

# The Role of Crisis Counseling and Church Discipline

**Galatians 5:13-6:5; Matthew 18:15-20**

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As believers, we have a glorious position before God - much of which we have sung about this morning. For in Christ, we have been given every spiritual blessing; the forgiveness of our trespasses, redemption through His blood and so much more. Not the least of which is that He raised us to be seated with Him in the heavenly places in Christ. We are citizens of the kingdom and sons and heirs. We are considered saints and not sinners in God's eyes.

But by now, you may have noticed there is a problem down here. We saints still sin. Our practice does not match our position and depending on the day or situation, it does not even come close. How was your week?

You see we still live in a fallen world in fallen bodies. Our hearts are still in the process of changing and growing in Christ-likeness - we are not there yet. Temptations come and we do not always overcome them and sin results. God's Word informs us of this "three step forward, two steps back" process and in it, He makes provision through the local church and one another to overcome through a pattern of growth and change - Christian discipleship.

This morning we will consider yet another aspect of church membership which is to revisit the biblical model for discipleship with emphasis upon helping those ensnared by sin (crisis discipleship) and also for the process of dealing with the unrepentant (church discipline). It is important to distinguish between the two.

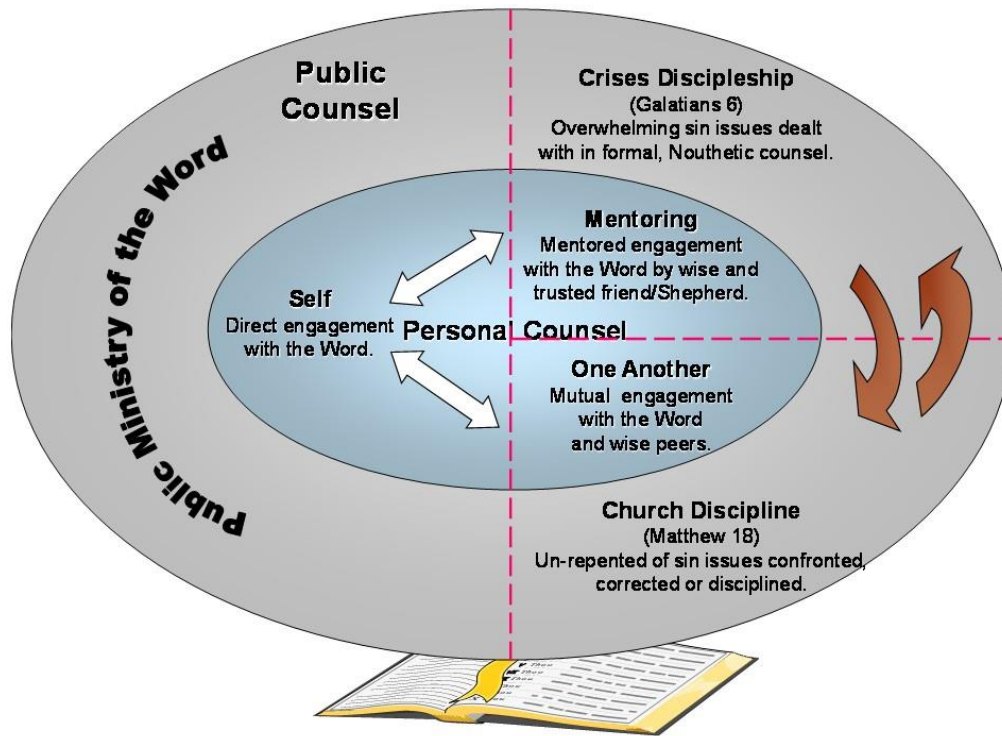
And we will find there is no greater support for church membership. For this is a process where we need God's grace and a commitment to one another to help each other grow in Christ.

In doing so, it is important to acknowledge our reliance upon Pastor Russ' good work in this area which will help us to think carefully.

## **A Ministry Model for Discipleship**

A picture can be helpful at times and here is one which offers a visual of what the discipleship at the Chapel looks like and how the various elements relate to one another

within the whole. The process includes foundational elements prescribed by God's Word - His explicit will revealed by the bible. It also includes elements of wisdom which are applied to fulfill His will.



