

A PASTORAL LETTER ON RESTORATIVE DISCIPLINE

Dear beloved members of Yio Chu Kang Chapel.

We are a covenant community, in fellowship with one another and with Christ. We the elders have committed to faithfully shepherd the church, recognising that we shall have to account to its Chief Shepherd one day.

A paper on the very important topic of Church Discipline was written after much study, discussion and prayer on the part of the elders. Church leaders and members should take guidance from this paper. A copy is available from the church office upon request. Please read it carefully and approach any of us should you have any questions about it.

According to Scripture, church discipline is mandated in order to protect the church from division, the spread of false teaching or immoral behaviour; and just as importantly, to restore the erring church member to a right relationship with God.

All registered members of the church are aware that church discipline is mentioned in Article 8(1) of our Articles of Association. Quite apart from this legal covenant, the Lord Jesus taught in Matthew 18:15-17 about how to deal with a believer who is in persistent and unrepentant sin, adversely affecting him/her and the church as a whole.

The discipline process described in the guidance paper is based on Christ's teaching. It involves counselling the errant member by a concerned fellow member (whether one-on-one, or together with other members/ witnesses), confrontation by church leaders and then (if the member is still unrepentant) removal from membership and participation in all church activities. The assembly as a whole may not aware of all steps in the discipline process, but at least those directly affected will be made aware of the removal of membership, if it were to come to this.

We wish to emphasise that church discipline is "tough love in action". Its primary purpose is the spiritual restoration of fallen members and the consequent strengthening of the church and glorifying of the Lord. The goal of church discipline is not to throw people out of the church or to feed anyone's self-righteous pride. The ones administering church discipline are not to take sides, lord over or humiliate any member who is broken by their own sin or suffering the consequences of other people's sin.

The elders recognise the frailty of man and our fallen nature. We desire to cultivate a community where we extend grace to one another and carry one another's burdens without condemnation. At the same time, we believe that a church that does not exercise church discipline at all, is indifferent to sin and allows it to flourish. Such a church would not be a Bible-believing, Christ-ruled church.

Please be in constant prayer for our church—the leadership and all members. May we journey together in obedience to the Lord, experiencing and ministering His abundant grace to one another.

Looking always to Christ,

The Board of Elders
Jan, 2017

YCK Chapel Guidelines for Restorative Discipline

A. Introduction

This paper is written to express YCK Chapel's stand and practice on church discipline. Given that the term "church discipline" invokes many erroneous and negative connotations, the church prefers to term the practice nearer to its intent, that is, "restorative discipline".

The church of Christ is an authentic and safe community where sinners are received. They do not have to leave their mess at the porch and put on a façade when they are in the church. Rather they may come as they are, to experience God's transforming grace and truth which will set them free.

The community of Christ does not deny the existence of sin and is not embarrassed to address sin in the church. It does not rank sin. Therefore, it receives all sinners as they are, not condemning nor despising any but always seeking their welfare even as Christ lovingly did.

At the same time, the community of Christ is not indifferent with sin. It does not make light of sin nor call it a different name (such as "bad habits", etc). It knows the destructive power of sin and God's strong contempt over it. It remembers that sin cost the blood of Christ. Therefore it will not allow sin to flourish in its place, but will seek to "destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ..." (2 Cor 10:5).

In summary, a true community of Christ opens its loving arms to all sinners, pursues restoration passionately and is committed to arresting sin so that the members can truly grow in the faith.

Many churches today are reluctant to practice church discipline because:

- One struggles over its compatibility with the gospel message of love and forgiveness.
- One is skeptical over its effectiveness in the modern society where church hopping is a norm.
- One is distrustful because of the way discipline is handled.

Yet these reasons are not enough for us to reject the practice of church discipline. Being Bible-believing disciples of Christ, we must preach and abide by the *whole counsel* of God. We should not side-step difficult biblical practices, but faithfully seek to understand and observe them.

A Christian who persists in unrepentant sin must be disciplined in accordance with the Biblical mandate and responsibility of the local church of which that person is a member. It is therefore necessary that the church community must at all times understand, accept and resolve to undertake restorative discipline when circumstances call for it, even as selected church leaders are the ones who initiate and direct the process in any particular case.

Under Article 8 of the YCK Chapel Articles of Association, all members of YCK Chapel are subject to restorative discipline. Registered members of YCK Chapel should not assume that the church has no moral or legal right to exercise discipline, or that those church leaders who carry out the task of discipline have a personal vendetta against a member.

B. What is Restorative Discipline?

John MacArthur said: "The purpose of church discipline is the spiritual restoration of fallen members and the consequent strengthening of the church and the glorifying of the Lord."¹

Restorative discipline is tough love in action. It is a process of confronting, correcting and restoring a wayward brother/sister to God. It also seeks to preserve the sanctity and testimony of the body of Christ.

