

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

For your information, inspiration and intercession, please study this ICCP Discussion Document from the Reformation 500 Church Consultation in Wittenberg, Germany, October 2017, in preparation for the upcoming [Reformation 500 Global Church Council Zürich](#) , 15-19 July 2019.

If you have any suggestions on how these may be improved, or to communicate the support of your church, mission, or ministry, write to the [International Church Council Project](#) .

ARTICLES of AFFIRMATION and DENIAL

Article I

We Affirm that Christ, out of love and concern for the nourishment, concord, unity, correction, and purity of His Body, has instituted and established through His Word certain ordinances for the discipline of the Church.¹

We deny that members of Christ's Church may be disciplined by the Church for, or that their consciences may be bound by, any human law or invention beyond what Holy Scripture requires or permits to be required.²

(See the principles and references under Article VIII.)

Mat. 15:2-3; 23:4; Mark 7:6-8; Acts 5:29; Gal. 4:9-11; 5:2-12; Col. 2:8, 18-23; Titus 1:14

Article II

We Affirm that the purpose of Christian discipline in the institutional church is instruction¹ and government² and that this discipline encompasses the communication of the knowledge of God's will and the regulation of practice.³

We deny that the rigors of human discipline are sufficient to subdue the power of sin;⁴ at the same time we deny that Biblical discipline is a barrier to realization of the divinely ordained potential or destiny of any person.⁵

2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:13

1 Cor. 5:7-13 with 2 Cor. 2:6-8; Eph. 4:11-16

1 Tim. 5:19-20; 2 Tim. 3:16-17

John 8:34-36

1 Cor. 5:7-13 with 2 Cor 2:6-8; Heb. 12:5-13; James 1:2-4

Article III

We Affirm that the purpose of admonition and discipline in the Church is at least threefold: to maintain the honor of God,¹ to restore sinners,² and to remove offense from the Body of Christ.³

We deny that the purpose of Church discipline is to impose retribution and vengeance for offenses against mere human traditions or worldly institutions within the church.⁴

Ezek. 36:22-23; 1 Tim. 6:1; Titus 2:10

1 Cor. 5:7-13 with 2 Cor. 2:6-8; Galatians 6:1; 2 Tim. 2:25-26

1 Cor. 5:4-13; 1 Tim. 1:20; Titus 3:10-11

Romans 12:19

Article IV

We Affirm that disciplinable offenses include both violations of the Divine Will (i.e., transgressions of a moral and ethical nature and delinquency in spiritual obligations)¹ and violations of sound doctrine, teaching, and Biblical truth (i.e., errors in belief that have the potential to dishonor God or bring offense to the truth).²

We deny that Church discipline is limited in scope to unethical actions involving personal relationships and/or acts of moral turpitude.

1 Cor. 5:7-13; (Also see the principles and references under Article VIII.)

Acts 18:26; 1 Tim. 1:2-5, 20; 4:6; 6:3-5; 2 Tim. 4:2-4; Titus 1:9-11; 2:1,7

Article V

We Affirm that vigilant admonition, reproof and rebuke, loving nurture and sound teaching are necessary and crucial as “preventive” measures to safeguard members of the Church from falling into sin.¹

We deny that churches, elders, and individual believers have fully discharged their duty to discipline if they fail to be continually vigilant in reproof, nurture, and sound teaching.²

(See the principles and references under Article IV² & VIII.)

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Article VI

We Affirm that discipline in all of its biblical aspects is non-optional; that is, it is required by God and Scripture for all Church members, including leaders, and is given great weight as an ecclesiastical duty.¹

We deny that the Church may neglect or abdicate its disciplinary duties out of fear of reprisal, threat of civil lawsuit, or any other external sanction.² We further deny that the civil magistrate has any right or jurisdiction to apply sanctions against the Church for meeting its scriptural duty to discipline its members.³

¹ Peter 5:2; (Also see the principles and references under Article VIII.)

Mat. 10:28; Acts 4:20; 5:29; 1 Tim. 5:20; 2 Tim. 4:1-4; Titus 2:15

Acts 5:29; 1 Cor. 5:12; 6:4; Eph. 1:20-23; Philippians 2:9-10; Col. 1:18; 2:10

Article VII

We Affirm that in every church disciplinary action, biblical justice is to be maintained and truth must be carefully established by due process and strict procedural safeguards in the case of any accusation of wrongdoing.¹ We further find and hereby advise that it is wise for churches to require consent to biblical disciplinary procedures as part of the covenant of membership.

We deny that any charge may be accepted for adjudication by Church authorities without the corroboration of two or three witnesses and other measures of standard due process.²

Deut. 19:15-18; Mat. 18:15-17; John 7:24; 1 Tim. 5:19

(Same as #1.)

Article VIII

We Affirm that the components and procedures outlined in the 18th Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Matthew constitute scripture's primary guidelines for the exercise of Christian discipline involving private sin. We find that these components and procedures include:

1. Self-discipline (vss. 7-9)
2. Mutual discipline (vss. 15-16)
3. Church discipline (vss. 17-20)

We find further that self discipline consists in self-examination,¹ guarding oneself against falling into temptation² and against enticing others away from the Kingdom of Christ.³ We find that mutual discipline consists in brotherly vigilance against sin and loving confrontation of brethren in sin,⁴ first in private⁵ and then, if necessary, in the presence of witnesses.⁶ We find that church discipline consists in: (1) admonition of the sinner and intercession for him by the ordained authorities and membership of the local congregation;⁷ (2) adjudication of the cause against any unrepentant offender;⁸ (3) appropriate rebuke, punishment, or order of restitution for offenders found guilty, including repentant offenders;⁹ (4) excommunication,¹⁰ disfellowship,¹¹ continued prayer, and evangelization of unrepentant offenders;¹² and (5) restoration and readmission of any offender upon repentance and evidence of sufficient spiritual growth.¹³

We deny that Matthew 18 is the exclusive scriptural revelation concerning Christian discipline.