You will note first there are two circles - the smaller fitting completely within the larger. The outer and all encompassing circle represents the sphere of public counsel and the community of the church. This is where public ministry of the Word takes place - engagement between God's Word and God's people openly in the community.

At the same time, the second circle gives focus on how the individual engages the Word as an individual. This is the sphere of personal discipleship and counsel and as such it is labeled as "personal counsel" But do not miss it, the individual engaging the Word is always operating within the sphere of public ministry. It is not done independently of but rather in harmony with and in submission to the public preaching and teaching of God's Word in the church. In no way is this circle to operate outside of community.

Note on the left hand side of the Personal Counsel circle that this individual activity begins with each believer's personal and direct engagement with God's Word. This cannot be stressed enough - it is the responsibility of every believer to regularly get into the Word. We must read, study, and obey the Word of God consistently. It is fundamental for growing in Christ - our increasing knowledge and understanding (assuming it is applied) causes us to grow. It also serves as a defense from sin and from sin which if left

unchecked, can lead to sin that overwhelms us. Are you regularly studying the Word of God as an individual? Does life seem to be closing in on you today – does it seem increasingly dark and hopeless? Perhaps you are not in the Word or in prayer on a regular basis.

Note also that the “Personal Counsel” circle includes “one anothering” as well. This is a mutual, shared engagement with God’s people along with wise peers. Discipleship is occurring with people who are largely in the same place of growth personally and spiritually. There is a back and forth interaction with our spiritual or personal peers.

The realm of “Personal Counsel” also includes mentoring. This is discipleship with someone who is more mature spiritually and personally. This may be an Elder/Pastor, a friend, or in the context of an established Titus 2 program or ministry.

In addition to personal study of the Word, are you involved in the ministry of “one anothering” or perhaps even mentoring? These are the kinds of relationships in which we need to be engaged – look for those opportunities.

So in looking at this sphere, we can view the left side as involving personal discipleship (what I do myself to grow in grace) and the right side as relational discipleship (what I do with others to grow in grace)

But what about when a believer is struggling with sin that he or she cannot overcome? How are we to engage failures in discipleship and do it according to God’s Word?

Well, in looking back at the model, we see in the upper right, as part of the overall public counsel sphere, crisis discipleship. This is ministry as described in Galatians 6 to help those who are unable to overcome sin in the personal counsel sphere by engaging them in formal biblical counseling.

And then in the lower right, we see church discipline which according to Matthew 18 is the process of engaging a person where there is no repentance over sin. Here unrepentant sin is confronted, corrected, and if necessary, disciplined.

Now there can be movement between crisis discipleship and church discipline – someone who is receiving biblical counseling may demonstrate an unwillingness to repent and need to be disciplined. While another may repent over the course of corrective discipline but need crisis discipleship in order to overcome sin and be restored to usefulness in ministry.

So this is a way to depict biblical discipleship. There are others ways to do so but this is how we think about it and its many elements at the Chapel.

## **Counseling: the Role of Crises Discipleship (Galatians 6:1-5)**

So let’s take a closer look at crisis discipleship as given to us in Galatians. Please turn there with me. Chapter six gives us the biblical mandate for crisis discipleship and also what characterizes it.

## Walk by the Spirit

(Galatians 5:13-21)

However, we first need the context for this ministry which is provided in chapter five. As we pick it up in 5:13, give attention to two walks or two realities which are set in contrast; the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. We read:

<sup>13</sup> For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. <sup>14</sup> For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>15</sup> But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

<sup>16</sup> But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. <sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

<sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. <sup>26</sup> Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Paul begins and ends the passage with "walking by the Spirit" – his point is that the way we are to live is grounded in what God has done for us. Yes, we still carry this fleshy, natural man around but the spiritual reality is that it was crucified with Christ. So he calls us to simply walk by the Spirit which has made us alive to God. Since we are now Spirit filled people then we have an obligation to walk as such.

And this has implications for how we treat one another – walking in the Spirit causes us to truly love our neighbor as ourselves. Walking in the Spirit causes us not to bite and devour one another (verse 15) or to become prideful towards or provoke or envy one another in verse 26.

