a compassionate ministry which attempts to preserve believers in the way of faith, but in the attempt may also result in their exclusion from the congregation.¹⁰⁴ He further claims that evangelism and Church discipline are dual acts of discipleship with the same goal of liberation of people from all forms of sin in order to bring them into the arena of Christian love, justice, peace, and joy.¹⁰⁵ This view allows for a different understanding of the command to ostracise the unrepentant. The directive to treat the excommunicated individual as a "tax collector or Gentile" could be seen as a

¹⁰³Hermann Sasse, "Kosmos," in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. G.W.Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1965), vol. 3, 893-94.

¹⁰⁴Jeschke, 16-19.

¹⁰⁵Jeschke, 30.

commission for extending evangelism and spiritual nurture toward the person.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, even the act or ministry of reformatory discipline in the form of excommunication, may be seen as an extension of the continual work of evangelism, whereby the offender now stands in the position of one needing to be disciplined. How far reaching should excommunication be to be effective?

Excommunication of the individual should only be applied to spiritual associations with natural social relations such as home and work being unaffected. People under discipline may be still permitted to attend worship or Bible study so as to facilitate repentance, but ordinary associations in secular things should be curtailed in order to quicken the conscience, since regular concourse may result in either comfort in the sin or the appearance of acceptance of the habit by other believers.

Owen succinctly states:

The ends of this prohibition are, -1) To testify [to]our condemnation of the sin and disapprobation of the person guilty of it, who is excommunicated; 2) The preservation of ourselves from all kinds of participation in his sin; 3) To make him ashamed of himself, that if he be not utterly profligate and given up unto total apostasy, it may occasion in him thoughts of returning.

In the eventuality of the repentance of this individual due to such strictures - "if he listens to you"- the Church is then required to exercise meekness, compassion and love in restoring the believer, upon satisfactory evidence of visible fruits of repentance.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷John Owen, The Church and the Bible, ed. William H. Goold (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), vol. 16, 181.

Hopefully, it is becoming clear that this level of discipline serves the purpose of maintaining a divinely initiated and ordered covenant relationship between God and His people and amongst the people themselves.

S. L. Greenslade affirms the existence of a pattern for formative discipline without which attempts at, or the practice of, reformatory discipline would be nonsensical and without warrant. The early Church perceived itself as a distinct unit in a pagan society which was faced with several options, that is, "to assimilate", to "separate themselves from the surrounding culture", or to "compromise on their convictions".¹⁰⁸ Christian discipline may be regarded as a proactive establishment of parameters of conduct for new believers, designed to equip and nurture them in such areas as chastity in marriage, in celibacy, and in the avoidance of idolatry.

[I]n the early days of its expansion, and without feeling any contradiction between its outlook and its evangelical duty, the Church saw its mission largely in terms of holiness and separation from the world, that is, from the thoughts and desires and customs of the majority of men and women among whom Christians lived.¹⁰⁹

Although many types of moral offences are listed in the letters of Paul as actions that mandated a reformatory disciplinary response based on the principles stipulated by Jesus in Matthew 18:15 -20, his focus is on the attitude of the sinner rather than on the deed. It is important to note that "discipline" always proceeds with admonition, the appeal to a given standard of faith and conduct embraced by the

¹⁰⁸S. L. Greenslade, Shepherding the Flock (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1967), 10,11.

¹⁰⁹Ibid, 21.

covenant community and to which the errant member is directed to return.

The first offence addressed by Paul is incest (I Corinthians 5) in the Church. The sin is seen as rebellion against the law of God (Lev. 18:8; Deut. 22:30; 27:20) and a contradiction of the very nature of the congregation as a unique community of faith, since even pagans abhorred the practice of a son marrying a stepmother. Paul also criticized the arrogance and pride of the Church in ignoring such gross immorality, which truly angered him. The arrogant attitude which was allowing the rumour to pervade the community only aggravated the situation and likely damaged the reputation of the Church, bringing disgrace to the name and cause of Christ.¹¹⁰ Thus Paul addresses the situation by appealing to the teachings of both the Old and New Testaments in I Corinthians 5:1-8.

It is evident that Paul had several concerns in mind about the Christian community in Corinth. First, its distinctiveness is emphasized by way of comparison with pagan customs alongside which it is expected to be superior. Alas ! This was not so. Second, the Apostle decries the smug attitude of false piety which allowed them to condone the reprehensible deed, maybe on the assumption that it would be too judgmental and uncharitable, and therefore to be ignored as mere human imperfection. Third, a strong caveat is enjoined against undisciplined behaviour that is left unattended and potentially capable of spreading like cancer throughout the "body" with deadly consequences. Decisive action must be taken if the health and

¹¹⁰Mare, 217.

longevity of the Church was to be preserved.

EXEGESIS

The word *porneia*, translated “fornication” in the foregoing text, refers to every kind of sexual sin or sexual immorality.¹¹¹ Paul probably alludes to the Old Testament moral and ethical prohibitions of incestuous relationships (Leviticus 18:8; Deuteronomy 22:30; 27:20).

In the second and third verses, Paul graciously asserts his Apostolic authority to judge the case *in absentia*, but accedes to the congregation’s responsibility in addressing the issue in light of the Lord's teaching. This acquiescence to ecclesiastical ruling is very important for congregational government. Similarly, any hint of being harsh or dictatorial in Paul's exhortation to the Church, seems modulated in the references -"In the name of our Lord Jesus,...in the power of our Lord". Mare affirms: "These two expressions amplify each other: church discipline is to be exercised carefully on the authority of Jesus' name and the verdict given is accompanied by the spiritual power of the Lord Jesus."¹¹² Indeed it is none other than the One who said " where are your accusers, ... neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more" (John 8:1 -11), who now gives authority to the Church to discipline the

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Ibid, 217.

unrepentant!¹¹³ "Handing over to Satan" (vs.4,5) was to be understood as a description of excommunication in Paul's time, with the view that God allows Satan to physically afflict backsliders, sometimes to the point of death. Of paramount importance is the extreme reformatory aspect of discipline which emphasizes the pernicious nature of sin and its power to disrupt both divine and human relationships. Paul affirms the lot of some contemporaries who had possibly rejected admonition and subsequently "shipwrecked their faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme"(I Timothy 1:19,20). Even this measure is seen as a means of repentance, restoration and preparation to be with Christ, having the educative function of teaching the gravity of blasphemy.

Several parallel passages express this view of Satan's varied but limited power in such areas as demon possession: " a man who was demon-possessed and could not talk was brought to Jesus. And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke."(Matthew 9:33). For Paul it was a "messenger of Satan" - "a thorn in the flesh" - a painful malady which kept him humble (II Corinthians 12:7), or

¹¹³Unfortunately, this statement by Jesus is often misinterpreted in support of permissiveness as seen in the words of one respondent:

I believe and always have that if we try our best to follow the golden rule we would have less problems both in the church and outside. It is very easy to criticize the other person but if we go back to the Bible we will find Jesus said "let him that is without sin cast the first stone". In order to help an individual we must not turn them away from the church but as a body of believers and Christ's followers we must try to lend them a helping hand.

else hindered his missionary progress (I Thessalonians 2:18).

John Calvin, in his comments on the Timothy text, also attests this as another description of excommunication whereby the person is surrendered to the attacks of Satan, being so exposed because of unconfessed sin which eclipses the protection of Christ. In another context, Paul refers to this state as allowing the Devil a foothold on one's life and indirectly that of the Church (Ephesians 4:27). The effectiveness of this ministry is only as potent, however, as the willingness of the congregation to do its duty by shunning the reprobate, as much as possible, in order to accentuate the sinful deed and possibly effect repentance.¹¹⁴

Consequently, there is a twofold disciplinary measure taking place, the congregation must put away the sinner, and the sinner must put away his sin in order that true fellowship with God and each other might be restored. The gravity and horrific effect of sin is probably alluded to in Paul's reference to Christ as "our Passover lamb" who was sacrificed for us to put away sin. Discipline then is to be addressed in light of human redemption. If God abhorred sin to such a degree as seen in Jesus' death, surely it should not be taken any less seriously when it occurs among those claiming to be the regenerate, that is, the "body of Christ". According to Calvin "it is the duty of every Church to mourn over the faults of individual members, as domestic calamities belonging to the entire body ... [necessitating] a pious and dutiful

¹¹⁴John Calvin, "The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians" in Calvin's Commentaries, translated by Thomas Allan Smail (Edinburgh: Calvin Transaction Society, 1964), vol. 1, 195.

correction ... inflamed with holy zeal through displeasure at the offence; in fear of otherwise severe judgment." Such a duty, to be done compassionately, must be executed in the "name of the Lord", reflecting the solemnity of the occasion and the contrite hearts of those who administer discipline. Failure to act constitutes sin on the Church's part.¹¹⁵

It is at this point that Mare seems to reach an untenable conclusion: by claiming that excommunication was sufficient to deal with the issue, hence the incestuous marriage need not be terminated, since Paul did not mention it.¹¹⁶ First, this view misses the point of the disciplinary process to "win your brother/sister", that is, effect the separation of the individual from the trespass and to restore that one to a state of obedience. Even the radical and extreme step of excommunication is intended to effect the attitude of repentance and restoration. Therefore, the circumstances resulting in the crisis, of necessity, would have had to be corrected also, namely, the unlawful marriage in this case. Moreover, the very nature of repentance demands no less than a total departure from the sin.¹¹⁷

Believers are warned also against persistent factiousness and obstinate rebellion, including greed and disobedience. Anyone claiming to be a Christian and involved in any practices that discredit the Christian community and undermine the

¹¹⁵Ibid, 183,184.

¹¹⁶Mare, 218.

¹¹⁷Stott, 72,73.

ministry, is to be subject to ostracism according to Paul's continuing argument (I Corinthians 5:9-13).

Mare acknowledges that the Apostle was writing to a Church in a notoriously immoral social milieu, making it crucial that the Christian community reflect a distinctly different standard from those outside its ranks as well as provide a witness to them. The fellowship meal was a sign of individual and corporate union with Christ, and therefore mandated that they adhere to a common moral and spiritual standard. Paul uses the word "judge" to emphasize the solemn responsibility Christians have to live with integrity.¹¹⁸ Indeed his rhetorical question (v. 12) which demands an affirmative response, adds force to the validity of discipline, including excommunication, as a viable ministry for today with the threefold intention of judging: retributive - punishing offenders; remedial -reforming the individual; and deterrent - discouraging others from yielding to the temptation.¹¹⁹

Thus far, it has been shown that Christian discipline entails both formative and reformatory aspects. When the former fails, the latter is intended to effect restoration

¹¹⁸Mare, 220. Barclay rightly emphasizes the mood of sorrow over the devastating effect of sin, and the concomitant abhorrence of its presence in the Church. Discipline then must be seen as beneficial for the individual's reformation as well as the Church's reputation as the "body of Christ". He concludes:"Discipline should never be exercised for the satisfaction of the person who exercises it, but always for the mending of the person who has sinned and for the sake of the Church. Discipline must never be vengeful; it must always be curative and prophylactic." William Barclay, The Daily Study Bible: The Letter to the Corinthians, Daily Bible Study Series (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1975), vol. 9, 45,46.

¹¹⁹Stott, 46.

based on the Matthean model taught by the Lord Jesus Christ. However, should this restorative approach of discipline be rejected, then it is the prerogative of the Church to administer the extreme corrective principle of discipline, still with the design of regaining the individual. There is divided opinion among theologians regarding the continued relevance of this ministry, probably reflecting the views of the laity.

Several major arguments have been advanced against the principle of excommunication decrying it as a contradiction to the message of Christian love. Consequently, some interpret the parable of the "Wheat and Tares" to mean that both the disobedient and the obedient must of necessity be allowed to coexist within the Church until Christ returns for the final judgment. This view seems to have overlooked the fact that Jesus was speaking about the Church and the world coexisting in the larger framework of the Kingdom of God. Similarly, Augustine's teachings on the "Invisible Church" has been interpreted to mean that no one can be sure who is truly a Christian, and therefore the discipline of excommunication should be avoided. Jeschke argues, however, that discipline addresses this very matter of Christian identity by holding accountable those who at some point submitted to the principle of membership.¹²⁰ William Barclay takes the extreme position of denying that the disciplinary pericope constitutes the words of Jesus. He contends:

There are many reasons to make us think that this, as it stands, cannot be a correct report of the words of Jesus, but an adaptation made by the Church in later days, when Church discipline was rather a thing of rules and regulations

¹²⁰Jeschke, 165.

than of love and forgiveness.¹²¹

Others such as E. Tyrell Green,¹²² John Owen,¹²³ and S. L. Greenslade¹²⁴ disagree. Moreover, the very tone of the passage in its immediate context, reflects a spirit of love which earnestly reaches out to the lost and wandering "sheep" in order to restore it to the parameters of the fold where it experiences the "seventy times seven forgiveness", which has been put in place for its own safety. Moreover, the very method outlined by the Lord seems most appropriate and conducive to loving and gentle response to the one caught in sin.

In conclusion it might be said that excommunication is a fitting and biblical response to sin in the fellowship wherever the one in sin refuses to repent. Prior to the compassionate restoration of the penitent, the individual is to be treated as a publican, that is, one who is the object of outreach. Just as a person is only permitted certain rights and responsibilities until a public profession of faith in Christ is made, so the believer who rejects admonition would be denied former privileges he/she enjoyed, and perhaps even sterner measures might be adopted. This could possibly include banning from such ordinary associations as recreation and sports where the

¹²¹William Barclay, The Daily Bible Study :The Gospel of Matthew, Daily Bible Study Series (Burlington: G. R Welch Co. Ltd., 1975), vol. 2, 187.

¹²²E. Tyrell Green, The Church of Christ, Her Mission, Sacraments, and Discipline (London: Methuen & Company, 1902), 337.

¹²³Owen, 152.

¹²⁴S. L. Greenslade, Shepherding the Flock (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1967), 109-110.

Church has social events as bowling, darts or other non-spiritual events, including the rescinding of opportunities for service in such ministries as teaching, choir, communion and other leadership responsibilities and privileges. These measures in the writer's view are adequate and thus tantamount to shunning; although not in the strictest Mennonite sense of shunning it still provides a measure of exclusion until the individual repents. This brings the discussion to the concept of restoration the third proposed principle in Christian discipline that must be applied where excommunication has been positively effective.

C. RESTORATION

The principle and methodology of restoration evidently originates in the Matthean pericope of Jesus' teaching where its literary context reveals a compassionate mood as the author deals with this delicate but necessary ministry. The section reflects humility and compassion which is shown in the shepherd image of Ezekiel 34 and John 10, wherein the design of discipline is illustrated in seeking, finding and restoring what was lost.

Matthew seems to use these two moving pericopes of humility and compassionate concern for one another to suggest the attitude required for effective Christian discipline. Having elucidated the private and possibly the public way of handling sin in the community, the evangelist immediately points to the importance of the spirit of unity and meekness in pursuing this goal as seen in the succeeding verses of the chapter. For example, the Church's vested authority from the Lord

seems most effectively exercised in the spirit of unity where there is an attitude of absolute and prayerful dependence on the Lord implied in the phrase "in my name" (vs.18-20). In other words, those who have sustained hurt by the callous selfishness of others must be ready to forego grudges and be willing to restore broken relationships when requested. Such forgiveness uses God as its standard of response rather than the deed or the degree of pain caused or experienced (vs.21-35).

Greenslade claims that pastoral care for the individual should be the main motivation for discipline.¹²⁵ Similarly, it is impossible to "wash one another's feet" without first pointing out the "dirt" and then providing the "basin and towel" to those who submit to this ministry because they see themselves as part of the fellowship of Christ and in need of cleansing.

In previous sections it was hinted that the decision to discipline a believer should not be determined merely by the gravity or enormity of the sin, but rather the individual's response to admonition or the approaches to restoration. Thus if there is no repentance then excommunication would be the next appropriate step in the scheme of discipline.

Jeschke exhorts that it is better to monitor the level of repentance and faith of the offender than to classify the sin as was practised in former times when sins were classified as venial (forgivable) and mortal (unforgivable), by a penitential system

¹²⁵Greenslade, 70.

which showed the need to facilitate repentance and faith.¹²⁶ Consequently, Jeschke proposes that the focus should not be on the sin, but on the attitude of the sinner regarding repentance and faith. Therefore he concludes, on the basis of several key passages (I John 5:16-18 & Acts 5:1-11), that the individual's attitude - "if he hears" - rather than the specific sin, be the basis of reformatory discipline.¹²⁷

Refusal to heed may be interpreted as the individual's rejection of the faith life for what is deemed the unfaithful. Subsequently, the aspiration of the believing community would be to seek the repentance and restoration of that one to the community standard of obedience. It must also be seen that unconfessed and unaddressed sin creates an atmosphere which disturbs the peace and joy of the community, resulting in disorder and suffering as well as rupturing the Church's relationship with God.¹²⁸ Therefore the response of the individual is crucial to the ultimate action and subsequent condition of the Church. John White and Ken Blue commends the value of corporate fellowship - *koinonia* - and its mutual responsibility to one another:

Unless someone in the Church decides to go lovingly to the person involved in the scandal with the object of establishing the truth, effecting righteousness and seeking to bring about reconciliation, every single member in the church who is aware of the situation is sinning every moment - is in fact a participator in the sin of the "identified sinner" in one way or another. The church is

¹²⁶Jeschke, 37, 38, 39.

¹²⁷Ibid, 40.

¹²⁸Ibid, 43.

sinning by avoiding corrective church discipline.¹²⁹

Paul clearly acknowledged the responsibility and privilege of the Christians to judge or discern and point out one another's errors with the express purpose of their restoration to the accepted standards of the covenant community. Discipline then is entirely in keeping with the desire of Jesus to "win back" the individual who desists from practising sin. Therefore, the implication that discipline undermines the covenant community and the accusation that such a ministry is purely *judgmental*, upon closer examination, seems without biblical warrant. In order to determine the validity of such a ministry one needs to examine the approach recommended or implied in some "discipline" passages within their context. Although the Galatian pericope (Gal. 6:1-5) on discipline might be more suitable to the discussion of admonition, it also points out the need for a particular approach that will facilitate restoration. Furthermore, Paul's injunctions also indicate that love is to be the chief motivation in this sensitive area of spiritual experience. "Fulfil the law of Christ" is understood as a reference to the new commandment given the disciples: "A new command I give you: Love one another. By this shall all men know you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34). Thus genuine spiritual love for each other, is manifested when there is a willingness to take the risk and reach out firmly and lovingly to another believer who has slipped in the Christian pilgrimage under the

¹²⁹John White & Ken, Healing the Wounded: The Costly Love of Church Discipline (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 66.

weight of temptation and the heat and burden of the day.¹³⁰

The expressed desire is to lift up and facilitate the restoration of all such fellow believers to the biblical standard adopted at the time of entrance into the community of faith. This objective standard is indispensable, since there is a proneness to use self or others as the measure of the Christian service we render. In the first instance (Gal. 6:2) "burdens" infer that which needs to be borne with the help of others¹³¹ because of the weight of such modern temptations as secularism, humanism, the renaissance of great religions, as well as individual and social pressures. Victory over these is only possible through pastoral, evangelistic and didactic nurturing of believers into mutually interdependent faith communities eager to "help one another by the grace of God."¹³²

Evidence from the survey, which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter shows that the Christian community is amenable to restoring erring believers into the fellowship. A comparable number of respondents from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick believe that effective admonition leads to repentance, forgiveness and restoration to fellowship with God (82% NSR; 88% NBR) and the Church (74% NSR; 72% NBR). Such an atmosphere is possible when each Christian bears personal responsibility for one another knowing she or he is ultimately accountable to Christ

¹³⁰Ibid, 501.

¹³¹Ibid, 502.

¹³²Greenslade, 79,80.

for the use of gifts and opportunities possessed to help others. Consequently, conceit or comparison is wrong and unacceptable in the sight of God and robs the Christian community of particular blessings.

In II Corinthians 2:5-11 Paul explains the importance of prompt restoration of those who had been excommunicated or removed from fellowship. Several major principles within this pericope reveal the approach, design and effect of Christian discipline. First, the note of compassion and sincere concern for the one being disciplined is implied in such words as "grief", "comfort", and "forgive". This refutes any charge against the Church of being judgmental and uncharitable; rather it indicates a strong compassionate interest in the welfare of the sinning believer. Second, it entails the expression of love which desires the restoration of the individual. Third, Satan is also cheated of his diabolic designs when the Church successfully "wins back" a believer from the ranks of sin. This last point also shows that improper handling of this ministry can be used by the demonic to discourage the congregation. Christian discipline is seen also in a remedial versus a retributive light.¹³³

Although opinions differ on whether this situation corresponds to the moral crisis of I Corinthian 5, it still provides a strategic model on the restoration of a penitent believer and the attendant dangers if it is mishandled. Paul's appeal to the

¹³³Murray J. Harris, "II Corinthians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), vol. 10, 328.

"majority". implies that the congregation had proceeded to implement some form of exclusion from its fellowship, but had retained ministry which had fostered repentance and restoration and now the conditions were right to restore him.

Therefore, just as he readily allied himself with the congregation to excommunicate the incestuous brother, even so Paul was now in the vanguard to reverse the decision because it had its desired effect. Verses 10 & 11 are interpreted by Harris¹³⁴ as evidence that Paul was dealing, in the immediate situation, with a personal effrontery in which the Church had supported him and with whom he now pleads to offer forgiveness and restoration. Such a forgiveness is patterned after Christ, the one ultimate model for Christian forgiveness. Thus Paul describes the restorative response as a reaffirmation of love which in turn frustrates Satan's divisive stratagems with its possible harmful effects to the congregational life.¹³⁵ Again it must be emphasized that the value of this pericope in the context of this thesis project shows the design for Christian discipline and the congregation's response to "reaffirm your love for him" when excommunication has had its desired effect.

