



PRE-MARRIAGE, MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE POLICY
Elder Training for Church Discipline, and Care of Members

Metro North Counseling Center

(MNCC)

COMPILED BY DIRECTOR OF BIBLICAL COUNSELING

Policy and Procedures Series

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Chapter 1: Why a Pre-Marriage, Marriage and Divorce Policy?¹

“The fact that you are a Christian does not insulate you from these challenges. As hard as it may be to believe, professing Christians have virtually the same divorce rate as those outside the church. Therefore, to think your marriage is somehow immune to divorce because you are a Christian couple is naive.”²

This guide has been compiled for the benefit of those involved in Pre-Marriage, Marriage and Divorce Counseling or considering involvement in this ministry. It has always been the desire of the leadership of the church to develop a curriculum guide for counselors. This is a first attempt to do so. We expect it to be modified and updated, and assume it will be adapted to each counselor’s gifts and style.

Over the years many couples have participated in this ministry. For those couples embarking on their first counseling journey, invariably the question is asked...”OK, what do we do now?” This guide has been put together to help answer that question. Perhaps even the “veterans” will find this information helpful.

Denominational Background

The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in America, which is subject to and subordinate to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the inerrant Word Of God, consists of its doctrinal standards set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith, together with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, and the Book of Church Order, comprising the Form of

¹ Some of these thoughts in the entire documents have been gleaned from the report on Divorce and Remarriage, presented to the 20th PCA General Assembly (1982). It can be found in the PCA Digest Position Papers 1973-1993 (Atlanta: Committee for Christian Education and Publications, 1993), 182-293. The author of this manual has referenced it and profusely adopted much of its work into this document with update material that was not present at the time of the GA. These papers can be accessed at: <http://www.pcahistory.org/pca/index.html>

² The Barna Research Group, Ltd., August 6, 2001, Survey on Divorce, Marriage, and Remarriage.

Government, the Rules of Discipline and the Directory for Worship; all as adopted by the Church.³

The Westminster Confession of Faith states;

CHAP. XXIV. - *Of Marriage and Divorce*

1. Marriage is to be between one man and one woman: neither is it lawful for any man to have more than one wife, nor for any woman to have more than one husband, at the same time. (Gen. 2:24, Matt. 19:5–6, Prov. 2:17)
2. Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife, (Gen. 2:18) for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and of the Church with an holy seed; (Mal. 2:15) and for preventing of uncleanness. (1 Cor. 7:2, 9)
3. It is lawful for all sorts of people to marry, who are able with judgment to give their consent. (Heb. 13:4, 1 Tim. 4:3, 1 Cor. 7:36–38) Yet it is the duty of Christians to marry only in the Lord. (1 Cor. 7:39) And therefore such as profess the true reformed religion should not marry with infidels, papists, or other idolaters: neither should such as are godly be unequally yoked, by marrying with such as are notoriously wicked in their life, or maintain damnable heresies. (Gen. 34:14, Exod. 34:16, Deut. 7:3–4, 1 Kings 11:4, Neh. 13:25–27, Mal. 2:11–12, 2 Cor. 6:14)
4. Marriage ought not to be within the degrees of consanguinity or affinity forbidden by the Word. (Lev. 18, 1 Cor. 5:1, Amos 2:7) Nor can such incestuous marriage ever be made by any law of man or consent of parties, so as those persons may live together as man and wife. (Mark 6:18, Lev. 18:24–28)
5. Adultery or fornication committed after a contract, being detected before marriage, giveth just occasion to the innocent party to dissolve that contract. (Matt. 1:18–20) In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce. (Matt. 5:31–32) and, after the divorce, to marry another, as if the offending party were dead. (Matt. 19:9, Rom. 7:2–3)
6. Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments unduly to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage: yet, nothing but adultery, or such willful desertion as can no way be remedied by the Church, or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage: (Matt. 19:8–9, 1 Cor. 7:15, Matt. 19:6) wherein, a

³ This statement comes from the Preface of the Book of Church Order (BCO), sixth edition, adopted by the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), part III.

public and orderly course of proceeding is to be observed; and the persons concerned in it not left to their own wills and discretion in their own case. (Deut. 24:1-4)⁴

Because of the wisdom outlined in #6 above, the Church therefore must educate its officers, staff, communing members, and those bringing requests for marriage on the stance of Scripture and of the Church.⁵

Because Scripture speaks of pre-marriage, marriage, and divorce (see above Scripture), then it is also clear that we must address this topic. Finally, we at Metro North Church are committed to preserving marriages. This document will outline our basic six commitments we have regarding this area of care for our members. Those commitments are:

COMMITMENT TO PEACEMAKING AND RECONCILIATION
COMMITMENT TO PRESERVING MARRIAGES
COMMITMENT TO PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN
COMMITMENT TO BIBLICAL COUNSELING
COMMITMENT TO CONFIDENTIALITY
COMMITMENT TO ACCOUNTABILITY AND CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Commitment to Peacemaking and Reconciliation

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. (Mat 5:9 NASB)

Our church is committed to building a “culture of peace” that reflects God’s peace and the power of the gospel of Christ in our lives. As we stand in the light of the cross, we realize that bitterness, unforgiveness and broken relationships are not appropriate for the people whom God has reconciled to himself through the sacrifice of his only Son (John 13:34-35; Eph. 4:29-32; Col. 3:12-14).

Therefore, we look to the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit for guidance on how we can respond to conflict in a way that will honor God, promote justice, reconcile relationships, and preserve our witness for Christ. As God gives us his wisdom and grace, we are committed to actively teaching and encouraging one another to live out the following principles of peacemaking and reconciliation:

Personal Peacemaking

⁴The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter XXIII, 4. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996.

⁵ Two excellent summary resources to study further on this matter are: 1) Sproul, R. C. Essential Truths of the Christian Faith, #95-Marriage, #96-Divorce, Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1996, c1992. 2) Sproul, R.C. (Robert Charles). The Intimate Marriage: A Practical Guide to Building a Great Marriage, Ch.6-The Institution and Sanctity of Marriage, Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1975.

- Whenever we are faced with conflict, our primary goal will be to glorify God with our thoughts, words and actions (1 Cor. 10:31).
- We will try to get the “logs” out of our own eyes before focusing on what others may have done wrong (Matt. 7:3-5).
- We will seek to overlook minor offenses (Prov. 19:11).
- We will refrain from all gossip, backbiting and slander (Eph. 4:29). If we have a problem with others, we will talk *to* them, not *about* them.
- We will make “charitable judgments” toward one another by believing the best about each other until we have facts that prove otherwise (1 Cor. 13:7).
- If an offense is too serious to overlook, or if we think someone may have something against us, we will go promptly to seek reconciliation (Matt. 5:23-24; 18:15).
- When we offer a word of correction to others, we will do so graciously and gently, with the goal of serving and restoring them, rather than beating them down (Prov. 12:18; Eph. 4:29; Gal. 6:1).
- When someone tries to correct us, we will ask God to help us resist prideful defensiveness and to welcome correction with humility (Ps. 141:5; Prov. 15:32).
- When others repent, we will ask God to give us grace to forgive them as he has forgiven us (Eph. 4:32).
- When we discuss or negotiate substantive issues, we will look out for others’ interests as well as our own (Phil. 2:3-4).

Assisted Peacemaking

- When two of us cannot resolve a conflict privately, we will seek the mediation of wise people in our church and listen humbly to their counsel (Matt. 18:16; Phil. 4:2-3). If our dispute is with a church leader, we will look to other leaders for assistance.
- When informal mediation does not resolve a dispute, we will seek formal assistance from our church leaders or people they appoint, and we will submit to their counsel and correction (Matt. 18:17-20).
- When we have a business or legal dispute with another Christian, we will make every reasonable effort to resolve the conflict within the body of Christ through biblical mediation or arbitration, rather than going to civil court (1 Cor. 6:1-8). If the other party attends another church, our leaders will offer to cooperate with the leaders of that church to resolve the matter.
- If a person coming to our church has an unresolved conflict with someone in his former church, we will require and assist him to make every reasonable effort to be reconciled to the other person before joining our church (Matt. 5:23-24; Rom. 12:18).

- When a conflict involves matters of doctrine or church discipline, we will submit to the procedures set forth in our *Commitment to Accountability and Church Discipline*.
- If we have a legal dispute with or within our church and cannot resolve it internally through the steps given above, we will obey God's command not to go into the civil court (1 Cor. 6:1-8). Instead, we will submit the matter to mediation and, if necessary, legally binding arbitration, in accordance with the *Rules of Procedure for Christian Conciliation* of the Institute for Christian Conciliation, a division of Peacemaker Ministries (www.Peacemaker.net).

Above all, we pray that our ministry of peacemaking will bring praise to our Lord Jesus Christ and lead others to know his infinite love and peace.⁶

Commitment to Preserving Marriages

"So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." (Mat 19:6 NASB)

God designed marriage to reflect the beauty and permanence of Christ's loving relationship with his bride, the church (Eph. 5:22-33; Rev. 19:7). Therefore, he established marriage to be a life-long, exclusive relationship between one man and one woman (Matt. 19:4-6). God also designed it to provide mutual companionship through life's joys and difficulties, to create stability for raising and nurturing children, and to give strength and cohesiveness to society in general.

In our society, marriages fail under a wide range of circumstances. Many people have gone through a divorce before having a relationship with Christ, and others have experienced divorce through no desire or decision of their own. Still others may have divorced because of their own wrongful choices, but have since experienced the repentance and forgiveness offered through our Lord Jesus. We want all of you to know that you are welcome in our church.

Because our church recognizes both the divine origin of marriage and the devastating effects of divorce, we are deeply committed to preserving marriages and preventing divorce. Toward this end, we will devote a significant portion of our preaching and teaching ministry to strengthening marriages and families. We require and provide thorough premarital counseling to ensure that couples enter into marriage advisedly and are well prepared for its many challenges.

We also encourage couples to nurture their marriages by participating in weekly fellowship groups in which people can grow together in their love for

⁶ Adapted from *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, by Ken Sande (Baker Books, 3rd Ed. 2004).

God and for one another (Heb. 10:24-25). As relationships deepen within these groups, we expect husbands to spur each other on in loving and cherishing their wives, and wives to encourage one another in respecting and loving their husbands (Eph. 5:33).

Our leaders are committed to providing counsel and support to couples who face marital difficulties. We will discourage couples from using divorce as a way to run away from issues that instead can be resolved through Spirit-guided counseling, repentance, forgiveness and ongoing discipleship.

We recognize, however, that there are times when God permits a believer to seek a divorce without sinning against God or a spouse. We believe divorce is permissible when the other spouse has been sexually involved with a person outside the marriage (Matt. 5:31-32), or when an unbelieving spouse abandons a marriage (1 Cor. 7:12-16).

Even though divorce is permissible in these situations, it is not required. God patiently bears with our sins, repeatedly calls us to repentance, and freely forgives us when we turn back to him (Ps. 103:8-12; Isa. 55:7). When divorce becomes an option, an offended spouse can imitate God's love by offering a straying spouse these same evidences of grace (Eph. 5:1-2). This may involve patiently bearing neglect or lovingly confronting serious sin (Col. 3:12-14; Gal. 6:1). In some situations, love may require asking the church to initiate formal discipline to rescue a spouse and a marriage from the devastating effects of unrepentant sin (Matt. 18:12-20).

Just as church leaders are involved in beginning a marriage, they should be involved when it ends. Therefore, when someone is considering divorce, he or she is expected to bring the situation to our leaders and cooperate with them as they determine whether grounds exist, promote repentance and reconciliation, and exhaust redemptive discipline, if appropriate.

Separated spouses who have filed for divorce should consider themselves married until the day a civil court issues a divorce decree. Thus they should refrain from dating or any other activity that is inconsistent with being married.

We are always interested in helping divorced people restore their previous marriage if that is possible and appropriate. We will support a decision to pursue a second marriage to a different person only when we have determined that it is biblically valid and that every reasonable effort has been made to seek and grant forgiveness of the sins that contributed to a previous divorce.

We rejoice that divorce never diminishes God's free offer of love, grace and forgiveness. He cherishes and loves every person who has been unwillingly divorced, as does our church. God graciously extends this same love to those who have wrongly left their marriages. That love moves him (and us) to call them to

repentance, to encourage and aid reconciliation when possible, and to gladly restore those who have done all they can to rebuild broken relationships.

Commitment to Protecting Our Children

A prudent man sees evil and hides himself, The naive proceed and pay the penalty. (Pro 27:12 NASB)

Children are a blessing from God, and he calls the church to support parents in their responsibility to train children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Therefore, the church should be a safe and blessed place for children, where they can grow, play, form friendships, and learn to experience and share the love of Christ.

Since sin affects every person and organization in the world, however, it is possible that children could be harmed even during church activities. We cannot guarantee that such things will never happen within our fellowship, but we are committed to taking every reasonable precaution to protect our children from foreseeable harm. This commitment includes, but is not limited to, the following steps:

- We do not allow anyone to work regularly with our youth (children or teenagers), unless he or she has regularly attended our church for at least six months and is a formal member.
- We require all of our youth workers to complete a detailed application and screening process.
- We require that, whenever practicable, youth workers serve in teams of two or more and be visible to other workers.

If a child is harmed in our church, we will take immediate steps to inform the parents, to accept responsibility for our role in the situation, and to hold offending youth workers fully responsible for their actions. We will also evaluate our practices and procedures, considering changes that might reduce the likelihood of such harm to children in the future.*

Commitment to Biblical Counseling

And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another. (Rom 15:14 NASB)

* These are the minimal steps a church should take to protect its children from abuse. For more detailed guidance on screening and supervising youth workers, see Child Protection First!™, which is available through Peacemaker Ministries. Another excellent resource is the Reducing the Risk kit that is available through www.ChurchLawToday.com.

All Christians struggle with sin and the effect it has on our lives and our relationships. Whenever believers are unable to overcome sinful attitudes or behaviors through personal efforts, God calls them to seek assistance from other believers, and when needed from church leaders, who have the responsibility of providing pastoral counseling and oversight (see Rom. 15:14; Gal. 6:1-2; 2 Tim. 4:1-2; Heb. 13:17; James 5:16). Therefore, this church encourages and enjoins its people to seek counsel from and confess sins to each other and to our leaders.

We believe that the Bible provides thorough guidance and instruction for faith and life (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Therefore, our counseling is based on scriptural principles rather than those of secular psychology or psychiatry. Unless they specifically state otherwise, none of those who counsel in this church are trained or licensed as psychotherapists or mental health professionals, nor should they be expected to follow the methods of such specialists.

God calls our leaders to set an example for us “in speech, in life, in love, and in faith and purity”(1 Tim. 4:12). Therefore, we expect them to treat counselees with every respect and courtesy, and to avoid even the appearance of impropriety or impurity during counseling (Eph. 5:3). We also expect counselees to promptly report to the leadership team any conduct that fails to meet this standard.

To prevent our leaders from being placed in situations that might compromise their pastoral commitments, we, the members and attenders of this church, agree that we will not try to compel them to testify in any legal proceeding or otherwise divulge any confidential information they receive through pastoral counseling or ministry (Prov. 11:13, 25:9).

There are occasions when our leaders do not have sufficient time to meet with every person who asks for counseling. At such times we expect our leaders to give first priority to people who have formally joined the church (Gal. 6:10), and to serve those who only attend the church by referring them to another source of godly counsel.

Commitment to Confidentiality

He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is trustworthy conceals a matter. (Pro 11:13 NASB)

The Bible teaches that Christians should carefully guard any personal and private information that others reveal to them. Protecting confidences is a sign of Christian love and respect (Matt. 7:12). It also discourages harmful gossip (Prov. 26:20), invites confession (Prov. 11:13), and thus encourages people to seek needed counseling. Since these goals are essential to the ministry of the gospel and the work of the local church, all members and attenders are

expected to refrain from gossip and to respect the confidences of others. In particular, our leaders will carefully protect all information that they receive through pastoral counseling, subject to the following guidelines.

Although confidentiality is to be respected as much as possible, there are times when it is appropriate to reveal certain information to others. In particular, when our leaders believe it is biblically necessary, they may disclose confidential information to appropriate people in the following circumstances:

- when a leader is uncertain of how to counsel a person about a particular problem and needs to seek advice from other leaders in our church or, if the person attends another church, from the leaders of that church (Prov. 11:14);
- when the person who disclosed the information, or any other person, is in imminent danger of serious harm unless others intervene (Prov. 24:11-12);
- when a person refuses to repent of sin and it becomes necessary to promote repentance through accountability and redemptive church discipline (Matt. 18:15-20); or,
- when leaders are required by law to report suspected abuse (Rom. 13:1).

Commitment to Accountability and Church Discipline

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. (Heb 10:23-25 NASB)

Like all of our Relational Commitments, the principles and practices described below apply to all the people who attend our church (both members and attendees).

A. Accountability and Discipline Are Signs of God's Love

God has established the church to reflect his character, wisdom and glory in the midst of a fallen world (Eph. 3:10-11). He loves his church so much that he sent his Son to die for her (Eph. 5:25). His ultimate purpose for his church is to present her as a gift to his Son; thus Scripture refers to the church as the “bride” of Christ (Rev. 19:7). For this reason the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are continually working to purify the church and bring her to maturity (Eph. 5:25-27).