## Restoration in the Midst of Sin

(v.1-2)

Walking in the Spirit is how we walk in helping our brother or sister who is overcome by sin. Paul explains this in 6:1-5 and in doing so, describes the ministry of biblical counsel. We read verses 1-5:

<sup>1</sup> Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. <sup>2</sup> Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. <sup>3</sup> For if anyone thinks he is something,

when he is nothing, he deceives himself. <sup>4</sup> But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. <sup>5</sup> For each will have to bear his own load.

These verses characterize biblical counseling in a number of ways:

### **It is the ministry of the church and of those who are spiritual**

First of all, notice this text is written to believers. How do we know? Well, it is addressed to the “brothers”. It is primarily a relational ministry where brothers and sisters are ministering to people – it is not addressed to a class of professional unbelievers. Who other than a Spirit filled believer can understand and impart the mind of Christ (spiritual things) to a brother or sister who is struggling and overcome by sin? Biblical counseling is a ministry of the church.

But Paul is even more specific in verse 1. Biblical counsel is done by those who are primarily walking in the Spirit and are manifesting the fruit of the Spirit. While we are all commanded to counsel, confront and comfort one another, the Christians who are overcome with sin need the ministry of mature and skilled people.

### **It is a ministry to saints overcome with sin.**

And note also in verse one who the ministry is directed unto – the one who is “caught” or run down or overcome by sin – such as caught in a net - it does not refer to being found out. There are Christians who struggle with sin and need loving and skilled counsel from the Word during this time.

### **It is a ministry focused on both sin and wisdom issues.**

It will give counsel reflecting God’s clear will from the Scripture and will also advise per biblical wisdom, understanding always that it must never confuse the two. It addresses and seeks to surface the heart issues that lead to sinful and foolish choices. It searches for the heart motivation leading to the transgression or lapse from righteousness. By doing so, the root cause is discovered and then gives an understanding of how to bring about lasting change.

### **It is a ministry of restoration.**

And we cannot miss the goal of biblical counseling – it is again found in verse one. The imperative and goal is to restore the person or to mend and return to full usefulness in the kingdom. The purpose is always and only to bring repentance, recovery, and restoration. It seeks to cause repentance and to teach, instruct, and help the counselee to interrupt and derail the repeated pattern of sin. Repentance is the first step but we may need help in how not to fall back into the pattern of the sin. Counsel is also given in how to face the consequences of sin because although repentance occurs and steps are taken to avoid the sin in the future, a person still need to face the consequences of what has already been committed.

## **It is a ministry conducted with a Holy Spirit enabled attitude of humbleness, meekness and gentleness.**

And notice the manner in which counseling is done; gently, humbly, and meekly. The Biblical counseling process is a tremendous opportunity to cultivate and grow the fruit of the Spirit in relationships – for all parties involved.

## **It is a ministry with temptations and dangers.**

But biblical counseling does not come without temptations and dangers. Verse 2 points them out. The primary one is legalism – an attitude of looking down upon the counselee as if the counselor is immune from lapsing into the same type of sin. This attitude can manifest itself as harshness, unkindness, and impatience with those being counseled. It is easy to deceive ourselves into thinking we are something (verse 2) when in reality we are nothing. In fact over the course of counseling exercise, the heart of the counselor can be revealed which should result in confession and repentance as well – we experience this in all of our relationships, do we not?

## **It is a ministry shaped by the cross.**

In this ministry we are also directed to bear one another's sin burden – not to pay its price since only Christ can do this but rather to sacrificially come alongside and help the person shoulder the sin and move them towards reconciliation and restoration. Those who give counsel are not to shield the sinning saint from the consequences of sin for this would interfere with God's work in that person, but rather to help the person face the sin and its consequences biblically – to suffer well if needed with an eye toward growth and lasting change.

This bearing of another's burdens also applies to a counselee who is simply suffering because of another who is sinning against them – the counselor can help that person to hold a cross kind of mentality and to look to God alone as his or her refuge and strength. In all of it, biblical counseling imparts a cross kind of mentality – suffering now for later glory.

## **It is a ministry with responsibilities (v.3-5)**

The remainder of the passage gives us three responsibilities in the work of restoring others and which apply to all of Christian ministry. These are standards for ministry that we measure ourselves against and seek to restore others to them.