Yet sometimes pain is necessary to get one's attention. In the Old Testament we read of how God used pain again and again to get the attention of His wayward people (eg. Lev 26:14-45, Psalm 32, Judges 3:7-9). In Hebrews 12:5-11, God speaks of using painful chastisement on His children.

C. Examples of Restorative Discipline in the New Testament:

- Members who transgressed against another (Mat 18:15-17).
- Factious members who were causing church divisions (Titus 3:9-11).
- Members engaging in sexual immorality (1 Cor 5).
- Members engaging in false teachings and blaspheming (1 Tim 1:20, 2 Tim 2:17-18).
- Members who disobey the counsel of the church leaders (2 Thess 3:14-15).

In summary, restorative discipline can be applied to any member who unrepentantly engages in conduct that violates the Scripture and harms the church.

D. The Purposes of Restorative Discipline (1 Cor 5:2b-8)

a) To affirm God's decrees (Vs 3)

To articulate how the act is against God's decrees and at war against His holiness leaving no room for ambiguity. To affirm one's loyalty towards God's standard (See also 1 Tim 5:20).

b) To restore the wayward believer (Vs 5)

Restorative discipline is crisis response care; it is critical resuscitation in progress; it is expending every means to save a brother/sister from future condemnation.

The final physical act of removing the person from church fellowship is to make the person come to realise that in reality, his/her wilful ways reveal that he/she is following the ways of this world like that of a non-believer.

¹ https://www.gty.org/media/pdf/Church_Discipline.pdf

c) To expel sin (Vs 6-7a)

- Sin spreads. Sin in one part stains and defiles the whole body – the person who sins and the church. Sin comes in a bundle; one sin frequently leads to another. Sin encourages hiding, masking and double living. Sin hates authenticity and accountability. Sin, if not dealt with, will become normalised and can cause other brothers/sisters to think it is permissible.

d) To protect the church from evil workers (Vs 13)

The church is a place for sinners who are broken and in need of grace and redemption, but not evil workers who despise the LORD and seek to mislead His people. Restorative discipline seeks to remove such evil workers to preserve the sanctity and testimony of the church.

E. The Steps of Restorative Discipline (Mat 18:15-17)

Jesus Christ's instruction in Matthew 18:15-17 provides for us a model for engaging in restorative discipline:

Step 1: A brother or sister who is wronged or sees the sin of another brother or sister raises it with him or her privately (v15)

Step 2: Private admonishment by a mature group of brothers/sisters (Vs 16)

Step 3: Community engagement (Vs 17a)

This step involves bringing up the case as in a church prayer meeting or gathering of members who know the wayward member, together for prayer and accountability.

Step 4: Excommunicated from the community (v17b)

F. The Act of Excommunication (1 Cor 5:5)

To deliver someone to Satan is equivalent to delivering the person to Satan's domain. Since Satan is the ruler of this world (John 12:31), Satan's domain means the world. In other words, excommunication is to:

- Remove the member from church fellowship. This means withdrawing from the person the spiritual care and protection he once was entitled to in the church.
- Return the member back to the world (Satan's domain). This means letting the person be subjected to the snares of the evil one in this world without the spiritual covering from the body of Christ.

However, the church will welcome back and restore to church fellowship the member who later repents.

G. Practising Restorative Discipline in YCK Chapel

1. The church will be faithful to preach, teach and uphold obedience to God and His Word in the church. We will teach and practice restorative discipline in obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thess 5:14, 2 Tim 4:2, Jude 1:22-23)
2. The church will cultivate the church to be an authentic and safe environment where grace and forgiveness abound, so that members struggling with sins are able to come forward and seek support and help from the community of believers knowing that they will not be condemned nor stigmatised.
3. The church will practice the 4-step model of restorative discipline with:
 - a. *Patience: We will be patient with the wayward member and not be quick to rush to Step 3 or 4 of the discipline process. We acknowledge that many things are not as clear cut, and there will be messiness in restorative discipline cases. We will therefore wait upon the Lord and seek his perfect timing.*
 - b. *Meekness: We are acutely aware that we are all sinners. We do not consider we are better than the wayward member. We therefore approach restorative discipline with pain and sorrow and not with pride and arrogance, realizing our own sinful orientation.*
 - c. *Love and deep concern: Our desire is for the restoration of the wayward member. We will be deeply concerned for the overall welfare of the wayward member and will continually keep him/her in prayers.*
 - d. *Courage and decisiveness: We will be decisive in handling discipline cases. We will seek to leave no room for ambiguity resulting in mixed signals being sent to the wayward member or the congregation.*
4. We will protect the flock from evil workers who claim to be followers of Christ, while exhibiting intentional disregard towards God and His Word and/or seeking to harm the church.