

## PROJECT ABSTRACT

Master of Divinity  
(Emphasis in New Testament)

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

Title: PERCEPTION OF MEMBERS' UNDERSTANDING OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE AND ITS ROLE IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH IN SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH, PORT-HARCOURT DISTRICT, RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

Researcher: Oamen Victor Ebhodaghe

Primary Adviser: Afolarin Olatunde Ojewole, PhD

Date Completed: February 2021

The study was focused on the perception of members' understanding of church discipline and its role in spiritual growth. For this purpose a mixed design comprising questionnaire and interview was adopted. A sample size of 230 composed of 117 female and 113 male. 12 of the respondents were between age range 15-25; 73 were between 26-39 while 145 were 40 and above years. The sample was drawn from Seventh-day Adventist Church, Mile 3, the headquarters of Port Harcourt district. The respondents were exposed to questions relating to restorative role of church discipline, and factors that can either enhance or hinder restoration. Three ministers in the Port Harcourt Conference Administration were interviewed on the importance and relevance of church discipline to the spiritual health of the church; the important roles of leadership in realizing the goal of church discipline; and the reality of restoration of

the disciplined erring member and spiritual growth of the church through church discipline.

Analysis of the data collected revealed that 100% of the respondents believes that church discipline is important and relevant. Approximately 99% of the respondents believes church discipline is truly redemptive and could restore the disciplined erring member, and cause spiritual growth of the church. The ministers interviewed, affirm that church discipline is relevant and truly restores the disciplined erring member and also give credibility to the mission of the church if the right condition are in place.

Though the level of belief in the restorative role of discipline is very high, one wonder why members resist it and some ministers are slack in the use of this tool ordained by God. That seems to suggest there is a gap between belief and practice. The study therefore suggested some practical solutions on how to makes church discipline effective. They are exemplary leadership and transparent conduct, compassion and love, strict compliance with church policy procedure, taking sin seriously, timely dispatch of disciplinary cases, church discipline education, fair and impartial administration of discipline, securing the influence of the Holy Spirit, transformed life, and follow up programme.

Adventist University of Africa  
Theological Seminary

PERCEPTION OF MEMBERS' UNDERSTANDING OF CHURCH  
DISCIPLINE AND ITS ROLE IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH  
IN SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH,  
PORT-HARCOURT DISTRICT, RIVERS  
STATE, NIGERIA

A Project

Presented in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirement

For the Degree Master in Divinity

by

Oamen Victor Ebhodaghe

February 2021

**This work is licensed under Creative Commons 3.0  
Attribution-Non-Commercial-Share Alike**

**You are free:**

- **to Share** – To copy, distribute and transmit the work
- **to Remix** – To adapt the work

**Under the following conditions:**

- **Attribution** – You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work).
- **Non-commercial** – You may not use this work for commercial purposes.
- **Share Alike** – If you alter, transform, or build upon this work, you may distribute the resulting work only under the same or similar license to this one.

**With the understanding that:**

- **Waiver** – Any of the above conditions can be waived if you get permission from the copyright holder. The author of this document may be contacted through the AUA Library at [library@aua.ac.ke](mailto:library@aua.ac.ke).
- **Other Rights** – In no way are any of the following rights affected by the license:
  - Your fair dealing or **fair use** rights, or other applicable copyright exceptions and limitations;
  - The author's **moral** rights;
  - Rights other persons may have either in the work itself or in how the work is used, such as **publicity** or privacy rights.
- **Notice** – For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the license terms of this work. The best way to do this is with a link to the web page where this information was taken from: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

Copyright 2021© Oamen Victor Ebhodaghe

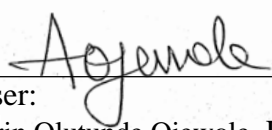
All Rights Reserved


PERCEPTION OF MEMBERS' UNDERSTANDING OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE  
AND ITS ROLE IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH IN SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST  
CHURCH, PORT-HARCOURT DISTRICT, RIVERS STATE,  
NIGERIA

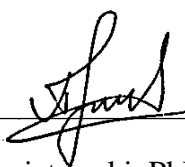
A project  
presented in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Divinity

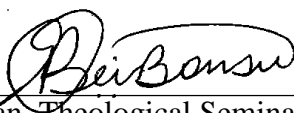
by  
Oamen Victor Ebhodaghe

APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Adviser:  
Afolarin Olutunde Ojewole, PhD

