

CHURCH.

LESSON 39

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. Pray and commit your group and this course on building Christ's Church to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) <i>[QUIET TIMES]</i> 1 PETER 3 -5
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Take turns and **share** (or **read** from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times with God out of the assigned Bible passages (1 Peter 3 to 5).

Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

3	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) <i>[CHRISTIAN PARENTS]</i> (3) DEUTERONOMY 6:6-7
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Review two by two.

(3) Teach God's Word. Deuteronomy 6:6-7. These commandments I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children, Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

4	TEACHING (85 minutes) <i>[CHURCH RESTORING MINISTRY]</i> EXERCISING DISCIPLINE
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Introduce. This teaching is about the principles and practice of exercising discipline. "Discipline" is the measures one takes when a member commits a transgression. This measure must be limited to the wrongdoing itself and may not be extended to the rest of the transgressor's life. The purpose of discipline is not to punish the wrongdoer, but to draw the wrongdoer back to Jesus Christ and his "narrow way". We will learn about the reasons for exercising discipline, the procedure of exercising discipline and the guidelines for exercising discipline.

A. THE REASONS FOR EXERCISING DISCIPLINE

1. The command to discipline.

Introduce. Christians are *saved sinners*. They have been *justified*, that is, all their sins have been forgiven and will not be counted against them in the final judgement day, because they believe in Jesus Christ (John 5:24). Although Christians are continually *sanctified* by the work of the Holy Spirit in them and the work of other Christians around them, they still fall into sin (1 John 1:8,10; 2:1). Most of the time, Christians confess their sin and again receive forgiveness and cleansing (1 John 1:9). But when they do not repent of their sin, discipline becomes necessary.

Read Matthew 18:15; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13.

Discover and discuss. In which cases should Christians exercise discipline?

Notes. There are times when a Christian does not repent or does not want to repent from his transgression. Maybe the offender tries to justify himself or blame another person for his behaviour.

In Matthew 18:15, Jesus commands Christians, "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault". Therefore, Christians should exercise discipline when they see or know that another Christian has committed a sin. In 1 Corinthians 5:12-13, the apostle Paul teaches, "What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church (congregation)? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. 'Expel the wicked man from among you'."

Therefore, Christians must act when they see or know that a brother or sister continues to practise certain serious sins, like sexual immorality, greed for money, power or fame, idolatry, telling lies and slandering others (gossip), drunkenness or cheating (corruption) in business, false teaching, disorder, disobedience (not listening), etc.

2. The value of exercising discipline.

Read Proverbs 3:11-12; 6:23; 10:17; 15:5; Ecclesiastes 8:11; Hebrews 12:10-11.

Discover and discuss. What is the great value of exercising discipline?

(1) Discipline avoids the spreading of sin.

Ecclesiastes 8:11 warns, "When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong." And Proverbs 10:17 warns, "Whoever ignores correction leads others astray." Therefore,

discipline is needed in the family, in the congregation and in society in order to avoid the spreading of sin and to combat crime!

(2) Discipline promotes spiritual growth.

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

(3) Discipline leads to experiencing life and love.

Proverbs 6:23 teaches, “The corrections of discipline are the way to *life*.” And Proverbs 3:11-12 teaches that a Christian should not despise the Lord’s discipline, because he disciplines those he *loves*. Therefore, discipline is one way in which God expresses his love to you, because he desires only the best for you!

B. THE PROCEDURE OF EXERCISING DISCIPLINE

1. The different types of discipline.

Introduce. There are seven different kinds of discipline in the Bible. They are: divine discipline, governmental discipline, parental discipline, and apostolic discipline, which we will only discuss briefly in this study. Then there is also self-discipline, mutual discipline, and church discipline, which we will study in more detail below.

Read Proverbs 13:24; Romans 1:18; Romans 13:1-5; Galatians 1:6-9.

Discover and discuss. What are the various reasons for God and people in authority to exercise discipline?

(1) Discipline by God (Christ).

God disciplined Israel when they turned away from him and he also disciplined the other nations for their idolatry and sexual immorality (Romans 1:18). Jesus Christ disciplines the seven historic churches (congregations) in the first century. For example, he says, “I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love” (Revelation 2:4). “I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the (false) teaching of Balaam, who taught” idolatry and sexual immorality. “Likewise you also have those who hold to the (false) teaching of the Nicolaitans (which I hate)” (Revelation 2:14-15). “I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her (false) teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of their ways. ... I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds” (Revelation 2:20-24). “I know your deeds, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth ... Those who I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent” (Revelation 3:16,19). “Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come (to discipline) like a thief (unexpected) and you will not know at what time I will come to you” (Revelation 3:2-3).

Jesus comes unexpectedly to churches AT THE PRESENT TIME in order to punish! The purpose of discipline is repentance! Whatever Jesus Christ said to the seven historic churches he also says to all other churches in the history of the world (Revelation 2:7). No Christian and no Christian church are exempted from Christ’s discipline!

