

Elder Council Policy on Church Discipline

Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul taught clearly that efforts should be made to correct those professing faith in Christ who have begun to live in sin or error. Christ's basic approach, found in Matthew 18:15-17, is a simple and clear starting point. I Corinthians 5 is another important passage on the necessity of church discipline. As the elders of Faith Baptist Fellowship, it is our earnest desire to shepherd our flock with biblical faithfulness, humility, and prayer; and to protect the church from harm. Thus, the result is this Elder Council policy, prepared in accordance with Scripture and our church's governing documents.

However, first we must note that while taking steps to maintain the witness, unity, doctrine, reputation and purity of the church, the church must always keep in mind its goals and focus in discipline:

- Reconciliation where there is brokenness,
- Righteousness where there is impurity, and
- Restoration of fellowship to the erring believer,
- All for the glory of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

May we never seek to humiliate or embarrass a person in our church family, but always seek their repentance and joyful restoration to the church and fellow believers. May we never seek our own personal interests, but always the interests of the body and the honor of Christ and his church (Philippians 2:3-4). May disciplinary steps always be pursued with gentleness, love, and the hope of true Christian fellowship (Galatians 6:1-2; I John 1:7-10; 2 Corinthians 2:6-7). May disciplinary steps be received with humility, earnest self-reflection, and eagerness to repent and be restored by the blood of Christ (Hebrews 13:17).

First Step

As a first step, any believer in our fellowship, when they become aware of a brother or sister pursuing a life of disobedience and sin, must take the step of speaking directly to that person, preferably in private (Matthew 18:15). We cannot triangulate by asking others to do what we must do, which is take the initial step of speaking directly to the person in question to lovingly confront them about their sin. As this gentle confrontation takes place,

misunderstandings can be cleared up and heartfelt confession and repentance will bring the end of the matter. To further reflect on this point, see the Faith Communication Covenant (above).

Second Step When Necessary

Where this initial step is rebuffed, in obedience to Christ we will then pursue the second step, which is to speak with the person again but with one or two witnesses (Matthew 18:16). It would be most helpful at this point if one or both of the witnesses were an elder familiar with biblical church discipline. As more people become aware of the communication taking place (in this case, the witnesses), extra care must be taken to avoid gossip about the parties involved and to protect both their individual reputations and the reputation of the body of Christ. Also, caution and care must be observed, that evidence be presented fairly and lovingly in the pursuit of truth, righteousness, and helpful correction. Our hope is that this second step will lead to repentance, reconciliation, and restoration, so that believers are strengthened in their walk with Christ and the church family protected from harm.

When Additional Steps are Needed

In the case where neither of the preceding steps results in satisfactory settling of the issues, where there is not reconciliation, restoration, and righteousness by grace established, a third step is in order and needed. At this point, the Elder Council will be informed and further efforts toward repentance and restoration will be undertaken. However, if the elders deem it necessary, the church will be informed of the unrepentant sin (Matthew 18:17; read also I Corinthians 5) and the need to remove the person from membership. The elders will have discretion concerning the setting, nature, and timing of this public communication with the Faith Baptist body (1 Timothy 5:20; Titus 3:10; I Corinthians 5:6-7). The elders will also carefully instruct the body as to their duties in communicating with and showing love to the person out of fellowship. The elders will exercise great care to carry out this duty in all humility, submission to Scripture, and meekness (Philippians 2:3-4).

When Immediate Action Is Required

There may be occasions when the Elder Council, in order to protect the church body and its reputation, must take immediate action. In such cases,

the elders will act in accordance with the spirit and intent of this policy, with the goal of repentance and restoration in the life of the person in question. The elders will also act in accordance with public laws which may apply, such as notification of law enforcement officials when sinful actions may be against the law. In all cases, it will be the prayerful, careful desire of the elders to act with wisdom and biblical faithfulness as each situation requires.

Our Shared Responsibility

As we hope this policy makes clear, the responsibility to maintain the spiritual health and vitality of the church is in the hands of every member, not only its elders. Let us agree that we will begin the process by going to the person in sin, knowing that at this first, initial encounter the Holy Spirit may well bring brokenness, confession, and the application of the gospel.

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