This does not mean that God expects the church to be made up of perfectly pure people. He knows that the best of churches are still companies of sinners who wrestle daily with remaining sin (1 John 1:8; Phil. 3:12). Therefore, it would be unbiblical for us to expect church members to live perfectly. What we can do, however, is confess our common struggle with sin and our mutual need for God's mercy and grace. We also can spur one another on toward maturity by encouraging and holding each other accountable to love, seek after, and obey God with all of our hearts, souls, minds and strength, and to love others as we love ourselves (Mark 12:30-31; Heb. 10:24-25).

The Bible sometimes refers to this process of mutual encouragement and accountability as "discipline." The Bible never presents church discipline as being negative, legalistic or harsh, as modern society does. True discipline originates from God himself and is always presented as a sign of genuine love. "The Lord disciplines those he loves" (Heb. 12:6). "Blessed is the man you discipline, O LORD, the man you teach from your law" (Ps. 94:12). "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline" (Rev. 3:19).

God's discipline in the church, like the discipline in a good family, is intended to be primarily positive, instructive and encouraging. This process, which is sometimes referred to as "formative discipline," involves preaching, teaching, prayer, personal Bible study, small group fellowship and countless other enjoyable activities that challenge and encourage us to love and serve God more wholeheartedly.

On rare occasions God's discipline, like the discipline in a family with growing children, also may have a corrective purpose. When we forget or disobey what God has taught us, he corrects us. One way he does this is to call the church to seek after us and lead us back onto the right track. This process, which is sometimes called "corrective" or "restorative" discipline, is likened in Scripture to a shepherd seeking after a lost sheep.

If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off (Matt. 18:12-13).

Thus, restorative or corrective discipline is never to be done in a harsh, vengeful or self-righteous manner. It is always to be carried out in humility and love, with the goals of restoring someone to a close walk with Christ (Matt. 18:15; Gal. 6:1), protecting others from harm (1 Cor. 5:6), and showing respect for the honor and glory of God's name (1 Pet. 2:12).

Biblical discipline is similar to the discipline we value in other aspects of life. We admire parents who consistently teach their children how to behave properly and lovingly discipline them when they disobey. We value music teachers who bring out the best in their students by teaching them proper technique and consistently pointing out their errors so they can play a piece properly. And we applaud athletic coaches who diligently teach their players to do what is right and correct them when they fumble, so that the team works well together and can compete for the championship.

The same principles apply to the family of God. We, too, need to be taught what is right and to be lovingly corrected when we do something contrary to what God teaches us in his Word. Therefore, we as a church are committed to help one another obey God's command to be "self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined" (Titus 1:8).

The leaders of our church recognize that God has called them to an even higher level of accountability regarding their faith and conduct (James 3:1; 1 Tim. 5:19-20). Therefore, they are committed to listening humbly to loving correction from each other or from any member in our church, and, if necessary, to submitting themselves to the corrective discipline of our body.

B. Most Corrective Discipline Is Private, Personal and Informal

God gives every believer grace to be self-disciplined. "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2 Tim. 1:7). Thus discipline always begins as a personal matter and usually remains that way, as each of us studies God's Word, seeks him in prayer, and draws on his grace to identify and change sinful habits and grow in godliness.

But sometimes we are blind to our sins or so tangled in them that we cannot get free on our own. This is why the Bible says, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently" (Gal. 6:1). In obedience to this command, we are committed to giving and receiving loving correction within our church whenever a sin (whether in word, behavior or doctrine) seems too serious to overlook (Prov. 19:11).

If repeated private conversations do not lead another person to repentance, Jesus commands that we ask other brothers or sisters to get involved. "If he will not listen, take one or two others along" (Matt. 18:16). If informal conversations with these people fail to resolve the matter, then we may seek the involvement of more influential people, such as a small group leader, Sunday school teacher or church leader. If even these efforts fail to bring a brother or sister to repentance, and if the issue is too serious to overlook, we will move into what may be called "formal discipline."

C. Formal Discipline May Involve the Entire Church

If an individual persistently refuses to listen to personal and informal correction to turn from speech or behavior that the Bible defines as sin, Jesus commands us to “tell it to the church” (Matt. 18:17a). This first involves informing one or more church leaders about the situation. If the offense is not likely to cause imminent harm to others, our leaders may approach the individual privately to personally establish the facts and encourage repentance of any sin they discover. The individual will be given every reasonable opportunity to explain and defend his or her actions. If the individual recognizes his sin and repents, the matter usually ends there, unless a confession to additional people is needed.

If an offense is likely to harm others or lead them into sin, or cause division or disruption, our leaders may accelerate the entire disciplinary process and move promptly to protect the church (Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; Titus 3:10-11).

As the disciplinary process progresses, our leaders may impose a variety of sanctions to encourage repentance, including but not limited to private and public admonition, withholding of the Lord’s Supper, removal from office, withdrawal of normal fellowship, and, as a last resort, removal from membership (Matt. 5:23-24; 2 Thess. 3:6-15; Matt. 18:17).

If the straying individual does not repent in response to private appeals from our leaders, they may inform others in the church who may be able to influence that individual or be willing to pray for him or her, or people who might be harmed or affected by that person’s behavior.⁷ This step may include close friends, a small group, a Sunday school class, or the entire congregation if our leaders deem it to be appropriate (Matt. 18:17, 1 Tim. 5:20).⁸

If, after a reasonable period of time, the individual still refuses to change, then our leaders may formally remove him or her from membership and normal fellowship. They also may inform the church body of their decision and instruct the congregation to treat the individual as an unbeliever.* This means that we

⁷ For example, it is not uncommon for a person to attend a church, develop relationships of trust, persuade people to give him money to invest, and then fail to return the money as promised. Senior citizens are particularly vulnerable to these schemes, and many people have lost much of what they had saved for retirement. When such sinful men are discovered, they usually leave a church, but continue to prey on members who have not heard about their schemes. If our leaders found such a man in our church, they would call him to repent and confess his wrongs. If he refused, they would bring him under formal discipline, and also warn the congregation not to trust him with their money.

⁸ If our leaders inform our entire congregation about a disciplinary situation, they have discretion whether to divulge the individual’s name. This decision usually will depend on a variety of factors, such as: how widely known the situation already is; whether there might be people in the congregation who could persuade the individual to repent; or whether the congregation needs to be on guard against potential harm he might cause (see previous footnote). Even if our leaders decide it is not necessary to identify an individual specifically, they may still inform the congregation of the general situation and the disciplinary steps they have followed. This general information can help to enlist wide prayer support, let the congregation know that our leaders are obeying the Lord’s command to seek after those who stray, and warn people who may be flirting with secret sin that they, too, may face discipline if they do not turn back to God.

* For a congregational church, the first part of this paragraph could be changed to read, “If, after a reasonable period of time, the individual still refuses to change, then our leaders may bring the situation before the congregation, with the

will no longer treat him as a fellow Christian. Instead of having casual, relaxed fellowship with the individual, we will look for opportunities to lovingly bring the gospel to him, remind him of God's holiness and mercy, and call him to repent and put his faith in Christ (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20)

We realize that our natural human response to correction often is to hide or run away from accountability (Gen. 3:8-10). To avoid falling into this age-old trap and to strengthen our church's ability to rescue us if we are caught in sin, we agree not to run away from this church to avoid corrective discipline. Therefore, we waive our right to withdraw from membership or accountability if discipline is pending against us. Although we are free to stop attending the church at any time, we agree that a withdrawal while discipline is pending will not be given effect until the church has fulfilled its God-given responsibilities to encourage our repentance and restoration, and to bring the disciplinary process to an orderly conclusion, as described in these Commitments (Matt. 18:12-14; Gal. 6:1; Heb. 13:17).

If an individual leaves the church while discipline is in effect or is being considered, and our leaders learn that he or she is attending another church, they may inform that church of the situation and ask its leaders to encourage the individual to repent and be reconciled to the Lord and to any people he or she has offended. This action is intended both to help the individual find freedom from his sin and to warn the other church about the harm that he or she might do to their members⁹ (see Matt. 18:12-14; Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 3 John 1:9-10).

Loving restoration always stands at the heart of the disciplinary process. If an individual repents, and our leaders confirm his or her sincerity, we will rejoice together and gladly imitate God's forgiveness by restoring the person to fellowship within the body (see Matt. 18:13; Luke 15:3-7, 11-32; 2 Cor. 2:5-11; Col. 3:12-14).

People who have been excluded from another church will not be allowed to partake of the sacraments in our church, to become members, or to participate in the regular fellowship of our church until they have repented of their sins and made a reasonable effort to be reconciled, or our leaders have determined that the discipline of the former church was not biblically appropriate.

recommendation that the individual be removed from membership and normal fellowship. If the congregation supports that recommendation, we will treat the individual as an unbeliever."

⁹ For example, if we confronted a man in our church for seducing young women, or for acting inappropriately around little children, or for sowing gossip and division, and he left and started attending another church, we would consider it our duty to urge the leaders of that church to counsel with him and to protect their people from his harmful behavior.

If an individual disagrees with the way discipline has been carried out, he or she may appeal the church's decisions according to the established disciplinary procedures of our denomination.*

As we pursue the blessings of accountability and church discipline, we will hold fast to the promise of Scripture: "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" (Heb. 12:10-11).¹⁰

Church Covenant (Sample B)

By the Members of [Our Church Name]
Our Commitments to One Another in the Sight of God

Having been chosen by God and drawn by the Spirit to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior, I now, with a view to my baptism in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, do joyfully enter into this covenant with the members of this church as one body in Christ, according to the following affirmations and commitments.

1. I believe the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, to be the Word of God, and its doctrine of salvation to be the perfect and only true doctrine of salvation.¹¹
2. I acknowledge myself to be a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving his wrath, and without hope except in God's sovereign love and mercy to save me.¹²
3. I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the only Savior of sinners, and receive and rest upon him alone for salvation as he is offered to me in the Gospel.¹³

* Denominational churches may revise this provision to match their disciplinary process. Independent churches may delete it entirely.

¹⁰ Taken from Peacemaker Ministries Relational Commitments FREE document:
http://www.peacemaker.net/site/c.aqKFLTOBIPh/b.958161/k.6E48/Relational_Commitments.htm

* This covenant is based on the membership vows used by the Presbyterian Church in America.

¹¹ 2 Tim. 3:14-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21; Matt. 4:4

¹² Rom. 3:9-18, 23; 6:23; Eph. 1:3-14; 2:1-10; Tit. 3:3-7; 1 Pet. 1:2-9; Rom. 8:29-30

4. I resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that I will endeavor to put to death the misdeeds of my sinful nature and to live my life as is fitting a true follower of Jesus Christ.¹⁴

5. I promise to support the church in its worship and work to the best of my ability.¹⁵

6. I submit myself to the government and discipline of the church, and promise to pursue its purity and peace.¹⁶

7. I acknowledge that I have read the Relational Commitments of this church and agree to live by them.

Signature

Date

Print Name

Pastor's Signature

Date

Evaluate Current Policies on Church Membership

Again, because of the changing legal environment in the United States, if your church does not require church membership, you can essentially forget being able to carry out any kind of substantive church discipline that would stand up legally if a disciplined individual became angry and sued the church and its leaders. Ken Sande explains, "Many churches do not place a strong emphasis

¹³ John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom. 1:16-17; 3:9-26; 10:9; Phil. 2:5-11; 3:5-9; Tit. 3:3-5; 1 Tim. 1:15

¹⁴ Eph. 4:17-6:4; Col. 3:1-4:6; 1 Pet. 1:13-15; 2:18-5:11; 2 Pet. 1:3-9; Rom. 8:29; 12:1-15:14

¹⁵ Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:9-15; Eph. 4:1-16; Heb. 10:24-25; 12:24-25; 1 Pet. 4:7-11

¹⁶ Matt. 16:18; 18:15-20; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; 1 Tim. 3:15; 5:17-20; Heb. 13:17; Col. 3:15; Rom. 12:18-21

on formal membership. . . . When problems with a nonmember arise, these churches are caught in an awkward position. If they attempt to minister to the person as though he were a member, they can face devastating lawsuits. On the other hand, if they decline to confront sinful conduct or warn others of it, the nonmember generally continues in his destructive behavior and often goes on to injure other people, either in his own family or in a new church to which he flees. In either case, God is dishonored and the church as a body suffers.”⁶

Your Church magazine stated that “churches must precisely define membership. Review the definition of a member in your church’s constitution or bylaws. If that isn’t clear, clarify it. Also, whether protected or not, a church should never offer its members any damaging information about a disciplined member without first seeking an attorney’s counsel.”⁷

One reason church membership is so critical is a concept called “informed consent.” This means that if a member knows ahead of time and agrees (in writing) to abide by your church’s policies and procedures relating to church discipline, then if a problem arises later his ability to bring a lawsuit is reduced. Much like clarifying boundaries and expectations with a teenager, clear communication of these policies is essential if the desired outcome is to be achieved.

But protection from a lawsuit is secondary. More importantly it is an essential component of biblical justice and love. Establishing, communicating, and applying biblical expectations for marriage and family are critical for exercising biblical justice and love in the local church. The best means for accomplishing this is through membership covenants presented in new-member classes and annual membership covenant-renewal ceremonies in the local church.¹⁷

Additional Resources

For further insight into the biblical principles, purposes, and practice of church discipline, the following resources are recommended;

Adams, Jay (1972). *Christian Living in the Home*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.

Adams, Jay (1975). "What To Do When Your Marriage Goes Sour." Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.

Adams, Jay, *Solving Marriage Problems*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983.

⁶ Sande, *Managing Conflict in Your Church*, 77. See also Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997).

⁷ “Church Discipline in Court,” *Your Church*, July/August 1999, 8. Internet: www.christianityonline.com.

¹⁷ Rainey, Dennis, Charles R. Swindoll, and Roy B. Zuck. *Ministering to Twenty-First Century Families : Eight Big Ideas for Church Leaders*. Swindoll leadership library, Page 266. Nashville: Word, 2001.

Adams, Jay, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible*.. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980.

Building Marriages God's Way. Lafayette, IN: Faith Baptist Church.

Burkett, Larry, *The Complete Financial Guide for Young Couples*. Larry Burkett. Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1993.

Chapell, Bryan, *Each for the Other*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2001.

Eyrich, Howard, *Three To Get Ready: Premarital Counseling Manual*, third revised and expanded edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2005).

Knight, George W., *The Role Relationship of Men and Women*. Phillipsburg, PA: P. & R. Publishing, 1985.

Mack, Wayne (1980). *A Homework Manual for Biblical Counseling, Vol. 2: Family and Marital Problems*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.:

Common interests and activities, p. 14.

Companionship record, p. 15.

Marriage homework, p. 20.

Rate your marriage (wife), p. 21-23.

Rate your marriage (husband), p. 27-28.

God's blueprint for marriage, p. 27-28.

Sorting out responsibilities, p. 29-32.

Mack, Wayne, *Preparing for Marriage God's Way*. Virgil Hensley Publishing, 1986.

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Nelson, Tommy (1998). *The Book of Romance*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Peace, Martha. (1995). *The Excellent Wife*. Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, Inc.

Scott, Stuart, *The Exemplary Husband*. Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2000.

Wheat, Ed, *Intended for Pleasure*. Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming Revell, 1981.

Wheat, Ed, *Love Life for Every Married Couple*. Grand Rapids, MI: Pyranee Books, 1980.

Wheat, Ed (1983). *How To Save Your Marriage Alone*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

Wilson, Douglas, *Federal Husband*. Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1999.

Wilson, Douglas, *Reforming Marriage*. Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1995.

Wilson, Douglas, *Fidelity*. Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1999.

Wilson, Douglas, *Her Hand in Marriage*. Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1997.

Thomas, Gary, *Sacred Marriage*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2000.

Chapter 2: Domestic Violence: What's the Church to Do?

George C. Scipione

Imagine yourself watching a real life police show. In the first clip, police officers, responding to a 911 call, enter the small wood-frame home of Zach, 45, and Elizabeth, 40. He is slightly built and balding, and has a beer belly; she is frumpy, weary, and worried. Two boys, ten and eight, run around the small house in their underwear. Zach, an unemployed logger, spends his days watching sports on TV, drinking, and yelling at everyone. Elizabeth, who works part-time to help financially, fearfully tries to make everything perfect in order to avoid Zach's wrath. Five years ago, Zach threatened to beat the boys severely, and when Elizabeth intervened, he slapped, hit, kicked, and spit on her. Zach's remorse consisted of banging his head against the wall until he bled. He has never hit her since, and figures that making holes in the wall is better than hitting her. Tonight his drinking and threats, including throwing things, triggered her fear and she called 911. She is packing to go to a battered women's shelter.