(2) Discipline by the government.

God has given the governments in the world authority and the responsibility to punish wrongdoers. They are “God’s servants” and *should hold terror for those who do wrong (not for those who do right)*.

The government has authority “to bear the sword”, that is, to execute the death penalty (Romans 13:1-5), but only for the reasons recorded in the Bible (Genesis 9:5-6; Exodus 21:12-17; Matthew 26:52).

However, all governments have only a limited authority. For example, they may not prohibit God’s work through Jesus Christ (for example, preaching the gospel by word and deed) in their country (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29).

(3) Discipline by parents.

God has given parents the responsibility and authority to bring up their children who are still under age in the training and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4) and if necessary to punish them. “He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him” (Proverbs 13:24) The Bible teaches, “Discipline your son and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul” (Proverbs 29:17)

(4) Discipline by the apostles.

Jesus Christ gave his twelve apostles the special responsibility and authority *to include and exclude* people from the Church (Matthew 16:18-19; 18:18; Acts 5:1-11; 8:14-17; Galatians 1:6-9). This apostolic discipline no longer exists, because the church with a council of elders has been established and the apostles of Jesus Christ had no successors (cf. Acts 1:21-22)! There are still “apostles of the churches” in the sense of representatives or missionaries (Acts 14:1-4,26-

28; 2 Corinthians 8:23; Philippians 2:25; 1 Thessalonians 2:6-7), but they do not have the same authority as the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ.

2. Self-discipline.

Read Matthew 18:7-9; Luke 6:42-43; Romans 16:17-18; 2 John 9-10.

Discover and discuss. How should all Christians exercise self-discipline?

Notes. Every human being has a personal responsibility to exercise self-discipline. By making use of God's grace, every Christian should *exercise his will* to recommit himself again and again to the exercise of self-discipline. In the end at the Last Judgement God will hold every person responsible for his own works (Romans 2:6).

(1) Every human being is responsible for removing personal sin or bad habits in himself.

In Luke 6:42-43, Jesus teaches, "How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. 'No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit'."

While non-Christians receive no forgiveness of sins (as long as they remain unbelievers), Christians are able to confess their sin and receive complete forgiveness (1 John 1:9). While non-Christians remain slaves of sin (as long as they are not born again) (John 8:34), Christians have the Spirit of Christ living in them to give them power to resist sin (John 8:36).

(2) Every human being is responsible to turn away from divisive persons and false teachers.

Romans 16:17-18 and 2 John 9-10 teach that Christians should keep away from people who cause divisions and who teach false teachings. While non-Christians cannot resist the lies of the devil (John 8:44; 1 John 5:19), Christians can resist the devil (Ephesians 6:16-17; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8) and cannot be harmed by the devil (1 John 5:18).

(3) Every human being is responsible not to cause others to fall into sin.

In Matthew 18:7-9, Jesus says, "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin" (all stumbling blocks) (cf. Matthew 13:41)! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!" For example, all people who exploit casinos, gambling and lotteries, night clubs and sexual immorality, the production and selling of drugs including cigarettes, terrorist organisations and killing, false propaganda and lies, etc. are people who do evil and promote sin.

3. Mutual discipline.

Read Matthew 5:23-24; Matthew 18:15; Galatians 6:1.

Discover and discuss. How should Christians exercise mutual discipline?

Notes. Every Christian has the responsibility and authority to exercise mutual discipline. It does not matter whether the other Christian sins (commits a transgression) against God, against someone else or against you.

(1) Every Christian is responsible to immediately resolve a problem, when he hears that another Christian holds something against him.

In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus teaches that if you remember that your brother has something against you, then you should take the initiative to get reconciled with him. Mutual discipline should be exercised in private, under four eyes, and it should be done in a gentle way.

(2) Every Christian is also responsible to admonish another Christian who has sinned against him.

In the case of two Christians having a dispute or one feeling that the other has sinned against him, they should first try to resolve their problem between themselves, before involving the elders or the whole congregation in their problem. In Matthew 18:15, Jesus teaches, "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over."

(3) Every Christian is responsible for admonishing other Christians who fall into any kind of sin.

Galatians 6:1 teaches, "If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted."

4. Church discipline of sin of a more private nature.

Read Matthew 18:15-17.

Discover and discuss. How should the congregation exercise the discipline of sin of a more private nature?

Notes.

(1) Church discipline.

Church discipline usually begins where personal and mutual discipline fails. In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus teaches, "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take the second step and take one or two others along, so that "every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses". If he refuses to listen to them, take the third step and

tell it to the church (the organised assembly of the church or the council of elders that represents the congregation). If he refuses to listen even to the church (congregation), treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector (that is, as an unbeliever).”