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Director, MDIV  
Feliks Poniatowski, PhD

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Reader:  
Feliks Poniatowski, PhD

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dean, Theological Seminary  
Robert Osei-Bonsu, PhD

Extension Site: Valley View University

Date: February 2021

To the glory of God, this project is dedicated to my wife, Victoria, my son, Samuel, and my daughter, Abigail for their support and prayer. Also included are all church leaders and churches committed to the exercise of loving discipline for reformation and restoration.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	v
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	vi
CHAPTER .....	10
1. INTRODUCTION .....	10
Description of the Ministry Context .....	10
Statement of Problem .....	17
Statement of Purpose .....	18
Justification of the Study .....	18
Delimitation of Study .....	18
Methodology .....	18
2. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS .....	20
Concepts of Church Discipline in the Old Testament .....	23
Adam and Eve .....	23
Discipline of Cain .....	25
Achan .....	26
Miriam .....	26
Concepts of Church Discipline in the New Testament .....	27
Church Discipline in the Light of Matthew 18:15-17 .....	27
Church Discipline as Corrective Training and Holiness in Hebrews 12:4-11 .....	29
Church Discipline is a Corrective Judgment in 1 Corinthians 11:32 .....	30
Church Discipline as a Method of Checking the Spread of Sin in 1 Corinthians 5 .....	31
Insight from the Spirit of Prophecy .....	33
Responsibility, Purpose, and Objective of Church Discipline .....	34
Purpose of Church Discipline .....	35
The Procedure of Church Discipline .....	36
Spiritual Benefits of Church Discipline .....	38
Factors that Enhance the Positive Result of Church Discipline .....	39
Conclusion .....	40
3. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	42
The Omission of Church Discipline .....	45
Church Discipline and Grace .....	48

Church Discipline and Church Growth .....	51
Church Discipline and Spiritual Growth .....	53
Synthesis .....	56
Conclusion .....	56
<b>4. METHODOLOGY/DESCRIPTION OF THE LOCAL CONTEXT .....</b>	<b>58</b>
History of Port Harcourt District .....	58
History and Practice of Church Discipline in Port Harcourt District .....	61
Research Design .....	62
Administration and Collection of the Instrumentation Procedures.....	63
Findings from Questionnaire .....	64
Findings from the Interview .....	71
Conclusion .....	78
<b>5. ANALYSIS AND PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS .....</b>	<b>81</b>
Addressing the Attitude Challenge .....	82
Addressing the Slackness in the Exercise of Church Discipline.....	84
Making Church Discipline Effective and Result Oriented .....	86
<b>6. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>89</b>
Conclusion .....	91
Recommendation for Further Study .....	91
<b>APPENDIXES .....</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>A. LETTERS .....</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>B. QUESTIONNAIRE .....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>99</b>



## LIST OF TABLES

1. Showing the Distribution of Respondents by Sex .....	64
2. Showing the Distribution of Respondents by Age .....	64
3. Showing the Distribution of Respondents by Marital Status .....	65
4. Showing the Decisions of the Respondents on Necessity and the Importance of Church Discipline .....	65
5. Showing Respondents Views of Church Discipline .....	67
6. Showing the Percentage of Decisions on the Goal of Church Discipline.....	68
7. Showing the Percentage of Decisions on Effective Restoration.....	68

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AUA	Adventist University of Africa
GC	General Conference
KJV	King James Version
MS	Ministerial Secretary
NIV	New international version
NKJV	New King James Version
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
PPC	President, Port Harcourt Conference
RMS	Retired Ministerial Secretary
SDA	Seventh-day Adventist
SOP	Spirit of Prophecy
VVU	Valley View University

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It was a long eventful journey, five years of discovery, of God's mercies, of building relationships, of happy sojourn in Ghana, with the Valley View University family. It all started while I was in Mba district of the Seventh-day Adventist church in 2016. I thank the members of Mba District Council for their cooperation. The inspiration to research on church discipline started from my experiences in that district.