Next you see Jim, a hardworking Navy NCO in his early twenties. He and his wife, Sheri, have two children—Peter, 5, and Michael, 6 months. After a particularly rough day, when his men had bad attitudes and his CO was critical of him, Jim tried to help Sheri, who was sick. He managed to get some food on

the table and watch the boys. Jim's frustration mounted when Mikey would not stop crying—no matter what he tried. In anger, Jim shook Mikey like a rag doll. Mikey shrieked in pain as his head snapped back. Suddenly, Mikey stopped and didn't move. Frightened, his parents took him to the Naval hospital, but lied about the cause of the injury. The police have been called to arrest Jim. Mikey is now permanently brain-damaged and developmentally injured. Jim will go to military prison for a seven-year term for felony child abuse. Peter and Mikey are in foster care. Sheri lives alone.

Sam, 13, has a sister, Susan, 15. Their American dad married their mother after meeting her in Japan. She gave up her land, her family, and her job (as a Geisha girl), and followed him to the States. Dad is not a believer, but mom now is. He has left her and the children to pursue a younger woman. Mom and Susan often lock themselves in their rooms because they fear Sam. He runs with a gang, has been violent to them, constantly threatens them, and has spent time in juvenile hall. He despises all authority and brazenly brings drugs into the house. His parole officer is too busy to be directly involved with him, and there is no space in juvenile hall for him. The police are responding to a 911 call for help.

What do these three clips have in common? They portray domestic violence and family feuds, true. But also, these true but detail-altered cases are from Christian families in Bible-believing churches—including OP churches! What is one to do? More particularly, what can and should we and our church be doing?

Discovery

The church, locally, regionally, and nationally, needs to do at least three things: discover the problem(s), define the problem(s) biblically, and then develop and direct people towards God-glorifying solutions. We have our work cut out for us. We need to understand and apply God's instructions for being peacemakers in a violent and hostile world.

We need to discover the reality all around us. We must have biblical eyes to see. The church must be careful in this discovery process. On the one hand, we must not adopt worldly viewpoints and see "abuse" in every imperfect, fallen action. Today, many people view any exercise of authority as abusive by definition. But authority is not always abusive. God wields an awful lot of it and sometimes he delegates it to others. He certainly never abuses his authority. On the other hand, we should not think that every mention of abuse is part of a liberal conspiracy to get government social workers into every home or to get our children into lesbian-run day care centers.

Why must women in danger have nowhere to go but to a feminist shelter for battered women? Are the only alternatives to stay, to be hurt, or to die? Why must truly oppressed victims face a church that increasingly treats people humanistically rather than biblically? People, including church members, are

sinners, capable of cruelty, violence, and lying to cover their sins. We Reformed Christians, above all others, should take total depravity seriously. Sinners sin. Should we be shocked? Grieved, yes; shocked, no.

Definition

We also must do the hard exegetical work to define the biblical view of domestic violence and how to deal with it. Again, extremes must be avoided. On the one hand, we cannot accept the world's victim mentality, which focuses on individual rights and entitlements. We are image bearers of God and responsible to him, not pawns in an evolutionary chess game. We not only are sinned against, but sin!

On the other hand, while we do not have a biblical primer or handbook on domestic violence, there are Mosaic laws that relate to violence in general, expounding and applying the sixth commandment. Some deal with particular abuses in the family. The "general equity" of these laws, statutes, and judgments cannot be ignored without sinking into a quagmire of relativistic sentimentality or a bog of personal biases. Passages such as Ex. 20:13; 21:10–27; 22:20–24; Lev. 19:13–18, 33–37; 20:1–5, 9; 24:17–23; 25; Num. 5:5–31; 15:22–31; 35; Deut. 12:29–31; 13:6–11; 16:18–17:20; 19; 21:1–9, 15–21; 22:13–29; 24:1–25:16 are more than covenantal museum pieces, ensconced in their Old Testament trophy case. There are many other passages, in both the Old and the New Testament, that direct our paths from violence to peace. Difficult work? Yes! Necessary? Yes! But if you and I do not do it, do not expect the church in general or the world to do the job for us.

Direction

Once discovery and definition are in process, the church needs to direct people. Primarily, the church needs faithful shepherds who are willing to get dirty and even hurt while feeding and wrestling with smelly sheep. If we do not have elders who are worthy of the Good Shepherd, the job will not get done. The work is tough, smelly, serious, solemn, and often dangerous. Elders must deal with the everyday issues that affect the sheep and then be ready to deal with the tough cases. If they don't, we should not be surprised when government agencies step into our family lives. Nor should we complain. (Part of the reason we have the cultural mess that we are in is that too many elders have abdicated their jobs.) Elders must live with the sheep to care for and direct them.

Shepherds should follow Christ's model as our mediator (see the Larger Catechism, 36, 42). Imitating his threefold office, they should prophetically proclaim God's will to people (LC, 43) from the pulpit and in Sunday school, VBS, special seminars, house visits, etc., teaching God's will for family life (LC, 123–33). The sixth commandment must be taught (LC, 134–36).

The elders should persist in priestly pleading with God for patience with his people (LC, 44). This involves prayer, fasting, counseling, discipleship, and peacemaking both between God and man and between man and man. They must bring sheep to repentance; biblical counseling is a must.

They should also provide kingly protection (LC, 45). Elders must not try to be Rambo. They are shepherds, not cowboys; kings under Christ, not Kung Fu masters. But they must protect. The elders must set up “cities of refuge” within the borders of the congregation—that is, safe houses, to protect both the victims and the perpetrators. People trained in biblical counseling and reconciliation should oversee the counseling and reconciliation process, including these live-in situations. Older couples could be mentors. This help is as necessary to the work of reconciliation as shepherding homes are to the pro-life movement.

Elders must trust God and use the process set forth in Matthew 18:15–20. Especially in the tough, violent cases, they must be willing to employ the keys of the kingdom and not withhold this blessing. The sword of the Spirit applied in loving discipline is much more powerful than the state’s literal sword. This is necessary so that 1 Corinthians 6:1–9 is not violated and God may honor their work. The elders need to have working positions or papers on the issues involved in domestic violence and how to apply them pastorally to all who are involved. In certain extreme instances, they need to render judgments as to the application of 1 Corinthians 7 to individual cases as possible grounds for divorce. They act as judges of God’s people. This is serious indeed, but necessary.

Along with the elders, the deacons must see to the practical, physical concerns of the family members involved. If the church offers safe houses correctly, the state’s foster-care system for the children may be avoided. The perpetrator may need a place to stay while reconciliation is being sought. In rare circumstances, there may be medical problems that contribute to the violence or result from it. The deacons may help to insure proper medical care. If the deacons can help financially, the family can be protected economically and in some cases legally. Also, temporary protection may create a need for transportation, as well as a need for shelter. The deacons should be familiar with the police and other government officials, so as to minimize jurisdictional turf wars.

Extension into the Community

The church, once it gets this all together, can extend this discovery, definition, and direction to the community at large as an evangelistic tool. We say there is power in the blood of the Lamb; if ever a needy group existed that needs this help, it is the family cursed with domestic violence. Battered wives and bitter husbands need good news, not self-help groups. They need knowledge of the risen Christ proclaimed with power, not professional dog-and-pony shows for self-satisfied yuppies. They need the hand of the reigning Christ, not some hip X-rated hero for Generation X. They need the light of the world. Let your

church shine as light in darkness; let it salt a dying and decaying community. You can influence government officials and especially judges, who are supposed to be God's agents in matters of public violence.

Dear ones, may the Lord of Glory, the Prince of Peace, the ruling and reigning King Jesus, conquer all his and our enemies. Let's not ignore evil and stick our heads in the sand, or wring our hands and whine about our helplessness, leaving the hard work to the police and government agencies. Instead, let's do our job. Let's live completely consecrated lives, competently to Christ's honor and praise. Let men see your Spirit-produced good deeds and so glorify the Father in heaven.

There are resources that can assist you in this process. The ones listed in the box below are available from OP or other Reformed men who are committed to biblical exegesis and practice. Make use of them!

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Helping the Victims of Domestic Violence



Edward Welch

“The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.” —Psalm 9:9

Couples who sit peacefully in church pews may nevertheless be at war. Spouses can attack each other, defend ground, employ manipulative guerrilla tactics, and declare occasional truces. When war has been declared, there is sin on both sides, but when violence is involved, a strong man typically oppresses a woman. With God's grace, afflicted women often look to the church for help. When they do, what are some basic biblical parameters that should guide your ministry to them?

You hear the cries of the oppressed.

The victim must be heard. As an imitator of Christ, you begin by listening to the cry of the afflicted (Ps. 10:17). Granted, this is self-evident. There could be

no other starting point. But there is a background that makes listening more profound than simply gathering data or taking a perfunctory first step.

First, our Lord encourages the cries of the oppressed. The sheer number of Psalms that call out for God's protection indicates that we serve a loving Lord who never tires of listening to and acting on the groanings of the needy. God is the righteous judge who hears every complaint of injustice and hates oppression, but he is more than a judge. He is also the One who in unfailing love comes close to his oppressed people. His listening occurs in a relationship between the weak one and the compassionate Hearer-Shepherd.

Remember that some victims of violence are reluctant to speak openly about it. They may fear that openness will lead to retaliation by the perpetrator. They may feel ashamed that they contributed to the war (though they are not responsible for the violence done to them). They may consider their problems unworthy of an elder's or a friend's attention. Or, they may feel ashamed that their husbands could dislike them even to the point of violence.

Some shepherds make the situation more difficult by moving quickly to the refrain, "Forgive and forget." In other words, as soon as the perpetrator asks for forgiveness, the responsibility now falls on the victim to forgive him and never to raise the subject again. But the idea of immediately forgetting sin is dubious teaching. Furthermore, if the primary biblical encouragement given to the victim is "Forgive and forget," she is left feeling as if she is now the perpetrator, since she cannot easily forgive and forget.

In light of these teachings and tendencies, it is impossible to overestimate the importance of hearing the afflicted woman. Help begins by listening, not as a detective who wants to solve a case quickly, but as a brother or sister who mourns with those who mourn.

Since biblical listening is coupled with action, you may determine, especially if the violence has been personal and dangerous, that listening means taking the victim to a doctor, calling the police, or providing a temporary safe place. If the home is potentially unsafe, it is wise to inform the perpetrator that his wife has revealed the violence and is being kept at an undisclosed safe place.

If the woman is confident that returning to her home will not lead to her physical harm, then listening should include a more systematic review of the violent, controlling patterns in the marriage. This information is most helpful when it is specific and written down. Then the perpetrator can be confronted according to the requirements of Matthew 18, and made to understand that the church leadership takes domestic violence very seriously and will act to protect his wife even as they seek to minister to him and hold him accountable.

You teach the oppressed to put their hope in God.

The victim must be encouraged in her faith. As in all suffering, she may think that God is indifferent and aloof, or that the perpetrator is all-powerful. Either way, affliction is always a time for God's people to know and rely on our God who hears. Furthermore, if a victim is ever to move toward a repentant perpetrator in love and to open herself to love and trust, she must be strengthened by a robust faith.

1. God does not forget (Ps. 10:12; 56:4). Personal trouble does not mean that God has forsaken his people. Rather, the Bible constantly shows that God responds to prayers for deliverance. While we cannot always observe this deliverance immediately, God will most assuredly deliver his people. The story of God's work in their lives is not over. Therefore, remind victims to keep their eyes open, watching for God's strong hand in their lives.

2. Jesus knows our sufferings. In his own body, he experienced violence at the hands of his own people. In fact, his experience surpasses our own because he suffered even to death. When we see this suffering, it can actually begin to lighten, or outweigh, a woman's grief.

For the woman who feels forsaken by God, the sufferings of Jesus can be a great comfort. It is a comfort that exceeds the sympathy and comfort extended by other women who have endured similar experiences. At a women's shelter, a victim of violence will be surrounded by people who understand, but in the throne room of God, she will be in the presence of One who understands perfectly, grieves deeply, and loves completely.

3. The Cross provides the timeless evidence of God's love for his people and his "toughness" with sin. Sin and suffering will always remain a mystery. Neither makes sense in a world that God created as good. Yet it is clear that God's love, demonstrated to us in Jesus, exceeds the boundaries of our imagination, and his justice leaves observers silenced. In a world where a woman cannot trust the one closest to her, the greatest blessing you can offer to her is the assurance of God's loving and watchful presence.

You teach the oppressed how to disarm the controlling, angry, or violent person.

The victim must know how to preempt and respond to ungodly anger. Whether or not the woman returns immediately to her home, she must learn to manifest "a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2 Tim. 1:7). Too often her responses to violence fluctuate between timidity and revenge, revealing both the perpetrator's ongoing control and his dominance in her life. Instead of fluctuating between these two extremes, wives need to be led in a biblical course that is humble and powerful.

A key text is Romans 12:21, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." In the context of Romans 12, this passage suggests that radical

freedom from perpetrators consists of loving the enemy more, not less. This moves us beyond the question What do I need from him? to How do I overcome with the love of Christ?

1. When in doubt, confess your sin to the perpetrator. There may be no more powerful response to the sin of others. Everyone knows how difficult it is to confess sin to another person, but to confess it to a perpetrator of violence seems utterly impossible. But a woman who is strong in the Lord does not stand on her own righteousness; rather, she stands on the righteousness of Christ and can therefore confess her own sin. This, of course, does not imply that her actions caused the violence or abuse. She simply confesses sin that God has exposed in her life.

2. “Then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye” (Matt. 7:5). For some women, confrontation may be harder than confession. It may be easier for them to assume they deserve sinful treatment than take a stand against sin. Or they may be afraid that confrontation will lead to divorce. But a way to love the perpetrator is to clearly portray his sin and its consequences. Minimizing or ignoring it can be spiritually deadly—for either party. Such confrontation should be done in the presence of another person.

3. Forgive quickly, but don’t allow the perpetrator’s request for forgiveness to be the end of the discussion. Reconciliation begins when the perpetrator asks for forgiveness. In situations where there has been an outbreak of violence, this violence uncovers a larger pattern of demandingness, control, and arrogance. Such patterns should never be swept aside with the words, “Will you forgive me?” The flesh and the devil thrive when hurts and sins are kept in the dark. Therefore, one way a wife can love is to let her husband know the consequences of his sin in her life. This is not done to hurt; it is done to heal.

4. Speak with gentleness and love. In a world where advanced technology is power, we often overlook the power of words. Words, however, can disarm angry people. It can be a great encouragement for women to know that “a gentle answer turns away wrath” (Prov. 15:1). Although the woman is not the cause of the violence, she nevertheless has power to subdue it with humility, gentleness, and love.

Domestic violence is as damaging to a marriage relationship as adultery. We should never minimize its impact on the victim. But, as with all suffering, we should also never minimize the grace of God to these victims. God reserves unique glimpses of himself for those who have been oppressed, and he gives power to shake off the twin enemies of timidity and rage.

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Helping the Perpetrators of Domestic Violence

Paul Tripp and David Powlison

The grace of God ... has appeared.... It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives. — Titus 2:11–12

People who publicly sit together in church pews on Sunday morning are not thereby prevented from doing violence to each other once they are in private. Ministry to the violent—like ministry to anyone with immediately destructive sins—demands wide-awake, bold, knowledgeable intervention, full of grace and truth. The perpetrators of battery (like sexual predators) are criminal, as well as wicked and highly deceptive.



The perpetrators of domestic violence need grace—effectual grace, life-changing grace, real grace. As they become willing to stop and look at themselves in the mirror of truth, as they embrace the Messiah as he is in fact, they can and will genuinely change. Scripture says a great deal about the sins of anger and violence, and the ways of the Redeemer of sinners. What considerations ought to control your efforts to help such men (and, sometimes, women)?

Violent people have much in common with other people—both with those who would help them and with those they hurt.

We are all basically alike: see 1 Corinthians 10:12–13. Interpersonal hostility comes in many forms—attitudinal, verbal, financial, physical, sexual. It comes with many degrees of intensity, from grumpiness and bickering to assault and murder. Every argument is, in principle, on a continuum with outbreaks of actual violence. So domestic violence is not different in kind from other typical sins.

This fact produces both confidence and humility in those who seek to help others. If you know how to deal with your own anger, you will have good things to offer others who struggle with it. I (DP) once counseled a couple who had had a gunfight in their home! My own repentance from irritability and a critical attitude helped me both to understand them and to proceed surefootedly. Those who counsel the violent should not suppose that they are the sinless coming to the sinful. We are finders of grace coming to those who need grace.

Similarly, you should expect to find two sinners embroiled with each other, not an irredeemable monster oppressing an innocent victim who needs no redemption. God will be at work in the lives of both people. So explore incidents of violence in detail. You will usually find places where both parties need Christ's grace to change.

Perhaps one party draws most of the attention because he acts with his fists. But, on closer inspection, the other party may skillfully and perversely wield her tongue in ways that goad him to violence. Outbursts of violence are usually extreme instances in more widespread, low-grade patterns of conflict. Look for the common sins that both parties share, not just the unique outbreaks of sin in one party. You want to help both people become more loving, wise, and peaceable.

These truths must be handled with great care by those who would minister. Remember that batterers distort them regularly. We are all tempted to anger, aren't we? Batterers will turn that into an excuse: they are "just one of the boys," and violence is not that serious. Aren't the victims of violence also sinners, whose sins are often intertwined with the batterer's sins? Batterers will turn that into an excuse and an accusation: fault really lies with their victims. You who would help must know the truth about anger and sin, but don't let the batterer twist that truth into lies.