(2) The prescribed order of church discipline of a more private nature.

- The first step is to show the offender his fault (literally: to expose his sin) in private (just between you and him).
- The second step is taken when he does not listen. Take one or two other members as witnesses along and confront him again.
- The third step is taken when he refuses to listen. Make his offence known to the council of elders that represents the congregation and not to everyone in public. The elders should then discipline the brother or sister.
- The fourth step is taken when he persists in his refusal to accept correction from the elders. The elders make the matter known to the whole congregation and officially cut him off from membership of the congregation. This kind of discipline is often called “excommunication”, because the unrepentant sinner is cut off from participating in the Lord’s Supper and from exercising any ministry in the congregation. The other members of the congregation should be notified and they should *treat this person as a non-Christian*. This does not mean that they should treat him as an enemy or shun (avoid) him, but they should treat him like they should treat all other non-Christians. They should pray for him, keep contact with him, love him and try to win him back to faith in and obedience to Jesus Christ.

5. Church discipline of sin of a more public nature.

Read Romans 12:17-21; 1 Corinthians 5:1-5,9-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; 2 Timothy 2:25-26; Titus 3:9-11; James 2:12-13; 3 John 9-10.

Discover and discuss. How should the congregation exercise the discipline of sin of a more public nature?

Notes.

(1) Church discipline.

Certain sins may develop to a point where only public discipline can be exercised. According to the Bible the following sins need to be judged:

- incest, adultery, homosexual behaviour, bestiality (Leviticus 18:6,20,22,23; 1 Corinthians 6:9)
- stealing, lying, deceiving, swear falsely, defrauding, robbing, holding back wages, cursing, putting stumbling blocks, perverting justice, showing partiality, spreading slander (as in political campaigns), endangering lives, hating your brother in your heart, sharing in another’s guilt, seeking revenge, bearing a grudge, not loving the neighbour, dishonesty in business (Leviticus 19:11-36)
- being a medium or spiritist (Leviticus 20:27; 1 Timothy 4:1-2)
- involving your children in idolatry, practising divination, sorcery, witchcraft or other occultism, false prophecies (Deuteronomy 18:9-14,20)
- rape, paedophilia, lover boys (Deuteronomy 22:25)
- prostitution (Deuteronomy 23:17-18)
- kidnapping, slave trading (Deuteronomy 24:7; 1 Timothy 1:8-11)
- depriving the alien or fatherless of justice (Deuteronomy 24:17)
- beating someone cruelly (Deuteronomy 25:1-3)
- lying. God hates a lying tongue and a false witness (Proverbs 6:16-19). False prophets, false teachers, false preachers, false witnesses, speakers of false dreams, false visions, etc. must be suspended immediately. God himself will punish a person who claims that what he says “comes from the LORD” (Jeremiah 23:16-40; cf. Deuteronomy 18:21-22).
- murder (Matthew 15:18)
- haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventing ways of doing evil, disobeying parents (Romans 1:28-32)
- sexual immorality, greed, swindlers, idolaters (worshipping with another religion or sect); slander, drunkenness, swindling (1 Corinthians 5:11)
- idleness, laziness by not wanting to work, busybodies (2 Thessalonians 3:11)
- divisive people, sowing disunity and breaking up into parties (Titus 3:10)
- terrorism, holy wars (James 4:1-2), violence, murder
- debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry (1 Peter 4:3)
- unbelievers, the vile, murderers, sexual immoral, those who practice magic arts, idolaters and all liars (Revelation 21:8)
- etc. etc.

But this judgement must always be done in Christian love (1 Corinthians 13:1-8) and with mercy. James 2:12-13 says, “Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgement without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgement!” In the plan of salvation, justice demands that the sinner should be condemned and mercy pleads that the sinner may be saved. In the plan of salvation mercy prevails! Likewise, in the matter of church discipline, justice demands that the sinner be condemned and mercy pleads that the sinner may be persuaded to repent. May mercy triumph over judgement in church discipline!

(2) The prescribed order of church discipline of sin of a more public nature.

For example: preaching false doctrine, committing sexual immorality, causing trouble and divisions, being dishonest with respect to money, etc.

- **The first step** is that one of the leaders (like Titus) warn (admonish) (Greek: μέ paraggelló) the sinner at least twice (Greek: μέ paraggelló) (Titus 3:10-11). The first time under four eyes. The second time could be in the presence of those he sinned against or of an elder.
- **The second step** is taken when he does not show remorse, does not repent and does not heed the warning of the brothers. Call the attention of the whole congregation to the sinner's conduct (Greek: sémaio) so that he will feel ashamed (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15; 3 John 9-10). The whole congregation should take note and be aware of the sin and its danger. However the Christians should not treat the sinner as an enemy.
- **The third step** is taken when the sinner is not affected by public shame and refuses to change his behaviour. The church must then withdraw from associating with the sinner on intimate terms (2 Thessalonians 3:6,14). They should keep away from him, that is, shun or avoid him, in order that he may feel ashamed.