The experience of true forgiveness further influences a process that leads the offender to experience victory over the sin and joy in restoration to the fellowship. Confession, repentance, reconciliation, restoration of relationships, and the offer of

¹³⁴ Harris, 329.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 328-29. The verb *kuroo* (v. 8) is said to imply a public reinstatement and readmission to fellowship following earlier formal reproof or punishment. Cf. notes, Ibid, 330.

restitution where appropriate, are all elements of successful reformatory discipline. The goal of discipline is achieved as the individual is led back to the "normal, healthy, sanctified life of the whole community of faith".¹³⁶

The context of discipline is very important for understanding the corporate nature of the Church. The terms reconciliation and restoration are relational and indicate involvement with others, self and God in a covenant community. It is within this arena of faith that healing is most appropriately done and the characteristic of purity is highly desirable, lest the contagion of sin corrupt the whole "body".¹³⁷ Such a sensitive ministry demands the power of discernment imparted by the Holy Spirit in order to determine genuine repentance. Upon assurance of this, forgiveness granted must be sincere, personal, authoritative and divinely mediated even as received of God. This level of discipline looks not at the degree of sin but at the disposition of the sinner in response to admonition,¹³⁸ and excommunication. However, for maximum effectiveness, restorative approaches must be sensitively and lovingly exercised by the majority within the Church and just as humbly received by the individual.¹³⁹ Probably the most difficult process of restoration involves

¹³⁶Jeschke, 65.

¹³⁷White and Blue, 52.

¹³⁸Ibid, 156,160-1.

¹³⁹Ibid, 71. Don Baker poignantly and simply illustrates the effectiveness of the process of restoration when the entire congregation supports the discipline, removal and restoration of a pastoral staff member for immorality. Beyond Forgiveness (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1984), 102 pages.

leaders who have fallen, which also shows that restoration is applicable both to those who respond readily to admonition and to those who repented after being previously removed from membership. In an insightful article “Restoring a Fallen Colleague”, Edward G. Dobson provides three helpful suggestions stating that restoration involves a return to healthy fellowship with God and others based on II Corinthians 2:5-11; I John 1:9-10, restoration to service, as in Peter’s case, and eventually restoration to leadership as God in His time may allow.¹⁴⁰

Paul’s injunction to the Corinthian congregation seems to be intended to address a situation wherein they failed to implement disciplinary measures upon those who were in need of it. Because some had refused to submit to covenant stipulations, the unhappy and devastating effect was seen among the members as well as on the reputation of the congregation. Whatever their reason for not taking disciplinary action, Paul sought to teach them about dealing with sin in believers’ lives by way of admonition or excommunication. If the effect of this radical action of the congregation produces repentance then the individual should be promptly forgiven and restored to the fellowship. This concern for discipline remained prevalent throughout the history of the Church and even into the modern era as the following discussion will show.

¹⁴⁰Edward G. Dobson, “Restoring A Fallen Colleague” in *Leadership*, 13, # 1(Winter 1992) : 106-121. This particular issue includes a section “Forum” which involves a discussion with members of the accountability team to which individual in question had to be submissive as part of the disciplinary process of restoration. 122-34.

D. DISCIPLINE IN THE DEVELOPING CHURCH

The astute comments of Bishop Desmond Tutu in a recent interview about his acceptance of an appointment as Chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa probably indicates the pervasive influence of Scripture on society or at least on the purveyors of its teaching. He asserted that

The Western form of justice is largely retributive, seeking to be punitive. African jurisprudence is different. It's largely restorative. It seeks to make up deficiencies that have resulted from acts of injustice. It seeks to bind up, to heal relationships, and that is what we are going to do.¹⁴¹

The Christian Church has continued to reflect similar concerns and struggles through the ministry of Christian discipline as shown in the following eclectic survey of Church history.

Tertullian (c.a. 200 A.D.), an early Church leader and theologian, defined the Church as "a body united by our religious professions, by our godly discipline, by the bond of hope ...[nurtured] by exhortations, admonitions and godly censures." These censures along with excommunication are seen as motivated by the confidence of being in God's presence. Judgment is therefore passed with great gravity in the light of future divine judgment, and is symbolized in the banishment of the impenitent from participation in corporate prayer and fellowship because of sin and the departure from the rules of discipline. Indeed the apparent harshness of this measure

¹⁴¹Desmond Tutu, "Tutu's Quest for Truth," The Daily News (Friday Perspective), 5 April, 1996, 15.

must be balanced with its intent to prompt repentance and to serve as warning to others. Furthermore, it was taught that true repentance which preceded forgiveness, required the individual's public prostration and humiliation which was expressed in particular dress codes and a specifically strict diet that indicated both the individual's need of mercy, as well as the awfulness of sin.¹⁴² Christians were required to live a holy life in the world based on biblical standards. Upon the failure to maintain such standards, the community of faith resorted to reformatory discipline as an appropriate restorative recourse.

Evidently, the early Christian Church recognized the organic implication of life within a covenant community where members "bear one another's burdens" (Galatians 6:1-3) and "stir one another up to love and good deeds" (Hebrews 10:24). The Apostolic Constitutions (A. D. 252-270) stated:

When you see the offender in the congregation, you are to take the matter heavily, and to give orders that he be expelled from it. Upon his expulsion, the Deacons are likewise to express their concern, to follow and to find the party, and to detain him for a while without the Church. In a little time they are to come back, and to intercede with you on his behalf ... as our Saviour interceded with His Father for sinners, saying, as we learn from the Gospel, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Then you shall order him to be brought into the Church; and after having examined whether he be truly penitent, and fit to be readmitted into full Communion, you shall direct him to continue in a state of mortification for the space of two, three, five, or seven weeks, according to the nature of the offense; and then, after some proper admonitions, shall dismiss [or absolve] him.¹⁹⁷

¹⁴²Henry Bettenson, ed. and trans., The Early Christian Fathers, (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 152.

¹⁹⁷Jeschke, 127-27.

The gravity of sin and the nature of the sin apparently was of greater concern to the congregation than the individual's attitude as the determined punishment. Nonetheless, the note of compassion and desire to restore the erring member is quite obvious. There is, too, a strong sense of maintaining a distinction between the Church and the world. Concerning the further development of this ministry in the Church, it is observed that of the two penitential systems of discipline which developed, each held a different view of excommunication as an appropriate means of discipline; while one supported it the other rejected it.¹⁹⁸

Discipline in the Constantinian era was flawed because of the legalization of the Church by the State resulting in confusion between Church discipline and secular law. This also diffused any distinction between the Church and the world since "membership in the church became coterminous with citizenship in the state, [and] church discipline became confused with secular law."¹⁹⁹

During the Medieval era leading up to the Reformation, a protracted struggle to remain faithful to the New Testament took the shape of several Monastic movements within the Roman Catholic Church. Not only were these conservative centres of religious faith, but to a great degree they are credited also with decelerating the imminent decline of the Church. Vos observes that these movements, the "backbone of the Medieval Papacy", were:

¹⁹⁸Ibid, 129.

¹⁹⁹Ibid, 131.

the conservatories of learning, centres of missionary and philanthropic work. The monks were the writers, preachers, philosophers, and theologians of the age, they headed the Crusades and Inquisition ...[they] provided something of a safety valve for the Roman Catholic Church, for in them earnest Christians had a great deal more freedom from ecclesiastical machinery than they would have had outside the cloister. Without this freedom, it is possible that much of the evangelical life would have parted company with Romanism sooner than it did.²⁰⁰

While many of these reactions were directed against materialism and Scholasticism and were concerned for the needs of the poor, others were more concerned about the place of Scripture as a formative influence in the lives of the populace. In the first group were the Beguines, a group of single women and widows who had pledged virginity or abstinence and lived alone or together as families in collective houses. Their houses were usually located near hospitals in which they spent time caring for the sick. The Beghards was the male counterpart of the Beguines.²⁰¹

Mysticism also flourished in this period. Famous people associated with this expression of faith included Catherine of Sienna, Joan of Arc, Bernard of Clairveaux and Francis of Assisi. As monastics they practised the faith by observing prayer, fasting, poverty, a life of purity, and by extending charity toward the sick and the poor. They strove for “certainty of salvation and truth through experience” particularly of the love of God. This movement is credited also with maintaining the

²⁰⁰Howard F. Vos, Highlights of Church History (Chicago : Moody Press, 1960), 67.

²⁰¹Kenneth Scott Latourette, History of Christianity, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1953), vol. 1, 541,549.

purity of the Church.²⁰²

In the area of doctrine or truth John Hus, Peter Waldo and John Wyclif were the stalwarts who campaigned for both accessibility of Scripture to the general populace as well as faithfulness to its contents for godly living. Peter Waldo, father of the Waldensees, reacted against the materialism of his time by divesting himself of his wealth and adopting a mendicant life style in response to his understanding of Christ's call to discipleship. In the effort to preserve tradition, the Roman Church eventually excommunicated him and his adherents as heretics because of improper procedure, false doctrine and different lifestyle. This moved the group to further efforts at renewal in both faith and life in conformity to the New Testament. Even their enemies regarded them as humble folk who dressed simply and were industrious and hard working with their hands, chaste, temperate in eating and drinking, refusing to frequent taverns and dances, sober and truthful in speech, avoiding anger, and viewing the accumulation of wealth as evil.²⁰³

John Wyclif was particularly famous for his contention that the Sovereignty of God extended to all property and that human leaders are stewards who are required to be faithful. In the event of unfaithfulness in such stewardship, he promulgated that clergy as well as Pope might be removed from office.²⁰⁴ This remarkable view of the

²⁰²Vos, 65, 66.

²⁰³Latourette, 453.

²⁰⁴Ibid, 663.

scope of corrective Christian discipline is similarly matched by an equal if not greater conviction of the value of the word of God as the depository of preventive discipline and the source of the principles of corrective discipline. Thus Wyclif is known also for his translation of the Bible into the English vernacular of the day for the benefit of lay people. He also inaugurated lay itinerant preaching through followers called Lollards. Wyclif denounced the “accepted beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church” probably unleashing several phases of ecclesiastical persecution against the group, which practically drove them into extinction.²⁰⁵ Another reformer was John Hus of Bohemia whose influence was similar to Wyclif’s. He too was condemned eventually by the Council of Constantance and was burned at the stake.²⁰⁶ Other similar movements were not well received. Some of their members were excommunicated while others were executed because of their efforts at reform within the Church.

Perhaps the greatest resistance against reformers such as Wyclif and Hus was the infamous Inquisition which was established by Gregory IX to eradicate heresy and curtail the spread of radical religious groups. In addition to being a means of controlling competing ideas, however, it was an extreme application of “reformatory” and “restorative” discipline. Failing to gain the recantation of heretics who were seen as a threat to the Roman Catholic Church, the Spanish Inquisition resorted to “trials,

²⁰⁵Ibid, 664-666.

²⁰⁶Vos, 72-73.

torture and killings".²⁰⁷ Even those in the fields of science were victims of this purge including Copernicus (post-humously excommunicated) and Galileo who was excommunicated for their belief in a solar-centred universe. Galileo spent three years in a dungeon and the rest of his life under house arrest because he refused to recant.²⁰⁸ The worst excesses were perpetrated under the inquisitor Torquemada in 1483 when approximately 50,000 Huguenots were killed for embracing divergent views.²⁰⁹

Henry Bettenson summarizes the extensive powers of this group:

The third Lateran Council in 1179, under Alexander III, involved the aid of secular power; ' although the discipline of the Church does not carry out bloody retributions, being content with priestly judgments: still it is aided by the regulations of Catholic princes, so that men often seek a salutary remedy for fear of incurring corporal punishment . Therefore ... we decree that [the Albigensians] and their supporters and abettors lie under an anathema, and we prohibit, under pain of anathema, anyone to dare to keep in his house or on his land, or to support them or to have dealings with them.' (Cap. 27, Mansi xxii.231; Denzinger, No.401). In 1208 Innocent III started the Albigensian Crusade; but this failed to extirpate the heretics, and in 1220 a papal inquisition was entrusted to the friars and superimposed on the bishops' courts.²¹⁰

These various movements illustrate the continuing struggle in the Christian faith for orthodoxy and orthopraxy based on the New Testament teachings.

²⁰⁷Ibid, 64, 65.

²⁰⁸Lorraine Boettner, Roman Catholicism (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1962), 250, 364,365.

²⁰⁹Ibid, 428.

²¹⁰Henry Bettenson, Documents of the Christian Church , 2nd ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 133.

DISCIPLINE DURING AND AFTER THE REFORMATION

To a great degree the foregoing discussion on the growing Church evinces the very concern for Christian discipline in both its formative and reformatory nature. On one level there is the quest by various individuals and groups to know and practise the truths of the Bible as these were understood, and on the other there were the efforts to preserve this biblical heritage (more often tradition) at any cost as illustrated in the extreme measures of the Inquisition.

Martin Luther, father of the Reformation, himself resisted tradition and contended for the Bible as the sole source of authority in Roman Catholic Church. He also seemed to have acquiesced to the State's discipline of offenders, thinking it inexpedient for the Church to be solely responsible for this ministry. Nevertheless, whenever the penalty was instituted, exclusion from the sacraments was common.²¹¹

Discipline in the Radical Reformation was regarded and zealously promoted as a "mark of the true church". Approaching discipline as an act of love, the Anabaptists utilized relevant moral principles and practices that enabled them to excel in the struggle to restore the spiritual life of the Church. The inclusion of teachings on discipline during the lessons of preparation for baptism appear to be one basic reason for their effectiveness. Balthasar Hubmaier states that:

In receiving water baptism, the baptizand [sic] confesses publicly that he has yielded himself to live henceforth according to the rule of Christ. In the power of his confession he has submitted himself to the sisters, the brethren and the

²¹¹Jeschke, 132.

church, so that they now have the authority to admonish him if he errs, to discipline, to ban, and to readmit him Whence comes this authority if not from the baptismal vow? ²¹²

This practice distinguished the Anabaptists from the State Churches. Whereas the latter viewed discipline as a function of the State, the former interpreted “the keys” to be a direct commission of Christ to the Church as a unique authority to preserve its witness. Hubmaier propounds:

I believe and profess the remission of sins. The Church has received the keys... that is, the power --from Christ to open to the sinner the gates of heaven as often as he feels sorrow and repentance for his sins, and to receive him into the sacred community of Christian believers, as the Prodigal son and contrite Corinthian. But where a man will not heed the threefold fraternal admonition, nor desist from his sins, I believe in my heart that the Church has power to exclude such a one, and to regard him as a publican and a heathen.²¹³

The ban meant total spiritual and social isolation of the individual, designed to effect repentance which, upon occurring, resulted in forgiveness and restoration. In effect the entire process was founded on the preventive and formative influence of the gospel as well as the supportive context of the community to which one is pledged in full mutual responsibility at the moment of joining. The preservation of the Church’s integrity was also an important goal of Christian discipline.²¹⁴

²¹²Balthasar Hubmaier, “A Form for Baptism,” 1526-1527, *Armour*, 43, cited from *Anabaptist in Outline* (Kitchener: Herald Press, 1981), 168.

²¹³Hubmaier, “Twelve Articles”, 1526-1527, Davidson/Klassen, *Hubmaier*, 219-222 cited from *Anabaptism in Outline* (Kitchener: Herald Press, 1981), 103.

²¹⁴Hubmaier, “On Free Will, Nicolsburg, 1527,” *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, ed. George Huntston Williams, and Angel M. Margal (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), 124f.

Religious instruction was intended to engender faith and obedience through the means of catechization, private confession, individual pastoral counsel and admonition, all geared toward transformation. Public profession of faith and obedience was particularly emphasized as a mark of submission to the disciplinary oversight of pastors and lay leaders. Conjointly, parish fellowships were chiefly established to foster disciplined living²¹⁵ and, one might add, accountability. The main purpose of discipline, regarded as the responsibility of each Christian, in this context was “admonition with the goal of the sinner’s repentance.” In the event of public sins, public confession involving fasting, prayer, self-denial, diligent attendance at worship services and almsgiving were the required evidences of sincere repentance.²¹⁶

However, where the individual refused admonition, excommunication was administered resulting in several strictures against the guilty party. The errant one was denied the prerogative of being a God-parent, being at baptisms, or being a witness at weddings. Pastoral care was denied during illness and in the event of death occurring in that impenitent state, a Church burial was denied. Furthermore, all unnecessary contact beyond mere civility was avoided with the person, except for admonishing or allowing worship.²¹⁷

²¹⁵Amy Nelson Burnett, “Church Discipline and Moral Reformation in the Thought of Martin Bucer,” in *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 22 (1991), 446,447.

²¹⁶Ibid, 448,451.

²¹⁷Ibid, 452.

Martin Bucer's conviction was that one's belief should influence one's behaviour. Therefore, moral reformation and progress in piety formed the main goal of discipline. In fact the very concern of this thesis project is that discipline be seen as a positive ministry in both its formative and reformatory aspects and is intended for the maintenance of a holy life. Perhaps one might even conclude that submission to Christian discipline is an acknowledgment that humans are basically sinful and rebellious and therefore in need of moral formation and reformation in order to attain to the holy life provided for by this aspect of Christian ministry.

Reformed tradition during the sixteenth century also regarded discipline as one of the "essential activities of the church ... a mark of the true church". It was seen as an inevitable bond to which all members submit for the benefit and welfare of all. Such submission included faithfulness in preaching, teaching and counselling designed to provide both formative and reformatory discipline at all times. Discipline was seen as a necessary element for maintaining the bond of fellowship which the Lord foresaw would be necessary for His Church, and which would be dangerous to omit.²¹⁸ John Calvin admitted the vital need of preserving this significant and salutary ministry which in his estimation was as necessary to the Church as order is to the maintenance of safe society or modest family.²¹⁹

²¹⁸R. N. Caswell, "Discipline," in New Dictionary of Theology, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 199-200.

²¹⁹John Calvin, Institutes of The Christian Religion, trans. Henry Beveridge, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), vol. 2, 453.

Martin Bucer's understanding and interpretation of discipline included a system that was designed for the amendment of the sinner, Christian progress in piety, and the edification of the Church.²²⁰ According to his system, discipline was both formative and reformatory in thrust.²²¹

Mennonites, Amish and Brethren groups also practised discipline to varying degrees of severity. The English Puritans who lacked the support of the State, devised their own system of discipline reflected in the 1589 Confession based on Matthew 18. It was designed to be executed by the authority of the entire congregation as a ministry of "mutual watch and care", according to their understanding of the New Testament. Similarly, English Baptists exercised conscientious discipline as a positive ministry for the general welfare, and spiritual nurture of each member while excommunication was incurred only by those who despised the "counsel of the church".²²² Again, it is evident that the common thrust of discipline was directed against the attitude of the sinner rather than the sin which has already been provided for in the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Reputedly influenced by Martin Bucer's On the Cure and Care of Souls, the Puritan, Richard Baxter, affirmed the link of discipline ministry involving the offices of pastors and elders.²²³ In spite

²²⁰Burnett, 453.

²²¹Ibid, 440.

²²²Jeschke, 134,136.

²²³Caswell, 200.

of the obvious complexity of Church and State relationships in this period, discipline was, nonetheless, a prevalent and reasonable pursuit of the Church.

Other groups continued to either experiment with or seriously advocate discipline as a necessary component of the Christian experience within the bonds of a covenant relationship. The Anabaptists through the Schleitheim Confession, 1527, implemented the *Ban* upon impenitent members. This was effected during the Communion service in order "to exalt love", probably meaning to express love for the wrong-doer.²²⁴

Citing the writings of both Anabaptist and Reformed Theologians, Kenneth R. Davis²²⁵ contends that discipline was indispensable to the moral fibre of the Church. Discipline in this system is designed to maintain, nurture or restore the Church to its true nature through its preventive or corrective effect. Even the *Ban* or excommunication and the jurisdiction of Church based on Matthew 18, must be seen as radical love intended for restoration and not rejection.

The rise of Pietism in the eighteenth century was regarded as a reaction against the "cold orthodoxy of the Lutheran Church" in Germany and Switzerland, and against the Dutch Reformed Church in Holland. Promoted by Philip J. Spener and August H. Francke, the movement emphasised "the need for a regeneration

²²⁴William Lumpkin, ed., Baptist Confessions of Faith, rev. ed. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1969), 25.

²²⁵Kenneth R. Davis, "No Discipline, No Church: An Anabaptist Contribution to the Reformed Tradition," Sixteenth Century Journal. XIII, (1982): 44, 45, 48, 56.

experience on the part of all, promoted a living Christianity wherein the love of God would be expressed, and encouraged practical Church work and Bible study [by] laymen.”²²⁶ Spener’s work was inspired by a desire for discipline in the form of a new moral and spiritual climate²²⁷ among the people of God whose lives were characterized by nominalism, drunkenness and dishonesty seriously detrimental to the work of God. His concept was to use small groups as centres of discipline and renewal by means of education which illustrated the value of the “covenant community” concept in which committed members are accountable to one another.

Practical reading is essentially necessary and eminently useful; and its object is the application of the Scriptures to faith and practice ... We ought frequently to read some book of Scripture which inculcate the foundations of faith and practice with peculiar force and perspicuity, and studiously endeavour to render ourselves as much as possible conformed to it.²²⁸

The common factor in these Anabaptist and Pietistic movements was their emphasis on formative discipline within a group of committed believers as a proactive measure against the breakdown of discipleship. Should the latter occur they would have been better prepared to deal with the problematic behaviour in a systematic and biblical way.

Within the Anglican tradition, Methodism reflected the formative concept of

²²⁶Vos, 97.