I also thank Port Harcourt district council and church board of Seventh-day Adventist church Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Diobu, Mile 3 for their financial support and encouragement. I am very grateful to Dr Mrs Angela Nwaomah for prodding Port Harcourt Conference Administration into action when it developed cold feet over releasing me to proceed on this course. I am indebted to Port Harcourt Conference Administration headed by Pastor Anyalebechi Nnunukwe for the encouragement and sponsorship. Many thanks to Elder Emmanuel Njoku, Port Harcourt Conference Treasurer (2011-2019) for giving us (me and my colleagues) the opportunity to travel by flight to and from Ghana for three years. The current Administration also deserves a deep appreciation for maintaining the status quo even in harsh economic climate.

I must never forget my Professor, a preacher par excellence and a great theologian, Pastor (Professor) Tunde Ojewole, who though far away in the United States has successfully supervised my project work. May the Almighty God perfect all that concerns you and your family in all ramifications. I am truly indebted to Dr. Lilia Ponyatovska for her expert ideas on the methodology of this research. God richly bless you. I salute all my lecturers on this M.Div. programme from 2016 -2020:

Professor Davidson Razafiarivony, Dr. Feliks Poniatowski, Professor Samson Nwaomah, Dr. (Mrs) Angela Nwaomah, Dr. Emmanuel Kollie, Dr. Melak Tsegaw, Professor M. Akpa, Dr. J. Balisasa, Dr. A. Galeniece, Prof. A. Adesegun, Dr Ugochukwu Elems, Dr. Adebisi Joseph Ola, Pastor Dr. Samuel Larmie, Dr. D. Dei, Dr. David Odhiambo, Dr. Jean Esso, Dr. Daniel Berchie, Dr. Emmanuel Takyi, Dr Daniel Bediako, Dr. Philip Baptiste, Dr. J. Nyamari, Professor Delbert W. Baker, Dr. Israel Kafeero, and Dr. Alex Ambuchi. Your names are indelible in my memory. And you occupy a very sensitive part of my success story. I cannot end this section without acknowledging the role of my dear wife, Victoria Oamen for her support, and encouragement, urging me to start the programme when I was considering deferment for better preparation. Thank you for holding the ground in the family while I was away in Ghana. I thank my 95 year old father, George Emokpaire Oamen for believing in me. To God be the glory for being faithful to me all through the Journey.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Description of the Ministry Context**

Church discipline is “an act of love whereby the spiritual believers extend their care and concern toward a fellow believer who has been caught in sin (Galatians 6:1).”<sup>1</sup> Spiritual believers are not super Christians. Rather, they are aware that the Christian life is so challenging that they choose to depend on Jesus. They enjoy a saving relationship with Jesus. And they value this relationship, investing in it through Bible study, Christian meditation and prayer, personal witnessing, total resolve to uphold their baptismal commitment, and unconditional obedience to God’s revealed will.

According to John MacArthur “The goal of church discipline is not to throw people out of the church or to feed the self-righteous pride of those who administer the discipline. It is not to embarrass people or to exercise authority and power in some unbiblical manner. The purpose is to restore a sinning believer to holiness and bring him back into a pure relationship within the assembly.”<sup>2</sup>

Since the responsibility for restoring the fellow member caught in sin rests with the spiritual members, there is, therefore, no room for spiritual arrogance and superiority, no harsh and cold attitude. The spirit of discipline will be that of love,

---

<sup>1</sup>Philip Mutetei, “Church Discipline, The Great Omission: Part one,” *African Journal of Evangelical Theology*, Issue 18.1 (1999):003.pdf

<sup>2</sup>John MacArthur, “Church Discipline,” accessed April 16, 2021, <https://www.gty.org/library/articles/DD02/church-discipline>.

care and humility. The apostle Paul says “considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” (Gal. 6:1). This does not suggest avoiding the disciplining of your fallen member so that no one will judge you when it happens to you. It means being watchful and careful not to fall into sin too.

The work of restoring the member who erred is a tender and delicate one. The Greek word translated “restore” is καταρτιζετε. “It signifies to set in joint, as a dislocated bone; ... to bring them to themselves, by convincing them of their sin and error, persuading them to return to their duty, comforting them in a sense of pardoning mercy... confirming our love to them.”<sup>3</sup>

Philip Mutetei streamlined the purposes of church discipline. They include “the restoration of the sinning believer, purification of the church, deterrent of sin, and the testimony to the world.”<sup>4</sup> MacArthur in addition to restoration of the erring member, the “strengthening of the church and glorifying of the Lord.”<sup>5</sup> Jacob A. Targgart concurs that church discipline “seeks to mimic God himself, bringing fallen believer back into full communion with Him. Church discipline, contrary to innate punitive connotations, is fundamentally rooted in God’s glorification and man’s restoration- a motif that follows the ultimate example of the work done at the cross.”<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry Bible Commentary* (Complete), Galatian 6, accessed April 16, 2021, <https://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary.php?com=mh&b=48&c=6>

<sup>4</sup>Philip Mutetei, 6-13.