This kind of discipline may seem to be harsh and unjust, but the Bible has a good reason for this command. This kind of discipline is not for small sins and definitely not for a brother or sister who repents from his or her sin, even when the sin was very serious! This kind of discipline is for Christians who refuse to repent after repeated warning. Such unrepentant sinners will not only destroy their own lives with their sin, but will contaminate other Christians and draw them into sin as well. The sins that call for such serious discipline are especially the following: sexual immorality in all its forms (pornography, adultery, prostitution, homosexuality); spiritual immorality (false prophets and false teachers, sects, 2 John 10), idolatry in all its forms (greed for money, practicing any of the many forms of occultism); bitterness (lies, slander, spreading hatred against other people, Hebrews 12:15); blasphemy of God, Christ and the Christian faith (1 Timothy 1:19-20); misuse of alcohol or drugs; corruption and crime. In order to avoid other Christians being drawn into his sin and getting defiled by his bitterness, Christians should shun or avoid him.

The unrepentant sinner may feel rejected and turn completely against God and all Christians and consequently be lost. But if the congregation allows the unrepentant sinner to continue to practise his serious sin in their midst, many more people will be lost! The best approach would be to ask an elder or competent Christian counsellor to try to keep contact with the unrepentant sinner and try to gently instruct him and persuade him to repent (2 Timothy 2:25-26). The unrepentant sinner may finally feel deeply ashamed of his conduct and repent. A Christian or elder that has kept contact with the sinner would then save the sinner from falling away from the Christian faith (1 Timothy 4:16).

- **The fourth step** is taken when shunning (avoiding) has not helped and the sinner refuses to repent. Then the church must remove the sinner from their midst. The church must terminate his membership (1 Corinthians 5:2), no longer associate with him so that he will feel shamed (2 Thessalonians 3:14) and regard and treat him in the future as a non-Christian (Matthew 18:17). Without spiritual fellowship within the congregation, he is exposed to Satan and the destruction of his sinful nature, in the hope that his spirit (soul) may be saved on the Last Judgement Day (1 Corinthians 5:4-5).

To be cut off from membership of the congregation is a serious matter. In the case of a weak congregation as in Corinth, the Christians should have nothing to do with the unrepentant sinner anymore (1 Corinthians 5:9,11; Titus 3:10).

However, Christians are forbidden to take revenge (Romans 12:17-21). And if this sinner wants to attend the services of the congregation again, Christians should allow him and give him new opportunities to repent of his sin. Mercy should always triumph over judgement (James 2:13)!

6. Church discipline of sin of an elder or any other leader in the congregation.

Read Titus 1:6; 1 Timothy 3:2; 5:1-2,17-20; Galatians 2:11-16.

Discover and discuss. How should the congregation exercise discipline of the sin of an elder or any leader in the congregation?

Notes.

(1) An elder must be rebuked publicly only when there are at least two witnesses.

In 1 Timothy 5:19-20 is written, "Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. Those who sin are to be rebuked (Greek: elenchó) publicly, so that the others may take warning." Elders or other Christian leaders are not exempt from Christian discipline! All ordinary Christians should watch the teaching and conduct of their leaders (1 Timothy 4:15-16). And if a leader teaches false teachings or does not live according to the Christian teachings, then he should be admonished by at least all the other elders so that he will fear the consequences of such sins!

If he refuses to repent or continues to justify his conduct, while he has been proven guilty, he should first be suspended from his office *and the whole congregation should be notified of his conduct.* If he continues to harden his heart, the

whole congregation should withdraw from associating with him on intimate terms. If he continues to refuse to repent, he should be cut off from membership.

(2) An elder (church leader) must be disciplined regardless his age or position in the congregation.

1 Timothy 5:1-2,19-20 teaches that an offender must be rebuked *regardless his age or his position* as an elder in the congregation. In Galatians 2:11-16, the apostle Paul did not hesitate to publicly rebuke another apostle for hypocritical conduct!

Although some national cultures forbid rebuking or correcting an older person or a leader in the community (out of fear of losing face), the Christian culture or kingdom of God culture commands that both older people and leaders should be rebuked and corrected! In cases like this, the national culture must be made way for the culture of the kingdom of God and the culture of the kingdom of God must be introduced and consistently practised in the congregation!

(3) An elder who is involved in sexual immorality, must be suspended immediately.

An elder or leader, who has been involved in sexual immorality, should be suspended immediately from his office and disciplined, because “an elder must be blameless”. One of the God-given qualifications for an elder is that he must be “the husband of but one wife”. This means that he does not flirt and he does not involve himself in pornography, sexual immorality, adultery or a divorce, but wins and loves his wife in a holy and honourable way (1 Thessalonians 4:4; Ephesians 5:25-29).