²²⁷D. W. Brown, “Pietism,” in New Dictionary of Theology, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David S. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 515-517.

²²⁸August Herman Francke, A Guide to the Reading and Study of the Holy Scriptures, trans. William Jacques (Philadelphia: David Hogan, 1823), 114.

discipline, laying emphasis on the attainment of holiness. Some American frontier groups of the free Church tradition including Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians (1800-1850) did, however, reputedly practise the best models of discipline. This is evident in their value of discipline as a covenant responsibility. Jeschke states for example that:

No Christian looked upon his behaviour as "no body's business ..." The members of those pioneer congregations felt both free and obliged to watch over each other ... Moreover, at their best the systems of admonition and correction were intended as means of repentance and reconciliation for the fallen. Their investigations were not just snooping; they were devised to protect and to keep from harm.²²⁹

This disciplinary principle was also seen in the Churches of the American South which applied it even in master-slave relationships, to the full extent of excommunication.

Modern Atlantic Baptist attitude toward discipline might be illustrated in the oral tradition about the farmer who was barred from communion because of his use of foul language during a painful encounter with a hornet's nest while haying. Only after due confession and repentance was he restored to fellowship at the Lord's table.²³⁰

One significant cause for reformatory discipline in Maritime Baptist Churches was intemperance. Members were allowed "moderate indulgence" but drunkenness

²²⁹Jeschke, 137.

²³⁰As told to the writer in conversation with Dr. Robert Wilson, Professor of Church History, Acadia Divinity College.

met with the swift penalty of excommunication or being “read out of church membership.” The temperance movement became a strong force and was a needed counter offensive to the inebriation so common in a society where “half brought the alcohol and the other half sold it.” Thus all converts were encouraged to join a temperance society.²³¹

Stuart Murray represents one strident evangelical voice in the call for disciplined congregations. From his contention it is deduced that discipline must be considered since the Church is a covenant community consisting of individuals who are organically joined together to comprise the local congregation. Thus they are “members [who] are in covenant [and] not [an] organizational relationship with each other.”²³² Therefore those who are very conscious of the covenant relationship into which they have entered will take seriously the Church as organism, including their walk, their witness and their erring brothers [and sisters]. A covenanting believer will desire also to seek prompt fellowship in another covenanting congregation upon moving to another area.²³³

Murray sees discipline as a natural outgrowth of a spiritual concern for the formative and reformatory nurture of the body of Christ. Two foci of this ministry

²³¹George E. Levy, The Baptists of the Maritime Provinces (Saint John: Barnes-Hopkins Limited, 1946), 141,142.

²³²Stuart Eldon Murray, “Through Him Who Strengthens Me,” in Selected Shorter Writings and Sermons, ed. James Murray (Hansport: Lancelot Press, 1989), 141.

²³³Ibid.

include “preventive measures” and “reclaiming or healing ministry.” Murray then cites and interprets the biblical authority and Christian method and motive for the practice of discipline as follows:

When the body is hurt because of the walk of an erring member, it is generally overlooked by the local church members that I know. I am sure that Jesus and the Apostolic Church emphasized the necessity of church discipline. Such passages as Matthew 18:15-17 and I Corinthians 5:1-5 bear witness to this ... it seems to me that church discipline, that is genuine biblical confrontation of sin in the believer’s erring walk, is a matter from which we must not shrink. What we need to see is that church discipline is by nature restorative and not punitive. It is the greatest force for rehabilitation of unhealthy members.²³⁴

SUMMARY

This exploratory account shows that Church discipline referred to as Christian discipline in this thesis project has featured prominently in the history of the Christian Church,²³⁵ and was paramount where the congregation sought to remain distinctive from its social milieu.

Christian discipline, then, is a biblical and historical ministry of the Church, implemented by the Jesus himself. Although it has been subject to abuses and neglect, it is absolutely indispensable to the nature and mission of the Church in any age. Furthermore, where there is a breakdown of such, the Church, through a given methodology, is required to seek the restoration of those affected, for the benefit of the entire community of faith. Upon the refusal of the erring believer to respond

²³⁴Ibid, 143.

²³⁵Ibid, 139.

favourably to this disciplinary approach, excommunication is an appropriate action to be instituted by the congregation with the design to spur the sinning saint to confession, repentance and restoration. True discipline, therefore, must be pursued with this in mind or else risk being unbiblical and improper. The most significant observation to note is that this action should not be directed against the sin but against the particular attitude: "if he listens ... you have won your brother" but "if he does not listen; let him be to you as a Gentile and tax-gatherer". Thus "to listen" or "not to listen" indicates the attitude which offers direction for further Church action to restore or to remove from membership. It is not to be construed, however, that restoration involves only those who have been removed from membership due to lack of repentance. Rather, restoration also involves those who have positively responded to admonition and have been subsequently put on a corrective disciplinary therapy to ease them back onto the plane of obedient Christian living (Galatians 6:1-4).

The next chapter constitutes a survey of opinions from a select group of Churches in two regions in order to determine the views of Church members on the concept of Christian discipline.

CHAPTER III

MODERN VIEWS OF DISCIPLINE

Jackson W. Carroll in his comments about the Church in the world argues that "A congregation - its theology and ethics, its worship, its style of operation, and what it does, or does not do with reference to mission - is profoundly shaped by its social context."²³⁶ This statement may be regarded as both descriptive and prescriptive of the presence and function of the Church in the world. By presence is meant its values and impact. Jesus described his disciples as being "in the world but not of the world." However, it is the function of the Church which must reflect its relevance and impact in evangelizing the world - "Go ... into all the world...and make disciples."(Matthew 28:19,20)

What then could Carroll possibly mean in the above quote? Is the author promulgating that the Congregation's expression of its beliefs, development and

²³⁶Jackson W. Carrol, *et al.*, ed., Handbook of Congregational Studies (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 48.

implementation of its programs, organization and behaviour of its members are all influenced by the location? Do the people, politics, economics, values, and class interests of its setting exert irresistible and formative influences upon it? On the other hand, can the congregation through its religious faith tradition be a catalyst to initiate change through ideas and inspiration, beliefs and experiences, in order to permit it to transcend or resist negative and evil influences? Hopefully, these questions will be addressed in this chapter in the light of a survey that was conducted to examine the possible impact of modern societal mores on the attitudes of Church members toward Christian discipline.

Two areas of the Atlantic Provinces chosen for this purpose were the Annapolis Valley, Nova Scotia and the Saint John River Valley, New Brunswick. Traditionally the former has been described as theologically liberal, possibly implying a less conservative view of Scripture. The latter has been touted as the "bible belt", hence putatively more theologically conservative and likely to be stricter in views on Scripture for daily living. The general accuracy of these assessments is indicated by the results of the survey. Nonetheless, the most important facet of this quest is to determine the general consensus or mood of congregations concerning the ministry of Christian discipline as a necessary facet of the Church's ministry for maintaining a unique and distinctive existence in the world.

Based on the principles for questionnaire design by Seymour Sudman and

Norman Bradburn,²³⁷ Howard Schuman and Stanley Presser,²³⁸ and samples from the Center For Social And Religious Research,²³⁹ the particular design has been chosen (Appendix A). The format which begins with general biographical questions was intended to ease respondents toward the more demanding sections of the questionnaire. Contact was made with pastors by telephone in order to solicit their cooperation and questionnaires were delivered personally at a mutually acceptable time.

From the Saint John River Valley (NB) area 44 responses were received, whereas 76 were received from the Annapolis Valley (NS) region giving a total of 120 respondents, providing a 12% return of survey questionnaires from the 1,000 that were distributed. The majority of those surveyed believed that Christian (Church) discipline is for the Church today. The responses to the survey have been both encouraging and surprising. Stereotypes were challenged, perspectives corrected and views modified! Moreover, in each of the areas approximately ninety percent of the surveys picked up were returned, some included comments that further served to provide a more rounded profile of the respondents' perspective on the subject.

²³⁷Seymour Sudman and Norman M. Bradburn, Asking Questions (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1983).

²³⁸Howard Schuman and Stanley Presser, Questions and Answers in Attitude Surveys (New York: Academic Press, 1981).

²³⁹"Church Assessment Inventories" from Center For Social And Religious Research, Hartford Seminary, Connecticut. Samples of questionnaires for various congregational purposes provided excellent ideas on format.

NEW BRUNSWICK

The following comments were made in response to the question on the value of excommunication (Q# 20 in section on Discipline) in the Analysis of Surveys. These views were eloquently expressed on the "Comments are welcome" page of the questionnaire. Following are samples of such responses.

Respondent A: "There is [sic] some things in the church I don't agree with which hinders my becoming a member." This individual holds a very conservative view of Church membership and is in full support of Christian discipline where it is biblically sound and compassionately exercised. Unfortunately, she has refused to become a member because of personal observations and likely concerns with which she disagreed. That she still attends, proves the Church evidently is still meeting a specific need.

Respondent B: This individual rejects the possibility of effective "cut and dried" discipline, arguing that the uniqueness of each person makes it difficult. This view reflects the common danger of privatization of religion, whereby the good of the community is sacrificed for the pleasure or interest of the individual.

Respondent C: The "disciplined member may abstain from church attendance whereas if prayed for and loved, one such person may in time hear God's admonition and repent of all sin." The concern seems legitimate, but implicit "individualism" seems to rule out the "corporateness" of the Church wherein the members "have the

same care for one another" enough to lovingly confront and challenge each other to live a holy life.

Respondent D: "I think any sin which the individual is unwilling to deal with", forms the basis for Christian discipline. This person sees sin as serious and is seeking the biblical approach to discipline which focuses on the attitude rather than the sin.

Respondent E: "If no repentance, all or any [sin]" require the exercise of discipline to address the issue, according to this person. Also expressed was the impact that unaddressed sin has on the Church's witness in the community, since even the world expects certain standards whether spoken or unspoken.

Respondent F: "If they reject correction and continue in sin", such people are undoubtedly prime objects of discipline.

Respondent G: Discipline viewed as an indispensable ministry for both home and Church must be fairly and equally applied to all -"I believe that all members should be treated equal; no favouritism, loved or disciplined, regardless of status ...I believe more disciplined teaching tools should be given to parents today and that they would [sic] not spare the rod."

Respondent H: Perhaps the focusing of discipline based on the attitude (i.e., whether the person responds or not), rather than on the sin, removes the burden of categorizing sins, according to this respondent. "I have a real concern that the church not 'fasten' onto certain areas for action while totally ignoring other more 'acceptable' infractions."

These responses show that whether the Church is addressing the issue of "sin in the camp" or not, opinions prevail on what is permissible or prohibitive within the community of faith. Since these are only excerpts from the voluntary additional comment section of the questionnaire the analysis should prove quite illuminating.

NOVA SCOTIA

Analysis of Surveys (comments directed at excommunication; Q#20 Discipline)

Respondent A: In keeping with what the research of this thesis project has shown, this individual observes the need for formative Christian discipline whereby members have clear teaching about acceptable codes of conduct within the Christian community. Claiming that only upon failure of this should reformative discipline be applied, she states:

For many ... don't know or realize they were sins (e.g. gambling) and I feel the church needs to point out to them first, offer guidance, counsel, love and pray and only if all has failed and there is a complete lack of responsibility or care in the individual's part should removal of membership be done. The whole point of Christ's teaching was to bring sinners to saving grace (salvation) through Christ Jesus. Only when people rejected or put down God did Christ tell us to remove them from our fellowship.

Quite a remarkable and balanced view of the biblical approach to Christian discipline and particularly of excommunication, notwithstanding residency in the so-called "liberal theological belt".

Respondent B: "As we are all sinners I personally do not feel worthy of passing judgment on the members ...", expostulates one who concludes that Christian discipline is purely judgmental.

Respondent C: This individual pushes discipline somewhat further by pleading for those truly loyal to Christ to maintain doctrinal purity and refrain from involvement in quasi-religious groups, deemed inconsistent with faith, such as Free Masonry.

Respondent D: " Admonition first of course", was the cryptic comment of this person, and a very valid concern indeed.

Respondent E: "I think this area is often neglected in our churches today. In my recent experiences, many people (Christians) wish to ignore this area in fear of offending. This stifles the work of God in our lives and consequently in our churches and communities."

Respondent F: Quite perceptively, this person defined "judging" as that which is done before teaching occurs.

The majority of those who reject the ministry of discipline or are more cautious in embracing it were people over sixty five years of age.

Respondent G (Age 65-74): In the larger context of the response this person contends that prayer and not excommunication is the proper response to sin, the latter is seen as being "judgmental". However, this individual must be credited with insight to a very necessary step in implementing discipline:

The church is to assist us in becoming more Christ-like and should not be judgmental. Even though we would like to be like him, we are always striving for that ideal so we should be very careful before we exercise any discipline of others but pray for them instead.

Respondent H:(Age 75 years) This individual expresses concern regarding "conveyance of the discipline and its reception" by those to whom it is directed.

Another pertinent concern for the impact of discipline upon Church membership.

Respondent I (Age 65-74): This person states:

I believe and always have that if we could try our best to follow the Golden rule we would have less problems both in the church and outside. It is very easy to criticize the other person but if we go back to the Bible we will find Jesus said 'Let him that is without sin cast the first stone.' In order to help an individual we must not turn them away from the church but as a body of believers and Christ's followers we must try to lend them a helping hand.

The second part of this individual's response reveals the influence of extra-biblical literature on Christian world view. Illustrating how she successfully helped one person while failing in the other, she attested "the other I have tried and hope that in time it will right itself, with a lot of prayer, 'more things are wrought by prayer than this old world dreams of.'"

The incomplete, sketchy method of Scriptural support for the position is probably symptomatic of a chronic ignorance of biblical teaching which will be more evident later. This comment is made with consideration that the respondent could have used a Bible since the questionnaires were taken home for a two week period.

Respondent J (65-74): Perhaps this individual above all others reveals the dire need of biblical literacy. This individual constructed a patch work of Bible verses to reject the view of discipline as a valid ministry, finally concluding: "I understand the principle but I don't entirely agree that this is the best way to 'win back the individual'."

Respondent K (65-74): Christian discipline is condemned as "narrow and unChristlike." She observes that sins are unfairly categorized "adultery versus gossip:

discrimination based on colour, speech, poverty, seniors, disabled (especially mental)." This respondent contended that any serious attempts at practising discipline would likely reduce membership and put pastors out of work. The major proposition is to ask "What would Jesus do?"

Respondent L (75-up): Referring to the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son, this person issues a caveat stating that, although she believes discipline may be necessary at times,

[It] should be done in the spirit of love and kindness ... it is wrong to excommunicate members since God loves the sinner, but hates the sin. He alone has the authority to judge. Since Jesus is the Bread of life, turning people away would leave them with no recourse to this Bread.

Some younger respondents shared similar concerns about Christian discipline as a necessary ministry within the Church as the following comments reveal.

Respondent M (45-54): "Discipline in "today's church " unlike in cults would be ineffective since people would simply get new friends who accept their life style, and would turn around and blame the church." This view evidently overlooks or misunderstands regeneration and its ethical and moral impact on life conduct, that is, "church" is seen as a mere social gathering.

Respondent N (26-34): This respondent argued subjectively against the concept of Christian discipline contending that it could be potentially discouraging to the unconvrtd. Citing her own experience, she claimed that she was allowed to provide leadership even though unconverted at the time and often inebriated on arrival at Church to fulfil her duties. She concluded that had the leadership turned her away or

denied her of her duty, she might have never become a Christian. The individual's response illustrated the impact of subjective individualism and humanistic philosophy on Christian thinking. Interestingly enough there was no scripture reference to support her claims, nor did it enter discussion as to the influence her life style might have had on the group for good or evil. All conclusions were based on personal satisfaction rather than corporate benefits. One wonders whether she would now subject her own family to similar influences.

Respondent O (45-54): Major deterrents to the application of Christian discipline were listed as the low amount of offering, inability to pay the pastor's salary, and unwillingness to accept criticism or be accountable before God and others. It was concluded that corrective discipline is "forced accountability." It was further stated " I believe in most Churches, if we were to live truly as God instructs us to, and the minister to preach and teach God's word as it is written Church attendance would be very small."

Is this an indictment of the ministry of the current leadership of our Churches?

One that is concerned with numbers rather than spiritual nurture?

Respondent P (45-54): In the estimation of this individual, Christian discipline is judgmental and a trespass on divine jurisdiction: "I don't think anyone should be kept away from the church ... all people deserve God's love - only he knows what is in their hearts - we are to pray for the sinners of this world and not judge their sins - only God can do that."

Respondent Q (45-54): The concern is expressed that the whole counsel of God - inspired word of God , be preached faithfully in order to address needs of repentance and holy living.

These responses provide a panorama of the varied attitudes toward the practice of Christian discipline as a viable ministry for the Church today. The major observable concern is that of responsibility and accountability. Is it the responsibility of Christians to confront each other regarding sinful conduct or is this practice simply inappropriate and “judgmental”? Simultaneously, will the guilty individual respond positively and gratefully to such admonition and accept correction or reformation from the particular habit? According to several of the respondents most people would be offended and leave the Church since in their thinking only God has the right to judge. The implication appears to be that each person has the right to “live and let live”, even in the Church, thus any concept of living within a covenant relationship which binds the believer to others thereby making him or her accountable to others, has no meaning.

The following statistics from the survey serve as a representative indicator of the popularity of Christian discipline among Church members. The responses will hopefully show whether the apparent condition of apathy toward discipline in most congregations has influenced pastors and other lay and denominational leaders to avoid the issue, thinking that most congregations generally disapprove of it. On the other hand if there is such a disapproval, is it possibly due to a misunderstanding of

its salutary nature and purpose within the body of Christ?

ANALYSIS BY GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION²⁴⁰

The first surprise of this survey result between the two provincial areas somewhat dispelled the "bible belt"\' "liberal belt" myth, or at least brought it into question. Based on these theories it was hoped that there would have been a greater response to the questionnaires from the "bible belt" in (St. John River Valley) New Brunswick but Nova Scotia's "liberal belt" (Annapolis Valley) eclipsed them in response. More surprising, however, were the views about the Bible. Based on the question of whether they believe "the Bible is the inspired word of God, the authority in matters of faith and practice."(Question T9d), 70% of NSR agreed compared to 66% of NBR. Perhaps this reflects that the people of the Book are not as well informed as to the details of the Book. Overall the greater majority of respondents, 68% of all respondents from both areas, affirmed this view of Scripture.

Views on discipline have been equally revealing from the two areas. An average of 70% of those surveyed in the two Provinces believe that "every sin causes a break in one's relationship with God" (Question D1): 64% of NSR and 81% of

²⁴⁰For the purposes of brevity, "New Brunswick respondents" will be referred to simply as NBR and "Nova Scotia respondents" as NSR. Similarly, the abbreviated form for the questions is to be understood as follows: T = The Church as Community; D = Christian Discipline; M = Membership; B = Background; and C = Community. Therefore the reference T9d = question 9, sub-section d of "The Church as Community". See Appendix 1 for sample questionnaire.

NBR. On the question of whether private sin affects others (Question D2), 77% of NSR and 77% of NBR agree on this social impact of sin. Correspondingly, 60% of NSR and 72% of NBR disagree that personal sin is a private affair limited only to personal relationship with God (Question D3).

Regarding the necessary action to be taken by the Church in addressing the incidence of sin in the lives of Christians, 67% of NSR compared to 32% of NBR support personal admonition of these people (Question D4b). This small response from the "bible belt" must be taken together with another variable of the same question, that is, 27% of NBR prefers immediate suspension as compared to 7% of NSR respondents (Question D4e). This communal response to sin and the awareness of the value of admonition is further educed in the mutual support by both regions for joint action of deacons and pastor (Question D5d)-30% (NSR)/ 34% (NBR), followed by 22% and 25% respectively, favouring approach by a member aware of the situation (Question D5b), or else approach by the pastor (D5a) -15% and 11% respectively. Only 4% of NSR respondents thought the situation should be addressed only by deacons (D5c), while NBR completely rejected (0%) this option.

In terms of the clear mandate of Scripture in addressing ethical or moral issues (D6), 58% of NSR agree compared to 80% of NBR. This likely indicates one of two things, either the conservative or high view of scripture typical of the "bible belt", or a difference in understanding the application of Scripture.

Admonition then, as the means of prompting repentance, restoration and

forgiveness from God -D7 -(82% -NSR; 88% -NBR) and the Church fellowship -D8- (74% -NSR; 72% NBR), is supported by both regions. Both regions also highly esteem admonition as a biblical approach of personal involvement and compassionate concern for believers' growth in Christ-likeness -D10- (75% NSR; 84% NBR). Such approach is also endorsed as a display of God's continuing mercy and grace toward human failure in sin - D12- (89% NBR; 73% NSR). Generally, New Brunswick reflects a higher view of the Bible (70% NBR; NSR -60%) and Christian community (25% NBR; 22% NSR) seeing these as central to spiritual maturity. The Bible is also acknowledged as a necessary resource for discipleship in the discipline of Christian living -D14 - (77% NSR; 75% NBR).

Although they hold admonition in high regard, only a small majority of Nova Scotian and New Brunswick respondents agreed that rejection of admonition is tantamount to rejection of personal privileges - D18 - (40%NSR; 61%NBR) and responsibilities - D19 -(56% NSR; 66% NBR), the latter showing a slightly improved appreciation for this concept of discipline. Similarly, the excommunicative aspect of Christian discipline received a low response although reflecting a simple majority in favour of it as an appropriate step -D20 -(39%NSR; 61% NBR). Curiously enough, a considerably higher percentage of respondents in both regions nonetheless agree that excommunication is necessary, whenever admonition is deliberately rejected by erring members -D22-(46% NSR; 73% NBR). The conservative conscience of New Brunswick continues to be revealed in these responses, thereby giving credence to its

"Bible belt" image.