You need to know what violent people are like, because they easily create a fog of confusion and evasion.

Sin is deceitful: see Jeremiah 17:9. Violent people neither know themselves nor let others know them. They are habitual liars and hidiers, who often create elaborate patterns of deceit. They tend to conceal what they do; when that fails, they tend to downplay its seriousness; when that fails, they tend to shift the blame, portraying themselves as somehow aggrieved, innocent, and victimized; when that fails, they tend to wallow in despair and "repentance" to make people feel sorry for them. Bear in mind the following characteristic sins of violent people:

1. Undergirding the violent act is a pervasive selfishness: the violent person's pleasure, his agenda, his desires, his demands, and his cravings dominate much of his life. Counseling must not let the visible "marquee" sins divert attention from the foundational perversity of a lifestyle characterized by "ungodliness and worldly passions." Often the violent person's awareness of his sin is superficial; he may grieve over his sporadic violence, but rarely will he recognize his selfish lifestyle or the specific passions that drive him.

2. Expect to encounter intricate, subtle patterns of self-deceit. Violent people often feel sorry for themselves: "I'm really the victim, and my anger is just a reaction." They often express the self-righteous opinion that "I'm not really like that" or "I know I shouldn't do that, but ...". Often they exhibit a marked ability

to adopt different patterns of behavior, living two lives in two worlds. For example, a man might hit his wife, and then, one hour later, shift gears and smoothly lead a Bible study.

3. Expect to encounter intricate patterns of winsome deceit towards others. Violent people (like sexual predators) are often gifted seducers. They win people, creating trust again in the very people they have mistreated and betrayed. They skillfully manipulate other people—the victim, the would-be helpers—into feeling guilty and responsible for what hap-pened and for now making it better.

4. Expect to encounter self-deceived versions of confession and repentance. It is almost as if they could deceive God—though of course they really deceive only themselves and others. They may say the right words or seem to have the right feelings, but their “repentance” is often godless. It expresses remorse for smirching their self-image or their reputation in the eyes of neighbors. Such “repentance” actually serves the very same pride and fear of man that lead to the sins of secret violence. Violent people typically misuse grace or misunderstand it. Grace becomes “cheap,” and repentance becomes “jumping through hoops” to assuage the conscience and get back into the good graces of other people. It can even become a tool of sin, a quick fix—sometimes calculating—that sweeps problems under the rug. Violent people may weep, pray, and pledge that it will never happen again, without any of the fundamental changes involved in genuine repentance and faith in Christ: that “change of mind” and “turning” that lead to a change of life.

5. They often intimidate and manipulate their victims. Violence is frightening. Violence is a tool of control. You will sometimes find it hard to get the facts even from the violated. The victim may seek to preserve the present moment’s interlude of peace, or may fear that openness will lead to revenge (perhaps having been threatened that “if you tell, then ...”). The victim may find it highly embarrassing that the family has these problems, and may be reluctant to make the degree of evil known. All this adds up to the fact that you may have to overcome a “conspiracy” of silence in the family that serves to protect the evildoer.

In all these ways and more, domestic violence is a “secret” sin. You must be prepared to drag it into the light.

The violent need the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ.

Violent people need Christ: see Hebrews 3:12–14. The drift of sin is always away from the living Christ. That is a problem of the heart that needs daily attention. Jesus, who died for sinners, is gracious, and grace is effectual.

1. Aim for a fundamental restructuring of heart and lifestyle. Cosmetic adjustments that make the person’s behavior more socially acceptable are not

enough. You must expose the heart issues that motivate violence: cravings for power, love, control, comfort, money, respect, pleasure. About what things is this person willful? The batterer's violence is not about his wife; it is about himself and the flagrant idolatries he brought into the marriage. Violent people play God and so act like the devil, rather than serving God. They must repent of the "vertical" sins that fuel the "horizontal" sins. Both the motives and the expressions of hostility must be laid bare: see James 3:5–12, 14–16; 4:1–4, 6, 11–12.

2. Aim to solve the minor versions of the major sins, as well as the major outbreaks. Judgmentalism, grumbling, irritability, bickering, and arguing usually precede violence and express identical themes of the heart. People who learn to repent of grumbling—and thus learn both gratitude and contentment in Christ—will rarely need to repent of assault and battery.

3. Give people the living Christ himself. Jesus is abundant in loving-kindness and terrible in wrath. Violent people need to know the love of Christ. They deserve the violence of God, but he has provided the Lamb of God. Jesus loved sinners, the ungodly, the wicked, the weak, the enemies of God. He died, that those who live might live no longer for themselves. God freely gives grace and wisdom from above: see James 1:5, 17; 3:17; 4:6, 10. Effectual, life-rearranging grace is available for all who need it. Violent people need to learn to fear the Lord of wrath. He is jealous and holy: see James 4:5, 12. A person committing an act of violence lives without the fear of the Lord. He acts and reacts as if there were no God. But in fact, "everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Heb. 4:13). To begin to live radically "in public" is to live without the secrecy that violence depends on.

4. Bring violent people to a God-centered repentance: see James 4:6–10. Internal changes come first. Compare their "repentance" to real repentance: see Psalms 50 and 51, which contrast godly and worldly sorrow. To know the Christ of the gospel is to rearrange heart and soul so that sin can no longer thrive. Settle for nothing less. Those who seek, find. Those who believe, receive the Holy Spirit. How do you know someone has truly repented? You will know. Time always tells genuineness from falsity. You will see fundamental changes in relationships, first with God and then with others.

5. Help repentant believers learn the practical, peaceable, loving alternatives to manipulation, shifting of blame, intimidation, and violence: see James 3:13, 17–18. People can learn to listen, to ask questions, to ask for forgiveness, to take a time-out, to ask for help, to postpone decision-making, to give in tangible ways. Such actions flow from the wisdom that comes from above. Love can and will replace not only the moments of violence, but the pervasive lifestyle of selfishness and willfulness. You will see progress, not perfection. A

person who has more and more “give” is a person with less and less room for hating and hitting.

6. Bring to bear the resources of the community of Christ: see James 5:19–20 and Hebrews 3:12–14. People repenting of violence need more than once-a-week, “formal” counseling. They need radical honesty, accountability, reminders, encouragement, models, daily exposure to the light of day, and prayers of intercession. I have never known an incident of domestic violence to occur in a public church service or while someone was talking on the phone to his pastor or small group leader! Help the perpetrators of such sins to come out of hiding and live in the open. Sin thrives in dark corners; righteousness thrives in the daylight. A person who has changed internally towards Christ will desire the humbling structures of accountability to Christ’s people, in order to save him from himself.

How will you help those who are violent in private? Their souls must be rearranged to seek and know the Christ of the gospel. Without that fundamental, living relationship with Christ, you can’t teach enough truth, you can’t shine the light of insight brightly enough, you can’t put up enough fences, you can’t make enough plans, you can’t invite enough commitment, you can’t bring in enough people, you can’t be enough like Christ. But when violent sinners embrace the love of Jesus Christ, these things—doctrine, insight of the heart, structure, plans, commitment, community, counsel—become channels and expressions of effectual grace.

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Spousal Abuse: Grounds for Divorce? by Prof. John M. Frame

The traditional Reformed view of divorce is well expressed in Murray’s *Divorce* and Adams’ *Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage*, and nothing much more about that need be said. On this view, there are two grounds for divorce: one is sexual uncleanness, which includes adultery, but also the other sexual sins covered by the term *porneia*: homosexuality, bestiality, prostitution, etc. The other ground is desertion of a believing by an unbelieving spouse. Of course when a professing believer deserts a believing spouse, the professing believer (unrepentant) can be disciplined by the church, so that the situation

¹⁸ Taken from the website: http://www.opc.org/new_horizons/NH9702/NH9702.html, and also from the book by, Grudem, Wayne A., and Dennis Rainey. *Pastoral Leadership for Manhood and Womanhood*. Foundations for the family series, Page 265. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2002

becomes that of a believer divorced by an unbeliever. So in effect any desertion can be, with appropriate church involvement, ground for divorce.

Recently, however, some Reformed thinkers have thought that more needs to be said. Spouse abuse, for example, has become much more visible today, whether by an increase in its occurrence or an increase in its reporting is hard to say. Can spouse abuse be a ground for divorce?

I do believe that in a situation of spouse abuse, the abused partner, usually the wife, may be removed from the situation for her own safety. The sixth commandment would mandate that kind of self-defense. Of course, that creates an unbiblical marriage relationship; married couples ought to live together. But the responsibility for distorting the relationship rests with the abuser. And it is typical in Scripture for exceptions to be made to divine laws where human health and safety are at stake.

But can spouse abuse be a ground of divorce? Some have argued that it is a form of *porneia*, since *porneia* is used metaphorically for a wide variety of non-sexual sins. I do not think that path is promising. If we granted divorce for anything that could metaphorically be called *porneia*, we would have a liberal divorce policy indeed; but Matt. 19 makes clear that Jesus' own view of divorce was seen as so restrictive as to be virtually impossible to keep. Rather, I think we should limit the application of the *porneia* exception to those sins that are explicitly sexual in character.

But what of "desertion?" Could spouse abuse be a form of desertion? A prior question is this: Is it possible for a spouse to desert a marriage without physically leaving the home? The answer seems to be "yes." Certainly if a husband refuses to support his wife and children financially and continues unrepentant in that pattern, but continues to live with them under the same roof, we would conclude that he has "deserted" his family in the most significant sense. He has refused to take responsibility for them. He has broken his marriage vows and does not seek to renew his adherence to them.

It does seem to me that spouse abuse may also be a ground for divorce on the basis of "desertion." The unrepentant spouse abuser, too, has forsaken his marriage vow. He no longer loves, honors and cherishes his wife; rather he has become a threat to her life and health. This is not to say that a person once abused should file immediately for divorce. Opportunities for counseling and reconciliation should certainly be taken. (Even adultery in the most literal sense does not immediately *necessitate* divorce.)

I am also asked sometimes whether an adulterer (or one who is guilty of any marriage-breaking sin) who repents of his sin *must* be allowed by the innocent spouse to continue the marriage. I have held both views on this through my teaching career. Matt. 19 seems to teach that *porneia* itself, whether repented or not, can be ground for divorce, and I taught that early in my career. Later,

however, I was moved to consider the concepts of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation more deeply. If we argue that forgiveness means forgetting, such that the forgiven sinner bears no further consequences for his sin, then it would seem that it would be wrong to divorce a repentant adulterer. To do that would be to continue to hold forgiven sin against him, contrary to true forgiveness.

Still later in my reflections, however, I came to the conclusion that forgiving does not always mean forgetting, nor does it always mean that the person forgiven should bear no further consequences for his sin. Certainly when God forgives, he does not forget, nor does he absolve us of all earthly consequences for our sins, though he does absolve us of eternal punishment. Nor does the civil law “forget” the sins of those who repent of crimes. Even in personal relationships, forgiven sins cannot often be entirely forgotten. For one thing, to completely forget is often psychologically impossible. For another thing, it would be contrary to the truth simply to pretend that the sin never happened. Further, remembering past sins, even forgiven ones, may often be necessary in our dealings with people. If a teenager is guilty once of drunken driving, but repents, a parent may very well choose to allow him to keep driving — both because he needs to drive and because he needs to sense the fullness of his restoration. But if a teenager habitually drinks and drives, contrary to his parents’ commands and discipline, then the *pattern* cannot be “forgotten.” The parent, in determining the punishment, cannot forget all the repented sins of the past. Rather he must punish the pattern. And that will generally result in a more severe punishment, for the good of the child and that of his potential victims.

It is scriptural for parents and churches to require repentant sinners to “bring forth fruits of repentance” before forgiveness culminates in “forgetting.”

Therefore, I seem to be returning to my earlier view, which, again, is the *apparent* meaning of Matthew 19. *Porneia*, even when repented, may be so destructive of the “one flesh” bond between husband and wife that that bond cannot again be repaired. I believe I have seen cases in which that sort of rupture has taken place. When it has, the only remedy is divorce.

That of course makes it less easy to tell someone when he or she has, or does not have, grounds for divorce. Often answering that question requires heart searching. Priority should certainly be given to reconciliation, for God hates divorce (Mal. 2:16). But there are times when that is impossible, and it is hard for third parties to give advice in these cases. Difficult as it is to live with such ethical vagueness, it often appears in biblical teaching. This fact should not surprise us. Biblical ethics in general is an ethic of the heart.¹⁹

¹⁹ [IIM Magazine Online](http://www.thirdmill.org/newfiles/joh_frame/PT.Frame.divorce.abuse.html), Volume 4, Number 22, June 3 to June 9, 2002, http://www.thirdmill.org/newfiles/joh_frame/PT.Frame.divorce.abuse.html

Chapter 3: Discipline?

Discipline must be carried out in a loving way; it is done to preserve the honor of God's Name, to assure the purity of the church (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:7), and to reclaim and reconcile the offender. Unless all three of those elements are present, the discipline exercised is not biblical.²⁰

Broadly speaking, discipline is the exercise of Church power in the areas of instruction, and defending the purity and welfare of the church. It includes both the positive aspects of instruction, as well as the more negative judicial defense of the purity of the Church. One of the “healthy” marks of the church is the active and effective exercise of church discipline, which is designed to protect the peace and purity of the church and reclaim the wandering sheep. The *PCA Book of Church Order (BCO)* defines discipline;

Discipline is the exercise of authority given the Church by the Lord Jesus Christ to instruct and guide its members and to promote its purity and welfare. (27-1)

it goes on further to describe the power of discipline;

The power which Christ has given the Church is for building up, and not for destruction. It is to be exercised as under a dispensation of mercy and not of wrath. As in the preaching of the Word the wicked are doctrinally separated from the good, so by discipline the Church authoritatively separates between the holy and the profane. In this it acts the part of a tender mother, correcting her children for their good, that every one of them may be presented faultless in the day of the Lord Jesus. Discipline is systematic training under the authority of God's Scripture. No communing or non-communing member of the Church should be allowed to stray from the Scripture's discipline. (27-4).

²⁰Adams, Jay Edward. *The Christian Counselor's Manual*. "The sequel and companion volume to *Competent to counsel*." Page 55. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1973.

This section on discipline deals with the judicial process of church discipline. It is intended primarily to provide a quick overview of our policies and practical assistance to the elders as they participate in a discipline case. It is not designed to answer theological questions, nor fully explain the approach of discipline, as outlined by the BCO.



Why Do We Discipline?

We exercise church discipline, because Jesus commanded it (Mt 18:12-20).²¹ Because it is His ordinance, and we do it for His honor and for the cause of His truth. Consider this question;

What are the duties required in the second commandment?

The duties required in the second commandment are, the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath instituted in his word; (Deut. 32:46–47, Matt. 28:20, Acts 2:42, 1 Tim. 6:13–14) particularly prayer and thanksgiving in the name of Christ; (Phil. 4:6, Eph. 5:20) the reading, preaching, and hearing of the word; (Deut. 17:18–19, Acts 15:21, 2 Tim. 4:2, James 1:21–22, Acts 10:33) the administration and receiving of the sacraments; (Matt. 28:19, 1 Cor. 11:23–30) church government and discipline; (Matt. 18:15–17, Matt. 16:19, 1 Cor. 5, 1 Cor. 12:28) the ministry and maintainance thereof; (Eph. 4:11–12, 1 Tim. 5:17–18, 1 Cor. 9:7–15) religious fasting; (Joel 2:12,18, 1 Cor. 7:5) swearing by the name of God; (Deut. 6:13) and vowing unto him; (Isa. 19:21, Ps. 76:11) as also the disapproving, detesting, opposing all false worship; (Acts 17:16–17, Ps. 16:4) and, according to each one's place and calling, removing it, and all monuments of idolatry. (Deut. 7:5, Isa. 30:22)²²

Therefore, the exercise of discipline is highly important and necessary. In its proper usage, discipline maintains:

1. *the glory of God*
2. *the purity of His church*

²¹ Paul exhorts us to walk it out also in (Gal. 6:1-5).

²²The Westminster Larger Catechism : With Scripture Proofs., Question 108. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996.

3. *the keeping and reclaiming of disobedient sinners. Discipline is for the purpose of godliness (1 Tim. 4:7); therefore it demands a self-examination (2 Cor. 13:5) under Scripture (BCE 27-1,3)*²³

Forms of Church Discipline

Informal discipline has reference to the disciplinary responsibility every member of the body of Christ has as part of the exercise of his “general office” as a believer. What is the most basic discipline in the life of the Christian? Is it not self-discipline? Paul says “self-control” is the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23). Self-control enters Paul’s witness-bearing discussion with Felix in Acts 24:25 in connection with righteousness and the judgment to come. In I Corinthians 11:31, the church is exhorted to individual self-discipline in light of the direct discipline of the Lord for their sins at the Lord’s Supper. Basic to every Christian’s life and growth in grace is the practice of individual self-discipline. Another form of discipline of an informal nature is the mutual admonition and correction we owe one another as members together of the body of Christ. It goes by the Greek term *nouthesia*, which may be translated “counseling.” Dr. Adams has called it “nouthetic confrontation,” and it describes our confrontation of one another out of loving concern with a view to effecting life-change in the direction of greater holiness. Jesus speaks of such a confrontation, though not using the term, in Matthew 18:15: “And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.” Every Christian is responsible to participate in this ministry of “provoking one another to love and good works” (Hebrews 10:24), and every believer is to be ready to restore the brother “trapped” by sin (Galatians 6:1). Moreover, God has given the grace to equip the saints for this ministry, making them competent to counsel (Romans 15:14). By means of this informal discipline, we rebuke, correct and direct one another on the path to holiness. Counseling is a variety of informal church discipline, or perhaps we should say counseling is church discipline in its informal stages. Every believer can and should counsel himself (as David so often did in the Psalms, cf. Psalm 42), and other Christians.