C. THE PROCEDURE OF RESTORING A REPENTANT SINNER

1. The sinner must repent.

Discover and discuss. What is the meaning of the word “*repentance*”? How does the repentant sinner show his repentance, when he formerly did not want to repent?

Notes. Repentance (Greek: metanoieó) means “to change your mind”. Before a sinner repents, he often tries to justify himself. He thinks that he is right and he wants to convince others that he is right! But when he repents, he changes *his mind, acknowledges* that God is right and that he is wrong. Repentance means to feel *remorse*, to be regretful about what he has done, and to *resolve* not to continue the wrongdoing. Repentance means to be *turn away from* his own evil and to *turn towards* what is right in God’s eyes. Repentance means to be reformed in his thinking, attitudes and behaviour!

Read Psalm 32:1-5. As long as the sinner refuses to acknowledge his sin and to confess his sin, God will not forgive him and he will suffer various bad consequences in his life (See also Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 11:30). Sin must be acknowledged and confessed.

Read Proverbs 28:13; Isaiah 57:20-21. As long as a person conceals his sin, he will not prosper. God says that he will not experience “peace”, but only turmoil in his life: unrest, confusion, sadness and all kinds of bad physical symptoms (Psalm 32:3-4).

Read Ezekiel 18:21-32; Matthew 3:6-10; Acts 3:19; 26:20. Genuine repentance is not the same as an acknowledgement and a confession of sin. It requires a genuine turning away from the former sin and a turning towards what is right in God’s eyes. It requires “producing fruit in keeping with repentance”. A repentant sinner must prove his repentance by his changed behaviour (Luke 3:8).

Read Luke 13:1-5. Failure to repent will lead to destruction!

2. The sinner must show godly sorrow.

Read 2 Corinthians 7:8-13.

Discover and discuss. What is the difference between worldly sorrow and godly sorrow?

Notes. In his first letter to the Corinthian congregation, in 1 Corinthians 5, Paul rebuked the congregation for not taking disciplinary action against a certain brother who lived in gross sexual immorality. The Corinthian Christians tolerated unacceptable sin in their midst! Although the Corinthian Christians felt hurt by Paul’s first letter, they responded positively and expelled the transgressor.

Now in his second letter to them, Paul says that he wrote his first letter not to make them sad, but to bring them to repentance. He says, “You became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death”. Paul regretted that his first letter hurt the Corinthians, but its result of producing godly sorrow and repentance was something he did not regret!

(1) Worldly sorrow.

If the Corinthian Christians had not genuinely repented, they would have responded with *worldly sorrow*. They would have indulged in hypocritical self-vindication and even in embittered recrimination. They would have felt hurt by Paul’s rebuke and sorrow because of the painful and unwelcome consequences of their sin. They would have manifested self-pity rather than true contrition. They would have risen in opposition to God instead of turning to God.

Esau is an example of worldly sorrow. In Hebrews 12:16-17 we read that he first sold his inheritance rights and after he was rejected, he could not change Isaac's mind, even though he sought this blessing with tears. Esau's sorrow and tears were for the loss of his inheritance!

Another example of worldly sorrow is king Saul. In 1 Samuel 15:17-31, Saul's sorrow and confession of sin was not because he had remorse about his sin, but because he feared to be dishonoured (that is, to lose face and be shamed) before the elders of Israel!

In Luke 23:29-31, the sorrow and wailing of the women of Jerusalem would be for the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple and their families. "Worldly sorrow brings death".

At the final judgement, the unbelievers and disobedient people will manifest worldly sorrow, which culminates in their weeping and gnashing of teeth in hell (Matthew 13:42; Revelation 6:15-17).

(2) Godly sorrow.

However, the Corinthian Christians genuinely repented and proved this in the way they responded with *godly sorrow* to Paul's rebuke. They became genuinely sorrowful, just as God intended them to become. "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to *salvation*". This phrase is difficult to understand. The Corinthian Christians were already saved. Had the Corinthian Christians not repented of their tolerance to gross sexual immorality in the midst of the congregation, then they would have suffered, not a loss of their eternal salvation (justification), but a loss of their ongoing salvation (sanctification and reward).

Therefore, the meaning here cannot be that *repentance* is the foundation for *salvation*, or that the goal or result of repentance is salvation. The ground for salvation is never what humans do (showing remorse and repentance), but always what God does (his grace, forgiveness and acceptance)! The Corinthians repented of their tolerance to sin in their congregation. A better translation of the phrase is, "The sorrow in accordance with God's will *once for all* produces (Greek: *katergazomai*) (aorist tense) (verse 11) a change in thinking about salvation." The fact that they repented (changed their thinking), proved that they were genuinely saved (cf. Matthew 3:8)! This fact greatly encouraged Paul and Timothy.