<sup>5</sup>John MacArthur, *MacArthur New Testament Commentary on Matthew 16-23*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1988), 132.

<sup>6</sup>Jacob A. Targgart, “A Call to Harms: Is Church Discipline for Today?” *Journal for Baptist Theology & Ministry*, 7. 2 (Fall 2010):105, accessed 10 December, 2019, [https://www.nobts.edu/baptist-center-theology/journals/journals/JBTM\\_7-Fall\\_2010.pdf](https://www.nobts.edu/baptist-center-theology/journals/journals/JBTM_7-Fall_2010.pdf).

Justin Taylor, states six (6) reasons churches should practice church discipline: It is biblical. Church discipline is an implication of the gospel. Church discipline promotes the health of the church. It clarifies and burnishes the church's witness before the nation. Church discipline warns sinners of an even greater judgment to come; and most importantly, it protects the name and reputation of Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup>

The stated purposes of church discipline sound positive and good. It appears the church discipline serves as a good instrument for the accomplishment of the mission. Jay Adams succinctly points out: "discipline is not as many have thought, simply the negative task of ridding troublemakers out of the church. Rather, it is God's provision for good order in a church that creates conditions for instructions and growth of members."<sup>8</sup> It is a spiritual exercise with implications for the church leadership, the membership, the church as the body of Christ, and the community.

Some church leaders are reluctant to apply discipline for several reasons. Chuks Lawless, in his survey, found out twelve (12) reasons why churches do not practise church discipline. They are as follows: They do not know the Bible's teaching on discipline. They have never seen it done before. They don't want to appear judgmental. The church has a wide-open front door. They have had a bad experience with discipline in the past. The church is afraid to open "Pandora's box." They have no guidelines for discipline. They fear losing members (or money). Their Christianity

---

<sup>7</sup>Justin Taylor, "*Church Discipline: Principles and Reasons*," accessed 2December, 2019, [www.the.gospelcoalition.org](http://www.the.gospelcoalition.org).

<sup>8</sup>Jay E. Adams, "*Handbook of Church Discipline*," (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1986).

is individualistic and privatized. They fear being “legalistic.” They hope transfer growth will fix the problem. And leaders are sometimes dealing with their sin.<sup>9</sup>

Tim Crosby observes that “for most churches today, church discipline is a forgotten art. Many pastors find it an uphill battle because church members tend to think of discipline as unloving.”<sup>10</sup> Samuel Koranteng Pipim stated: “Those who have embraced the gospel of tolerance insist that it is wrong to discipline anyone. Since only an infallible God can truly judge anyone..., those who insist on disciplining fellow believers are hypocrites or ‘Pharisees,’ for they also are sinners like the one they are judging.”<sup>11</sup> Some also see it as an infringement on their freedom. For them, they are responsible to God for their conduct as Christian. To exercise Church discipline is prying into an individuals' affair; and the church is not supposed to interfere with individual church member's freedom. In the era of relativism and post-modernism where freedom is over-emphasized, church discipline which holds a member accountable for sin is viewed as anathema. Dennis Prager states that “this generation believes everything is relative---everything. Good and evil do not exist. It is all relative. There is no truth. Everything is determined by one's agenda”<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup>Chuck Lawless, “12 Reasons Churches Don't Practice Church Discipline,” accessed 11 July, 2019, <https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/252470-12-reasons-churches-dont-practice-church-discipline.html/2>.

<sup>10</sup>Tim Crosby, “*Church discipline, the redemptive way*,” accessed on 26<sup>th</sup> August, 2020, <https://cdn.ministrymagazine.org/issues/2002/issues/MIN2002-10.pdf>

<sup>11</sup>Samuel Koranteng Pipim, “*The Gospel of Tolerance vs. Church Discipline*,” *Adventists Affirm*, Nov. 15, 2004, accessed August 5, 2016. <http://www.adventists.org/article/121>

<sup>12</sup>Dennis Prager, cited by Robert Bretsch in “*Soft touch*” *church discipline* March 1994, *Ministry Magazine*. Interview in *Door*, November/December, 1990, 11, accessed 4 December, 2019 <https://www.ministrymagazine.org>.