Formal church discipline is authoritative teaching and correction carried out within the church through the ordained special officers for the government of the church. These officers are called in Scripture variously “pastors,” “elders,” or “bishops.”²⁴

²³ See also BCO, Chapter 29. Offenses

²⁴ Wagner, Roger, “Counseling and Church Discipline—A Definitive Study: Part I,” *The Journal of Pastoral Practice*, Vol. VI, No. 1, 1983, pp. 21-30.

For the sake of understanding here at Metro North Church, the Metro North Counseling Center, would be defined as “informal discipline” until such time, discernment, evaluation, and counsel of the Teaching Elder/Session would see fit to graduate a “case” or “counselee” to the “formal discipline” status.

The Stages of Discipline

Discipline will typically take place in four stages, as set forth in the Scriptures and the BCO (27-3);

1. *Instruction in the Word.*
2. *Individual’s responsibility to admonish one another (Mt. 18:15; Gal 6:1; Act. 20:31; Act. 27:9; Rom. 15:14; 1Co. 4:14; 1Th. 5:14; 2Th. 3:15).*
3. *If the admonition is rejected, then the calling of one or more witnesses (Mt. 18:16; Deut. 19:15; 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Tim. 5:19).*
4. *If rejection persists, then the Church must act through her court unto admonition, suspension, excommunication, and deposition.*

When Should the Elders Become Involved?

1. Be sure the situation warrants elder involvement or church discipline. (Pro 10:12; James 5:19-20). See stage 1-3 above.
2. Be sure that every sincere attempt has been made at reconciliation. (Gal 6:1-5)
3. Be sure to expect reactions if there is no repentance (Heb 12:6-8; 13:17).
4. Be sure to have all the facts in writing (John 7:24), this includes, counseling records, e-mails, copies of letters, receipts for certified letters, etc.
5. Be sure the session is totally agreed on the procedure of discipline and the manner in which the information is brought to the congregation.
6. *BCO 31-2. It is the duty of all church Sessions and Presbyteries to exercise care over those subject to their authority. They shall with due diligence and great discretion demand from such persons satisfactory explanations concerning reports affecting their Christian character. This duty is more imperative when those who deem themselves aggrieved by injurious reports shall ask an investigation. If such investigation, however originating, should result in raising a strong presumption of the guilt of the party involved, the*

court shall institute process, and shall appoint a prosecutor to prepare the indictment and to conduct the case. This prosecutor shall be a member of the court, except that in a case before the Session, he may be any communing member of the same congregation with the accused.

7. Occasionally, a person will come forward and confess a sin, determined by the elders to be of such a heinous nature, that although the first three stages of discipline have not been officially followed, the elders may decide to proceed to stage 4 discipline. Therefore, charges will be filed and a specific form of censure will be enacted.

How do the Elders Become Involved?

There are two primary ways the elders may become involved in a discipline case.

- 1) Elder Committee: This consists of a committee of 1-3 elders assigned to the case by the Director of Biblical Counseling. They investigate the offense(s), meet with the accused, and begin the process to try the case, if necessary. Depending on the outcome of the trial, the committee may recommend specific censures to the Session. The exception is when the offense is such of a public nature, that the Session decides itself to initiate the discipline process or if the Session becomes aware of the specific case first. In the later case, the Session may decide to begin the discipline process itself. A vast majority of discipline cases at Metro North Church are private offenses (public offenses are those, which are notorious – BCO 29-4). That is, only a few persons know them. Because of this, an elder committee (including a Team Leader) is usually recruited by the Director of Biblical Counseling to begin the discipline process.

Note

An elder committee may initially be formed as a shepherding committee to come along side the accused, to listen, pray, and provide spiritual guidance. Because of on-going sin and lack of repentance on the part of the accused, the shepherding committee may decide to invoke some form of discipline on the party or parties involved. At that point, the shepherding committee becomes a “Judicial” committee. The BCO states in 32-11; *In every process, if deemed expedient there may be a committee appointed, which shall be called the Judicial Committee, and whose duty it shall be to digest and arrange all the papers, and to prescribe, under the direction of the court, the whole order of the proceedings. The members of this committee shall be entitled,*

notwithstanding their performance of this duty, to sit and vote in the case as members of the court.

2) Session: All recommendations for church censures are brought to the Session for approval. The Session

- ✓ brings charges against a specific member
- ✓ appoints a committee to work with a specific discipline case
- ✓ votes on a specific recommendation submitted by an Elder Committee
- ✓ provides additional counsel to the Elder Committee about future decisions

For a list and definition of censures, refer to BCO 30-1 thru 30-3.

What is the Task of the Elder Committee?

1. To examine and investigate the offenses of the accused, in light of the Scriptures
2. To shepherd the erring member(s) through the discipline process to call them to repentance, forgiveness, accountability, reconciliation, and restoration.
3. To seek and/or recruit the assistance of others who have the professional expertise and can help clarify the issues/offenses.
4. To help restore them in to fellowship with Christ and His Church, following repentance.
5. If unrepentant, to bring charges against the accused and make recommendations for censure.

It is not the task of the Elder Committee...

- To solve every bizarre behavior
- To provide on-going counsel to the accused
- To be “counselor’s,” by delving in to all the reasons for their behavior

Elder Committee Team Leader Responsibilities

1. Coordinate meeting times and facilitate meetings with the accused and with team members.

2. Designate assignments for each team member.
3. Seek outside help if and when necessary
4. Act as the “prosecutor” if and when the case is adjudicated
5. Designate someone to take notes at every meeting
6. Lead discussions and prayer times, as team prepares the written indictments (charges)
7. Contact Director of Biblical Counseling periodically to update him on progress of case
8. Meet with the Session to make recommendation for possible censure.

Elder Committee Team Member Responsibilities

1. Note taking at each meeting
2. Pastoral Care Contact – While the person is under discipline, there should be one elder who contacts this person weekly to see how they are doing
3. Prayer
4. Communication with counselor (If the team is to talk with a person’s counselor other than the church counselor or doctor, they will need to get written permission, i.e., HIPAA forms to do so).

The First Meeting with the Accused

The Team Leader arranges a time for the Shepherding Committee to meet with the accused. At least thirty minutes before the meeting, the team leader gathers the committee together to review known facts of the case, as well as pray.

Goals of the First Meeting

1. **To review and investigate the charge(s) against the accused.** Ask the person whether he/she is guilty or not.
2. **To gather information.** This is a fact finding meeting, designed to obtain the facts of the case.

3. **To discern the “heart” of the offender.** You are seeking to discern the attitude of the offender. Are they remorseful? Are they repentant? Are they willing to submit themselves to the government and discipline of the church?*
4. **To decide a plan of action.** The team may need to schedule a follow-up meeting to gather more information or to seek assistance or counsel from church staff or interview people involved with the case. Generally, though, if the person is repentant, then the team should see “Action Points” below for further instruction. If the person is unrepentant, the shepherding committee will become a judicial committee with the responsibility of processing the case. See the “Filing of the Charges” section below for a quick overview of the process the committee is to follow.
5. **Pray with and for the offender(s).**
6. **Schedule the next meeting.**

*

This certainly is not always easy to know after one meeting. Some people can be extremely remorseful but not repentant. Others may not show a lot of remorse (at least on the outside) but be repentant. **Typically, time will tell here.**



Action Points

If the accused confesses guilt and is repentant, then action points will need to be discussed either at the first meeting or follow up meeting. Action points should include at least some of the following:

1. **Weekly contact from a team member.** This is so important, because it communicates care and also how important the process is.
2. **Accountability.** You as an elder team may decide that there are specific areas of accountability. Who should the offender be accountable to? You as a team should decide that, either one of the team members or someone who is assigned.
3. **Counseling.** Though this is not required, it highly suggested, especially for married couples.
4. **Prayer.** It may be that this person or couple is willing to meet with the members of the prayer team, in order to be prayed over.

5. **Discipleship.** It is crucial that members identify with other members of the body of Christ in order to be accountable and encouraged to grow in Christ. Elders should choose among the various ministries in the church that fit this individual or couples needs.
6. **Ceasing specific involvement.** If the person is involved in some type of leadership within the church, they should step down for a season. The length will be determined by the elder team.
7. **Periodic Meetings.** This will be determined by the elder committee as they discern the complexity and intensity of the situation.

The Filing of Charges

The Book of Church Order (BCO), Chapters 27-46 provides the necessary church discipline procedures for each Judicial Committee and Session to follow. Therefore, it is important that the Team Leader refer to the BCO, in order to become acquainted with the process. Below, are listed some key points from the BCO, which the committee will want to review;

1. Before a person is officially placed under discipline, charges must be filed against the accused. The Elder Committee shall;
 - Appoint a prosecutor (typically will be the team leader)
 - Draw up an indictment, along with names of witnesses
 - Cite all parties and witnesses to appear and be heard at the another meeting which is to take place at least ten days after such a citation is given (BCO 32-3)
2. At the meeting with the accused, the charges shall be read to the accused and the person shall respond if they are guilty or not. If the person pleads guilty, the elder committee will decide upon the type of censure to be recommended to the Session. If the accused does not agree with the charge, then a trial will proceed (BCO 32-3). Refer to the BCO for an outline of the trial process. The elder committee must remember to document everything that arises and abide by the process of the BCO.
3. If the accused refuses to answer the citation or to meet with the Elder Committee, he shall be cited a second time. In the second letter, it should be said that if the accused refuses to meet with the elder, he shall be dealt with for his contumacy. The time for allowing the accused to respond to the second letter should be left to the discretion of the elder committee (BCO 32-6).

4. If the person has been cited twice and refused to meet with the Elder Committee, then the accused shall be suspended from the sacraments (BCO 33-2). If the charge be one of gross crime or heresy, and the accused persists in his contumacy, the elders may proceed to inflict the highest censure (BCO 33-3).
5. A husband or wife shall not be compelled to bear testimony against one another in any court (BCO 35-2).

Suggested Forms

For a list of suggested forms to be used under the rules of discipline, refer to Appendix G of the BCO.

Follow Up Meeting

Follow up meetings will be scheduled for information gathering, accountability and prayer. After any person has been indefinitely suspended from the Sacraments, it is proper that the rulers of the church should frequently converse with him, as well as pray with him and for him, that it would please God to give him repentance (BCO 37-2).

If it is determined that there is no evidence of repentance, then (depending on the nature of the sin) the highest form of discipline may be enacted.

Concluding Discipline

When discipline has concluded and the person has been restored, it is important that the elders communicate that to the offender. If possible that should be done in person and always in writing (Refer to BCO 37, for the removal of censure).

CHAP. XXX. - Of Church Censures

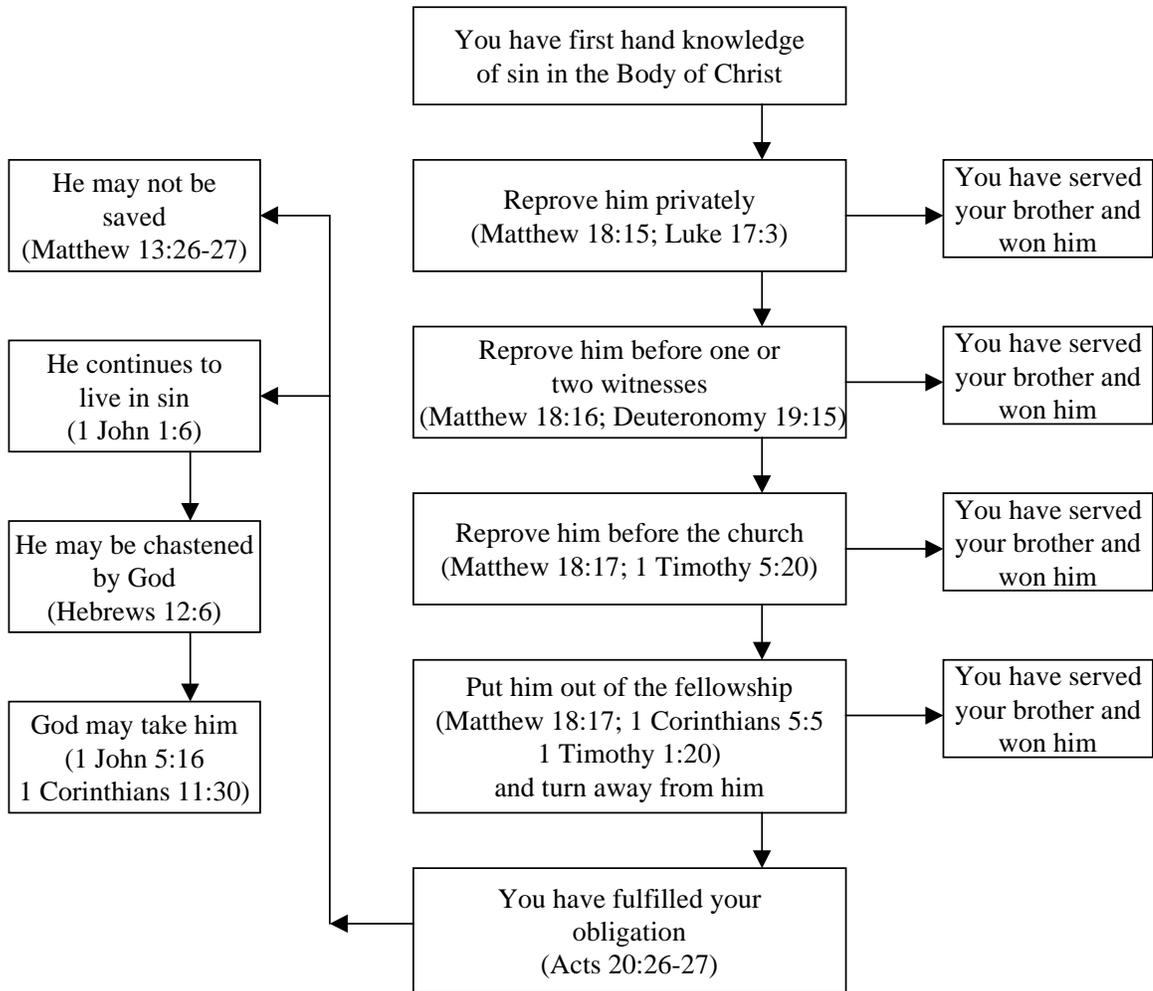
1. The Lord Jesus, as King and Head of His Church, hath therein appointed a government, in the hand of Church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate. (Isa. 9:6-7, 1 Tim. 5:17, 1 Thess. 5:12, Acts 20:17-18, Heb. 13:7,17,24, 1 Cor. 12:28, Matt. 28:18-20)
2. To these officers the keys of the kingdom of heaven are committed; by virtue whereof, they have power, respectively, to retain, and remit sins; to shut that kingdom against the impenitent, both by the Word, and censures; and to open it unto penitent sinners, by the ministry of the Gospel; and by absolution from

censures, as occasion shall require (Matt. 16:19, Matt. 18:17–18, John 20:21–23, 2 Cor. 2:6–8)

3. Church censures are necessary, for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren, for deterring of others from like offenses, for purging out of that leaven which might infect the whole lump, for vindicating the honour of Christ, and the holy profession of the Gospel, and for preventing the wrath of God, which might justly fall upon the Church, if they should suffer His covenant, and the seals thereof, to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders. (1 Cor. 5, 1 Tim. 5:20, Matt. 7:6, 1 Tim. 1:20, 1 Cor 11:27–34, Jude 23)
4. For the better attaining of these ends, the officers of the church are to proceed by admonition, suspension from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper for a season; and by excommunication from the Church, according to the nature of the crime, and demerit of the person. (1 Thess. 5:12, 2 Thess. 3:6,14–15, 1 Cor. 5:4–5,13, Matt. 18:17, Tit. 3:10)²⁵

²⁵*The Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter XXIX, 8. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996.

Church Discipline Dealing with Sinning Christians



Church Discipline: God's Search and Rescue Plan

BY DAVID V. EDLING, J.D., M.A.R.

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No Way Out

Jake knew his life was in peril. What started as a great day of fun and adventure was now one of terror and loss. As he clung to the overturned hull of a chartered fishing vessel, his thoughts turned to how he would change his life, if he

could somehow escape the stormy waters that sought to engulf him. He was on the verge of drowning. The numbness in his feet and hands warned him that hypothermia must be setting in. How much time did he have? What chance of rescue?