When asked what would be their major concern if this principle of discipline became a necessary recourse (D26), the following responses show the feeling about excommunication: Outdated (15% NSR; 5%NBR); will adversely affect the Church's reputation (21% NSR; 29%NBR); it is God's prerogative (32% NSR; 18% NBR); dangerous to personal rights (28% NSR; 25%NBR); judgmental (49% NSR; 52% NBR); causes conflict (37% NSR; 16% NBR). Would these people still support such a decision if necessary in spite of these concerns? The responses to the last two questions reveal the answer to this question.

Nova Scotian respondents (73%) and New Brunswick respondents (81%) convincingly attest that such concerns would not detract from the pursuit of excommunication as (D27), the extreme yet redemptive measure of discipleship, providing there is adequate assurance that it is consistent with biblical teaching - D28- (71% NSR; 81% NBR). Altogether Churches in New Brunswick seem more apt to implement the full measure of discipline wherever this is necessary and biblical, those in Nova Scotia seem more reserved in attempting the full range of discipline. Nevertheless both regions affirm the value and necessity of the full range of Christian discipline within the covenant community of faith. The following table shows the comparative combined totals of those who agree, against those who disagree, with this

aspect of ministry in the two areas surveyed.²⁴¹ (See questionnaire in Appendix I)

QUESTION	AGREED	DISAGREED
D1	70%	15%
D2	78%	6%
D3	20%	65%
D5 (responsibility to admonish) - 24%(did not answer); 14%(pastor); 23%(member); 3%(deacons); 32%(pastor & deacons); 4%(other). ²⁴²		
D6	66% (always)	20% (mostly)
D7	85%	3%
D8	73%	7%
D10	78%	3%
D12	78%	5%
D14	77%	4%
D18	48%	23%
D19	60%	18%
D20	48%	34%

²⁴¹The “Ignored” and “Don’t Know” categories have been removed for the purposes of this comparison.

²⁴²The variation of response to the ministry of pastor and deacons reveals a low confidence level in the lay ministry of deacons, perhaps raising the question about the congregation’s perception of the deacon’s role and the actual biblical understanding of it among Atlantic Baptists.

D22 56% 9%

D26 (concerns over excommunication) 12% (outdated); 24%(reputation);
27% (God's); 27% (rights); 4% (other); 50% (conflict).

D27 77% 3%

D28 76% 3%

It is evident from these cumulative totals that the ministry of Christian discipline in both its formative and reformatory aspects including the practice of excommunication where admonition fails, is favourably accepted by the greater majority of respondents. The remainder of this chapter will explore whether age, economics, gender, membership tenure, or spiritual maturity affects the decision of the respondents.

AGE

In this section on Age, the majority of respondents were in the 45-54 age range. However, there were both younger and older people covering the ages of those under 20 years right through to 75 and up, who responded to the questions.

Based on D1 regarding whether they believe every sin breaks fellowship with God, 71% said yes. Following is a breakdown of this group:

1 of 2 under 20 years supported the statement

2 of 2 between 21 - 25 years supported statement

9 of 9 between 26 - 34 years supported statement

23 of 24 between 35 - 44 years supported statement

21 of 28 between 45 - 54 years supported statement

15 of 19 between ages 55 - 64 supported statement

7 of 21 between ages 65 - 74 supported statement

7 of 15 between ages 75 - up supported statement.

Notably, those of the older age group, 65 and up, were more apt to disagree for reasons stated in the material quoted from the questionnaire earlier in this chapter (pp.104-112). The response is reflected on questions about the relational effect of sin against God and others showing that 78% believed private sin affects one's relationship with God while 65% believed private sin has communal effect on others. The ratio by age response shows no marked difference from the above table.

Although only 54% supported the concept of admonition regarding sinful conduct, the age range support remains consistent with the above table. The responses on D5 may be considered quite conservative with the general consensus on the pastor and deacons taking the responsibility to approach the errant individual. However, older members preferred a strictly pastoral approach to resolve the problem.

Based on question D22, 56% of respondents in the various age groups agreed that removal from membership was in order wherever admonition was rejected; 30% ignored the question, 9% disagreed 5% were non-committal-Don't Know. The age spread remained consistent with positive affirmation as per table below:

Under 20 years - 1 of 2 agreed

21 - 35 years - no response
26 - 34 years - 5 of 9 agreed
35 - 44 years - 13 of 24 agreed
45 - 54 years - 18 of 28 agreed
55 - 64 years - 13 of 19 agreed
65 - 74 years - 9 of 21 agreed
75 - up - 8 of 15 agreed

Again the trend of lower agreement from older members perhaps shows either a more cautious view or limited Bible knowledge among seniors concerning this ministry of Christian discipline. Probably, greater Bible knowledge would result in more informed support of Christian discipline in this 75 and up age group which claimed less exposure to teachings on discipline. Only 40% of this group acknowledged receiving teachings on discipline from the overall average of 67% (D23).

However, despite hesitancy and the fear of being accused of as "judgmental", the majority believed it to be necessary at times. Thus in response to question D27 an overwhelming 77% supported its value, reflecting an age range spread as follows:

Under 20 years 1 of 2 agreed
21 - 25 years - no response
26 - 34 years - 8 of 9 agreed
35 - 44 years - 22 of 24 agreed
45 - 54 years - 21 of 28 agreed

55 - 64 years - 17 of 19 agreed

65 - 74 years - 13 of 21 agreed

75 - up years - 10 of 15 agreed

Quite a positive response to a sensitive issue!

This responsiveness might also be seen in the openness to teaching where necessary (D28), to enlighten toward a proper understanding and practice of Christian discipline in accordance with Scripture. The response by each age group shows that age is no barrier to change of perspective since 76% of respondents reflect a consistent majority expressing a willingness to obey Scripture if so convinced of the biblical nature of this discipline. Comparison of the two areas showed similar support on D28 (81%NBR; 71% NSR).

GENDER

On the average, female respondents tended to be more reserved in their responses to disciplinary procedures, perhaps displaying a more compassionate approach. Males, on the contrary, more readily supported the concept of Christian discipline and its ramifications as the following chart shows. Probably these reflect the general tendency of females to be more communicative, patient and willing to talk through issues in quest of resolution rather than acting hastily. Perhaps it reflects their ability to be more compassionate and emotive, thereby displaying a greater affinity to interpersonal relationships (D10- 83% agree that in contrast to 69% males). Males are perhaps products of a male dominated society and therefore tend to be more

authoritarian in their approach to issues.

Gender / Discipline Responses

		% of Females	% of Males
D1	Agree	(68%)	(76%)
D2	Agree	(74%)	(87%)
D3	Disagree	(60%)	(76%)
D4b	Personal	(54%)	(53%)
D4e	Suspend	(17%)	(9%)
D5a	Pastor	(14%)	(13%)
D5b	Member	(22%)	(24%)
D5d	Pas.&Dea.	(33%)	(29%)
D6	Always	(69%)	(58%)
D6	Mostly	(14%)	(31%)
D7	Agree	(83%)	(89%)
D8	Agree	(74%)	(73%)
D10	Agree	(83%)	(69%)
D12	Agree	(82%)	(71%)
D14	Agree	(78%)	(76%)
D18	Agree	(47%)	(47%)
D20	Yes	(49%)	(44%)

D22	Agree	(60%)	(51%)
D27	Agree	(75%)	(80%)
D28	Agree	(74%)	(80%)

Membership Tenure

Length of years in Church membership (M2) appears to be a determining factor in perspective on Christian discipline. Although respondents who possessed longer memberships (71% - 10 to 19 years; 54% - 20 years up) displayed support for Christian discipline, the greater support came from those under nineteen years tenure. However, even after 91% of these long-time members acknowledged that discipline was necessary to preserve "the faith and witness" of the Church, yet they balked at the actual application of discipline, particularly in its extreme form of excommunication should the restorative overtures of admonition, 56% of them rejected this disciplinary measure. Probably it is a sign of commitment to relationships, though somewhat unhealthy, since 90% claimed that even conviction of the biblical basis for such discipline would not influence their decision against it.

Another concern of this section on Church Membership (D6) was to determine whether people's level of involvement within the congregation was linked with their views on Christian discipline. It was discovered that those who were most active responded with greater commitment to this ministry. Two significant areas of involvement that showed high support of Christian discipline were Bible study and

Sunday School. In the first group 54% of all respondents claimed they attended Bible study (M6A) and the majority of these gave responses consistent with a very high acceptance of discipline. In the case of rejected admonition (D20), it is the belief of 43% that excommunication is an appropriate response by the Church, and is also a valid principle in discipleship (D13 - 82%). They also favour this step where admonition has been deliberately rejected (D22 - 63%), and it is clearly biblical (D28 - 83%) even though it may cause some concern (D26 - 83%).

On the other hand there were 55% who claimed involvement in Sunday School (M6D). These also evince a consistently high acceptance of discipline (D20-83%) and resolve that the pastor and deacon (30%) be the vanguard of any admonition deemed necessary. Moreover, in spite of direct involvement in Christian education, 32% of these asserted no teaching on discipline, 53% could not recall any instances when it may have been exercised, and 41% were aware of cases when it might have been done but was not.

Attendance to worship services (M5) was also examined to see whether it had any effect on the member's view of discipline. It was discovered that the majority of those attending four or more times a month supported the general consensus on sin as a breach in both divine (D1-70%) and human relationships (79%). That the Church may personally admonish members for infractions, is the belief of 55% of these regulars; 34% of respondents support the pastor and deacons doing so, whereas 23% believe it to be the duty of another member aware of the situation. The greater

majority of these regular Church-goers acknowledge that the Bible has clear teachings on ethical and moral issues (D6 -64%) compared to the average (66%) between the two Provinces. Altogether those who attended Church four or more times monthly (64%) had a consistently higher acceptance of Christian discipline, compared to the average between the two Provinces (66%).

On the question of devotional exercises such as Bible study, prayer and fasting, and their usefulness for Christian growth and maturity (M7), 94% of the respondents agree that they are beneficial. Furthermore, the support of discipline remained consistently high with the rest of the survey results being of course the same people. In the most significant area of excommunication when admonition fails, for example,(D20) 49% of the respondents affirm it as a necessary recourse. In the case of members' deliberate rejection of counsel (D22), 59% of respondents support such action. This ratio rises significantly (D28 -76%) among those who claim support for it providing they are satisfied of its biblical basis. Even those who claim it will cause them some concern (D27-77%) as to its impact upon the Church, attested its probable necessity at times.

An examination was also made of those who acknowledged practising daily prayer and daily Bible reading as necessary devotional exercises and the influence this had on their attitude toward Christian discipline. The following results were revealed.

In response to the question of the practice of prayer (M8A), among those who agreed to its value, 48% highly supported the need for Christian discipline including

the extreme measure of excommunication where all else fails (D22) compared to the average between the Provinces (56%). Similarly, others admit to support of it in spite of serious concerns about its potentially negative impact upon the Church (79% - M8A/D27), especially if convinced of its biblical base (78% - M8A/D28).

However, those who read their Bibles daily also highly value discipline as displayed in their responses. Of the respondents who read daily (M8B) 54% supported the principle of excommunication where admonition fails (M8B-D20), compared to 56% average between the Provinces, while 39% of those who read weekly did the same. These people (MB8 - 62% daily; 53% weekly) also believe excommunication is particularly necessary when counsel is deliberately rejected (D22). So in spite of concerns about the impact of such action upon the Church, 76% of daily Bible readers and 80% weekly ones, support discipline especially if convinced of its biblical nature (81% and 67% respectively). One might be safe in concluding from this comparison of these two reading frequencies that the degree of involvement in devotional exercises influences the individual's response to Christian discipline. Interestingly, it does not show that a high level of interest and commitment to the Bible necessarily leads to unreserved acceptance of its teachings!

One area of vulnerability in Church administration has been the critical need of satisfying the "big givers" or staunch financial supporters. Hence issues that seem potentially detrimental to the budget were dexterously avoided unless or until these folks were on board. Whether factual or not, this impression exists among many.

Thus it was felt that a question on Stewardship (M10) be included on the questionnaire in order to determine the pervasiveness of this sentiment and its accuracy.

It has been discovered that Church members who gave magnanimously constitute the greater number of those with higher regard for discipline. For example the higher giving brackets reflect the highest percentage of those in support of discipline. Of those contributing \$1,000 - \$1,499 annually 65% agree that excommunication is best where admonition fails (D20); 50% of those in the \$2500 - \$3,499 bracket, as well as 63% of those in the \$3,500 and above range exhibit the highest support for discipline. The consistency of support also prevails in cases where admonition is deliberately rejected (D22): 75% in \$1,000 - \$1,499 bracket; 62% in the \$1,500 - \$2,499 bracket; 64% in \$2,500 - \$3,499 bracket; and 58% in \$3,500 and up bracket. The remarkable nature of this support is best evidenced in questions D27 & D28. In the former which deals with occasions that may demand the extreme measure of discipline, and even where it is a matter of serious concern respondents stood for discipline almost right across the "giving" spectrum: D27- 80% in the \$400 - \$599; 57% in the \$600 - \$799; 69% in the \$800 - \$999; 100% in the \$1,000 - \$1,499; 70% in the \$1,500 - \$2,499; 86% in the \$2,500 - \$3,499; 83% in the \$3,500, giving ranges. In the last four categories relating to D28, the ratio of support for biblically based discipline was 85%; 86%; 86%; and 82% respectively. Evidently, the reality of financial ruin is not as justified as some might make it out to be, instead the need for

proper education is accentuated, since respondents seem more confident and supportive with the knowledge that the procedure is biblical.

The section on Community (C8) was included to discover how Church and society influence each other as well as to discern whether Christian beliefs are usually carried over into social relationships outside the realm of the Church. In response to the question regarding involvement and responsibility in one's conduct in community, it was discovered that the same expectations for Church life were applied to community life. For example, 74% of those who agreed that it is appropriate to submit to the penalty for any infraction against community mores, also acknowledge sin affects relationship with God, by a margin of 70%. This same high consistent average of responses holds for the entire survey on this particular question, showing that Christians' beliefs do tend to affect their lifestyles and attitudes towards even secular laws. This implies submission to an accepted community standard of behaviour by those within its boundaries.

Similarly, membership in the body of Christ entails the acceptance of and commitment to given stipulations intended to regulate conduct through submission to certain responsibilities and privileges. Such stipulations might be referred to as a Church covenant. It was therefore explored to discover whether the possession of a covenant or lack of it influenced the views of Christian discipline. Respondents who claimed the existence of a covenant in their congregations (T1- 70%) also supported the concept and practice of Christian discipline within the Church (D28 - 78%). An

average of 72% of respondents (D1, D2, D3) acknowledge that sin has both vertical and horizontal spiritual effects in the believers' lives thereby resulting in breach of relationships with both God (D1-69%) and others (D2 -79%). Although this group of 77% supports admonition as a biblical principle in discipline based on question D10 and accept it as beneficial to the preservation of faith and witness - D13 (90%), they do exhibit a tentative approach toward excommunication-D18, D20 (48%). Subsequently, though the respondents affirm its necessity at certain times, hesitantly at first -D22 (55%), they are yet inclined to biblical obedience as displayed by the considerable increase in percentage points in D27 (79%) and D28 (78%) favouring excommunication should the need arise. Overall the possession of a covenant seems to foster a higher sense of discipline.

Another challenged assumption was the view that liberal secular education undermines biblical faith. Perhaps the evidence points more to a general hesitancy to endorse biblicism since some post-graduates tended to disagree with the statement (D6) that the Bible is always the source for clear teaching on ethical and moral issues unlike others who generally agree that it does:

82% of those with less than high school agreed that it always provides such teaching.

63% of those with high school agreed ...

76% of those with trade or vocational training agreed ...

61% of those with college degree agreed ...

46% of those with post-graduate studies preferred to say the bible "mostly ", compared to 38% who claimed it always provide clear teaching on ethical and moral issues.

In spite of this reservation, post-graduates rank highest among supporters of the occasional need for excommunication within the Church (92% - D27, D28) next to pre-high school (88%- D27; 94% - D28), providing it is convincingly biblical.

SUMMARY

The findings discussed in this chapter have been informative and exciting. Undoubtedly, there is general awareness, concern and conviction that the Church is and should clearly reflect its nature as a disciplined community of faith. Such a community possesses standards and practices that distinguish it from the secular realm. Respondents agree that Christian discipline is the appropriate and biblical response to prevent and correct any breach of these standards.

Based on the questions concerning the influence of personal, social, economic, spiritual contexts on one's views on discipline, the majority of responses show a consistent support across the board. The results of the survey show that there is significant support for the practice of the ministry of Christian discipline within the local Church.

In all of it there was a willingness to care for one another to the extent of a readiness to admonish or remove from fellowship should the need arise in order to

facilitate repentance and restoration. Meanwhile, Christian education surfaces as a great resource in breaking the silence on discipline in the local congregation. The possibilities of this ministry are observed among respondents who worship regularly and practised such formative disciplines as Bible study and prayer. They showed consistently higher regard for discipline.

An area that shows potential for further study or research is the level of variance between male and female attitudes towards discipline as discerned from their responses. Women showed greater readiness to practise admonition and less inclination toward removal when compared to men. Perhaps this shows a great strength and tremendous resource among females for the ministry of pastoral care and counselling.

Probably, the greatest need revealed through this chapter is the need for intentional leadership that is in tune with the mood and maturity level of congregations in order to give clear directions on the principles of disciplined Christian living in accordance with Scripture. The following chapters will explore some of the barriers to this ministry, as well as suggest some methods for the renewal or establishment of Christian discipline in the local congregation.

CHAPTER IV

BARRIERS TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE IN TODAY'S CHURCH

Perhaps the major observable barrier to implementing or emphasizing Christian discipline in the Church today is the influence of individualism within the Church. In this aspect of ministry Jackson W. Carrol *et al.* are probably right when they observe that societal values often impact the Church. In this chapter the truth of this sentiment is examined in the light of certain issues being raised concerning Christian discipline that intimidate the Church against performance of this vital ministry.

John Stott identifies three major barriers to the practice of discipline: a) Failure to see it in the larger context of training in godliness, involving preaching, teaching and intimate fellowship; b) the Western mind-set of individualism which is opposed to the corporateness of God's people - the belongingness of Christians to each other; and c) Fear of criticism and of legal problems.²⁴³ One respondent to the questionnaire affirms Stott's third point about fear being a hindrance in implementing discipline.

²⁴³Stott, 28-30, and *passim*.

The individual states: "I think this area is often neglected in our churches today. In my recent experiences, many people (Christians) wish to ignore this area in fear of offending. This stifles the work of God in our lives and consequently in our communities." This individual certainly sees the benefit of this ministry for the wider witness of the gospel. However, even though many expressed great fear of being labelled "judgemental" (D26F - average 50%), others did regard discipline in the context of training in godliness, fellowship (D1- 70%; D2-77%) and proclamation (D6 - 66%; D13- 78%). These responses either echo or contradicted Stott's views on the reasons why discipline is rare in the Modern Church. Mark Littleton adds that uncertainty of which sins to address and lack of successful discipline models among other things, hamper the practice of Christian discipline. He further asserts that discipline in its proper community context can be seen as a mark of a God-glorifying fellowship of believers.²⁴⁴ These concerns for discipline will be elucidated in the succeeding discussion.

Individualism, Corporateness and the Law

These three areas seemed to be the bases for much fear and avoidance of the ministry of Christian discipline, and rightly so since they pose certain challenges and demand critical thought of those who would implement or execute such a ministry.

²⁴⁴Mark R. Littleton, "Church Discipline: A Remedy for What Ails the Body", *Christianity Today*, 8 May 1981, 30-33.

The following discussion is intended to examine the impact of these on the Church that dares to discipline.

“Invasion of privacy” has become the most common charge against the Church when it attempts to institute discipline within its ranks (D26d- 27%, average between Provinces). This charge shows a definite misunderstanding of the corporate nature of Church membership, a lack of appreciation for life in community, and a rejection of accountability for those who join in covenant relationship with others of common faith. Fortunately, this sentiment is not as pervasive as one might be led to believe. In fact there is a strong sense of community within the Church, which reflects people's sense of interrelatedness to one another. For example in response to the questions on whether "private sin" affects others (D 2), 77% of the respondents in each of the regions (NB & NS) affirm that it does. Similarly 60% of NSR and 72% of NBR disagree that "private sin" affects one's relationship with God only (D3).

Nonetheless, it is this concept of individualism which seems to fuel resistance against discipline in Churches while empowering courts to act as defenders of apparently wronged citizens. Both clergy and lay members seem attracted to this loophole in the attempt to circumvent the effect of Christian discipline. Consequently, such legal challenges are apparently becoming a major threat and deterrence to those who regard discipline as an integral part of the Christian ministry.

An illustration of this is seen in the case of one pastor who was excluded from fellowship and active ministry because of adultery. He initially admitted guilt and

voluntarily resigned his position, but later appealed the congregation's decision claiming it to be an "invasion of his private life". The Quebec Court overruled his appeal arguing that "he was in a special class of professionals with special obligations and as such a private resignation was not sufficient." Thus even as his entrance in the ministry was public (ordination) so ought to be his removal. The court further stated:

In fact there are certain professions which can only be exercised if those who exercise them are answerable to and guaranteed by respected and respectable authorities. To be a priest, pastor or rabbi, is not the same as to be a vendor of peanuts. The exercise of such professions carries with it the obligation to respect the standards of the religious authorities concerned, failing which one's credentials may be removed. And it is not sufficient to resign in order to avoid the withdrawal of credentials; the withdrawal of such credentials is just as public as their granting through ordination or otherwise. For example, it is common that the bar publishes notices of radiation [disbarment] in case of members of the bar who have contravened the profession's code of ethics."²⁴⁵

On the other hand there are those "fallen" pastors who readily submit to discipline for the purpose of restoration, the ultimate goal of reformatory discipline. One pastor acknowledged the particular standard of moral conduct for clergy, thereby affirming accountability as an indispensable characteristic of covenant relationship. He admitted "stepping over the bounds of acceptable behaviour" by his repeated involvement in sexual contact with several females. Having voluntarily resigned, he also accepted suspension from active ministry, restriction on his movements within the bounds of Presbytery as well as submission to continual therapy sessions.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵Terrance Steven Carter, "A Legal Analysis of Church Discipline in Canada" in CCCC Bulletin Update, 1 May, 1994, 1-3.