These objections appears to counteract or detract from the goal of church discipline and its benefits to the moral and spiritual life of the church and its corporate image. Therefore the reluctance and the lax in the exercise of church discipline may not be unconnected with the subtle and sometime brazen resistance to it.

The result of this lax is manifesting in many ways. Such as drifting into worldliness, lack of spiritual sensitivity and the gradual demise of the fear of God among the professed people of God. In a preliminary study carried out by the researcher to ascertain respondents' observations about the church discipline situation in the district and to freely suggest ways to improve its administration, one of the respondents wrote: "Though sermons have been going on (preached) concerning dress code no much change has taken place in the life of the female church members."<sup>13</sup> That statement gives credence to the menace of worldly fashion existing in the church.

For instance, one of the respondents wrote in the free comment section of the survey instrument: "Some members instead of accepting church discipline positively, with open mind, they try to divide the church or run away from the church."<sup>14</sup> This point is further substantiated with a story of a young woman who was accused of immorality but refused to meet with the elders who wanted to do a preliminary investigation on the allegation.

Obstructing church discipline procedure is a very common phenomenon in the church. Another respondent wrote that "those who try to obstruct church discipline procedure should be removed from office."<sup>15</sup> They use a lot of manipulative strategies

---

<sup>13</sup>Preliminary study:Free comments of participants, Port Harcourt, June 2020.

<sup>14</sup>Preliminary study:Free comments of participants, Port Harcourt, June 2020.

<sup>15</sup>Preliminary study:Free comments of participants, Port Harcourt, June 2020.

to frustrate the process such as going through those who can weigh some influence of the leadership in order to discourage them from furthering the case. Some could also use the threat of law suit to intimidate leaders.

One of the three ministers interviewed, that is the incumbent Ministerial Secretary, shared his experience about a “popular church member in his congregation accused of adultery.”<sup>16</sup> She filed a lawsuit against the church when she was disciplined. The Conference President intervened in the case securing an out of court settlement. The case was reviewed by the president who ascertained that the church has followed the right procedure. He found a way to convince the woman to accept the position of the church since the discipline was done in love.

There are some cases that are suppressed and buried because of the persons involved. This is the class that one of the respondents referred to as “sacred cows who are connected to power brokers, their cases are covered up.”<sup>17</sup> In the same vein, another respondent from the preliminary study wrote: “Most issues concerning moral conduct are not brought up. And those brought up are not handled in considerable time leading to delay. Sometimes members who err are not disciplined because a member or some members of the board are indicted or are morally unfit to handle such matter.”<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup>Nation A. Nation, Ministerial Secretary, Port Harcourt Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church. Interviewed by the author, Port Harcourt 5 August, 2020.

<sup>17</sup>Preliminary study:Free comments of participants, Port Harcourt, June 2020.

<sup>18</sup>Preliminary study:Free comments of participants, Port Harcourt, June 2020.

The issue of taking sides in a case being handled by the church board is also such a commonplace occurrence. According to one of the respondent, “rather than being neutral and objective, some take sides making discussions to linger.”<sup>19</sup>

Another respondent wrote that “there is need for proper education on church discipline especially for members who boycott business meeting during voting time.” That recommendation points to the fact that the church members needs to know that he or she has a sacred responsibility to unite with others in expressing love for the erring one.

Many perceive Church discipline as persecution exercise. One of the Administrators (PPC) said: “the average member of the church see church discipline as punishment. Some would claim ‘it is a set up’ meaning they are innocent and that either the elder or pastor is looking for ways to discredit them or cast them down” and for that reason extreme care must be taken to ensure that the matter is properly investigated and that the leadership must be transparent and carry the erring member along until he or she is convinced of the alleged wrong before proceeding with the discipline”<sup>20</sup>

According to the Administrator 3 (RMS): “Church discipline is not witch-hunting, rather it is correction in love. People can claim to be witch-hunted if the leaders are excessively punitive. The other ground on which they make such claim is

---

<sup>19</sup>Preliminary study:Free comments of participants, Port Harcourt, June 2020.