### **Examine ourselves humbly (v.3)**

First, we must examine ourselves humbly. There is no room in ministry for pride and conceit or thinking we are “something” when we are “nothing”. And this begins with our thought life – are we simply looking for praise from other people rather than pointing to Christ. We must continually view ourselves humbly and see who we truly are before God. Otherwise we deceive ourselves and our ministry is a sham benefiting no one and possibly causing great harm among all who we touch.

## **Evaluate our work honestly (v.4)**

Paul preempts all boasting in ministry in verse four. We are taught here to honestly assess our own ministry and measure it to the approval of God alone – avoid the comparisons with the ministries of others. And this includes judging another’s ministry to a higher standard than our own or even admiring it as an excuse to not do your best in your own.

## **Exercise our ministry fully (v.5)**

Finally in verse six, we are to carry our own load of ministry. Notice the switch in words from verse 2 with “burden” to that of “load”. With reference to sin, we are to carry one another’s burdens but we are to carry our own ministry load. We each have a ministry work to complete but it cannot be done fully if we are overcome by sin ourselves since we will fail at it or even be disqualified.

Now what happens when a professing believer will not acknowledge or repent of sin? Well, God has given us a process for this situation as well – it is the process of church discipline. Let’s now turn to Matthew 18

# **Community: the Responsibility of Discipline**

## **Matthew 18:15-20**

### **Process of Biblical Discipline**

**(v. 15-20)**

Beginning in verse 15 we read:

<sup>15</sup> “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. <sup>16</sup> But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>17</sup> If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

<sup>18</sup> Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. <sup>19</sup> Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

The Lord lays out a four step process for dealing with sins against one another.

Notice there is no time frame given. It is a very general framework that has to be worked in wisdom. The goal is confession, forgiveness, restoration and reconciliation.

### **Informal – Private with brothers and sisters**

The first steps are personal and relational. These correspond to the circle of personal discipleship.

The starting point is to always maintain personal holiness through grace enabled self-discipline. But then in verse 15 we are given the first step which is to lovingly, carefully, and gently confront the person who sins against us. This is one-on-one with the aim of repentance and reconciliation. And we always leave room for the possibility that we might be mistaken in thinking an offense has even occurred.

If that does not work, then one to two others are brought into to help as explained in verse 16. The role of bringing the other believers is to serve as witnesses and advisors. They are to witness to whether Biblical confession and forgiveness has taken place or not. Having heard the matter, they may even determine the charge is false.

### **Formal – Public with church**

If no repentance occurs, the next steps are public and formal. These correspond to the circle of public discipleship.

The “tell it to the church” is divided into two steps here at the Chapel. We involve at least two shepherds who seek to be instruments of grace and to bring about confession and forgiveness. If the person still does not repent, then the elders will tell the church and ask the church to either “have nothing to do with the person” or to “engage the person in love calling on them to repent and be reconciled.” Unlike the earlier steps, a set period of time is given for the church to do this.

### **Final – Removed**

The last step is to remove the person from membership. The underlying assumption is that God grants repentance to true believers who then do repent. If they are unable and unwilling to acknowledge their sin and turn from it to righteousness, then they are to be treated as an unbeliever. All church discipline happens, not as punishment for sin, but as a result of not repenting. Since a person will not repent of real, perceptual sin, then we must identify and treat them as unbelievers. Unbelievers should not be members of the church and therefore are removed. With the exception of those teaching error, the church is encouraged to continue to win the person through the gospel.

The effect of removal from membership is to remove them from the safety of the church. This exposes them to the consequences of their sin. It hands them over to Satan’s realm with the *aim of bringing about repentance and restoration* (1 Cor 5:5)

*Again, the aim of this process is confession, forgiveness, restoration, and reconciliation. And when this happens, we join God the Father in rejoicing – it is a beautiful thing (18:13).*

### **The Application of Process in New Testament**

There are other texts that enlarge the scope of this one to include dealing with any and all who refuse to hear and heed admonition, who refuse to repent of sin.



Luke 17:1-19; Jesus commands us to admonish our brother but forgive him if he repents – we are to admonish with a poise to forgive and restore. We must never approach it with an aim to remove, but a hope to restore.