Forty miles away, in the coastal city from which Jake had sailed with his friends earlier that day, Rich sat in his office with his head in his hands. “How had she ever found out?” That was the question plaguing his mind on the wet, cold afternoon. It started out innocent enough, but somehow the relationship with Beth, his attractive twenty-one-year-old secretary, had gotten out of control, and now his wife knew!

“What if the kids found out? Or any of the guys in my men’s prayer group!” To complicate matters, Rich knew he didn’t want to give up the pleasures he was enjoying on his “golf Saturdays.” And besides, Beth could potentially claim sexual harassment if he made her mad. Then where would he be? No job, no future... humiliated! Rich felt trapped. How much time did he have? What chance of rescue?

A Desperate Situation

Jake...

“How far out were they? Four hours of running at around ten or twelve knots...that would mean at least forty or fifty miles. No land in sight. No other boats. A Coast Guard helicopter could be here in minutes if they just knew.”

Had the operator sent out a call before the vessel swamped and rolled? Jake hadn’t seen the ship’s captain or any of his friends after being tossed into the frigid water. He wondered if he was alone. Had his friends already drowned or were they over on the other side, clinging as he was, or drifting away on pieces of wreckage?

In this cold, he couldn’t hang on long. “Does anybody know how desperate I am? Can anyone help me?”

Rich... “Hello, this is Rich.” Rich swallowed hard when he heard his pastor’s voice on the other end of the phone. He couldn’t believe it! Linda had called their pastor asking what she should do if she knew a professing Christian was caught in sin. Now the pastor was calling to ask if he could meet with the two of them to discuss Linda’s question!

What was going on? Pastor John hadn’t said anything specific. How much had Linda told him? “Well, sure...ah....Okay, Pastor John, tonight at 7:30 would be fine. We will be expecting you.”

The Rescue Operation

Jake...

As Jake struggled to inch around the edge of the vessel, he caught a glimpse of something in the air. Soon a Coast Guard helicopter was hovering right over his head. Jake’s heart pounded as he watched an orange-colored mesh basket dropping towards him. Everything was okay—he was being saved!

As the large basket lowered into the water next to him, Jake realized he would have to let go of the boat's hull and reach over to the floating basket. The ocean's swells kept everything moving, and his arms felt like lead. He was so cold and tired he could barely move. Were he to let go of the boat, he feared he would immediately sink straight down.

If only he had strapped on the life vest tucked behind his tackle box. He had never paid much attention to following rules or taking precautions. After all, he was young and strong. What would ever come his way that he couldn't handle? Now Jake's cockiness was something of the past. He felt helpless.

Rich...

Even if Linda hadn't told Pastor John anything specific, she must have said enough to prompt him to plan this face-to-face meeting. And certainly tonight it would all come out— all the details of his affair. Then everything would come tumbling down.

"What a mess! What can the pastor do to me? Probably something along the lines of that church discipline stuff! I'll be kicked out of the church and publicly humiliated. Linda will probably want a divorce, and I'll hardly ever see the kids again." Rich felt like he was on the verge of drowning. He felt helpless.

Saved by the Sacrifice of Another

Jake...

Lifting his head skyward, Jake wanted to yell that he couldn't do it. He couldn't grab the basket and pull himself to safety. There was no way he could save himself. Then he saw a man jumping out of the helicopter! "I can't rescue myself," Jake thought, "so some Coast Guardsman is risking his life for mine."

With powerful, confident strokes, Petty Officer Doug James swam to Jake and relayed the plan to get him on board the hovering helicopter. Within minutes Jake was flying above the waves, wrapped in a warm blanket, and receiving first-rate care from several Coast Guardsmen. He was the only survivor.

Rich...

That evening, Pastor John sat across from Rich and Linda in their living room. He shared that he had come because he sensed from his conversation with Linda that something serious was going on. After beginning with a short prayer, he opened his Bible and read from Ezekiel 34 in order to explain his responsibility to faithfully shepherd them. "I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak...."

Rich was hearing, but his mind was in a fog. "What did this passage have to do with Linda's question? Or with him?"

Pastor John explained, "Linda, the question you asked about a believer caught in sin is at the very heart of the whole message of the Bible. When someone has placed his trust in Christ and has professed that faith publicly in joining the church, he has become part of God's flock, of God's family. A special relationship has formed—a bond—and the church is called on in a very special

way to be there whenever one of its members finds himself in danger, especially when sin has taken him captive.”

Pastor John flipped in his Bible to chapter 18 of Matthew and asked Rich if he would begin reading at verse one. Rich read, “At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’”

The pastor stopped Rich. He explained that the whole rest of the chapter is a response to that question. Rich remembered that the disciples seemed to have a recurring interest in which one of them would be the greatest, even arguing about it during the Last Supper!

Pastor John went on to explain how people often misunderstand Jesus’ teaching here because they don’t understand that the disciples’ question provides the context for the rest of the passage. Jesus is answering a specific question, which, at its heart, deals with the theme of relationships *within* the kingdom.

Rich read the next several verses. The pastor noted how gentle Jesus was in his teaching by using the example of a little child he beckoned to join them. This child, Jesus says, has believed in him for eternal life. The passage then goes on to talk about the great sinfulness of sin (vv. 6-9) and how Christians have a special relationship to God, even when they are tempted by sin (v. 10).

It’s only when sin continues that the full weight and authority of Christ, acting through the church, comes into play.

Rich was waiting for the pastor to get to the bottom line in order to open the door for Linda to tell him all about Rich’s sin. He started thinking of excuses for his behavior. Pastor John then asked Linda if she would read verses 12-14, the parable of the lost sheep.

“What do you think?” Linda began reading. “If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way, your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.”

Rich again was perplexed. What does a story about evangelism have to do with this situation? As if reading his mind, Pastor John said, “You have probably heard sermons or read things about this parable that assume it is talking about evangelism. Because it uses the word ‘lost,’ most people think it is talking about seeking and saving those who have not placed their trust in Jesus for eternal life. But in context, it cannot mean that for several reasons.

“First, in response to the question posed in verse one, remember that Jesus is talking about the relationships of those who *are* saved and *within* the kingdom. Second, notice that he carries the example he used earlier of a ‘little child’ into this parable, and Jesus refers to ‘these little ones’ as people who believe in him.

“Third, the word ‘sheep’ is used throughout Scripture as referring to those who are a part of the family, his family. In other words, they are those who have

believed. For example, in John 10:14-16, Jesus says, ‘I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know my Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep!’ Also, in verses 27-30 of that same chapter, he proclaims, ‘My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.’”

Pastor John continued, “If we understand that this parable is directed toward believers who need rescuing from sin, it should be a great comfort to us. Jesus uses it to convince us that when a beloved believer, one of his flock, falls into sin, extraordinary efforts should be made to bring him back into fellowship. That action, Linda, goes directly to the point of your question.”

Linda nodded, but then shared, “While I see God’s motive for seeking to restore one of his children from sin, I don’t understand how that can be accomplished.”

John responded, “That’s what we come to next—the *means* and *methods* that Christians are to use to make the rescue! The process described in Matthew 18:15-20—what we call ‘church discipline’—is actually God’s search and rescue plan for seeking to restore a brother or sister lost in his or her sin.

“These steps guide us in responding appropriately to someone based on the nature of his sin and his spiritual readiness to respond. According to verse 15, the person most affected by the sin should initiate a personal, private discussion with this individual. The process slowly progresses to include others, if, and only if, the person being confronted is unwilling to listen, turn, and repent.”

Where sin has built barriers, forgiveness tears them down!

Rich jumped in, “You mean, if someone immediately repents and confesses to that one person, no one else needs to be involved or even hear about the situation?”

“In most circumstances,” John replied, “that’s right. The matter is finished and over with if his confession is genuine, and if he stops sinning, does all he can to change, and makes whatever restitution is necessary to the one he’s wronged. If he has sinned against others, he needs to demonstrate his repentance and confess his sins to them as well.

“Only in the case that he refuses to listen—that is, if he fails to acknowledge his sin and his need to repent, confess, and receive forgiveness—would the person who was wronged proceed to the next steps. I’ll never forget what one of my seminary professors said about the purpose of church discipline. He said, ‘Discipline is not just an exercise of negative judgment, a matter of church courts and censures. It begins with the care of friends with whom we strive to follow Christ, and to whom we are, in a measure, accountable.’²⁶ It’s only when sin

²⁶ Edmond P. Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995).

continues that the full weight and authority of Christ, acting through the church, comes into play. And that can be a powerful force to turn a Christian away from his sin.

“Rich, are you familiar with the story in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 of the man caught in sexual sin?” Rich mumbled that he was. Pastor John continued, “The thing I like best about chapter 18 of Matthew is what comes right after Jesus has taught the steps of the search and rescue plan. Peter, old loveable Peter, after hearing all this, asks Jesus, ‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?’ This uneducated fisherman gets it! He realizes that what Jesus has been talking about is forgiveness, a rescue plan that leads to restoration and reconciliation. Where sin has built barriers, forgiveness tears them down!

“Then Jesus tells one of the most powerful parables recorded in Scripture, the parable of the unmerciful servant. God’s forgiveness is unimaginably expansive! And because he has forgiven each of us so much, how much more should we be ready and willing to forgive those who have sinned against us?”

“It all fits,” Linda said. “It’s almost as if those two parables that express God’s great love for his sheep serve as bookends to support the ‘book’ you’re talking about—God’s search and rescue plan found in verses 15-20!”

“Yes! And it’s amazing to me,” remarked Pastor John, “how everybody loves those bookends, but turns up his nose at God’s greatest expression of care—the book supported between them! Can you imagine how crazy it would be for a Coast Guard helicopter rescue team to fly out, hover over a sinking vessel with injured and near-death sailors, and merely yell to them, pointing in the direction of the land so they could begin swimming?

“No! Of course not! What does that helicopter crew do? They lower a rescue basket, and if the survivors are about to slip away and can’t climb into that basket, the pilot commands one of his crewmen to jump out and risk his own life to save those who are about to perish. In Ezekiel 34, that is exactly what the shepherds of Israel failed to do—jump out and seek the lost and bind up the wounds of the injured.”

Just then the phone rang. Rich walked into the kitchen to answer it. “Rich, it’s Jake. You’re not going to believe what happened to me today. I would have drowned if I hadn’t been rescued!”

Rich responded, “Jake, I can believe it because I think I am about to be rescued myself.”

Friend, do you feel like you are playing the game of the hypocrite, professing to faith in Christ, yet swimming in the stormy waters of unrepentant sin? The church is there to rescue you. The biblical process of loving confrontation and the involvement of others to help you come to your senses is God’s plan for eternal good in your life, now and forever. Seek out a church that lovingly practices church discipline, submit to their authority by becoming a member, and reap the rewards God intends for you. If you are already a member of a church but don’t

*know if it practices church discipline, go to your church leaders and ask them. Share with them what you have learned in this article.*²⁷

Additional Resources

For further insight into the biblical principles, purposes, and practice of church discipline, the following resources are recommended;

Adams, Jay, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1986, <http://www.timelesstexts.com>

-----*Discipling, Counseling and Church Discipline*, Journal of Biblical Counseling, Volume VIII, No. 3, 1984, p 15-33.

Sande, Ken, *The Peacemaker—A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 1997. <http://www.peacemaker.net>

Wagner, Roger, *Counseling and Church Discipline-A Definitive Study, Pt 1*, Journal of Biblical Counseling, Volume VI, No. 1, 1982, p 21-30.

-----*Counseling and Church Discipline, Pt 2*, Journal of Biblical Counseling, Volume VI, No. 2, 1983, p 25-34.

-----*Counseling and Church Discipline, Pt 3*, Journal of Biblical Counseling, Volume VI, No. 3, 1983, p 33-41.

-----*Counseling and Church Discipline-A PostScript*, Journal of Biblical Counseling, Volume VI, No 4, 1983, p 7-9.

Fisher, G. R., *What Do You Do When Church Discipline Fails?*, Journal of Biblical Counseling, Volume 5, No. 3, 1982, p 35-41.

Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, <http://www.ccel.org/b/baxter/pastor/home.html>

John Broger, *Self-Confrontation: A Manual for In-Depth Discipleship*. www.bcfministries.org

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Translated by Henry Beveridge, One Volume, Book Fourth, Chapter XII, pp. 452- 471. Eerdmans, 1989.

²⁷ Edling, David, "Church Discipline: God's Search and Rescue Plan," Journal of Biblical Counseling, Vol. 20, No. 3, 2002, pp. 53-57.

Mark Devers, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, Ch. 7, "Biblical Church Discipline", pp. 153-180. Crossway, 2000.

J. Hampton Keathley III. (Article), "*Church Discipline*",
<http://www.bible.org/docs/theology/eccles/churdisc.htm>

Steve Lawson, *Made in Our Image: What Shall We Do with a "User-Friendly" god?* Multnomah, 2000.

Wayne Mack (booklet) *The Biblical Concept of Church Discipline*. (To order: strengtheningmin@aol.com)

_____ Also, by Dr. Mack, *Life in the Father's House*.

John MacArthur, Jr., General Editor, *Pastoral Ministry: Shaping Contemporary Ministry with Biblical Mandates*.

Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) Part II - Discipline,
<http://www.pcanet.org/bco/>

Jay A. Quine, (Article) "[*Court Involvement in Church Discipline*](#)" (Part I),
Bibliotheca Sacra: Volume 149, Issue 593, (Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary) 1992. (Part II - Issue 594).

Shannon, Bill, *Restoration Hardware*, Pastor of Discipleship & Counseling,
Grace Community Church, Shepherds Conference Seminar, 2006,
<http://audio.gracechurch.org/shepnew/2006notes/Restoration%20Hardware,%20Shannon.pdf>

Chapter 4: Pre-Marriage Counseling & Wedding Policy

“Most people still want to get married in a religious ceremony; an estimated 73 percent of all marriages are still held in a church or synagogue.¹⁹ But amazingly, only 20 percent of all engaged couples receive premarital counseling.²⁰ In our society, where authority means little, this is one situation where the church still has some clout. Churches ought to use it effectively to give couples the very best preventive premarriage checkup possible.”²⁸

Qualifications and Approval
We believe the Scriptures teach that marriage is an institution established by God, and that it is a lifetime commitment. We also believe an understanding of the biblical foundation for marriage is essential for any couple considering marriage. For those requesting Pre-Marriage Counseling, asking to be married, or inquiring about the use of our facilities, we require:

1. Both partners give clear testimony of being born-again believers, who personally trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and for eternal life.
2. Both partners be scripturally qualified to marry.
3. Both believing partners be committed to a Christian marriage, as defined in the Bible.
4. The couple be married by a church Elder-approved Officiant, who holds to the teaching of Scripture. If the Officiant is unknown to us, one or more church Elders will meet with him for approval.

¹⁹ Jan Johnson, “How Churches Can Be Truly Profamily,” *Christianity Today*, 6 February 1995, 35.

²⁰ Ibid.

²⁸ Rainey, Dennis, Charles R. Swindoll, and Roy B. Zuck. *Ministering to Twenty-First Century Families : Eight Big Ideas for Church Leaders*. Swindoll leadership library, Page 246. Nashville: Word, 2001.

5. Both partners be willing to complete our Pre-Marriage Counseling or a church Elder-approved Pre-Marriage Counseling program.
6. The wedding participants abide by the Building Use Policies of the church.

Pre-Marriage Counseling

The ideal would be to enter into Pre-Marriage Counseling before having made a commitment to one another. In view of the seriousness of the commitment you are considering and the importance of the material to be covered, couples **should allow at least four months** before their marriage to complete the counseling comfortably.

The church Pre-Marriage Counseling is designed to assist the couple in building a biblical understanding and foundation for their marriage and consists of five basic parts:

1. The Criteria for Marriage
2. Christian Marriage I: Basics
3. Christian Marriage II: A Christian Husband, A Christian Wife
4. Before Your Marriage
5. Your Wedding and After

We want to be very clear that going through Pre-Marriage Counseling does not guarantee approval of your marriage. The Officiant and Pre-Marriage Counselors assigned to you must be satisfied that you understand and meet the requirements and qualifications for marriage before approval. **After the third session, your Pre-Marriage Counselor will submit his recommendation to you and to the Officiant for final approval.** Wedding dates are **penciled in** on the Master Calendar until final approval. **Invitations should not be sent until final approval is received.**

Your Wedding Ceremony and the Church Facilities Use

Your wedding ceremony and accompanying music is expected to be Christ-centered, God honoring, spiritually edifying, and in good taste. Any departure from traditional music and ceremony requires prior approval of the Elder overseeing Pre-Marriage Counseling. The couple should ask themselves how their ceremony and music will bring honor to the Lord.

It is the desire of the church to make the building available to the Lord's people who wish to use it for weddings and to minimize the expense for them. For church members, there is no cost for use of the building, unless extensive plans incur above-normal wedding costs. Non-church members may contact the church Office to determine the wedding fee. Reserved dates for the wedding and rehearsal are **tentatively** penciled in, awaiting approval of the marriage Officiant and/or Pre-Marriage Counselor. The fee is fully refundable if the wedding is canceled. Reservation requests and subsequent confirmation are considered on the basis of: 1) the clear testimony of personal salvation on the part of both partners and your biblical eligibility for marriage; 2) the approval by the church Elders of the Officiant, and 3) your willingness to actively participate in a Pre-Marriage Counseling program.

