

NORTH WAKE CHURCH CHURCH DISCIPLINE POLICY

“We must love each other with a biblical love – a love that discerns, desires, and does what is best for another person, according to Scripture. We have to value each other’s holiness more highly than we value our own comfort. Even more importantly, we must value the approval of our Lord more highly than we value each other’s approval. Otherwise, we will be unwilling to do the right thing when we fear that it might upset someone.” Biblical Church Discipline Manual

“God’s desire for His children here on earth is purity of life. It is impossible to study Scripture attentively and not be overwhelmingly convinced that God seeks above all else for His people to be holy and that He is grieved by sin of any kind. Directly quoting God’s command to His Old Covenant people Israel, Peter wrote the same command to Christ’s church: ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’ Because God is so concerned for the holiness of His people, they should be equally concerned. The church cannot teach and preach a message it does not live, and have any integrity before God, or even before the world.” The MacArthur New Testament Commentary

“Pursuing someone in sin is the most loving thing that can be done for that individual, the body of Christ, and the name of Christ.” Shepherding the Church Family

Church discipline at North Wake is founded upon the holiness and the love of our glorious God, the Lordship of Jesus Christ who is the head of the church, and an understanding of the church as the Body of Christ. (Eph. 4-5; Col. 1.9-29)

Discipline is a courageous and compassionate act of love, desiring only good for the person caught in sin. Its aim is rescue, restoration, and reconciliation. Just as discipline is a mark of a healthy family, church discipline is a mark of a healthy church. The context and prerequisite for church discipline is authentic Christian community. (Prov. 3.11-12; 1 Cor. 5.5, 11.32; 1 Tim. 1.20; Heb 12.5-11; Rev. 3.19)

The primary teaching and hopeful desire of the elders at North Wake is for believers to develop self-discipline, so that they may be lead godly lives characterized by obedient faith. We believe that love for God, the first and greatest command by our Lord Jesus Christ, is manifested primarily through diligent obedience to the Word of God and love for other believers. (Rom. 12.1-2; 2Cor. 7.1; Col. 3.5-10; 1 Thess. 4.3-8; Heb 3.12-15, 12.14-17; 1 Pet. 1.13-16; 2 Pet. 1.3-11; Rev. 3.14)

Church discipline has 3 purposes: 1) To glorify and honor God through obedience to His Word. 2) To protect and maintain the purity of the local church by pursuing individual and corporate holiness. 3) To rescue and restore believers overtaken by sin.

We believe that church discipline should be exercised in every case of substantiated, habitual, willful, unrepentant sin when the erring party is not willing to make any attempt to resolve the matter. Though not an exhaustive list, the following sins are addressed by the New Testament church: divisiveness (2Thess. 3.11; Titus 3.10-11; Rom. 16.17-20),

irresponsible and undisciplined living (1 Thess 5.14; 2 Thess. 3.6-15), sexual immorality (1 Cor 5.1-13), doctrinal heresy (1 Tim 6.3-5; 2 Tim 2.16-18; 2 John 1.10-11; Rev. 2.14-16).

The actions and heart attitude of the church, particularly the elders, are to be characterized by humility, compassion, mercy, gentleness, and fairness (Gal. 6.1-2; James 5.19-20; 2 Thess. 3.15; 1 Cor. 5.2; 2 Cor. 2.4-8; Micah 6.8). Elders and deacons are held to an even higher standard of accountability (1 Tim. 3.1-7, 5.17-22; James 3.1).

We believe that church discipline is applicable to all members and believers who fellowship with us. Withdrawal of membership or fellowship does not necessarily negate the process of church discipline, particularly where it appears that a person has done so to avoid church discipline. Such requests may not be honored until the disciplinary process has been concluded.

If a believer fails to discipline himself and demonstrates no evidence of repentance, the Scriptures clearly indicate that loving confrontation is the responsibility of the church. Church discipline is a biblical process that is to be handled prayerfully, carefully, and justly and only after several individual attempts at correction have been attempted and have failed.

The basic stages of church discipline, according to Matthew 18.15-20, are as follows.

FIRST: If a Christian fails to discipline himself and is trapped in unrepentant sin, Christ commands (“Go and show him his fault, just between the two of you”) the individual who is aware of the matter to go to him in private to lovingly confront, counsel, and encourage him to repent.

SECOND: If he will not listen to the one person, especially after several attempts, and there is no evidence of repentance, “take one or two others along with you” to further address the matter and to continue to encourage him to repent. The intent of others being involved is to guarantee clear communication and to enlist others for prayer and discernment.

THIRD: If these personal and informal steps do not elicit repentance, Jesus says we should “tell it to the church”. Tell it to the church necessarily involves bringing the elders into the process and requesting their direct assistance in resolving the problem, if they were not involved in the previous steps. In some cases, one or more elders may repeat the previous steps and try to persuade the offender to repent. The elders, after confirming the information, a proper process, and continued refusal to repent may then inform the church when it is assembled. The elders will send a letter by registered mail warning the individual that the third or fourth step of church discipline will be taken if they have not received significant evidence of repentance by a specific date.

“Telling it to the church” means that the congregation will be informed about the general nature of the sin, given a general description of the process that has taken place, and about the refusal to repent. They will be asked to pray for and plead with the offender to repent and to pursue the person for the purpose of restoration. Personal visits, telephone calls, and letters are examples of what it means to “pursue” them. The church is to keep on loving them and seeking their restoration.

FOURTH: If the offender refuses to submit to the caring admonition of the church and continues to harden his heart, then Jesus says we are to “treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector”. This means that the person is publicly dismissed from the church with the hope of future repentance and reconciliation. In addition, this means that the person will be denied Christian fellowship, treated as an unbeliever, and delivered over to Satan in the hope that his soul will be saved. (Romans 16.17; 2 Thess. 1.20, 3.6,14; 1Cor. 5.1-5; 1Tim 6.3-5; Titus 3.10)

If at any point during this process, the offender demonstrates repentance, then notice to that effect will also be made publicly so that the church may rejoice and gently and judiciously restore the repentant believer to the fellowship of the church.

We accept these stages as principles prescribed by our Lord and our Scriptures. The elders of the church, after prayer and consultation with one another and the Holy Scriptures, may eliminate, compress, contract, or combine into one any of these stages. Elders are commanded to protect the flock and some forms of sinful conduct deemed harmful to the flock may require immediate action. (Acts 20.28-31; Titus 3.10; 1 Cor. 5.1-5)