1 Corinthians 4:14-5:13; One of a number of problems in the church at Corinth was that the church was tolerating known and confronted sin. They were even boasting about it. But Paul saw their tolerance as weakness and a lack of love for God and for the person in sin. He commanded them to take the final step and remove them.

2 Corinthians 2:1-11; It is the church in Corinth again but this time they had gone to the other end of the spectrum – they followed biblical discipline correctly and removed the unrepentant man. But after he repented, they did not restore him. They had lacked love and failed to rejoice in his repentance and restoration. Paul called on them to restore him so that he might not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.

2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; This passage shows us there is a place for warning a brother who is walking contrary to the commands of Scripture. They can be identified and cut off from Christian fellowship so that they will be brought to repentance. Paul says, “<sup>14</sup> If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. <sup>15</sup> Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.”

Titus 3:8-11; A person who is teaching error is to be warned the first time to stop spreading the error. If they continue, they are to be warned a second time and then removed. There is not interaction with the congregation due to the infectious and contaminating effect of error.

1 Timothy 5:17-23; An elder is shielded from malicious accusations requiring two witnesses of the sin being charged against him. This is a higher standard because of their more vulnerable position. However, an elder who keeps on sinning is to be rebuked publicly as a deterrent to sin among the elders and the church at large.

This is simply a flyover concerning church discipline – much more can be said. But hopefully this has encouraged you that we are seeking to live in obedience to the Scriptures. In today’s church, discipline is not often practiced and we are often criticized for what we believe. But we need to be faithful to the Lord and to His Word.

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## **Reflect and Respond**

So this morning an overview of discipleship in the church has been presented – a process which we undergo together as members of the body of Christ – a process which we must work out together – this is God’s design. Included are:

**Christian discipleship** – a pattern for growth and change which is a biblical framework for being an instrument in the Lord’s hands for helping one another grow into maturity.

This is counseling in life - the loving ministry of words with one another. Are you engaged in this process? Are you regularly in the Word of God and praying personally and with others?

**Crises discipleship** - Plan for helping the ensnared...

The ministry of Biblical counseling is done by spiritually qualified, gifted and able men and women to help them overcome sin and suffering so as to be restored to their work of ministry.

**Church discipline** - Process for dealing with unrepentant...

The steps of loving admonition leading to a public recognition by the church that an unrepentant person may not be a believer and is to be treated as such including removal from the church.

And there are several principles important to clarify:

Counseling is a word that has many meanings in our culture and does not exist in our Bibles. It is a label used to speak of one person speaking to another in order to effect change. So, in some sense we all counsel. The basic principles of counseling are applicable to all word ministries, including evangelism. Counseling then may be a gateway for the gospel to an unbeliever. It may be the way the gospel will change a person in casual and intentional conversations.

Shepherds are the first line of helpful, regular counseling. They will minister God's Word to you in the ordinary struggles of life, sin, suffering, change and so on.

As a formal ministry of the church, counseling is primarily Galatians 6 ministry. It is intended to help those overcome with sin (either their own, others against them, or sinfulness in general) to deal with sin Biblically and be restored.

A person in crises discipleship may be brought to church discipline if they will not hear and heed the Biblical call to repent of sin.

A person who, in the process of church discipline, repents of sin may need crises discipleship to overcome sin.

All of us, all of you, are somewhere in these processes. Make the most of them to grow in the grace of our Lord. May we love one another so that we encourage, edify, admonish, confess, forgive, overlook... let's live as God's people in all the verbs of our grace-life together.

So as we bring this series on church membership to a close we see ourselves as a distinct group of people covenanting together to serve a covenant God. We gather together regularly as did the early church to hear the Word, to pray, to fellowship, and to live life together. We share our lives and the gifts God has given us to serve one another - this includes our money and material things. We also covenant together to hold up a high view of the church, to love people, and to pursue holiness as individuals and as a

corporate body. And together we work to grow, change, and mature according to God's Word and to His Spirit's working within us - sometimes this necessitates crisis discipleship or even church discipline, but we do so in obedience to God's Word, and to help one another to not be overcome and left behind by sin. According to the Scriptures, we believe church membership is vital - it is for our good and in working it out together biblically, it is for His glory and for the ever expanding proclamation of His great Name.