²⁴⁶News, "Reagan's former minister suspended D. D. Moomaw" in Christian Century, 22-29 March, 1995, 322.

Unfortunately, the same standards and expectations required for clergy seem absent from cases involving laity. Members can get court judgments or even out-of-court settlements in their favour against the congregation, as the following case reveals.

Marian Guinn moved into Collinsville, Oklahoma, with her children, perhaps in quest of a new beginning. Through her sister's encouragement she soon became an active member of the congregation of Church of Christ. Things took a nasty turn when the elders sought to excommunicate her for rejecting admonition to end an adulterous and publicly known relationship with a former mayor of the town. Following legal advice the disgruntled member sued her Church for "inflicting emotional distress and invasion of privacy." She was awarded \$490,000 in actual and punitive damages.²⁴⁷ One is left to wonder whether the cause of justice was truly served or whether a secular law court had usurped the sacred privilege of the Church and invaded the sanctum and biblical precincts of the covenant community of faith. Similarly, a California woman named the pastor and six elders of the Fairview Church of Christ in Garden Grove as defendants in a lawsuit because of similar attempts at administering Church discipline against her. Meanwhile, Church insurance in some cases has escalated drastically into million dollar policies in order to accommodate malpractice actions relating to pastoral care and counselling.²⁴⁸ Such situations will

²⁴⁷J. Carl Laney, "Church Discipline Without a Lawsuit," Christianity Today, 9 November 1984, 76.

²⁴⁸Ibid.

surely intimidate congregations from practising such a ministry.

It might be argued that the courts would be hesitant to apply the same procedures to members as is done to pastors, since members' lives are not as public as that of pastors. However, one may retort that the experience of members in such rites as baptism, communion, reception into fellowship, and acceptance of covenant responsibilities and privileges are just as public as the ordination and induction of pastors. In fact these occur in the presence of others including fellow members, family, friends and visitors; not to mention denominational and sometimes secular media coverage. The hesitancy of the court may possibly be based on the erroneous view of pastors having a different level of moral accountability, a concept foreign to the body of Christ. Paul said "follow me as I follow Christ." The major point of distinction between pastors and members is that the former is in a profession and the latter in volunteer service. Thus unlike members, pastors could be accused of abusing a position of influence. But beyond this distinction both parties should subject themselves to Christian discipline.

According to Terrance Carter, the Canadian court's main concern in reviewing such cases is whether certain basic principles of justice were satisfied, such as i) carrying out the disciplinary act according to the applicable rules of the group; ii) the enforcing of the rules according to the principles of natural justice (meaning, the provision of due notice of said action, opportunity to make representations, and presence of an unbiased tribunal); and, iii) clear indication that said action was not

motivated by personal vendetta by those executing the disciplinary act, but rather it is being exercised with beneficent intention for the individual involved.²⁴⁹ J. William Fuller's interpretation of I Timothy 5:19-25, apart from other conclusions, shows that if the congregation abides by the biblical method of discipline then indeed natural justice would be served. Its allusion to the Old Testament triad of witnesses as a necessary prerequisite to disciplinary action (Deuteronomy 19:15-20) against any accused is identical to the recommendations of Matthew 18:15-21, emphasizing both fairness or justice, godly fear, and subsequent accountability.²⁵⁰

It would seem that for a smooth and effective application of discipline there must be much education about the basis of Christian fellowship especially of the covenant concept of congregational life and the development of written guidelines (cf. Carter above). In spite of the apparent individualism plaguing the Church, there yet exists within in its ranks a positive view and support for it as a covenant community.

Several authors claim that individualism is sociologically and theologically foreign to Christian fellowship. They argue that it is illogical to belong to the Church and yet make the charge of "invasion of privacy", since this is inconsistent with Christian discipline.

Beverly R. Gaventa states that discipline is indispensable to the *koinonia* of the

²⁴⁹Carter, "Church Discipline Update," 5 May, 1994, 1-3.

²⁵⁰J William Fuller, "Of Elders and Triads in I Timothy 5:19-25," New Testament Studies, April 1983, 260.

Church life. It demands a “costly forthrightness,” and candid concern to the extent of shunning by the entire community if it fails in attempts at attaining the desired goal of admonition - the individual’s restoration. Gaventa interprets the Matthean pericope on discipline as an expression of radical inclusion as indicated by the “seventy times seven” forgiveness principle.²⁵¹

Since the emphasis within the Church is on the individual in relation to others (I Corinthians 12), any court which addresses the issue of “invasion of privacy” must earnestly seek to understand and respect the uniqueness of the Christian fellowship and its distinctiveness from other organizations if it is to judge rightly in decisions concerning discipline. Similarly, the congregation must appreciate, uphold and promote within its ranks the uniqueness of its nature and mission from all other organizations in the world. A distinctiveness which assimilates people of diverse races, cultures, status, class and backgrounds into a mystical body indwelt by and bound together by the Holy Spirit; have become “no more two but one new man, having broken down the dividing wall of hostility” which formerly separated them. This Pauline statement in Ephesians 2 evidently emphasizes a corporateness which transcends individuality and makes all participants responsible for personal actions and accountability to others for the consequence of such actions.

Stanley Hauerwas identifies reasons for this misunderstanding of fellowship

²⁵¹Beverly R. Gaventa, “Costly Confrontation,” in Christian Century, 11-18 August, 1993, 773.

by those who charge the Church with "invasion of privacy". The Church, he states, is presently regarded as a consumer item within which discipline is inconsistent, because "the buyer is not to be punished". This "market place" perspective of the Church demands that it confine itself to a ministry of care and compassion, voluntarism and friendliness. Unfortunately, these qualities eclipse accountability which is a necessary component of community and contradicts the secular view of individualism and its emphasis on personal rights.

According to Reginald Bibby there is a positive side to this "consumer" perspective of the Church since it can take advantage of the religious basis of such rites of passage as birth, baptism, puberty, marriage and death, and turn them from ends in themselves to opportunities for evangelism. Moreover, in the light of the culture's preoccupation with death and the after life, the Church can also utilize its distinctive means of speaking to culture by providing clear statements about hopes and expectations beyond the present realm of reality.²⁵² This leaves the Church with the major challenge of being a disciplined community in an individualistic society, and subsequently imposes on it the task of educating its membership concerning its corporate nature and accountable responsibility. Hauerwas stipulates:

Discipline, morality ... are learned characteristics... Training is important because it involves the formation of the self through submission to authority that will provide people with virtue necessary to make reasoned judgment... In order to be moral, to acquire knowledge about what is true and good, a person has to be made into a particular kind of person. Therefore

²⁵²Reginald W. Bibby, Fragmented Gods (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1987), 238, 250.

transformation is required if one is to be moral at all. In short, no account of moral life is intelligible that does not involve some account of conversion ... especially conversion from [secular] liberal convictions.²⁵³

Hauerwas' article is a fresh and exciting interpretation of what it means to be Christian, not merely on the basis of beliefs embraced but also on account of one's active and intentional response to Christ's call to become disciples and members of "a different community with a different set of practices". He affirms the need for people to be grafted into a community of faith where there is strong emphasis on formative discipline which first enlightens believers about sinful finiteness of humanity and their place in God's plan as objects of unmerited forgiveness. Furthermore, he shows the link between morality and worship emphasizing that the former becomes real and relevant in the light of the latter.

This rising battle for jurisdiction over the issue of discipline between the law courts and the Church is well illustrated by the Moravian Brethren. The application of discipline within this group might seem extreme to outsiders, particularly those unaccustomed to communal lifestyle with its obligation to accountability unlike the individualistic world view.

Elisabeth Sommer discussed the clash of cultures between the German idea of liberty in community versus American libertinism and individualism in a society which is becoming more common within the Church. Because the religious group utilized

²⁵³Stanley Hauerwas, "Discipleship as a Craft, Church as a Disciplined Community" Christian Century, 2 October, 1991, 881-84.

Matthew 18:15-21 as the basis of community discipline, the author's conclusions are significant for an appreciation of the concept of discipline within community.

“Spiritual freedom” as the basic goal of community discipline implied “submission to the good of the whole and obedience to Christ as literal Lord of the community.”²⁵⁴ Whereas a disciplined community may be regarded as a rigid and joyless experience to be shunned in place of libertinism or the freedom to do as one pleases, Sommer sees it otherwise. She contends:

In a sense, the statutes ... served as a specific blueprint for life in the baptized town. The Salem statutes [patterned after a European model] encompassed both the life of the Spirit and the life of the flesh. They provided a measure by which to discipline human weakness, but they were drawn up for a people in whom the Holy Spirit was assumed to be working towards sanctification and providing continual strength to resist evil. Under these circumstances, all activity was to be guaranteed by a spirit of brotherly love. The statutes held no room for renegade individualism; and little room for conflict.²⁵⁵

However, the application of these principles was resisted by succeeding generations exposed to the American influence of individualism. Consequently, even where the extreme measure of shunning or excommunication was meted out on those refusing to submit to community discipline in the effort to restore them, some preferred to voluntarily abstain from communion or withdraw from membership to frustrate the goal of discipline.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴Elisabeth Sommer, “A Different kind of Freedom? Order and Discipline among the Moravian Brethren in Germany and Salem, North Carolina 1771-1801” Church History, June 1994, 221.

²⁵⁵Ibid, 224.

²⁵⁶Ibid, 226-27.

Bibby posits that the new generation is likely influenced by the American secular pluralistic world view which rejects conservative religion as extreme and repressive.²⁵⁷ Consequently, he contends that if the Church is to fulfil its transformative function it must speak out prophetically and unequivocally on such issues as law, war and compassion, education, gender roles and, the present writer would add, systemic racism. If the Church speaks clearly on justice it would increase its waning credibility and encourage more people to appeal to the Church for decision making and meaningful evaluation instead of to the secular system. Bibby claims:

Life's questions and previous mysteries are dealt with pretty much by resorting to the physical and social sciences, the humanities and medicine ... The ultimate questions concerning the meaning of life and death are seen as interesting, but beyond resolution; one's attention is best given to more practical and pressing concerns. Religion neither tends to integrate life nor inform behaviour.²⁵⁸

The Church is therefore challenged to speak without continuing the mere echoing of or catering to culture. Bibby insists that the Church's unique role mandates a unique message: "In very few instances do we find signs that religion speaks with a unique voice and is having a unique impact. When religion is relegated to the status of a consumer item, it clearly transforms few lives."²⁵⁹

The impact of individualism within the Church is also credited to other issues.

²⁵⁷Bibby, 57.

²⁵⁸Reginald W. Bibby, *Unknown Gods*, (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co. Limited, 1993), 62.

²⁵⁹Ibid.

It is alleged that Revivalism and its emphasis on individual salvation in conjunction with the Enlightenment and its emphasis on self-fulfilment seriously eroded the communal aspect of fellowship in the first part of the twentieth century. The rights of the individual were being championed through such emphases as "self-realization", "self -fulfilment", "self-gratification" and "self-confidence". These themes were popularized in the Protestant tradition through the sermons, writings and teachings of Harry Emerson Fosdick and Norman Vincent Peale at Union Theological Seminary.²⁶⁰

In his book Christianity in Progress, Fosdick secularizes the doctrine of sin describing it as "not having oneself together" rather than as rebellion against God. Subsequently, salvation becomes a subjective matter of self effort and perpetual change into a "real person" through self-discovery, self-acceptance, and self-love instead of the objective experience of forgiveness and regeneration into a new person by God's power.²⁶¹

Norman Vincent Peale promulgated a similar doctrine of the "self" in his book The Power of Positive Thinking. Notions such as "believe in yourself", "have faith in your abilities" and "self-confidence leads to self-realization and successful achievement" were soon popularised.²⁶²

²⁶⁰Paul C. Vitz, Psychology as Religion, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 68,70,71.

²⁶¹Ibid, 72.

²⁶²Ibid, 100.

According to Paul Vitz, these emphases either undermined or grossly distorted Christian doctrine about humanity: "The basic Christian concept of the unique importance of the self was stripped of its theological justification - [resulting] in traditional spiritual concepts as the Christian self in prayer, contemplation, obedience, mysticism -in faith, atrophied in twentieth century Protestantism."²⁶³ He further contends that this idealistic goal of self-theory which attempts honest self-evaluation without the restraint of sensible limits and moral responsibility, unfortunately resulted in degeneration "into a self-gratifying narcissistic world".²⁶⁴ Concerning the malevolent impact of this unhealthy emphasis on the "self", Vitz further charges:

In gratifying our biological hunger we often devour ourselves and others ... [it is a] well documented psychological principle that the adaptation level for pleasure (on the level for optimal stimulation by our environment) constantly moves up with experience. The "relativity of pleasure" pushes people to more and more extreme situations just to keep the level of pleasure constant.²⁶⁵

Other proponents of the "cult of self-worship" include Erich Fromm, Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow and Rollo May were influenced by Ludwig Feuerbach's The Essence of Christianity. In a critique of Maslow's fifth principle - creativity - in his hierarchy of human needs, C.S. Lewis condemns it as a poison of subjectivism:

Unless we return to the crude and nursery-like belief in objective values, we perish ... while we believe that good is something that could be invented, we demand of our rulers such qualities as "vision", "creativity", "dynamism" ... If we returned to the objective view we should demand qualities much rarer and

²⁶³Ibid, 101.

²⁶⁴Ibid, 101.

²⁶⁵Ibid, 40.

much more beneficial ..."virtue", "knowledge", "diligence" and "skill".²⁶⁶

Paul Vitz's arguments show the influence of society through the Enlightenment and its impact on individual freedoms and human rights resulting in gradual erosion of the faith community's authority over its members. Perhaps the importance of conversion is seen, as opposed to mere conforming to a system of beliefs reveals the need for a determined and dedicated paradigm of discipleship training which provides models of both formative and reformatory discipline. The need for such intentional education is illustrated in the well known work by William Kilpatrick entitled Why Johnny Can't tell Right from Wrong.

The first chapter affirms the necessity of moral character formation as prerequisite in moral and ethical decision making. The author reviews the astounding impact of the popular value-free education system which is based purely on individualism as expressed by one student who asserted that:

Moral values cannot be taught and people must learn to use what works for them. In other words, "whatever gets you through the night, it's alright. The essence of civilization is not moral codes but individualism ... The only way to know when your values are getting sounder is when they please you more".²⁶⁷

Such a view jettisons the examples and values of human history and ignores the gregarious nature of humanity and the mutual influence on one another. Similarly, the doctrine of sinful human nature is rejected and people are assumed to be basically

²⁶⁶C.S. Lewis, Christian Reflections (London: Geoffrey Bles., 1967), 81.

²⁶⁷William Kilpatrick, Why Johnny Can't Tell Right From Wrong (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 22.

good. In opposition to this rank individualism, Kilpatrick recommends the return to the reading of good literature and the support of culture in moral formation: “ Reading and listening to the right sort of stories creates a primitive emotional attachment to behaviour that is good and worthy; it implants a love and desire for virtue in the child’s heart and imagination; it helps prevent moral blindness.”²⁶⁸

Bibby agrees that secularization and pluralism are the forces behind the efforts of academics and the media to promote relativism as the bond of multiculturalism. Those who hold this position assert that all philosophies are of equal worth, hence truth is relative; a position accepted by the general public. In 1990, 65% of Canadian adults endorsed the idea that everything is relative; 50% agree that right or wrong is a matter of personal opinion; 65% of youth embraced this view in 1992.²⁶⁹

Therefore Kilpatrick affirms the biblical emphasis on education with home and community support as something integral to spiritual and moral formation (Deut. 6:1-7; Psalm 119:11). One African proverb says, it takes an entire village to raise one child! Kilpatrick concurs with this saying for “ultimately, character education is the responsibility of the whole culture.”²⁷⁰

Kilpatrick also rightly campaigns for the reclamation of educational terrain which has suffered from the ravages of the Rogerian and Maslowian “value-free”

²⁶⁸Ibid, 267.

²⁶⁹Bibby, Unknown Gods, 67.

²⁷⁰Ibid, 26.

emphasis that have been destructive to the principles of vision and virtue. He argues that vision is the understanding of purpose and pursuit whereby schools create a “positive moral environment” fostering exposure to such virtues as pride, loyalty and discipline.²⁷¹ This eventually facilitates the development of citizens with personal integrity since “A knowledge of the virtues -prudence, justice, courage and temperance - provide a standard by which opinions and feelings can be measured. A student who has begun to understand them can more accurately weigh moral arguments.”²⁷² The counterpart to this is the influence of modern psychology in its emphasis on “individuation and separation” which together with television has been devastating to moral sensibilities. It is stated that “It [television] defines morality, shapes sense of reality, interprets world events, conferring or denying significance according to whim or political correctness, promotes premarital or extra-marital sex and ignores or downplays religion.”²⁷³

Another subtle and insidious impact of this “value-free” system is the tendency to avoid personal responsibility for moral decisions and to refuse to be held accountable to others. It is rather ironic that, in the quest for so-called “individuation and separation”, individuals persist in blaming their faults on parents or others. Take the case of one pastor being confronted for sexual abuse of female members of his

²⁷¹Ibid, 226, 227.

²⁷²Ibid, 243.

²⁷³Ibid, 264.

congregation. In defence of his position he contended that:

[W]hen he was a kid ... his family had been sexually repressive and that he was determined as an adult to overcome that and make sure it didn't happen to other people, and help people appreciate their sexuality ... He did a lot of sex education in the community, and was known for that. ... [He] did counsel many women about their sexual problems, and that he just really wanted to help women fulfill their sexuality and experience orgasm and know themselves fully as sexual beings.²⁷⁴

In effect he was implying personal innocence thereby charging his guilt to his family of origin and portraying himself as an object of victimization due to growing up in a "sexually repressive" family.

If indeed secular schools need a revitalization in the educational system regarding morals and values, how much more the Church as a community of faith needs to reassess the impact of its teachings upon its members. It is a clear argument for consistency, clarity and particularity in teaching the principles of the faith. The Church, therefore, must be absolutely convinced of the need of Christian education as a major factor in spiritual formation and discipling in its ministry.

The home too is challenged by Kilpatrick to be a partner in this war for moral reformation.

Both plants and people grow best when a good environment has been prepared for them. For the youngest and most tender plants the best environment is a greenhouse. It gives them a head start: upon being transplanted, such plants are larger, stronger, and more resilient to disease than other plants. Children need similar protection and nurturing for healthy moral development... The child brought up in a good home environment would be stronger, healthier,

²⁷⁴Lewis Rambo, "Interview with Reverend Marie Fortune, August 8, 1990" Pastoral Psychology, (1991), 310.

and more resistant to various moral diseases circulating in larger culture.²⁷⁵

Religion, discipline and a Christian work ethic form solid pillars in homes where moral and spiritual development are inextricably linked. Religion of itself facilitates a vision by which the individual develops commitment and learns to make sacrifices for the benefit of others.

These arguments bolster the concern of this thesis project that the Church take seriously the responsibility of providing a good solid foundation in Christian training to new believers, and indeed all believers so that they may be equipped to make firm moral decisions and ethical choices in a secular and humanistic society. This first stage would be regarded as formative discipline which is the necessary foundation and repository in the eventuality of reformatory discipline.

Tom Price argues strongly for this pro-active method of ministry, emphasizing that formative discipline helps build fellowship so that when reformatory discipline needs to be exercised it will be more effective. Commenting on the legal ramifications and effectiveness of Church discipline as currently practised, he asserts:

Our efforts have been to develop a theology of disfellowship before we have ever discussed a theology of fellowship ... We need to put focus on having the right kind of relationship. If we do it, there will be less need to withdraw fellowship. Or if we have to withdraw it, at least there will be something to withdraw.²⁷⁶

Based on the comments made by some respondents and the arguments used

²⁷⁵Kilpatrick, 256.

²⁷⁶ Tom Price, "Church Discipline and Reconciliation," *Christian Century*, 29 July - 5 August, 1992, 703.

against excommunication or any disciplinary action for that matter, Price's evaluation is timely and significant. There needs to be a deliberate, intentional and positive training program in place in every congregation regarding the benefits, rights, responsibilities and privileges of Church membership, or else that faith community should not attempt to implement a principle that is foreign or unfamiliar within its ranks. The right to discipline is secondary to the responsibility to teach! Moreover, it is evident that in spite of the best efforts of the Church to educate before it excommunicates, there will still be those who challenge its right to do so. Also it has been observed by the present writer that the process of discipline has been short-circuited and frustrated because of a lack of communication and cooperation between neighbouring congregations often of similar denomination or doctrinal views. The one under discipline can find a place of fellowship with no questions asked about background or experience. In his comments about other impediments to discipline, Jeschke points out that the emphasis upon counselling, although valuable, rarely addresses such concerns as guilt, confession, forgiveness, and restoration in an effective way. Simultaneously, the high incidence of independent Churches and para-Church organizations which have little or no discipline, allow discipline-dodgers easy access into their fellowship.²⁷⁷

However, it will take not only excellent teaching to equip the Church to do its ministry but also exceedingly great courage. It is for those who dare to be radically

²⁷⁷Jeschke, 148-50, and passim.

faithful and trustingly dependent on the words of Him who said:

Happy are those who are persecuted because they do what God requires: the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!