David is another example of "godly sorrow that produces repentance (a change of thinking)". In Psalm 51:2-4,10, he says, "Cleanse me from my sin. I know my transgressions. Against you only have I sinned. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit in me."

(3) The worthy fruits of repentance.

In 2 Corinthians 7:11 we read about the worthy fruits of godly sorrow (sorrow in accordance with the will of God), "See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what *earnestness*, what *eagerness* to clear yourselves, what *indignation*, what *alarm*, what *longing*, what *concern*, what *readiness to see justice done*. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter."

- Earnestness (Greek: *spoudé*). In contrast to their former carelessness and indifference to sin in their congregation, they were now very serious to clear themselves.
- Eagerness to make an apology (Greek: *apologia*). Eager to set matters right again.
- Indignation (Greek: *aganaktésis*). They were *indignant*, not with the offending brother, but with themselves, because they had permitted such a scandal to continue unchecked in their congregation. They had brought dishonour to God's name.
- Fear (Greek: *fobos*). They were *alarmed* or fearful of God's punishment and of Paul's apostolic authority to judge them (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:21, "Shall I come to you with a whip?").
- Longing (Greek: *epithésis*). They were *longing* to be right with God again and to be reunited with Paul in their former relationship of trust and affection.
- Concern (Greek: *zélōs*). They were *concerned* with restoring God's honour and Paul's apostolic authority in their midst.
- Vengeance, to see justice is done (Greek: *ekdikésis*). They saw to it that justice is done by placing the guilty person under church discipline (and rejecting the false apostles that infiltrated into the church).

By putting their own congregation in order, they proved that they were innocent (pure) with respect to the immorality of that one brother and the teachings of the false apostles. They had taken action and had shown *godly sorrow*. The troubled past had been erased and they were pure so far as this matter was concerned.

But is it good to motivate people with "fear" instead of love? Both God in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament often motivated people with fear for the coming judgement if they did not repent. If you warn people that their house is burning down, you motivate them with fear, and this is often the only way to get them to act and flee from the impending disaster! God's perfect love does not exclude his perfect righteousness and perfect holiness! And the perfect love of God does not exclude a healthy dose of "fear (awe) towards God"! (Proverbs 1:20-33).

3. The return and restoration of a repentant sinner.

Read Luke 15:17-24; 17:3; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11; Hebrews 8:12.

Discover and discuss. How does a church allow a repentant sinner to return? How do they restore him?

Notes.

- (1) Discipline means to admonish and punish
with a view to the return and restoration of a repentant sinner

Discipline is a kind of punishment. However the purpose of the punishment is not to cool our anger against the sinner, but to restore the sinner. The purpose of discipline is to bring the sinner to his senses, to repentance, to changing his conduct and thus to bring him back to obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ! At any time, when the sinner repents of his sin, then the Christians and the congregation must restore him. In 2 Corinthians 2:5-11, the apostle Paul commands the congregation how to restore a repentant sinner. Of course, the offence of the sinner grieves the whole congregation. And by exercising discipline, the Christians or the whole congregation punishes the offender. However, when he repents, then the Christians and the congregation should forgive him, comfort (encourage) him and reaffirm their love for him.

- (2) Forgive the repentant sinner.

In Luke 17:3, Jesus commands, "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him." A person who feels very guilty or deeply ashamed about the sin he has committed, has a great need to accept total forgiveness from God, from the person that he offended or from the congregation that he offended.

In Matthew 6:14-15 Jesus Christ teaches, "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins". Ephesians 4:32 teaches, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you". Christians should forgive the repentant sinner in exactly the same way as God has forgiven all their sins! When Christians forgive, they should never speak about the offence any more (Hebrews 8:12)!

- (3) Comfort and reaffirm the repentant sinner.

Christians should treat the repentant sinner just as Christ treats all of us when we repent from our sins. Christians should comfort (encourage) the repentant sinner, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. And Christians should reaffirm their love to him by restoring him to membership of the congregation and by again having fellowship with him. See how the father treated his lost son when he repented (Luke 15:17-24).

4. The restoration of a repentant leader.

- (1) The question of restoring a repentant leader to an office.

This section concerns the restoration of a former Christian leader or elder to an office in the congregation. How should a congregation restore a former elder or other church leader, who had been suspended from his office or even excommunicated from membership because of some sin? If he genuinely repents and reforms his life, should he be allowed to take up an office in the congregation again?

This is an extremely sensitive issue among Christians. Besides the points concerning church discipline mentioned above, the issue is not further elaborated in the Bible.

- (2) Christians who advocate no restoration to an office or leadership.

Many Christian leaders agree that a Christian leader, who has once been involved in sexual immorality, must remain suspended forever from every office of the congregation. They believe that he may be restored as a member of the congregation (and thus again participate in the Lord's Supper), but never again as an elder (priest) or other leader in the congregation.