The couple requesting use of the building is responsible for arranging music and providing all decorations, flower containers, candelabra, candles, table linens, dishes, etc. All equipment, including rental equipment, must be removed from Chapel premises immediately following the reception. The piano and organ are available for the wedding, reception, and rehearsal but may not be moved.

Dripless candles must be used. Non-flammable, protective material must be placed under candles on the platform to protect carpeting. The florist should be careful not to cover air-conditioning or heating vents when arranging protective material.

Smoking is not permitted inside the building. The wedding party is asked to notify their Florist, Caterer, and Wedding Consultant to observe this policy. Birdseed is permitted **outside** the building only.

If desired, the Building Manager will make a cassette recording of your wedding if you provide a C-90 or C-120 cassette tape to him at the wedding rehearsal.

A church Wedding Liaison will be present to assist the wedding party both at the rehearsal and at the wedding. She is there to help with church policy and to offer assistance to the Officiant and the wedding party in sending the wedding party down the aisle, etc. Should you have a Wedding Consultant, she will be happy to work with her.

The wedding party assumes responsibility for any damage, loss, or breakage to Chapel property.

If both participants are in agreement with these policies, return the enclosed Request Form to the church Office within two weeks. When Pre-Marriage Counseling is begun, a Wedding Information packet will be sent.

Pre-Marriage Counseling And Wedding Process

1. office directs all wedding and pre-marriage counseling calls to pre-marriage coordinator. pre-marriage coordinator contacts couple, and lets them know pre-marriage counselors will be in touch.
2. wedding secretary sends set 1 (couples checklist, pre-marriage/wedding policies & wedding request form) and “pencils-in” wedding date as “tentative” on master calendar.
3. pre-marriage coordinator assigns pre-marriage counselors and provides copies of preparing for your marriage. counselors arranges first meeting. four meetings to follow.
4. when request form returned, wedding secretary mails copies to: pre-marriage counseling coordinator, counselors, wedding liaison, and files original. sends set 2 to couple: (pre-marriage counseling & wedding process, planning your ceremony, wedding schedule, wedding vows, wedding rehearsal, information

for caterer, information for florist, wedding liaison, request for building use, and facilities policies & guidelines).

5. if officiant is unknown, pre-marriage coordinator contacts officiant to confirm he holds to the sound teaching of scripture.
6. after third pre-marriage counseling meeting, pre-marriage counselors notify coordinator of approval/disapproval of wedding. coordinator notifies wedding secretary & liaison.
7. wedding liaison will arrange a meeting with the bride prior to the wedding.
8. the final meeting with the pre-marriage counselors and the couple should be scheduled as close to the actual wedding date as feasibly possible.
9. wedding
10. pre-marriage counselor follow-up

Forms and Checklists

PRE-MARRIAGE COUNSELING AND/OR WEDDING

Couples Checklist

| DATE | Action |
|-------|---|
| _____ | 1. After receiving Pre-Marriage Counseling Policies and Request Form, individually read and sign the form, and return to the church Office. |
| _____ | 2. Receive Wedding Information Packet following return of Request form. Pre-Marriage Counselors _____ Phone: _____ |
| _____ | 3. First meeting date and time: _____ Assignment? _____ |
| _____ | 4. Return Building Use Form if wedding is at the church. |
| _____ | 5. Second meeting date and time: _____ Assignment? _____ |
| _____ | 6. Third meeting date and time: _____ Assignment? _____ |
| _____ | 7. After approval by your Counselors, confirm date with Office <u>BEFORE SENDING INVITATIONS</u> then <u>SEND INVITATIONS!</u> |
| _____ | 8. Send Information for Florist and Caterer sheets |
| _____ | 9. Fourth meeting date and time: _____ Assignment? _____ |
| _____ | 10. Fifth meeting date and time: _____ Assignment? _____ |

| Contact | Name | Phone |
|--------------------|-------|-------|
| Building Manager: | _____ | _____ |
| Wedding Liaison: | _____ | _____ |
| Wedding Secretary: | _____ | _____ |

Wedding Request Form

Date _____

BRIDE

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------|------|
| Res. Phone | Bus. Phone | | |
| Address | City | State | Zip: |
| Church | Do you attend regularly? | | |
| Born-again believer in Jesus Christ? | Do both parents approve? | | |
| Number of previous engagements | Number of previous marriages | | |
| Pre-Marriage Counseling: Where? | With Whom? | | |

GROOM

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|------------------------------|------------|
| Res. Phone | | Bus. Phone | |
| Address | | City | State Zip: |
| Church | | Do you attend regularly? | |
| Born-again believer in Jesus Christ? | | Do both parents approve? | |
| Number of previous engagements | | Number of previous marriages | |
| Pre-Marriage Counseling: Where? | | With Whom? | |

(If known, please provide the following information.):

| | | | |
|--|-----------|--------------------|--|
| Planned date | | Time | |
| Place of wedding | | Place of reception | |
| Rehearsal date | | Time | |
| Officiant's name | Phone (H) | (W) | |
| Officiant's church | | | |
| Person helping with wedding arrangements (mother, friend, wedding consultant): | | | |
| Name | | Phone | |
| Number of Attendants | | Number of Guests | |
| Florist | | Phone | |
| Caterer | | Phone | |

A formal request to pursue Pre-Marriage Counseling and Wedding plans at the church may be made by individually signing below that you have read and agree with the enclosed policies. Please return this form within two weeks from the above date to the church office.

| | |
|-------------|-------------|
| BRIDE _____ | GROOM _____ |
|-------------|-------------|

| | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------|---------------|
| FOR Church USE | | |
| Dates forms sent: | Office Personnel | Date Returned |
| Assigned Pre-marriage counselor: | Date | |
| Final approval by: | Date | |

Information for Florist

The wedding party must provide all decorations, flower containers, dripless candles, table linens, dishes, etc. The wedding party assumes responsibility for arranging for all equipment and decorations to be removed immediately following the wedding/reception. The church provides only the re-cleaning of the building after everything has been removed. The piano or the organ must not be moved.

Dripless candles are permitted at the front of the auditorium only. Non-flammable, protective material must be placed under all candles to protect the carpeting. Candles are not permitted in the aisles or windows.

No nails, thumb tacks, staples, or screws are to be used in any part of the building or on furniture. Be careful not to block air-conditioning or heating vents.

The florist should contact the church office during normal Office hours for delivery or set up. A 2:00 p.m. closing time should be given to delivery personnel as they are often late, and the Office will be closed. Any other access to the building must be arranged through the church Office from 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. weekdays. The church will accept deliveries of rental equipment if financial arrangements have been settled by the responsible party. We cannot accept C.O.D. deliveries.

Please note that:

- Supplies stored in the refrigerator are stored at your own risk.
- Smoking is not permitted inside the building.
- Birdseed only is permitted **outside** the building.
- The florist or wedding party is responsible to remove all floral decorations and accompanying equipment.

The wedding party assumes full responsibility for any damage, loss or breakage of Chapel property.

Please give this information sheet to your florist.

Information for Caterer

The church's kitchen is available for your wedding and/or reception. The Parlor is normally used for the reception. A reception involves the wedding party being willing to provide:

- 1) Set up
- 2) Food service personnel
- 3) Clean up after the wedding and/or reception.

The kitchen, parlor and all used facilities should be left in the condition in which they are found.

The caterer or wedding party is responsible for providing any and all needed supplies.

The wedding party, or the caterer, should contact the church office during normal Office hours for delivery or set up. A 2:00 p.m. closing time should be given to delivery personnel as they are often late, and the Office will be closed. Any other access to the building must be arranged through the church Office from 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. weekdays. The church will accept deliveries of rental equipment if financial arrangements have been settled by the responsible party. We cannot accept C.O.D. deliveries.

Supplies stored in the refrigerator are stored at your own risk. We do have a freezer for storage and an ice machine. Leftover food and supplies **must be** removed immediately after your wedding/reception. If there is no caterer, the wedding party should assign someone this responsibility, and indicate on your building use form their name and telephone number.

Please note that:

- The piano or organ must not be moved.
- Our facility does not have storage room available after the wedding.
- Smoking is not permitted inside the building.
- **ALL REFUSE MUST BE TAKEN TO THE DUMPSTERS IMMEDIATELY AFTER YOUR WEDDING.**

Please give a copy of this information sheet to your caterer.

Information for Wedding Liaison

A church Wedding Liaison who represents the church and its policies will be available for the wedding rehearsal and wedding ceremony to help your wedding go smoothly.

She will assist the Officiant in both the Processional and Recessional, assist in lining up the wedding party, sending each one down the aisle at the appropriate time, coordinating with the pianist or organist when it is time for the bride to enter, and straighten her train, etc. If you have a Wedding Consultant, she will be happy to work with her.

She will alert ushers when it is time to seat people, and, at the proper time, have grandparents or other family members seated, followed by the parents.

At the rehearsal, she will work with the Officiant to assist in placement of bridesmaids and groomsmen for balance, and mark their places with masking tape for the wedding.

The Wedding Liaison will conduct a bridal interview to discuss details of your wedding and rehearsal. While she may be able to offer helpful suggestions for your reception, the reception will be the responsibility of the wedding party.

The Wedding Liaison will be happy to answer any questions you may have about the church. A bridal room is available for the bride's party; groomsmen may dress in the Conference Room.

Please give this information sheet to your Wedding Consultant if applicable.

Planning Your Ceremony

1. Mood of the ceremony:

- ☞ How would you like your ceremony to be distinctly Christian?
- ☞ What mood do you want to prevail at your wedding ceremony?
- ☞ How does the music and those participating relate to this mood?
- ☞ What impression do you want to leave with the audience?
- ☞ What memories do you want to cherish about your ceremony?
- ☞ Other comments:

2. How can the one officiating at the wedding help you create this mood and convey these impressions, which you desire?

3. In what ways do you feel your ceremony will be glorifying to our Lord Jesus Christ?

4. Both of you may wish to consider giving your testimonies (how you met Christ and how He brought you together) or both praying at the conclusion of your wedding. Have you considered this?

5. Important information:

☞ Date and time of wedding rehearsal

☞ Date and time of wedding ceremony

☞ Location of rehearsal and ceremony

☞ Have you completed all arrangements and reservations for the use of facilities for your wedding?

☞ Location of wedding reception

☞ Name of wedding consultant

☞ Name of florist

☞ Name of caterer

(When will the caterer need to be on site to set up for the wedding?

_____)

6. Concerning the Rehearsal:

☞ Be on time!

- ☞ Please insist on the presence of all members of the bridal party at the rehearsal.
- ☞ Invite your marriage consultant to be present. Also make it clear that the minister will conduct the entire rehearsal, but would appreciate any comments or suggestions.
- ☞ The church secretary responsible for weddings will be present to help you as well.
 - ☞ Plan on at least one hour for the rehearsal.
 - ☞ Bring your marriage license to the rehearsal and give it to the one officiating.
 - ☞ Remember that what is done at the rehearsal sets the tone for the ceremony.
 - ☞ Your attitude and conduct at the rehearsal will set the standard for others.
 - ☞ The same can be said for the rehearsal dinner (if any). Here the groom will be responsible for setting the tone for the evening. I would suggest that you consider giving your testimonies to the bridal party, thus setting the tone for the occasion. In the past, wedding rehearsal dinners have proven to be excellent opportunities for witnessing. You may wish to consider this in the placement of members of the wedding party at the table.
- 7. Please prepare the following diagrams and give them to the officiant before the wedding rehearsal:
 - ☞ A diagram of your processional (Names of each person in the proper place).
 - ☞ A diagram of the wedding party standing at the front of the auditorium. (Again with the names of the party in their positions, and also indicate the location of microphones for soloist, etc.)
 - ☞ A diagram of your recessional, with the names of the party in their positions.
- 8. Concerning your vows, you have three options:
 - ☞ Leave the choice to the one officiating.
 - ☞ From a variety of selections which are available for your consideration, you may choose the one you prefer.
 - ☞ Write your own vows. If this is the option you choose, the vows ought to be submitted to the one officiating, at the last session, for his approval. These vows should reflect your desire to follow the Scriptures in your marriage. They should also be concise.

Which option will you take? -

Will you memorize your vows or repeat them after the one officiating?

9. The wedding party: Please assist the officiant by listing those in the wedding party by name.

☞ Bride's parents:

☞ Maid (maiden) of honor:

☞ Bridesmaids:

☞ Others (include their relationship to the bride, if pertinent):

☞ Groom's parents:

☞ Best man:

☞ Ushers:

☞ Others (Again, give relationship to groom, if pertinent):

10. A suggested order for the ceremony:

☞ Organ Prelude by

☞ Lighting of Candles by

☞ Seating of groom's parents by

☞ Seating of bride's mother by

☞ Enter: minister, groom, best man, etc.

☞ Processional: As bride enters, organ introduces her; audience stands (as prompted by bride's mother standing).

☞ Solo (when all the bridal party is at the front in their positions):

Title of solo

Name of soloist

☞ "Who is giving away the bride?"

Bride kisses the father.

Bride's father seated.

☞ Ascend platform

☞ Message: The Meaning of Christian Marriage

☞ Vows: Which selection have you chosen?

☞ Exchange of Rings.

☞ Pronouncement of Husband and Wife.

☞ Optional: Lighting of single candle from two candles (Genesis 2:24) yes / no

☞ Prayer: You have several options (circle your choices):

Use of a kneeler? yes / no

Prayer with no "Amen" followed by solo, "The Lord's Prayer". yes / no

Prayer by minister only. yes / no

Prayer by groom, bride, then minister. yes / no

☞ Solo (optional): yes / no

Title of solo

Name of soloist

- ☞ Congratulations by minister
- ☞ Presentation of Mr. & Mrs. _____ to audience.
- ☞ Recessional
- ☞ How do you want the audience dismissed? En masse? _____ or by rows? _____
- ☞ Do you wish to have the minister announce time and place of reception?

11. Concerning your pictures:

- ☞ Be sure to check with the church or facility, as well as the officiant, concerning regulations regarding the taking of pictures during the ceremony. Some, due to tradition, shy away from picture taking before the ceremony, but generally it is easier on the bridal party and the audience to have most of the pictures taken in advance. These decisions should be discussed and made in advance.

12. One final word:

- ☞ You should assume the responsibility for the conduct of individuals at your wedding (rehearsal and ceremony). If there is likelihood of the use of tobacco or alcoholic beverages, please inform them politely not to do so either during the rehearsal or the wedding. This will spare many difficult situations.

Wedding Rehearsal

1. Begin with prayer.
2. Introduction of those involved in the wedding
 - ☞ Groom introduces his relatives, groomsmen and ushers.
 - ☞ Bride introduces her relatives and bridal party.
 - ☞ I introduce the church wedding consultant and those assisting in the wedding who will discuss where the microphones are to be placed, what time the caterers will arrive, review the church rules, and if the wedding will be taped.
3. Instructions

Ushers

- ☞ _____, _____ are lighting the candles.
- ☞ The candles are to be lit at (time): _____.
- ☞ Seating instructions:
 - ☞ Offer the right arm to ladies 14 years and older.
 - ☞ Seat Bride's friends on the left, groom's on the right (from the rear of the auditorium).
 - ☞ If one side of the auditorium becomes over-crowded, seat people on the other side.
 - ☞ _____ will seat the groom's grandparents.
 - ☞ _____ will seat the bride's grandparents.
 - ☞ _____ will seat the groom's parents.
 - ☞ _____ will seat the bride's mother.

Bride's mother

- ☞ She stands (when I nod to her) as the bride enters, signaling the audience to stand.

Bridesmaids and Ushers

- ☞ Everyone starts down the aisle on his/her left foot.
- ☞ Walk naturally, in time with the music, and slowly.
- ☞ Four pews spacing between bridesmaids and between groomsmen, with 6 pews spacing between last groomsman and first bridesmaid.

4. Order of processional

Processional

- ☞ Groom's grandmother

- ☞ Bride's grandmother
- ☞ Groom's mother
- ☞ Bride's mother
 - Pastor – Groom – Best Man
- ☞ Ushers
- ☞ Groomsmen
- ☞ Bridesmaids
- ☞ Matron of Honor (Optional: the one who assists the bride precedes the bride)
- ☞ Maid of Honor
- ☞ Ring Bearer
- ☞ Flower Girl
- ☞ Bride on father's *left* arm traditionally

Recessional

- ☞ Reverse of the above

5. Wedding party at front of auditorium

- ☞ Stand wedding party in place at front but not on platform (watch for symmetry, with tallest to the outside, thus coming in first).
- ☞ Groomsmen stand 10 inches apart with *all* hands to your side or with *all* hands crossed in front.
- ☞ Father gives daughter his *left* arm and escorts her down the aisle. Show him how to hand off the bride. (Bride may kiss father farewell). To avoid stepping on the Bride's train, father takes one large step backward before turning to take his seat.