Happy are you when people insult you and persecute you and tell all kinds of evil lies against you because you are my followers. Be happy and be glad, for a great reward is kept for you in heaven. This is how the prophets who lived before you were persecuted. ... I tell you: do not take revenge on someone who wrongs you. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, let him slap you on the left cheek too. And if someone takes you to court to sue you for your shirt, let him have your coat as well. (Matthew 5:10-12,39,40; Good News Bible ;TEV)

Paul in a similar exhortation encouraged the Corinthian Church to avoid secular law courts and strive in the wisdom of the Spirit to settle their differences (ch.6). Probably, a major part of this “out-of-court” settlement of disputes and or disciplinary problems rests upon the proper education of God’s people concerning their privileges and responsibilities as a covenanting people. The next chapter therefore is dedicated to a proposal to initiate or revitalize discipline within the Church with a view to standing in a court of the King’s making rather than the human law court for accountability.

Yet if the Church is faced with a lawsuit it may plausibly contend that any person who habitually and deliberately refuses to identify with the disciplined life of the community by continually rejecting its counsel to reform his or her personal ways, negatively affects the corporate life of the congregation. Consequently, that body has the right to protect itself and its reputation by whatever pre-arranged and mutually accepted means necessary. In fact it would be a strong position of the Church, in the event of being brought before a court of law, to emphasize in its defence its good

intentions directed at securing the restoration rather than the removal of the individual from the fellowship pending sincere repentance. Thus, insistence on voluntary resignation or personal withdrawal therefrom should only logically result in the Church's formal acknowledgment of the person's decision which then logically proceeds to disfellowshipping of the person as a mutual agreement. Disfellowshipping or excommunication at this stage would indicate the admission that the principles upon which the original relationship was founded have now been abrogated. However, it is evident from the foregoing discussion that a program of teaching or discipling is integral to preparing the Church to be an effective disciplined community. Thus, in any proposal for change, teaching must be paramount.

Summary

In preparing to examine proposals for change it is fitting to rehearse the difficulties that must be overcome as discussed above. As a result of the impact of individualism and human rights to which the law appeals to redress a perceived wrongful disciplinary measure by the Church, three major barriers impede the practice of Christian discipline in the local congregation. The first is fear of being regarded as "judgemental". However, it is clear from Scripture that believers are empowered to be discerning of each other's lifestyle in keeping with the principles of Christian conduct. The second barrier is the risk of legal suits against the congregation should it discipline a member by any biblical means for rejecting the caring admonition and

confrontation of the fellowship to repent from sin. The usual appeal for disgruntled members is the Human Rights Commission in the effort to circumvent discipline and even get revenge. The third major barrier is twofold and involves the lack of written guidelines and an equal lack of understanding of the biblical principles of Christian discipline as a formative and reformative means of maintaining the spiritual health of the Body. These will be addressed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE

It is evident that any proposals for change, renewal or institution of Christian discipline as a viable ministry within the Church must take into consideration the challenge of legal issues as well as the hurdle of recent tradition. This chapter is designed to provide some guidelines for restoring discipline where it has fallen into disfavour and of implementing it where it is non-existent. Three areas to be examined include the Bible, the Church covenant, and the constitution as the bases for the proposal.

Reflecting upon personal experience, the present writer would encourage emphases upon the formative aspect of discipline in order to establish a resource to which future appeal might be made in the eventuality of the need for reformative discipline. Most importantly however, such knowledge is intended to serve as a prohibitive and inhibitive measure in regulating Christian conduct and fortifying the mind against the values of the world.

The concern for the overall impact of social trends on Church membership including the practice of Christian discipline is lamented by Bill Cram who corroborates the concerns of the previous chapter by identifying several influences

and practices that are detrimental to the nature and practice of Church membership among Canadian Baptists. He subsequently challenges the Church to retrieve its territory through development of counteracting ministries that may reverse these destructive trends fostered by such emphases as "individualism and rights", and pluralism and consumerism. Cram then posed two questions for those who would consider revival: i) Is there a need, desire and will to recapture the value of Church membership? ii) If we are committed to recapture "valuable membership" how best can we / should we undertake that task?²⁷⁸

Believing that Church membership is consistent with life in the community of faith, the present writer proposes the route of education as of first importance in recapturing the territory conceded to a secular value system. This is stated with earnest conviction that the first bastion to be recaptured is the "mind" which ultimately determines the attitudes, behaviour and choices of the individual; as the writer of Proverbs admonishes: "Guard the heart with all diligence for it is the wellspring of life."(Proverbs 4:23) Such an approach will entail reviewing the repository of the faith and the realignment of the thinking with that of Christ which ultimately results in the transformation of the character under the influence and tutelage of the Holy Spirit, for life within the Christian community. Moreover, the proposition is that Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy stress an involvement in

²⁷⁸Bill Cram, "An Exploration of Church Membership Beliefs and Practices," a Study Paper submitted to the Faith, Order and Church Relations Committee of the Canadian Baptist Federation, April 1990. 7,11,12.

community which in turn magnifies the interrelatedness of participating members who share a mutual concern for each other and the glory of God. Unless such a perspective is established, the new believer entering this communal lifestyle will be traversing a road of lonesome solipsism which is inconsistent with life in community. For this reason the threefold cord of Bible, covenant and constitution are posited as the crucial bases for effective Christian discipline.

A. BIBLE

Harry Blamires made his strident appeal for the deliverance of the Christian mind from bondage to intellectual and mental self-exile in respect to a Christian world view over 30 years ago in The Christian Mind. The author laments the absence of Christian perspectives on such issues as education, politics, advertising, nuclear war and disarmament, and ecclesiastical affairs. Blamires also poignantly states that such fearless expression includes the unashamed affirmation of the supernatural orientation of the mind which subscribes to the reality of Heaven and Hell, time and eternity, and man and creation, all having their being and destiny in God. Similarly, it cultivates an eternal perspective of a loving sovereign God who sustains the universe and human life, thereby providing a faith which looks beyond this life because it understands that the natural order is dependent upon the supernatural.²⁷⁹ The implication is that Christian thinking had lost its biblical underpinnings and was merely reflecting the impressions of culture.

²⁷⁹Harry Blamires, The Christian Mind (London: S.P.C.K, 1963), 28,67.

Thus the Christian mind must be regained for that which cultivates "the eternal perspective, will bring a totally different frame of reference to bear upon all that touches human success or human failure, human joy or human misery, human health or human pain."²⁸⁰ Regarding the universe as a battleground of the forces of good and evil²⁸¹, the task of Christian thinkers is to detect and expose the advances of immoral culture,²⁸² particularly in a world of moral relativism. Truth then, is to be embraced as objective reality having its source in God through divine revelation and therefore itself eternal and unchanging.²⁸³ This particular principle contradicts the biases of secularism, with its emphases on individualism (pursuit of one's own ends or ideas as a mode or principle of life), subjectivism (one's feelings are the measure of values) and atomistic individualism (view that the world revolves around the individual), all deeply rooted in the self-culture.²⁸⁴

What is therefore the source of such a mind? Vitz propounds that the proper corrective to this incipient narcissism comes through the practice of contrition, penitence, humility, obedience and trust in God.²⁸⁵ These acts are fostered within the religious community, Christian friendship, group retreats and pastoral care and

²⁸⁰Ibid, 83.

²⁸¹Ibid, 86.

²⁸²Ibid, 102.

²⁸³Ibid, 117,119.

²⁸⁴Blamires, 130.

²⁸⁵Vitz, 91.

counselling that result in the development of relationships²⁸⁶. In such a setting, accountability, developed through formative and reformatory discipline in the atmosphere of love, knowledge and understanding, is seen as the cement of life in community. Howard Snyder in his comments on the virtues of Methodism, states some positive aspects of community life:

As a community the renewal movement prizes face-to-face relationships, mutuality and interdependence. It especially stresses Scriptures which speak of *Koinonia*, mutual encouragement and admonition within the body, and sees itself as a primary structure for experiencing these aspects of the church.²⁸⁷

"Mind"(Bible), "community"(covenant) and "accountability"(constitution) then, are the principal components of ministry that must be considered by any Church which accepts Cram's challenge to revitalize Church membership. The present writer believes that any attempts at renewal must consider this order of development as the essential bases for credible and meaningful Church membership which will entail Christian discipline and its inherent mutual accountability. One interesting response in the survey shows that people would be more amenable to do something they are convinced of rather than what they are unsure of. For example, on the question on whether they had any teaching on discipline 73% of NSR and 81% of NBR claim that, in spite of the concerns and risks involved in dispensing discipline, they would support it if satisfied that it is sound biblical teaching. Thus the preaching and

²⁸⁶Ibid. 101,102.

²⁸⁷Howard A. Snyder, The Radical Wesley (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 139.

teaching ministries of the Church are significant tasks in fortifying the mind for the warfare against evil, and should therefore be taken more seriously.

Paul emphasizes and outlines both the source and the value of the Christian mind in Church and society in the twelfth chapter of Romans. This entire section of Scripture encompassing chapters 12 -16, is particularly pivotal to the discussion of the value of the Christian mind, or life from the divine perspective as an overview of the text evinces.

The Christian life begins with submission to the Lord and separation from the world (Ch. 12: 1,2) which entails a "conscious, intelligent, consecrated devotion to the service of God." Such an act of service to the Lord entails transformation by education, whereby the natural mind or perspective - "*nous* :mind, the thinking power, reason in its moral quality and activity"²⁸⁸ of the believer is moulded by the word and the Spirit of God. This moulding is in contrast to that which the new believer formerly experienced through the unregenerate world system and which also determined subsequent conduct (Colossians 3:1-17). Now under the reign of Jesus Christ, the former lifestyle is halted because of the voluntary submission of the will to His Lordship resulting in newness of mind, perspective and conduct. Harrison appropriately suggests that the change of the verb tense of the word "offer" from "aorist" to "present" (Romans 12:1) implies the possibility of relapse into the former

²⁸⁸Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), 375.

mode of existence unless there is continual and deliberate effort of the Christian to live a life consistent with faith.²⁸⁹

Walter Brueggemann proposes that evangelical pastoral care embrace the responsibility "to permit, legitimate, and evoke change toward life in the kingdom and away from life with the 'rulers of this age' ". He argues that Romans 12:2 is a declaration of the possibility of transformation from the 'bondage of the will' which exists in conformity to the "'rulers of this age', to alien value structures, world views, and symbol systems ... helplessness, hardness of heart, and paralysis." Now, under the power of the gospel with its transformative truth, God offers powerful, resilient hope and the possibility of change, albeit painful and costly, in a despairing and romanticist world.²⁹⁰ The medium of that change of character and world view "depends on an alternate vision of self in the world. That alternative vision is mediated precisely through narratives, metaphors, and memories of biblical faith."²⁹¹ Thus knowing the word of God results in both knowing self in relation to God and self in relation to others within the context of the Church in the world. Subsequently, the individual is able to fulfil God's revealed will in relationship with God, self and others as the following outline shows:

²⁸⁹Everett F. Harrison, "Romans," in The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin et al (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), vol. 10, 128.

²⁹⁰Walter Brueggemann, Interpretation and Obedience (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 161.

²⁹¹Ibid, 175.

- I. Ch. 12:4-13 - a sense of accountability in community (cf chps. 14:1 - 15:13);
- II. Ch. 12: 14 - sympathy towards enemies;
- III. Ch. 12:15 -16 - empathy with others;
- IV. Ch. 12: 17 -18 - sensitivity in relationships;
- V. Ch. 12: 19 -21 - submission to divine justice;
- VI. Ch. 13:1 ff - sense of civil responsibility.

Overall Paul teaches that Christian believers who experienced the new life are called together into a life of community. Brueggemann describes this new relationship in terms that symbolize both privilege and responsibility, explaining that biblical faith calls believers to become children of God (Exod. 4:22; Hos. 11:1;14:3; Is. 1:2; John 1:12; Gal.4:1-7), friends of God (John 15:15), and servants of God (Mark 10:43-44; Isa. 42:1-4). Hence he concludes that

All of them [relational positions] a restless reception of newness about to be given and press toward a new world over which we do not preside, but in which we live at home, adopted, freed, open, vulnerable, obedient, at risk. A child is always vulnerable. A friend is always at risk. A servant is always called to accountability. The relation discerned through these metaphors permits, indeed, requires a sense of self which is either unrecognized or resisted in our culture.²⁹²

Together with our privilege as children of God comes the ministry of responsibility, which deals with one's social relationships particularly reflected in the attitude toward neighbours. This type of necessary interaction is regarded as biblical

²⁹²Ibid, 164.

and humane (Exod.20:16-17; Lev. 19:4; Mark 10:31; Luke 10:29-37). Contrary to the modern conception of the dispensability of others in one's quest of the full life in society, Christian faith regards it otherwise. According to Brueggemann, "In a biblical understanding of life, neighbour is not extra, marginal, or elective. The neighbour is definitional to social reality. The neighbour is indispensable for health, not only to care for but as a giver of gifts which we cannot generate for ourselves."²⁹³

Such is the exhortation of the Paul to the Corinthian Church : "And the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you; nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' No, much more those members of the body which seem more to be more feeble are necessary ..." (I Cor. 12:21,22) Thus, Paul, followed by these authors attest to the organic unity which is created among all who have experienced the new birth through faith in Christ, giving rise to a community of people possessing mutual care for one another. The concept of community has been further attested by writers such as Lawrence Richards²⁹⁴ and Jean Faurot [on Jeremy Taylor]²⁹⁵ who emphasized community as an important aspect of spirituality. Similarly, C. E. B Cranfield,²⁹⁶

²⁹³Ibid, 170.

²⁹⁴Lawrence O. Richards, Practical Theology of Spirituality (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987), 89.

²⁹⁵Jean N. Faurot, "The Rule and Exercise of Holy Living and Holy Dying," in Christian Spirituality, eds. Frank N. Magill & Ian McGreal (New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 1988), 311.

²⁹⁶C.E.B. Cranfield, Commentary on Romans (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985), 302.

Robert Banks,²⁹⁷ Walter W. Wessell,²⁹⁸ D.A Carson,²⁹⁹ C. Milo Connick,³⁰⁰ Norval Geldenhuys,³⁰¹ and Leon Morris,³⁰² affirm the positive value of members regarding themselves as an integral part of the body of Christ in spiritual union. In this intimate context they intercede for one another and provide support and service. Jarold K. Zeman sees this as the ideal context for the exercise of Christian discipline since it is the place where spiritual growth and maturity occur.³⁰³ Deitrich Bonhoeffer regards this as a reciprocal arrangement whereby believers in covenant practice mutual intercession and admonition in order to foster discipline as an acceptable ministry within its ranks.³⁰⁴ In addition, the distinctive lifestyle of this faith community allows it to have a witness which will transmit values to youth as well as the wider

²⁹⁷Robert Banks, Paul's Idea of Community (Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans, 1980), 49, 70.

²⁹⁸Walter W. Wessel, "Mark," in Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Corporation, 1976), vol. 3, 642- 43.

²⁹⁹D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Corporation, 1976), vol. 3, 69.

³⁰⁰C. Milo Connick, Jesus: The Man, The Mission and The Message, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974), 250, 251, 254.

³⁰¹Norval Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, New Testament Series (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. , 1979), 319.

³⁰²Leon Morris, "Hebrews" in The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Corporation, 1976), vol. 12, 105.

³⁰³Jarold K. Zeman, "Church Discipline" Syllabus on Believers' Church (Wolfville; N.S: Acadia Divinity College, 1986), 18.

³⁰⁴Deitrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1954), 86, 105, 107.

community.³⁰⁵

According to Harold L. Wahking, a biblically based community is a place of mutual guidance, consensus, openness and unity. Their frequent interaction produces a unity of purpose and, subsequently, effective service.³⁰⁶

Indeed such a place is necessary for encouragement and where believers support one another in resisting secular world views that promote "separation of the individual from tradition, parents, stories, community, and ... history in order to have more control on the so-called autonomous individual".³⁰⁷ Robert N. Bellah agrees that such a community, as an arena of grace, is the most effective medium for resisting individualism and for promoting happiness, self-esteem and moral worth.³⁰⁸ He also states that "the concept of community best suits the needs of human beings since it sets standards, adopts values, captures conscience, and becomes authoritative in their lives."³⁰⁹

In summary of this section it is evident that formative disciplines such as Bible study, Prayer, and obedience are indispensable to Christian discipline. These may be

³⁰⁵Stanley, Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, Resident Aliens (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 12.

³⁰⁶Harold L. Wahking, "Study of Baptist Church Discipline From The Perspective of Pastoral Care" (M. Div. Thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1961), 34, 45, 46, 50.

³⁰⁷Hauerwas & Willimon, 79.

³⁰⁸Robert N. Bellah et al, Habits of the Heart (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1985), 84.

³⁰⁹Ibid, 240.

best practised within small cell groups that foster intimacy and accountability, while being supported by intentional preaching and teaching on the values of both the formative and reformatory aspects of Christian discipline.

B. Covenant

Since change or innovation creates fear among many Church members, it is recommended that use be made of existing structures in any efforts at renewal or initiation of Christian discipline within the local congregation. For most Baptist congregations the Church Covenant is one such resource which has great potential to reorient believers to the importance of the Church as a community of faith where accountability to one another is of primary importance. Bellah *et al.* remind us of this, stating:

The Church idea reminds us that in our independence we count on others and helps [us] to see that a healthy grown-up independence is one that admits to healthy dependence on others. Absolute independence (radical individualism) is a false ideal. It delivers not the autocracy it promises, but loneliness and vulnerability instead.³¹⁰

Bill Cram promulgates the need for intentional and responsible Church membership in which members are liberated by accountability in using their gifts in service and also in willing, mutual care for one another. Similarly, he posits the need to return to the Baptist heritage as a covenanting community. Church covenants,

³¹⁰Ibid, 247.

believes Cram, are dynamic and vital means of calling Christians to rethink the meaning of membership and responsible living within community.³¹¹ Also commenting on the value of the Church covenant Jarold Zeman attests that they involve

A commitment of present and new members to specific minimal disciplines (responsibilities) of Christian life and service, both personal and congregational (responsible membership). Such a covenant should be formulated gradually and in group discussion and should reflect the specific needs and opportunities of a local Church at a given time. An artificial imposition of a traditional "standard church covenant" upon an unprepared congregation would hardly lead to the practice of vital discipleship and discipline.³¹²

Charles Dewese provides a helpful perspective of the history and value of covenants. He traces the Church covenant concept back to the early Baptists such as the exiles in Wittenburg who gathered around on the basis of a covenant-like document with legal overtones, and to the London Separatists whose members pledged loyalty by verbally affirming or voluntarily signing a similar document.³¹³ The idea, reputedly used extensively by both the English Baptists and Continental Anabaptists, focused on Baptism and the Lord's Supper as principles for Church membership. Unlike a confession which is "designed to elicit a voluntary commitment to a particular way of believing," the covenant is "intended to produce

³¹¹Cram, 2, 8.

³¹²Zeman, 18.

³¹³Charles W. Dewese, "The Origin, Development, and Use of Church Covenants in Baptist History." (Unpublished Th. D. thesis, Southern Baptist Theol. Seminary, Louisville, Ky., 1973), 26,27, 29.

a voluntary commitment to a particular way of practising one's faith."³¹⁴ Consequently, the emphasis of the covenant was on Church fellowship, Church discipline, worship and personal devotion, and pastoral or lay care to which all devotees are spiritually and morally obligated.³¹⁵

Furthermore, covenants are valuable in enhancing the Church fellowship. They create a sense of Christian community within the local congregation by providing a basis for equality of all members as one family under God. They also provide historical continuity with the "historical people of God" as well as eliciting voluntary subscription from adherents who are reminded of their spiritual and ethical responsibilities alongside of other members.³¹⁶

According to Cram, effective covenants have the potential for both the renewal of Church life as well as the restoration of accountability in several ways within the community of faith where atrophy and neglect had set in. He listed several additional benefits of the Church covenant.

First, it will curb the tendency toward individualism as people learn interdependence and servanthood and are made to be submissive to group consensus and to be held accountable to God's word. **Second**, it encourages commitment to private and public worship, practices required of "serious members of the Body of

³¹⁴Ibid , 32.

³¹⁵Ibid, 61.

³¹⁶Ibid, 67, 68.

Christ ... devoted corporately to grow and serve in Christ together." **Third**, those who embrace the mind of Christ, will be motivated to serve diligently in all areas of life. **Fourth**, the worth and importance of each individual believer is also affirmed within the wider organism of the congregation, through acts of worship and prayer, caring and sharing, protection and correction. **Fifth**, it will encourage the pooling of one's resources in talents, gifts, and finance with others in the discovery and fulfilling of the purposes and mission of the Church.³¹⁷

Deweese laments the influences of secularism and legalism as the reasons for the demise of this otherwise positive and formative ministry within the community of faith. During past eras, the covenant, despite its original intent, featured more prominently as a document of correction rather than prevention, mainly because of urbanization and its concomitant secularization. The following comments by Deweese illustrate this:

The kinds of offenses which led to exclusions quickly show the legalistic character of frontier Baptist discipline. In five frontier churches in Kentucky between 1800 and 1860, the following were among the reasons listed in the minutes of churches as to why members were excluded: stealing, beating one's wife, telling lies, mistreating another person, gambling, cursing, threatening suicide, drinking too much, fighting, living in adultery, being pregnant outside of marriage, striking one's father-in-law, refusing to attend church, dancing, moving from the state without applying for a letter of dismissal, bad conduct in a church meeting, refusing to pay a debt, attending a horse race, denying the faith and doctrine of the church, misrepresenting persons in church to the grand jury in the county, violating the rules of the church, playing cards and

³¹⁷Cram, 14. Charles DeWeese argues that the Covenant as a feature "of Church life helped insure the integrity of individual members and the corporate Church." A Community of Believers, 16.

billiards, taking out a lawsuit against another person, murder, and betting.³¹⁸

Moreover, the Churches "failed to develop a ministry to the persons whom they expelled", due to an imbalance of emphasis on the corrective versus the remedial aspect of discipline.³¹⁹ Although Deweese provides some excellent and positive advice on the restoration of healthy biblical discipline through the use of the covenant, he warns that the Church should not use the covenant as the basis of discipline since such action would elevate it above the Bible, the source of doctrine and practice. It is for this very reason the present writer chose to establish the Bible as the basis of the covenant relationship which includes emphasis on Christian discipline in its formative and reformative aspects. As a matter of fact, the major portion of the traditional covenant is formative or preventive in thrust and any use of it should show its scriptural base. This can be seen in the biblical basis of the Church covenant as a development from the *koinonia* - fellowship - concept of membership. *Allalon* is the Greek word which best describes this horizontal relationship of Christians. Its importance might be seen in the numerous references in the Scripture, about one hundred times, fifty of which applied to group relationship in reference to mutual care.³²⁰ The preponderance of the evidence shows that privilege and responsibility are

³¹⁸Ibid, 74.