- (3) Christians who advocate the restoration to an office or leadership after a probation period.

Other Christian leaders recognise the power of God's mercy and grace to forgive and to radically transform broken lives by repentance and sanctification. They believe that there may be exceptions to the general rule of not allowing such persons back into an office of the congregation. If there is strong evidence that new patterns of Christian character have been solidly established over a considerable period of time (say for example five years), then he may again be considered for an office of the congregation or leadership in some ministry.

God restored Moses as leader after he had committed murder (Exodus 2:11-12; 3:10). God restored Samson to power after he had broken his Nazirite vow of separation (Judges 16:17-30). God restored king David after he had committed adultery and murder (2 Samuel 11:1 – 12:14). God restored king Manasseh after he had led Israel into gross idolatry, witchcraft and spiritism (the belief that the departed spirits of people show themselves to and communicate with people, especially through mediums or at séances by means of spirit-rapping, spirit-handwriting, etc) (2 Chronicles 33:1-16; Leviticus 19:31).

1 Timothy 5:19-20 speaks of rebuking publicly an elder, who sins, but it does not speak of suspending him forever from every office.

- (4) The final decision.

The elders of the congregation may want to review whether their decision is biblical or not. But they should have the final say in this matter and the members of the congregation ought to respect their decision (Hebrews 13:17).

D. GUIDELINES FOR EXERCISING DISCIPLINE

1. Discernment of problems.

Introduce. In order to rebuke or to correct the sinner, you should first gather the necessary facts and try to understand the real problem. You should especially distinguish between the *surface problem* and the *root problem*.

(1) The surface problem.

The surface problem is the visible action or reaction accompanied by the expressed words, attitudes, feelings and behaviour of the sinner. For example, he gossips about a brother, because the brother wronged him.

(2) The root problem.

The root problem is the hidden thoughts, attitudes and feelings which lie at the root of the problem of the sinner. For example, he is bitter (unforgiving) against that brother.

(3) Exercise in discerning problems.

Discover and discuss. What is *the surface problem* and what is *the root problem* in each of the following Bible passages?

Notes.

Read 2 Chronicles 33:1-6,21-22. The surface problem of king Amon was that he got involved with the wrong kind of people, especially with idolaters. His root problem was that he came out of a broken home, where his father was also an idolater.

Read Psalm 32:1-4. The surface problem of the Psalmist was that he could not sleep, had no energy or got sick from worrying. His root problem was that he felt guilty about some sin he had committed.

Read Matthew 22:23,29. The surface problem of the Sadducees and some religious groups is that they teach false teachings. Their root problem is that they do not know what the Bible really teaches.

Read Mark 7:1-9. The surface problem of the Pharisees and some congregations is that they teach many man-made religious rules and constantly criticise other Christians for not keeping these rules. Their root problem is that they have let go of the Bible and what the Bible really teaches in order to hold on to their man-made laws (rules, traditions) which their denomination has drawn up in past years.

Read Luke 8:11,14. The surface problem is that people receive the Word of God in a divided heart and therefore remain immature and unfruitful. The root problem is that life's worries, riches and pleasures have choked God's Word out of his life.

Read Luke 18:18,22. The surface problem of the rich ruler was that he did not know what he must do to inherit eternal life. His root problem was that he was unwilling to break with his love for money.

Read Romans 1:18-32. The surface problem of the heathen is that they are morally depraved. They commit sexual immorality, indulge in idolatry or commit crimes. Their root problem is that they are suppressing or exchanging God's truth that is found in the Bible for lies. Sexual immoral Christians always change their theology and when a Christian changes his theology (his convictions with regard to the Bible), there is usually an immoral root problem.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-4. The surface problem of this congregation was carnality, jealousy and acting like the non-Christians in the world (one cannot see the difference between them and non-Christians). They quarrel and split the church into sectarian groups. The root problem was that they had not been made into (mature and functioning) disciples of Jesus Christ.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:2; Ephesians 5:8-12. The surface problem of some people is that they are freethinkers and approve of the evil practices in society. Their root problem is that they have some secret sin in their own lives, which they try to cover up.

Read Ephesians 4:13-15. The surface problem of these people is that they are easily misled by false teachings. Their root problem is that they are not growing up to maturity as Christians and they are not developing their own biblical convictions.

Read 1 Timothy 1:19. The surface problem of these two people was that they had lost their faith in Jesus Christ. Their root problem was that they had rejected a good conscience.

Read James 4:2-3. The surface problem is that he does not receive answers to his prayers. His root problem is that he never (or seldom) prays. Another reason could be that he cherishes a particular sin in his heart (Psalm 66:18; Isaiah 59:1-2; 1 Peter 3:12).

Read 3 John 9-10. The surface problem of this church leader is that he speaks evil of other Christians (churches or leaders) and keeps other good Christian workers away from the congregation. His root problem is that he loves to be the first, desires to have all the power in the congregation and wants to control every member.