1 Cor. 11:28-32; 2 Cor. 13:5

Joshua 6:18; Acts 15:29; Jude 1:21; 1 John 2:1,28; 5:21

Deut. 13:12-18; Mat. 18:6; Luke 17:1; 1 Cor. 8:9-13; 10:28-32; 2 Cor. 2:10-11

Lev. 19:17; Psalm 141:5; Prov. 9:8; 27:5; Luke 17:3-4; Rom. 15:14; Gal. 6:1-2; 1 Thess. 5:14; 2 Thess. 3:14-15;

James 5:19-20

Mat. 18:15

Mat. 18:16; Gal. 2:11-14

Luke 17:3; Rom. 15:14; Gal. 6:1-2; 1 Tim. 5:1,20; 2 Tim. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:14; 2 Thess. 3:14-15

Mat. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 4:21-5:13; 6:1-6; Gal. 6:1-2

Exodus 21:34; 22:3, 5-6, 11-14; Lev. 6:2-5; Numbers 5:6-8

Mat. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:11-13

1 Cor. 5:11-13; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15

2 Thess. 3:14-15

Mat. 18:21-35; 2 Cor. 2:6-11

Article IX

We Affirm that active affiliation of all believers with the Church on earth is commanded by scripture, without which membership biblical discipline is hampered or rendered impossible.¹

We deny that, apart from any unique or special circumstances which God may in His wisdom bring to pass, Christians can fully maintain their sanctification and spiritual growth apart from the Body of Christ.²

Philippians 1:1; Heb. 10:24-25; Rev. 2:1-3:22

Eph. 2:19-22; 4:15-16; (Also see the principles and references under Article VIII.)

Article X

We Affirm that duly ordained office-bearers of the Church have God-given authority to determine and declare the status of individuals' membership within the communion of the saints, the Body of Christ.¹ We further affirm that in making such determinations, the office-bearers of the Church act on behalf of God Himself, Who will seal in heaven those decisions made in accordance with His will and word.²

We deny that the authority of ordained office-holders over sinners and penitents is limited to mere fact-finding concerning guilt or innocence.

1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20; 3:10; 5:22; 2 Tim. 2:17-18; Titus 1:10-16

Mat. 18:18-19; 2 Cor. 2:6-10

Article XI

We Affirm that public sins should be publicly exposed,¹ publicly adjudicated, and, if guilt is found, publicly punished by duly ordained and constituted Church authority.² We further affirm that this authority may be vested in Church office-holders (elders, bishops, presbyters, overseers) or in Councils of the Church.

We deny that public sins are adequately addressed through private or confidential disciplinary actions.

1 Tim. 5:20

1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20; 3:10; 5:22; 2 Tim. 2:17-18; Titus 1:10-16

Article XII

We Affirm that local congregations have a responsibility toward one another for inter-church, mutual care and discipline, for the maintenance of purity in practice and doctrine. We Affirm further that local congregations must honor and respect one another's discipline of delinquent members, when that discipline has been carried out in accordance with the dictates of scripture.¹

We deny that any congregation is a totally independent entity and has no accountability elsewhere within the true universal Body of Christ. Moreover, we find reprehensible and unscriptural the common practice of certain churches to accept, without consultation and examination, members of other churches who are or have been under biblical discipline, censure, disfellowship, or ban of excommunication in another congregation.²

1 Cor. 1:10; 11:18-19; Philippians 1:27; Jude 1:3

1 Cor. 1:10; 11:18-19; Philippians 1:27; Jude 1:3; (Also see the principles and references under Article VIII.)

Article XIII

We Affirm that on the basis of the Word of God it is possible to discern the True Church of Christ and to distinguish it from the false church. We Affirm that the True Church is known by its acknowledgment of Christ as Head of the Church, by the pure preaching of the Gospel, by pure administration of the sacraments/ordinances, by faithful exercise of Christian discipline, by the management of all things according to the Word of God, and by the rejection of all things contrary thereto.¹

We deny that a church may consider itself pure or part of the True Body of Christ if it elevates any authority above Christ and His Word, neglects the Biblical administration of sacraments/ordinances, admits the validity of non-biblical or extra-biblical doctrines of man, or persecutes those who live holy lives in accordance with the Word of God.²

Mat. 7:15-27; Rom. 16:17-18; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15; 1 Tim. 6:3-5; Titus 3:10; Gal. 1:8; 2 John 1:10-11; Rev. 2:9

1 Cor. 11:1-2, 17-34; Philippians 4:9; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6; Rev. 2:1-3:22

Article XIV

We Affirm that no true Christian believer may rightly before Christ separate himself from the True Church.¹

We deny that a true Christian believer may rightly join himself to or remain a member of a false church. They place themselves in grave spiritual danger who, for the sake of tradition, expedience, status, convenience, or other false motives, refuse to separate themselves from the false church or to bring that church under righteous judgment.²

1 Cor. 12:12-31; Heb. 10:25

1 Cor. 15:33; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; 2 Thess. 3:6,14; Rev. 2:2,9, 14-15, 20-23; 3:14-22

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