³¹⁹Ibid, 74.

³²⁰Walter Bauer, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, trans., William Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, trans., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 38. cf. George V. Wigram and Ralph D. Winter, eds. The Word Study of the New Testament (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1972), vol. 2. A list of the applicable Bible references

indispensable characteristics of the life in community and are incumbent upon each member of such a covenanting community to be exercised for mutual care of one another.

Findings of the survey reveal current views on the possession and value of the Church covenant. Responding to the question on whether their congregation possessed a covenant, 85% claimed it did, and of these 58% believed it was binding on the members. However, the ratio of use was far less. For example 13% said that the covenant was read during communion; 19% said it was read at the Roll Call service; 38% acknowledged that it was read at least annually; and 18% commented that it was never read. This situation shows the necessity and opportunity of ministry emphases on the history, nature and value of the covenant.

Mark Parent rightly contends for a return to the use of the covenant as equivalent to a return to the historic roots of the Baptist faith.

Baptists have historically been a covenanting people. Covenants have been part of our Baptist life since the early 1600's. In the early years of the Baptist churches of Ontario and Quebec, it was the covenant which took priority even over the statement of faith. Moreover, Christianity is a covenanting faith. The covenants with Abraham, with Moses, and with David are part of the rich heritage of our faith. The new covenant, written on the tissue of the human heart by Jesus Christ, is foundational to who we are as Christians. It is time to get back to the covenant. [It is] Time to wrestle with what we believe and, even more important [,] how we intend to act to one another and to the world about us. [sic] It is time to once again become a covenanting people!³²¹

is included in the Appendix 2. This is a good source for instruction on the community concept.

³²¹Mark Parent, "A Covenanting People," in Atlantic Baptist Magazine, December 1986, 21.

Thus education about the history and value of the covenant and its biblical basis, seems to be the first step for any congregation that desires to reverse the trend of unregenerate membership or the paucity of discipline and the fear of applying it in full measure where necessary. Deweese argues convincingly that regenerate Church membership may be preserved only when there is courageous compassionate admonition of sin in the ranks, through the application of preventive and corrective Church discipline by a caring and supportive congregation. He argues that:

The disciplinary value of a covenant exists mainly in an alliance with preventive and formative discipline rather than corrective and punitive discipline. Ideally, a covenant guides church members into spiritual and ethical adventures which are positive expressions of their faith. The covenantal practice of providing disciplines by which church members can live out their commitments most meaningfully must be restored. All possible assistance must be given to the renewal of a responsible approach to discipline in Baptist churches.³²²

Deweese then proposes several ways of contemporizing the covenant in relation to Christian discipline for effective use in the local congregation.

First, it must be seen as a biblical, healthy, liberating, growth stimulating, and redeeming practice which preserves and enhances regenerate Church membership, despite charges of legalism and judgmentalism. **Second**, all aspects of discipline must be undergirded by love, grace and forgiveness. **Third**, discipline must be taken seriously to be successful, and should be seen as a guard and stimulant of the privilege of Church membership and its responsibility for moral living. **Fourth**, the principles

³²²Deweese, 75.

of discipline should be stipulated in the covenant and made prominent within worship and educational settings of the Church for common awareness and knowledge. **Fifth**, discipline should be established on a firm biblical base with a clear mandate on its formative aspect in order to preclude the reformative element if necessary. In event of the latter, the biblical principles must be highlighted. **Sixth**, the task of implementing reformative discipline must be that of the entire congregation in order to reflect the genuine and sensitive mutual concern among the membership to maintain a regenerate Church membership. **Seventh**, because it is designed to "keep church members biblically sound, morally upright, and spiritually strong", discipline should always emphasize the formative aspect. This is possible through an intentional and total Christian education program including the use of gifts and service. **Eighth**, reformative discipline should first seek to empower the individual in caring concern to resolve the problem. Only upon deliberate and hostile rejection of this overture should one be eventually excluded. **Ninth**, when applied therapeutically, in the sense of intentional pastoral ministry for healing of the part as well as the whole, discipline pursues reconciliation together with a reinforcement of Jesus' teaching [Matthew 18]. **Tenth**, the disciplinary decision needs to be the corporate decision of the Church while embracing a clear mandate of restoration.³²³

It is evident to this point that education must underlie any successful attempt at revival of covenant use with its accompanying benefits of formative and

³²³Deweese, 75-80, and passim.

reformatory discipline. Such education needs to take into account the relational commitment, benefits and risks involved in Church membership. James W. Fowler's faith development concepts provide some insight into what is needed to motivate spiritual growth and practical faith. Fowler proposes that most people remain at a "synthetic - conventional" stage of life which is reflected in their embracing a faith or belief system which they have not examined and are unable to explain. Consequently, such people merely live according to the expectations and judgments of significant others. Therefore any lifestyle that contradicts this belief occurs because these individuals have compartmentalized their beliefs thereby allowing them to "say one thing and do another".³²⁴ Thomas Groome provides an admirable paradigm for Christian education based on the concepts of faith development. He proposes a three-fold system of regarding faith : faith as belief conviction, faith as trusting, and faith as doing, and emphasizes the importance of small group settings for any serious attempts for life-changing faith that will affect the whole person.³²⁵

It must be appreciated that relational commitment involves vulnerability. By committing one's self to a group of people of like faith and intention, the new comer and the fellowship are simultaneously implying by such action a mutual responsibility for and dependence on each other. At this juncture the covenant may be used as the

³²⁴James W. Fowler, Stages of Faith (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1976), p.151, and passim.

³²⁵Thomas H. Groome, Christian Religious Education (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1980), 56-65.

medium for expressing what was previously implied in baptism and now expected in membership. If properly and thoughtfully done its emphasis on the corporate nature of the Church will directly contradict the secular concept of individualism which is foreign to the community of faith because of regeneration and incorporation into fellowship. Others have eloquently promulgated various means of restoring a covenant consciousness and Christian discipline within the Church.

Stewart Murray offers several practical suggestions for rebuilding of community using the Church covenant as the resource. He postulates that the covenant must be understood as a solemn vow of the believer to live in organic union with others in "the Spirit of Christ" as the local and universal Church.³²⁶ He also advances several correctives for what he sees as a decline in the value and meaning of Church membership and use of covenants. In order to do so he recommends that the local congregation needs to "magnify membership" by emphasizing the "priesthood" concept whereby believers are challenged to accept the responsibility of membership within the local fellowship. Similarly, the holding of covenant services can be utilized as a time to renew commitment when new members are being received. Recognition of faithful and loyal service among members and a campaign of Church loyalty visitation (i.e to encourage the faithful) were also proposed as viable means for revitalizing the covenant consciousness of the local Church. The latter is regarded as a means of restoring the inactive members, revitalizing the

³²⁶Murray, 138.

spiritual life of the Church, increasing attendance, and creating fellowship. One other innovative means suggested by Murray for emphasizing the importance of the covenant is the holding of services for those who are being transferred out of the area.³²⁷ These are certainly insightful and practical means of community building so necessary in many congregations today. Other avenues might include the Roll Call Services, the covenant meetings on the Wednesday evenings prior to communion Sundays, communion Sunday itself, and even the induction or ordination services of pastors. Perhaps the beginning of a new Church year or even calendar year are also good opportunities for the use of the covenant. Moreover, the regular covenant renewal meetings may also provide progressive edification for the youngest of members as they mature both physically and spiritually within the fellowship. Some Churches revise their covenants periodically, as often as once every five years, in order to keep it current in the reflection of the needs of the congregation.

C. Constitution

Many of the foregoing recommendations have been made with consideration of the benefits to the congregations but they also inhere risks of legal suits by disgruntled members who might have been disciplined for some uncovenantal conduct. Only a small number of respondents revealed some concern for the law on "human rights", for only 27% claimed that reformative Christian discipline is a risky

³²⁷Ibid, 139,140.

endeavour today. Nonetheless it is necessary to deal with this critical area of ministry in order to explore ways of confronting legal liability. It is at this juncture the Constitution becomes an important tool as a document containing clear guidelines for Church membership. The following discussion bears out this subject.

J. Carl Laney, in an article entitled *Church Discipline Without a Lawsuit*, succinctly outlines steps a congregation needs to consider in this area of ministry, thereby bringing into focus the value of the Church's constitution. It is paramount that the Church clearly detail in its constitution or bylaws what it believes about Christian discipline with the necessary supporting biblical foundations (Matt. 18:15-20; I Cor.5:1-13; II Cor. 2:1-11; Gal.6:1; II Thess. 3:14-15; I Tim. 5:19-21).³²⁸

According to Terrance Carter this will ensure the Church an authoritative basis for implementing Church discipline, as well as provide a procedure for the resolution of disputes amongst members. This is indicated in the following suggested steps:

- i) a specific allegation has been made,
- ii) the subject member has received notice of the allegation as well as the place and time at which the relevant church officials will consider the allegation,
- iii) the subject member is provided with an opportunity to be present and respond to the allegation, and
- iv) the subject member is provided with a decision arising out of the hearing together with reasons both in relation to the veracity of the allegations as well as the type of discipline that is to be implemented.³²⁹

³²⁸J. Carl Laney, "Church Discipline Without a Lawsuit," Christianity Today, 9 November 1984, 76.

³²⁹Terrance Steven Carter, "Appendix III : A Legal Analysis of Church Discipline in Canada," To Be Or Not To Be: Incorporation of Autonomous Churches in Ontario (Elmira: Canadian Council of Christian Charities, 1995), 97.

Also a general statement of waiver to protect the Church and its leaders against legal action should be included in a preamble based on I Corinthians 6:1-8. Next, a careful method of recruiting members should include thorough familiarization of prospective members with the congregation's constitution, including disciplinary steps to which they should willingly subscribe. Such a document must also specify that since the covenant expresses mutual consent to share privileges and responsibilities of members to care for one another, that relationship should similarly be only mutually dissolved.³³⁰

Carter concurs that in ensuring new members clearly understand their mutual obligations involving submission to one another, there must be several policies in place. Thus where there are certain requirements of conduct or life-style such policy statements must be enshrined in the constitution. Similarly, prospective members should be provided with a copy of the constitution to be thoroughly oriented with the expectations of the Church, followed by an interview with a Church leader for clarification of any resulting questions or concerns. Subsequently, a written application for membership should be encouraged to "provide evidentiary proof that the member has agreed to be subject to the church disciplinary process if an issue arises at a later time concerning the ability of the church to initiate discipline proceedings."³³¹

³³⁰Laney, 76.

³³¹Carter, 98.

This step is also intended to inhibit resignation or withdrawal from the fellowship during any disciplinary process, or from issuing of lawsuits against the Church due to disciplinary measures instituted against such a person. Carter avers that this clause in the constitution will allow for healing while ensuring the completion of the disciplinary process without premature action by either party. In the event of necessary discipline, the constitution should be strictly adhered to, in order to deter charges of partiality, prejudice, and intentional infliction of emotional distress. Furthermore, all information gleaned through the process should be treated in strictest confidence, showing respect for the one being disciplined and "to avoid a claim of breach of privacy."³³²

Therefore, in event of necessary declarations to the congregation only the bare minimum of details need be given since the intent is not embarrassment but restoration of the erring one through loving concern. Other congregations need not be notified except in the event of the desire to transfer membership or the revocation of ordination. In such instances, the subject Church need only confirm the present disciplinary status of the individual in question, to the requesting Church minus details, for example it might say: "Mr. T did not leave our Church in good standing. We cannot recommend him for membership in your Church." Also the disciplined member should be allowed to worship except where disruptive and threatening

³³²Ibid.

behaviour will affect public worship services.³³³

Because Church discipline is risky, those who would be boldly obedient must be prepared for persecution in spite of the best efforts to be a channel of grace. Therefore in the eventuality of a lawsuit being filed against the Church, it is recommended that the path of grace be taken and an out of court settlement be accepted in the interest of reconciliation versus "winning".³³⁴ In the case of Human Rights and the discipline of Church employees, Carter makes several pertinent recommendations:

- i) The church constitution should specify that all employees are to be members of the church, both to fulfil legitimate job qualifications and to ensure that all employees will be subject to the same authority and discipline as that which is imposed on all members of the church.
- ii) if church employees are expected to comply with life-style or moral conduct requirements, then those requirements should be set out not only in the church constitution but within a separate employment contract that the employee would be required to enter into before commencing his or her employment with the church. These requirements must be clearly brought to the attention of the employee during the interview procedure and should be included in job descriptions and personnel policy manuals.
- iii) The church must ensure that life-style or moral conduct requirements are consistently and fairly applied to all employees of the church.³³⁵

Carter also deals with the issue of adherents, by which he seems to mean associate members due to the formal way he discusses the status, and the congregation's responsibility toward them in the event of discipline. He recommends

³³³Ibid.

³³⁴Laney, 76.

³³⁵Carter, 99.

that this group of people be made to agree to subject themselves to the constitution and all procedures within its parameters in spite of differences concerning the statement of faith or doctrine and the inability to vote on matters of business.³³⁶ Two such principles of duties, rights and privileges incumbent upon participants of the covenanting faith community include, a) "the duty to minister to one another's spiritual needs as part of the Body of Christ;" and, b) "the duty to respect and submit to the authority and procedures of the church as expressed in the church constitution."³³⁷

One encouraging and positive note for Canadian Churches is the difference in attitude of the courts toward the issue of Church discipline. This gives hope for congregations who desire to exercise necessary discipline without contravening the law. The courts recognize the existence of and legitimacy of the Church to protect its rights through the medium of discipline since it's members are considered a "voluntary associations of persons come together for a collective purpose ... to be associated with the fulfilment of the religious objectives of the church." Therefore courts are most likely to intervene if there is proof of denial of fair procedure or questions involving property. Otherwise its judgment shows respect for the Church's philosophy of ministry to the whole person as exemplified in its decision to uphold the dismissal of a Catholic school teacher for remarrying in contravention of her

³³⁶Ibid.

³³⁷Carter, 100.

contract with the Christian school. The court concluded:

It is a fundamental tenet of the church that Christ founded the church to continue his work of salvation. The church employs various means to carry out His purpose, one of which is the establishment of its own schools which have as their object the formation of the whole person, including the education in the Catholic faith.... The Catholic church is a genuine community bent on imparting over and above an academic education all the help it can to its members to adopt a Christian way of life.³³⁸

Although this citation belongs to a Roman Catholic setting, it yet emphasizes the responsibility of the Church to have clearly understood terms of reference for its members. Within the tradition of the Believers' Church, the covenant represents this concise confession of faith to which all members voluntarily subscribe. The constitution on the other hand is the legal document which empowers the Church to act toward an erring member in times of discipline. The Church does so out of the position of vested authority given by the individual when membership was accepted, resulting in submission to its responsibilities and privileges. Carter subsequently addresses this concern about the court's position *vis-a-vis* the Church, emphasizing that the courts usually demand clear proof that the disciplined person is indeed a member of the Church in question having voluntarily accepted such association and therefore being subject to its authority stipulated in the constitution. Moreover, the court even acknowledges the possible negative impact of unaddressed sin on the membership where "the wayward behaviour can act as an adverse example to the rest

³³⁸Terrance Steve Carter, "A Legal Analysis of Church Discipline in Canada" Canadian Council of Christian Charities Bulletin, 25 May 1992, 2.

of the church", to both young and old,³³⁹ a statement that resonates with Paul's contention "Know you not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" (I Cor. 5: 6b).

Summary

This chapter began with the acknowledgment of a crisis of increasing proportions regarding unregenerate Church membership and identified the paucity of discipline as a contributing factor. The Bible, the Church covenant and the constitution were presented as effective tools for such renewal. Subsequently, it was posited that there be a definite and deliberate return to the basics of Christian practice as stipulated in Scripture beginning with a general education of members concerning their privileges and responsibilities as members of the community of faith. In this context it was seen that through the development of a Christian world view, members will see themselves as mutually responsible for one another as a corporate body contrary to the predominant non-Christian, individualistic world view. The covenant was therefore proposed as another instrument potentially viable in promoting this relationship.

Moreover, it was shown that since such a community would be subject to both formative and reformatory discipline as part of the commitment in the congregation, there may be times when reformatory discipline would become necessary resulting in

³³⁹Ibid, 91.

the extreme measure of excommunication. However, due to the rising risk of legal suits it is necessary for congregations to carefully compose or revise a constitution as the means to circumvent such problems while simultaneously streamlining and stipulating the relational expectations of the Church members, adherents and employees. Thus the Bible, the covenant as established on Scripture, and the constitution as it reflects natural justice have been proposed as the bases for renewal of membership and restoration of positive Christian discipline in the Church.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The question posed in the title of this thesis project was whether the practice of Christian discipline was a covenant responsibility or legalism. Indeed because of the nature of the topic, the experience in ministry and the reactions from those with whom it was discussed, it was presumed that there would be an overwhelmingly negative response or resistance to the use of this ministry within the contemporary Church. However, the results of the survey were encouraging and refreshing as outlined in chapter 4. Christian discipline is accepted as a covenant responsibility.

Although there were those who rejected the very idea of considering, let alone implementing discipline, most supported it in spite of reservations. As was stated earlier and substantiated by several journal entries, it was necessary even for this writer to resolve the tension regarding the value of this project for the local congregation. The findings of the survey, therefore, served to assuage doubts as to the usefulness of Christian discipline from the congregational perspective. These results also serve to assure the pastoral leadership of the presence of congregational support in the ministry of Christian discipline, so long as satisfactory biblical teaching is provided to validate the decisions.

It is evident that although Christian discipline is regarded as a necessary ministry because of its formative value, it is unfortunate when it has to be exercised within the Church for correction or reformation; much pain and hurt may result.

Nonetheless, covenant faithfulness requires obedience to Scripture. However, because of fear, inexperience and timidity, discipline is generally left undone. This thesis project began with that assumption that Christian discipline is a dormant ministry and needs to be revived for the betterment of the Body of Christ.

In order to lay the foundation for such a revitalization of discipline, the writer explored, in chapters 1 and 2, the teachings of the Old and New Testament records in order to determine the context and meaning of such words as “discipline”, “covenant” and, to a smaller degree, “community”. Following this, the history of the early Church, and the later writings of modern theologians, historians and other popular authors were examined for precedents in the practice of discipline.

Similarly, a careful examination was made of the congregational responses to the concept of Christian discipline, even to the point of excommunication in the event of the individual’s rejection of repeated admonition. Chapter 3 reveals the astounding results of a survey that was conducted for the purposes of analysing the response to be expected from a congregation if they should be faced with the decision of implementing such discipline at any particular level. The major insight provided from the survey was the willingness of the congregation to be taught how to view this ministry as well as when to practise it as a biblically sound act of obedience which pleases God and promotes spiritual values.

Chapter 4 provides some guidelines for Christian discipline as it examined the hindrances, the pitfalls and the legal implications involving discipline. In fact it might

be obvious that there has evolved in the discussion a dire need for educating congregations about principles of conduct based on Scripture. This need coincides with the formative aspect of discipline which is a prerequisite to reformative discipline. Chapter 5 proposed some guidelines for the congregation that desires to practise this ministry in a wise and sensitive way, toward the sinning saint.

Evidently then it is of great value for each congregation to establish good solid preventive disciplinary principles based on sound biblical teachings that members will voluntarily embrace for mutual benefit. This will promote an atmosphere of openness where each member serves and lives with honesty and integrity which in turn would result in alleviating or diminishing the number of moral and spiritual lapses that necessitate the application of reformative discipline. Such a trusting and caring community context would probably facilitate a smoother and more sensitive handling of disciplinary issues that may arise. Therefore one of the main challenges is breaking the communication barrier particularly in the apparent conspiracy of silence about the subject of Christian discipline as a necessary ministry of the Church.

The method of conducting the survey sought to encourage respondents to treat the exercise with confidentiality, therefore the results reveal their personal and private views regarding Christian discipline. Consequently, the sum total of the responses provides a clear indicator as to the general consensus of members' personal views about the subject and its value in Church life. Yet, even if there was some collusion among respondents, the surveys still reflect the general attitude of members about

Christian discipline. This posits another area of ministry with an emphasis on "openness" and "integrity" among members in order to facilitate clear and honest discussion about issues that may be difficult, sensitive or uncomfortable to talk about. Through a vital small group ministry this silence might be broken with the cooperation of participants who passionately embrace the cause. One might even consider signs of hesitance and uncertainty a mark of mercy worth affirming as a pillar of compassion for the erring, an attitude which the Scripture encourages.