6. Ascending platform

- ☞ Bride hands bouquet to Maid/Matron of Honor, allowing her to use both hands to raise skirt.
- ☞ Groom holds her right elbow securely.
- ☞ Bride takes bouquet back.

7. Wedding party on the platform

- ☞ Bride hands bouquet to Maid/Matron of Honor when she takes ring.
- ☞ Bride and Groom turn toward each other for ring exchange.
- ☞ When exchanging rings, don't be concerned about getting ring on all the way. Simply let the other person work it on slowly as the ceremony proceeds.

8. Recessional

- ☞ Bride gets flowers back from Maid/Matron of Honor.
- ☞ Bride turns and Maid/Matron of Honor arranges Bride's train behind her.

☞ Bride and Groom exit, followed by Best Man and Maid/Matron of Honor, then remaining wedding party exits.

☞ Leave happily, but not hastily – with dignity.

9. Walk through the ceremony once or twice until all are comfortable with it.

10. Exact order of ceremony:

11. Final instructions

☞ Directions concerning rehearsal dinner, when, where, how to get there.

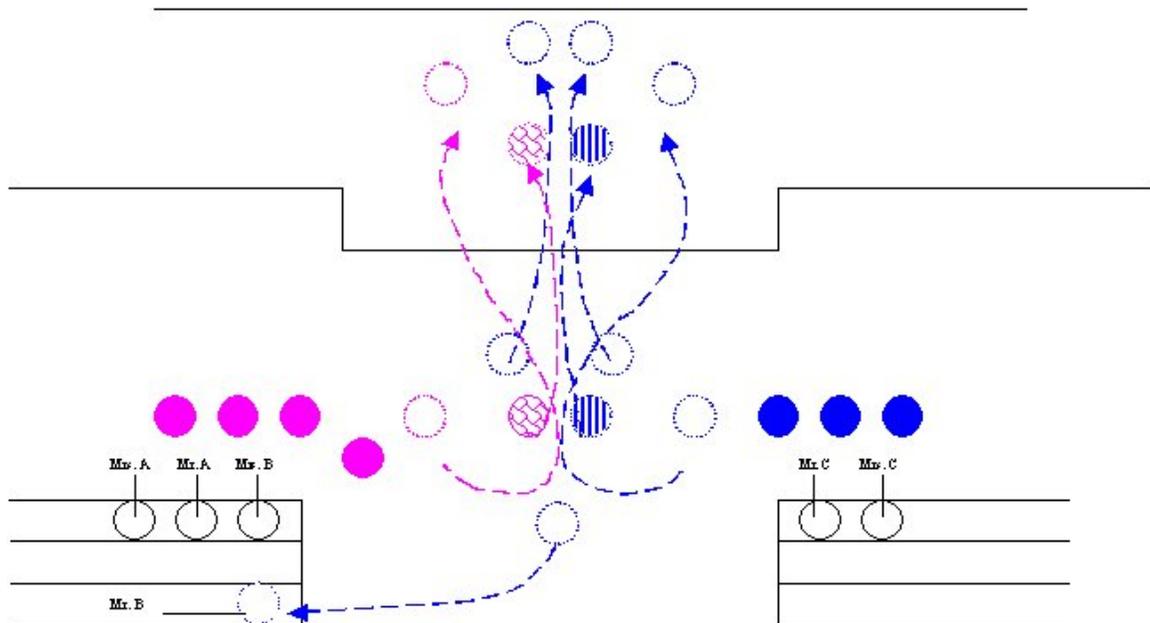
☞ When to arrive for the wedding.

☞ The church wedding consultant will show dressing rooms, if necessary.

Wedding Party Schedule

We appreciate your participation in our wedding! This list should help each of us, so please read it carefully, and feel free to ask any question you may have.

1. ALL ATTENDANTS arrive at the church at _____.
2. INSTRUMENTALISTS arrive at the church at _____.
3. WOMEN may dress in the Bride's Room.
4. MEN may dress in the Conference Room.
5. PHOTOGRAPHER will begin taking pictures at _____.
- 6. (*Arrive 15 minutes prior to this time!*)**
7. BOUTONNIERE for the Groomsmen and Groom to be worn on LEFT side.
8. ALL USHERS will escort women on RIGHT arm. Seat Bride's friends on LEFT, Groom's on RIGHT, or balance the seating if Bride/Groom desire (ask).
9. Bride on Father's LEFT arm.
10. Everyone starts down the aisle on his or her LEFT foot. Set your pace naturally, in time with the music, slowly and enjoyably!
11. PLEASE – no chewing gum!
12. Mothers will be seated at five minutes until _____ (time of wedding).
13. GROOMSMEN, please help your Bridesmaid up and down the steps with your RIGHT arm; secure her arm BEFORE you start UP or DOWN the steps.
14. Look pleasant during the ceremony; this is a joyous occasion.
15. AFTER THE CEREMONY, go immediately to _____.
16. There (will / will not) be a receiving line. If not, mix, mingle, have fun.



Wedding Vows



Selection 1

GROOM: I, _____ take you, _____

to be my wedded wife;

And I do covenant and promise;

Before God and these witnesses

To be your loving and faithful husband;

In plenty and in want;

In joy and in sorrow;

In sickness and in health;

As long as we both shall live.

BRIDE: I, _____ take you, _____

to be my wedded husband;

And I do covenant and promise;

Before God and these witnesses

To be your loving and faithful wife;

In plenty and in want;

In joy and in sorrow;

In sickness and in health;

As long as we both shall live.



Selection 2

GROOM: I, _____ take you, _____

to be my wedded wife,

to have and to hold from this day forward,

for better, for worse,

for richer, for poorer

in sickness and in health,

to love and to cherish

as long as we both shall live

according to God's holy ordinance,

and thereto I pledge thee my troth.

BRIDE: I, _____ take you, _____

to be my wedded husband,
to have and to hold from this day forward
for better, for worse,
for richer, for poorer
in sickness and in health,
to love and to cherish
as long as we both shall live
according to God's holy ordinance,
and thereto I give thee my troth.



Selection 3

GROOM: I, _____ take you, _____

to be my wedded wife,
With deepest joy I receive you into my life,
That together we may be one.
As Christ is to the Church, so I will be to you –
A loyal, sacrificial husband,
Always performing my headship over you,
Even as Christ does over me.
I promise you my deepest love and tender care.
No matter where the Lord may lead us,
I pledge you my life,
As a loving and faithful husband.

BRIDE: I, _____ take you, _____

to be my wedded husband.
With deepest joy I enter my new life with you.
As is the Church in her relationship to Christ,
So I will be to you.
I submit myself to your headship as to the Lord.
I will live for you,
loving you,
learning from you, and
seeking to please you,
I pledge you my life
As a loving, obedient and faithful wife.
(optional) – that like Ruth, I may say,

“Wither thou goest, I will go;
Where thou lodgest, I will lodge
Thy people shall be my people;
And thy God, my God.”



Selection 4

GROOM: I, _____

acknowledge before God and these witnesses

that God has brought _____ to me

to become one with me,

as my companion and counterpart and help,

as long as we both shall live.

_____, according to God's Word,

and by His grace,

I vow to be your loving leader,

your faithful provider and protector,

even as Christ is to His church.

BRIDE: I, _____

acknowledge before God and these witnesses

that God has led me

to become one flesh with _____

as his companion and counterpart and helper,

as long as we both shall live.

_____, by God's grace,

I covenant to be your faithful, submissive, and obedient wife,

even as the church is to be to Christ

This I do

in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ

and to His Word.

(After each has said their vows, they would place the ring on the finger of their partner as a sign or token of this vow.)



Selection 5

GROOM: In God's perfect will and the presence of these friends,

I take you, _____, to be my wife

to love, honor, and respect from this day forward,

I promise to provide for you, protect and defend you

as God shall make me able.

I will strive without ceasing to edify, encourage and instruct you,
according to the command of the lord Jesus Christ.

With the love God has so freely manifested in me,
I shall endeavor to give likewise this same affection to you.

I vow my life to you, trusting in the providence of God,
the power of the Holy Spirit,
and the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ,
in whom all things hold together.

BRIDE: _____, I take you to be my husband,
and give to you all that I am and have.

Through the power and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
I promise to love you with all of my being;
to honor, respect and esteem you above all others,
submitting to your loving leadership in all things as unto Christ.

I will comfort and care for you,
endeavoring always to encourage and edify you.

As we are blessed of God with children,
I will strive to bring them up in the love of God,
instructing them in His ways.

As Jesus Christ is the most important person in our lives
because He gives us life,

I will seek to help you attain the stature and fullness of Christ
as we serve him together,
from this day forward.

Selection 5a

ALTERNATE BRIDE'S VOW: _____, because we are
both at peace

in the assurance that our Lord planned and blesses our coming together,
I entrust my life and my love to you from this day forward.

I come to you with my need for you strength,
your understanding, and your tender care –
needs you have so lovingly developed in me by completely filling them for me.

And I will strive with Christ's help
to make you a sensitive, gentle, and godly wife,
and with His strength and guidance, I'll stand with you through everything.
I'll laugh with you and share your happiness, but, as well,

I'll comfort you in your sadness.
I'll care for you when you're ill.
I'll honor you in your hours of strength.
And, I'll joyfully submit to you as the head of our home
because I respect you and your integrity
and because God planned that it should be this way.



Selection 6

MINISTER: If you, then, _____ and _____,
have freely and deliberately chosen each other as partners
in this holy estate,
and know of no just cause why you should not be united,
in token thereof, you will please join your right hands.

GROOM'S VOW: _____, in taking the woman you hold by the
right hand

to be your lawful and wedded wife, before God and the witnesses present
you must promise to love her, to honor and cherish her in that relationship
and leaving all others cleave only unto her,
and to be to her in all things a true and faithful husband
so long as you both shall live. Do you so promise?

BRIDE'S VOW: _____, in taking the man you hold by the right
hand

to be your lawful and wedded husband, before God and the witnesses present
you must promise to love him, to honor and cherish him in that relationship,
and leaving all others cleave only unto him,
and to be to him in all things a true and faithful wife
so long as you both shall live. Do you so promise?

MINISTER'S RESPONSE: Then are you each given to the other for richer or poorer,
for better or worse, in sickness and in health,
till death shall part you.

GROOM'S RING VOW: What token do you give as an everlasting symbol
of your love, sincerity, and faithfulness?

As a ceaseless reminder of this hour and of the vow you have taken,
place this ring, the symbol of your love,
on the hand of your bride and repeat after me:

“With this ring I thee wed, with loyal love I thee endow,
and all my worldly goods with thee I share,

in the name of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen”

BRIDE’S RING VOW: What token do you give as an everlasting symbol of your love, sincerity, faithfulness and submission?

As a ceaseless reminder of this hour and of the vow you have taken, place this ring, the symbol of your love,

on the hand of your groom and repeat after me:

“With this ring , I thee wed, with loyal love I thee endow,

and all my worldly goods with thee I share,

in the name of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen”



Selection 7

MINISTER: _____, do you take _____,

Whose hand you hold, to be your lawfully wedded wife

and do you sincerely promise in the presence of this company

and in reverence before God,

to love, honor, and protect her through sunshine and shadow, alike,

keeping yourself unto her alone,

until death shall separate you?

Do you? (I do.)

_____, do you take this man, whose hand you hold,

to be your lawfully wedded husband; do you sincerely promise

in reverence for God and in the presence of this company

to be to him a loving, tender, and true wife,

through sunshine and shadow, alike,

keeping yourself unto him alone,

until death shall separate you.

Do you? (I do.)

Now will you repeat these vows.

I, _____, take thee _____,

to be my wedded wife,

to have and to hold from this day forward,

for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer,

in sickness and in health,

to love and to cherish

till death us do part,

according to God’s holy ordinance,

and thereto I plight thee my troth.

And _____, will you likewise repeat these vows.

I, _____, take thee _____,

to be my wedded husband,

to have and to hold from this day forward,

for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer,

in sickness and in health,

to love and to cherish,

till death do us part,

according to God's holy ordinance,

and thereto I plight thee my troth.

Now in God's sacred providence with us, He has given us reminding tokens and following this precedence you have chosen rings. These rings are fitting symbols of this relationship in two respects. The ring is fashioned of the most precious metal, which suggests the most priceless relationship on earth, that of a Christian home. Furthermore, the ring represents the permanency of the marriage union, until it's broken by the outside force of death.

_____, in placing this ring,

will you repeat after me these words.

I, _____, give thee this ring, _____,

As a token of my love,

and I pledge thee my loyalty and devotion

until death separates us.

I, _____, give thee this ring, _____,

as a token of my love,

and I pledge thee my loyalty and devotion

until death separates us.

First Letter and Forms Sent To Couple

S A M P L E 1ST COVER LETTER

[*date*]

[*salutation and name*]

[*street address*]

[*city, state, zip*]

Dear:

We appreciate the opportunity to participate in your Pre-Marriage Counseling and wedding. Because we believe the Scriptures teach that marriage is an institution established by God, and that it is a life-time commitment, we have established the enclosed policies.

We would like you and _____ to read the enclosed policies carefully. If you then desire to move forward with your wedding, please complete the Request Form, and return it to the church office within two weeks. If you do not return the Request Form to the Office by _____, we will assume you have changed your plans, and the requested date will be released for other uses. Your date will remain “penciled” in until final approval is given by your Pre-Marriage Counselors. At that time, if approval is given, the dates will be confirmed as “go” dates.

We want to be very clear that going through Pre-Marriage Counseling does not guarantee approval of your marriage. We desire to be faithful stewards of the gospel, and our hope is that, should you marry, you will enter into a marriage which will be to the glory of God.

If you have questions, please give me a call.

Sincerely in Christ,

[*Name*]

Pre-Marriage Coordinator

Enclosures (*Pre-Marriage Counseling and Wedding Policies, Wedding Request Form, Pre-Marriage Counseling and/or Wedding Couples' Checklist*)

Second Letter and Forms Sent To Couple

S A M P L E
SET 2 - 2ND LETTER

[*date*]

[*salutation and name*]

[*street address*]

[*city, state, zip*]

Dear

We were delighted to receive your Wedding Request Form and are now enclosing a Wedding Packet with additional material. If you plan to be married at the church, it is important that you return the Building Use form even though all information may not be available at this time. As you will see on the Couple's Checklist, a Wedding Liaison will work with you as we move along in the process.

As you read in the Wedding Policies, the wedding date has been tentatively "penciled" in until your Pre-Marriage Counselors notify the Office of their approval. We earnestly pray that this time will bring spiritual blessing to each of you.

In Christ,

[*Name*]

Pre-Marriage Coordinator

Enclosures (*Pre-Marriage Counseling and/or Wedding Process, Information for Florist, Information for Caterer, Wedding Liaison, Planning Your Ceremony, Wedding Rehearsal, Wedding Party Schedule, Wedding Vows*)

Additional Resources

- “The Act of Marriage” by Tim Lahaye
- “Master Your Money” by Ron Blue
- “The Complete Financial Guide for Young Couples” by Larry Burkett
- Preparing for Marriage – God’s Way, by Wayne Mack
- “Her Hand in Marriage” by Douglas Wilson

Suggestions/Ideas from Counselors

Lessons Learned

1. *Most important concept:* The Lord must be the *only* “priority.” Marriage should not be seen as a lesser priority. If a couple is called to be married, then working to have a good marriage must be seen as a service to the Lord. We have started emphasizing this point more and more in our pre-marriage counseling. See Deuteronomy 5:7-8, 6:4; Luke 14:25-35; and 1 Corinthians 7.
2. *Best indicator of compatibility:* Parental approval is the single most reliable indicator we have found of whether the individuals are “right” for each other. Even unbelieving parents who care for their children usually have a good sense about whether the intended spouse is a suitable mate, but may not be able to precisely identify a problem. In one case, the women’s mother, who may not have been a believer, objected to the marriage, saying the man’s personality was incompatible with her daughter’s. Even though the couple suspected that there was some other unknown reason, we advised them not to marry unless the mother changed her mind. When told that they would not marry without her blessing, the mother almost immediately gave her wholehearted approval. Something in that gesture convinced her that her daughter would get a good husband.
3. *Biggest mistake:* Assuming that the couple should be married can be a tragic error. Some of our best pre-marriage counseling work has been to convince people that they should not marry. Do not be afraid to ask hard questions. Follow your instincts and explore thoroughly the areas they are not comfortable with. For example, several times we have discovered that one of the people likely was not a believer.
4. *Funniest thank you note:* We usually ask each person to make a list of a few of the other’s faults. One couple told us with straight faces that they could not find

any fault with each other. Even after we suggested some we had observed, they persisted. Shortly after they were married, we got a thank you note with the postscript, “By the way, we can make the lists of our faults now!”

Things to Stress In Pre-Marriage Counseling

1. Complete honesty, including prior relationships, degrees of intimacy, sexual activity.
2. Ask the couple if they are involved sexually. If so, stop now.
3. How is communication with parents? Have both sets given their “blessing”?
4. Have you had a big fight yet? Details and resolution.
5. Attitudes toward money, children, budget, materialism, scripture, ministry?
6. Can each give the other’s testimony?
7. Is there a wide gap in spiritual maturity?
8. What do they dislike about each other and why? Can they live with that?