Read Revelation 2:4-5. The surface problem of this congregation was that it no longer did what it used to do when it was a young and vibrant congregation. The root problem was that this congregation had lost its first love for Christ.

2. Guidelines for exercising discipline.

Teach. The Bible gives the following guidelines for exercising discipline.

(1) Discipline the sinner in truth.

Matthew 7:1-2 teaches that Christians are able to make assumptions or unfounded judgements about other people.

1 Corinthians 5:12-13 teaches that Christians must not make judgements about non-Christians at all, but only judge other Christians in their own congregation. John 7:24 teaches that Christians may not judge another person according to his appearance or on the basis of just hearsay (gossip). John 18:23 teaches that Christians should have some specific evidence or a witness about what really was said or happened (the truth). Proverbs 18:17 teaches that Christians should hear the case from the point of view of both sides. 2 Timothy 3:16 teaches that the Bible is the only standard of what the truth is.

(2) Discipline the sinner fairly.

Leviticus 19:15 and Deuteronomy 16:18-19 teach that Christians must judge the sinner in fairness and righteousness. We may never show partiality for or against people. The Bible forbids favouritism! Proverbs 17:8,23 teaches that it is absolutely forbidden for Christians to receive or give bribes in order to distort justice or for any other reason!

1 Corinthians 6:11 teaches that Christians should rather take their case to Christian brothers in the congregation to judge, than to the worldly court and judge who has no regard for biblical principles. A worldly judge has a different value system and other interests and is not able to judge fairly.

(3) Discipline the sinner firmly.

Proverbs 27:5 says, “Better is open rebuke than hidden love”. The Greek word for “rebuke” (elenchó) reveals several possible aspects of correcting:

- **To expose.** According to Ephesians 5:11-13, we should begin by *exposing* the specific sin the sinner has committed. The sinner must know very clearly what his transgression was. Make sure that the sinner realises why his action was wrong in God’s eyes.
- **To rebuke.** According to Proverbs 28:23, we should *rebuke* the sinner by scolding or disapproving of his conduct.
- **To reprove or to refute.** If necessary, according to Titus 1:9, we should *refute* the arguments of the sinner when he tries to justify himself without a good reason. However, we should give the sinner opportunity to explain his conduct. The sinner may have a good reason, which we have overlooked. If we have made a wrong assumption or undeserved accusation, we need to apologise.
- **To convince and to convict.** In the mean time we should pray quietly that the Holy Spirit would *convince* the sinner of his wrong and *convict* him of the seriousness of his transgression, so that he feels guilty or ashamed of his transgression and desires to repent (John 16:8).
- **To correct.** Finally, according to 2 Timothy 3:16, we should *correct* the sinner by helping him to go in the way he ought to go.
- **To punish.** And if the sinner persists in disobedience by being foolish, arrogant or rebellious, hardening his heart against his brothers or sisters or challenging the authority of the elders, then we should *punish* the sinner in the appropriate way (Proverbs 22:15; Hebrews 12:6; Revelation 3:19).

When the issue is also a case for criminal justice of your country (for example: rape, paedophilia, abduction, forcing into prostitution, theft, etc.) the police must be notified. The leadership of the church may not hush the issue up.

(4) Discipline the sinner in love.

The whole purpose of discipline is to restore the sinner. Christians should love the sinner by disciplining his sin and by disciplining him in the biblical way. By remaining quiet and doing nothing about the sin (not exercising church discipline), the sinner will nevertheless be destroyed, the church will lose its credibility in the eyes of the world and God will be dishonoured. But when the sinner repents, Christians should love him by forgiving him and by restoring him to the Christian fellowship.

5	PRAYER (8 minutes)	[REACTIONS] PRAYER IN RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD
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Take turns in the group to pray short to God in response to what you have learned today.
Or divide the group into two’s or three’s and pray to God in response to what you have learned today.

6	PREPARATION (2 minutes)	[ASSIGNMENT] FOR NEXT LESSON
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(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. **Commitment.** Be committed to make disciples and build Christ’s Church.

2. Preach, teach or study the teaching of “Exercising discipline” together with another person or group of people. Teach new believers what the Bible teaches about discipline and restoration. Encourage every Christian to take responsibility for self-discipline, mutual discipline and church discipline.
3. Personal time with God. Have a quiet time with God from half a chapter of 2 Peter 1-3 and Jude each day. Make use of the favourite truth method or questions method. Make notes.
4. Memorisation. Meditate and memorise the new Bible verse. (4) Bring up in the Lord. Ephesians 6:4. Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
5. Bible study. Prepare the next Bible study at home. John 18. Make use of the five steps method.
6. Prayer. Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
7. Update your notebook on building Christ’s Church. Include your notes on personal time with God, your memorisation notes, your teaching notes and this preparation.