Other areas for possible ministry development include the clarification on the biblical role of such lay leadership as deacons in relation to the pastoral ministry. This observation is made in the light of the low confidence level of respondents regarding the involvement of deacons in admonition (cf. Footnote 242, page 113). Similarly, further study might be done in the area of differentiation between male and female responses to the concept of Christian discipline. The present writer believes that the tendency of females to be reticent in implementing corrective discipline as opposed to males reveals a great strength and resource for women in ministry of pastoral care. They revealed a greater willingness to be involved in the early stages of admonition where care, counsel and sensitivity are necessary qualities. This observation is not intended in any way to say they should be confined exclusively to this area of ministry, but rather to admit that males can learn from them.

Someone one may ask, "How long is the time between admonition and removal?" The Matthean text, however, focuses on methodology and responsiveness.

It does not address the time frame between admonitions leading up to possible excommunication. Evidently, this could involve indefinite periods of time according to the responsiveness of the individual as discerned by those seeking his or her repentance and restoration. Consequently, much discernment, sensitivity and patience would be needed throughout the entire process of reformative discipline with a view to reconciliation. Prayer then is an invaluable ministry resource for undergirding the entire process, as the congregation seeks divine guidance for the ministry. Such is the standard and nature of covenant responsibility!

Legalism in contrast to Christian discipline may be described as truth without love, thereby betraying little or no evidence of struggle in applying the word of God to situations. Whereas legalism simply passes judgment and metes out the penalty, covenant responsibility seeks through love to restore the erring in gentleness to their rightful position in the body of Christ.

Indeed in a constantly changing world the Church needs to be flexible and open to change, yet as an institution built on clear absolutes, it needs to be cautioned that methods may vary and change but principles ought to remain constant and non-negotiable. Subsequently, Christian discipline, both formative and reformative, must be preserved and practised and not be discarded or ignored as a vestige of "unenlightened" times by the gurus of modernity, or promoters of the "growth-and-unity-at-any-cost" philosophy. In fact where the latter posture toward discipline exists there antinomianism reigns in affirmation of the statement in *Judges* : "There was no

king in Israel, in those days, and everyone did what was right in his own eyes." (Ch.21:25) However where Christ is King and His word is law there is liberty for the obedient!

It is evident from the results of this thesis project that people individually believe the Church should reflect different values from society and have stated their desire that it be so, even though it might not be popular. These people, although showing their hesitancy and uncertainty about the effect of discipline, have indicated a willingness to be taught its principles and practice. Hopefully, the leadership of the United Baptist Churches of the Atlantic Provinces would rise to the challenge to teach and provide direction utilizing ideas from the propositions outlined in this thesis project in an effort to ensure that the covenant community is one where repentance, reconciliation and restitution prevail. The membership, as reflected in this representative sample, express a willingness to be obedient.

Possibly, the fruits of revival might yet be reaped where there seems to be barrenness; so also excellence, growth and maturity may blossom where there exists only mediocrity, spiritual immaturity and stagnation. Altogether these principles of implementation comprise the basis, motivation and goal for the Christian world view promulgated by Paul (Rom. 12:1,2, ff), they form the guide for conduct and standard for morality, so that collectively the Church will become "light" and "salt" in a dark and putrid age. Hence, to so do, the Church must boldly rise to Isaiah's challenge to Israel:

Awake, Awake; put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; from henceforth there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean.

Shake yourself from the dust, arise, and sit down, O Jerusalem; loose yourself from the bands of your neck, O captive daughter of Zion. (Isaiah 52:1,2)

Christian discipline then, is not legalism. Instead it is a ministry which shows that Christians are their brothers' and sisters' keepers. They are under a divine mandate to teach and preach the "whole counsel of God". Christian discipline is part of that mandate, to be expressed as a covenant responsibility and privilege that must be readily exercised among the faithful. It is a ministry of care. When exercised with integrity and openness, it has the potential in providing mutual care for one another as members in the community of faith, and ultimately to benefit the Church to the glory of God.

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APPENDIX 1

June, 1995

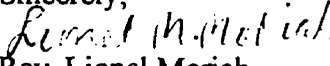
Dear Christian Friend:

I am the pastor of the Morristown United Baptist Church and a doctoral student at Acadia Divinity College. Presently, I am conducting a survey among Atlantic Baptists on the subject of "Christian Discipline".

I know this is a very 'touchy' subject in Christian circles today, but it is my prayer that the findings of this survey will benefit us all by helping us to understand the attitudes and views held by Baptists on the subject. It is hoped that the findings will also help in ministry among Atlantic Baptists. I want to assure you that this is not being done to pass judgment on you, but simply to help us understand how we feel about the subject. I only seek your views on the subject.

For greatest effectiveness, it would be appreciated if this questionnaire is done independently even if others in your home are involved in the exercise. Please check the appropriate box or supply the information needed by choosing answers that come closest to your views. In order for your privacy and strictest confidence to be maintained, do not sign your name.

I want to thank you for your willingness to be a part of this survey. Your input and response are essential to its effectiveness. Please try as much as possible to complete and return this questionnaire within two weeks. The completed surveys may be conveniently placed in the box provided to your church. Thank you again for your participation.

Sincerely,

Rev. Lionel Moriah
Morristown United Baptist Church
Nova Scotia

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT YOURSELF

1. **Gender?** Female Male

2. **Age?** Under 20 45 - 54
 21 - 25 55 - 64
 26 - 34 65 - 74
 35 - 44 75 and over

3. **Race?** Black White
 Native Indian Other

4. **Marital status?**
 Single, never married Separated or divorced
 Married Widowed

5. **Do you have children in the following groups?**
 - a. Birth - 4 years old Yes No
 - b. 5 - 12 years old Yes No
 - c. 13 - 17 years old Yes No
 - d. Over 17 years - at home Yes No
 - e. Over 17 years - away Yes No

6. **Do you have grandchildren in any of the above groups living at home?**
Please specify _____.

7. **What is your highest level of formal education?**
 Less than high school College degree
 High school Post graduate studies
 Trade or vocational school

8. **Are you (check one)?**
 Retired Employed part time
 Full time student Unemployed
 Employed full time Other (What?)
 Full time "house person" as a chosen option

- 8a. **If currently employed, disabled, retired or unemployed, what is/was your occupation?**
 Service worker: police, barber, janitor, beautician, porter, waiter, usher, etc.
 Care-giver and homemaker by choice
 Clerical worker: bookkeepers, secretaries, mail carriers, telephone operators, shipping clerks, ticket agents, etc.
 Farmer
 Operative or laborer: semi-skilled or unskilled workers in construction and manufacturing, apprentices, teamsters, stevedores, etc.
 Craftsmen, foremen: tinsmiths, bakers, carpenters, masons, shoemakers, electricians, machinists, etc.

- Sales worker: salesman, real estate agents, brokers, stock and bond salespersons, etc.
- Proprietor, manager or official: public officials, credit officers, buyers, floor managers, etc.
- Professional, ethical: teachers, doctors, architects, accountant, artists, athletes, surveyors, etc.
- Other (What?)

8b. If married, what is the employment status of your spouse?

- Employed full time Unemployed
- Employed part time Other
- Retired

9. What is your household income range - family, single living alone, or with children and sharing home with your parent(s)?

- Under \$7,500 \$35,000 - \$49,999
- \$15,000 - \$24,999 \$50,000 - \$74,999
- \$25,000 - \$34,999 \$75,000 and over

COMMUNITY

1. What is the name of your community? _____

2. Please indicate which of the following definitions of community you are satisfied with:

- a) A place where people share the same location
 Agree Disagree Don't Know
- b) A place where people share common interests or vocations
 Agree Disagree Don't Know
- c) A place where people have similar privileges
 Agree Disagree Don't Know
- d) A place where people share similar responsibilities
 Agree Disagree Don't Know
- e) A place where people share common ownership or partnership
 Agree Disagree Don't Know

3. How many years have you lived in this general area?

- 1 year or less 5 - 9 years 20 or more
- 2 - 4 years 10 - 19

4. How likely is it that you might move out of this general area within the next few years?

- Definitely will move Probably will not move
- Probably will move Very unlikely to move
- Might move (50/50 chance)

5. **Please indicate which of the following are reasonable benefits for you to expect as a citizen of your community?**
- | | | | |
|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Parks/recreation | <input type="checkbox"/> | Safe, healthy environment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Roads/sanitation | <input type="checkbox"/> | Public parking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Law enforcement | <input type="checkbox"/> | Health/medical facilities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Food Banks | <input type="checkbox"/> | Library |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Freedom to run for
Municipal Office | <input type="checkbox"/> | Welfare |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Freedom to participate in
Public Meetings | <input type="checkbox"/> | Social Assistance |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (What?) |
6. **Please indicate in which of the following areas your community should expect your support and cooperation.**
- | | | | |
|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Responsible use of Park
facilities | <input type="checkbox"/> | Care of environment (little, etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Observing Traffic rules | <input type="checkbox"/> | Neighborhood Watch |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Rates and taxes | <input type="checkbox"/> | Interest in Municipal Affairs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Law Abiding | <input type="checkbox"/> | Support of Food Banks |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Observing Sanitary regulations for garbage and sewage disposal | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (What?) |
7. **As a resident, how involved are you in community affairs? Please indicate areas of involvement from list:**
- | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Parent-teacher | <input type="checkbox"/> | Kiwanis | <input type="checkbox"/> | Neighborhood Watch |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Town/village council | <input type="checkbox"/> | Lodges | <input type="checkbox"/> | Women's Institute |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Ladies Auxiliary | <input type="checkbox"/> | Fire-person | <input type="checkbox"/> | Community club |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Big brothers/sisters | <input type="checkbox"/> | Lions | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (What?) |
8. **Suppose as a trusted member of the community you had broken the law resulting in personal injury and/or damage to property of another citizen for which you were held liable, what would you do?**
- | | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Challenge the law | <input type="checkbox"/> | Submit to the necessary penalty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Keep it a secret | <input type="checkbox"/> | Move away to escape penalty |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (What?) |
9. **Suppose as a trusted member of the community you had broken the law resulting in personal injury and/or damage of property of another citizen, what should the community do?**
- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Keep it a secret |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Treat you with understanding but ignore the problem |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Deal with you justly in correcting the problem |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Dispense the full measure of punishment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (What?) |

10. In what progression would you prefer to be dealt with by the proper authorities in community? Using 1, 2, 3,4, 5, 6, 7, 8, please arrange in order the steps you would appreciate, starting with the most desirable approach as a first choice (#1) to the least (#8):

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arrested | <input type="checkbox"/> Imprisoned |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Charged | <input type="checkbox"/> Allowed to make restitution |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Warned and placed on probation | <input type="checkbox"/> Warned by authorities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Permitted to correct the problem | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (What?) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assigned community work as penalty | |

THE CHURCH AS COMMUNITY

The church is often described as a "community of faith". Consequently, its members subscribe to principles of mutual value through a solemn agreement or covenant based on biblical teachings. As part of this group would you please indicate your views about the following:

1. Does your church have a covenant? Yes No
2. How often is it read?

<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly	<input type="checkbox"/> Quarterly	<input type="checkbox"/> Never
<input type="checkbox"/> Monthly	<input type="checkbox"/> Annually	
3. When is it read, if ever?

<input type="checkbox"/> Communion	<input type="checkbox"/> Roll Call	<input type="checkbox"/> Anniversary
------------------------------------	------------------------------------	--------------------------------------
4. When was it last revised?

<input type="checkbox"/> 20 years ago	<input type="checkbox"/> 10 years ago	<input type="checkbox"/> Never
<input type="checkbox"/> 15 years ago	<input type="checkbox"/> 5 years ago	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (What?)
5. Do you believe it is binding on all members? Yes No
6. Do you think it should be enforced? Yes No
7. What do you believe should be expected of you as a member?
 - a) Abide by all its teachings

<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Don't Know
--------------------------------	-----------------------------------	-------------------------------------
 - b) Accept only that with which I agree.

<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Don't Know
--------------------------------	-----------------------------------	-------------------------------------
 - c) Ignore the teachings and do as I please.

<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Don't Know
--------------------------------	-----------------------------------	-------------------------------------
 - d) Attend church services when convenient.

<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Don't Know
--------------------------------	-----------------------------------	-------------------------------------
 - e) Provide systematic financial support for its ministries.

<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Don't Know
--------------------------------	-----------------------------------	-------------------------------------
 - f) Other (What?)

8. **Which of the following should you expect as a member of the Christian community (church)?**
- a) To be valued as a human being made in the "image of God".
 Agree Disagree Don't Know
- b) To be taught the truths of God.
 Agree Disagree Don't Know
- c) To be loved and accepted alongside others in spite of my weaknesses.
 Agree Disagree Don't Know
- d) To be treated fairly and given the same opportunities as others regardless of race, social or financial status.
 Agree Disagree Don't Know
- e) To be admonished if and when I fail in living up to the standards accepted by the Christian community (church).
 Agree Disagree Don't Know
- f) To be forgiven if and when the need arises and I sincerely seek it.
 Agree Disagree Don't Know
- g) Other (What?)
9. **Which one of the following views best expresses your view of the Bible?**
- a) The Bible is a valuable book because it was written by wise and good people, but I do not believe it is really God's word.
- b) The Bible is the record of many people's responses to God and because of this, people and churches today are challenged to selectively apply for themselves its basic moral and religious teachings.
- c) The Bible is the inspired word of God and its basic moral and religious teachings are clear and true, even if it reflects some human error.
- d) The Bible is the inspired word of God, the authority in matters of faith and practice.
- e) The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally.
- f) Other (What?)
10. **Which one of the following best expresses your believe about sin and salvation?**
- a) Sin and salvation really don't have much meaning for me personally.
- b) I believe all people are inherently good. To the extent sin and salvation have meaning at all, they have to do with people realizing, or not realizing their human potential for good.
- c) All people are sinful, but many receive salvation as mediated through the sacraments (baptism, communion, etc.) of the church.
- d) All people are sinful, but only have to live morally responsible lives according to God's commandments and Christ's example, to be saved.
- e) All people are sinful and must accept Jesus Christ as Saviour and henceforth live a lifestyle of faith and obedience.
- f) Other (What?)

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

1. **What is the name of your church?** _____

2. **How long have you been a members of this church?**

<input type="checkbox"/> Not a member	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 - 4 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 10 - 19 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 year or less	<input type="checkbox"/> 5 - 9 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 20 or more years

3. **How did you become a member?**

<input type="checkbox"/> Baptism	<input type="checkbox"/> Salvation and Baptism
<input type="checkbox"/> Experience	<input type="checkbox"/> Parents are/were members
<input type="checkbox"/> Letter of Transfer	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (What?)

4. **In what Christian denomination were you raised or associated with. If you were involved in more than one denomination when you were growing up, with which did you have the greatest identification?**

<input type="checkbox"/> Anglican	<input type="checkbox"/> Methodist	<input type="checkbox"/> United
<input type="checkbox"/> Baptist	<input type="checkbox"/> Pentecostal	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
<input type="checkbox"/> Brethren	<input type="checkbox"/> Presbyterian	<input type="checkbox"/> None
<input type="checkbox"/> Lutheran	<input type="checkbox"/> Roman Catholic	

5. **On the average, how many times have you attended church services during the past year?**

<input type="checkbox"/> None
<input type="checkbox"/> Once or twice yearly
<input type="checkbox"/> Once or twice quarterly
<input type="checkbox"/> About twice or thrice monthly
<input type="checkbox"/> Four times or more monthly
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (What?)

6. **In how many church organizations, committees, boards, groups and ministries do you hold membership or are actively involved (not counting church membership itself)? Please check as many as apply:**

<input type="checkbox"/> Bible study	<input type="checkbox"/> Sunday School	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Group
<input type="checkbox"/> Choir	<input type="checkbox"/> Visitation	<input type="checkbox"/> Baby Band
<input type="checkbox"/> Missionary Group	<input type="checkbox"/> Men's Group	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (What?)

7. **Do you believe devotional exercises (prayer, bible study/reading, fasting) can be regarded as necessary for Christian growth and maturity?**

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Don't Know
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8. **If you answered "yes", please respond to the following:**
 - a) How often do you pray?

<input type="checkbox"/> Daily	<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly	<input type="checkbox"/> None
--------------------------------	---------------------------------	-------------------------------
 - b) How often do you read the Bible?

<input type="checkbox"/> Daily	<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly	<input type="checkbox"/> None
--------------------------------	---------------------------------	-------------------------------
 - c) How often do you fast?

<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly	<input type="checkbox"/> Monthly	<input type="checkbox"/> None
---------------------------------	----------------------------------	-------------------------------

9. Has your involvement in the congregation increased, decreased or remained about the same in the last few years?

Increased Decreased Remained the Same

9a. If your participation has increased, which of the following are reasons for that (check all that apply)?

- More time available
 Because of children involvement
 Because of grandchildren involvement
 Better health
 More positive attitude toward the church
 Stronger faith
 Other (What?)

9b. If your participation has decreased, which of the following are reasons for that (check all that apply)?

- Less time available
 Because of caring for children
 Because of caring for grandchildren
 Given up office or other responsibility in church
 Health problems
 More negative attitude toward the church
 Decreased faith
 Other (What?)

10. Approximately how much does your family household contribute to your church per year? (Whether single, separated, widowed or married with children and living with parents)

Under \$200 \$600 - 799 \$1,500 - 2,499
 \$200 - 399 \$800 - 999 \$2,500 - 3,499
 \$400 - 599 \$1,000 -1,499 Over \$3,500

11. How many persons or families have you invited to visit or join your church in the past year?

None 2 - 4
 1 5 or more

CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE

Christian discipline in this questionnaire means the application of principles set in place to preserve all believers in a life style consistent with biblical teaching. It includes the practice of **admonition** involving instruction, warning and correction. In some cases where correction is deliberately rejected, the individual may be liable for removal from membership, also a form of discipline intended to prompt restoration rather than rejection. The following statements are designed to get your response to **the ministry situation where admonition has failed.**

1. **Do you believe every sin causes a break in one's fellowship with God?**
 Agree Disagree Don't Know
2. **Do you believe private sin affects others?**
 Agree Disagree Don't Know
3. **Do you believe personal sin is a private affair which only affects one's relationship with God?**
 Agree Disagree Don't Know
4. **What do you think the church should do if a member is involved in a practice which is a serious breach of Christian teachings?**
 Ignore it
 Personally remind him/her of one's Christian duty
 Suspend from communion
 Admonish generally from the pulpit
 Suspend from official duties (teaching, serving, etc.)
5. **Who do you believe has the responsibility to approach the erring person?**
 Pastor Deacons Pastor & Deacons
 A member aware of the situation Other (Who?)
6. **To what extent does the Bible provide clear teaching on dealing with ethical and moral issues in admonition?**
 Always Mostly Sometimes Never
7. **Do you understand the main thrust of admonition (corrective Christian discipline) as attempting to regain or "win back" the individual to the way of faith, through the offer of God's forgiveness?**
 Agree Disagree Don't Know
8. **Do you understand the main thrust of admonition as attempting to regain or "win back" the individual to the way of faith, through the offer of forgiveness and continued fellowship by the church?**
 Agree Disagree Don't Know
9. **Should admonition be seen as necessary only where self-discipline has broken down and the way or faith and practice abandoned?**
 Agree Disagree Don't Know
10. **Do you believe admonition is a biblical approach of personal involvement and compassionate concern for the believer's growth in Christ-likeness?**
 Agree Disagree Don't Know
11. **Where the peace and joy of the church may have been disrupted by sin, do you believe that admonition is intended to resolve it?**
 Agree Disagree Don't Know

APPENDIX 2

The New Testament word which best describes the horizontal level of Christian fellowship in community, or “life together”, is the Greek word *Allalon*. It occurs about one hundred times in the new Testament, fifty-six of which refers to the order of group relationships. As the genitive plural of *allos*, it is variously translated “other, each other, one another, (members) of one another, or selves, themselves, together (with *meta* - Lune 23:12; or with *pros* - Lune 24:14), yourselves; or reciprocally.” *Allalon* translated as “another”, reflects an essential part of the Christian responsibility to care for others within the community of faith indicated in the commands “love one another” and “forebear one another”. Other references to the “one another” concept in the New Testament include the following negative and positive exhortations:

I) Negative

a) Admonish, Rom. 15:14; Col. 3:16. b) Don't judge, Rom. 14:13. c) Don't lie, Col. 3:9. d) Don't speak against, James 4:11.

II) Positive

a) Be hospitable to, I Peter 4:9. b) Be kind to, Eph. 4:32. c) Be of the same mind, Rom. 12:15, 16; 15:5; Phil. 2:2, 5,; 4:2. d) Be submissive to, Eph. 5:21. e) Bear the burdens, Gal. 6:1-5. f) Bear with, Eph. 4:1, 2; Col. 3:12, 13. g) Care for, I Cor. 12:15; Gal. 6:2; I Thess. 4:18. h) Comfort, I Thess. 4:13-18. i) Confess to and pray for, James 5:16. j) Give preference to, Rom. 12:10. k) Live in peace with, I Thess. 5:13. l) Love, John 13:34, 35; 15:12, 17; Rom. 13:6; I Thess.3:12; Heb. 10:23-25, I Pet. 1:1-22, 5:14; I John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; II John 5. m) Minister your gift to, I Peter 4:10. n) Receive,

Rom. 17:7. o) Seek that which is good for, I Thess. 5:18. p) Serve, Gal. 5:13. q) Worship with, Eph. 5:18-21. r) Edify, Rom. 14:19; Heb. 3:13. The preponderance of the evidence shows that privilege and responsibility as indispensable characteristics of the life in community are incumbent upon each member of such a covenanting community to be exercised for mutual care of one another. Findings of the survey reveal current views on the possession and value of the Church covenant.