<sup>20</sup>Anyalebechi Nnunukwe, President, Port Harcourt Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church, interviewed by the author, Port Harcourt 12 August, 2020.

when they refused to allow the Holy Spirit to touch their heart even when the church has followed proper procedure in exercising discipline.”<sup>21</sup>

These complaints raised by respondents represent a host of problems that affect effectiveness of church discipline. When serious issues of moral questions such as fraud, sexual offences (fornication, adultery, cohabitation, rape), sexual perversion (homosexuality, lesbianism) are delayed unduly or even suppressed, and those involved are not disciplined, and when cases linger in this manner because either the minister is not ready to pursue the case or he is somehow hindered from doing so, he would be reluctant to handle others. Some members may allege persecution in case the church board insists on looking into their own matter. This may pass for a case of partiality or selective justice on the part of church leadership.

### **Statement of Problem**

It has been observed from the preliminary study done in Port Harcourt Conference that there is a problem with church discipline. There are cases where church members avoid church disciplinary procedure and even manipulate the outcome through relationships with church leaders. There are also cases where church leader are not ready to manage situation.

### **Research Questions**

1. Do members truly understand the spiritual impact of church discipline?
2. Why do many tend to resist church discipline?
3. What can be done to make church discipline effective and acceptable to all?

---

<sup>21</sup>Samuel W. Amadi, Former Ministerial Secretary, Port Harcourt Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church, interviewed by the author, Port Harcourt 10 August, 2020.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to investigate how much members understand the importance of church discipline in restoration and spiritual growth of the church. The purpose of the study includes suggesting ways to make practice of church discipline more effective and relevant to all members of the church.

### **Justification of the Study**

This study will enlighten the church (both leaders and members), and the society on the role of church discipline in creating spiritual consciousness in the members and restoration of the disciplined member. It will further improve attitude towards church discipline based on a better understanding, and the appreciation of the fact, that discipline is a loving act rather than being punitive. This study will be a good resource material for future researchers who may wish to investigate other areas of church discipline and anyone that decides to replicate this study.

### **Delimitation of Study**

This study deals with church discipline in the local church setting with special focus on its impact on the spiritual life of the disciplined erring member in particular and the church in general. This includes conducive environment that will reduce resistance to church discipline. This study looks at only the district headquarters church and seeks to make inferences on church discipline based on this.

### **Methodology/Procedure**

This research will use mixed study design comprising a preliminary study to ascertain the problem with church discipline in Port Harcourt District. The research instruments will be questionnaire for members' understanding of church discipline and its role in spiritual growth and the interview to get the perspective of the

leadership represented by three senior ministers at the Conference. The population for this study is Port Harcourt District while Mile 3 Seventh-day Adventist church will be the population sample. Simple Random Sampling Method will be employed in selecting the main participants for the research.

The study will begin by providing a clear description of church discipline; will raise and clear misconceptions about church discipline, which will lead to the statement of the problem, purpose, delimitation and significance of study.

It will continue with the biblical and theological foundation of church discipline. It will look at some examples both in the old and New Testament of those who have faced disciplinary actions and how they were carried out. What Ellen G. White says about church discipline will be examined. Available literatures will be reviewed, arranging them around ideas. The research will consider the local context of the study. It will then proceed to do analysis of data and suggest practical solutions to the problem of resistance to church discipline. The study will end with a summary, conclusion and the recommendations for further study.

## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Church discipline is biblical. It is godly. And it originated from God's love to help His children develop a godly character. The Ten Commandments are given to shape the lives of the children of God. Moses wrote: "Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you. Observe the commands of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and revering him" (Deut 8:5-6).<sup>1</sup>

King Solomon endorsed discipline and encouraged the young to accept its benefit: "My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in (Prov 3:11-12). Apostle Paul, concurs: "Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who receive it" (Heb 12:8-11).

God's discipline may seem like a punishment. But, it is for correction leading to moral improvement. "God loves His people, but this does not mean He will not punish us for sin. His love requires Him to work to motivate our repentance, but His justice and righteousness still require Him to punish those who sin."<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>*Church discipline: Chastisement of Erring members*, accessed 13 January, 2020, [https://www.gospelway.com/teaching/church\\_discipline.php](https://www.gospelway.com/teaching/church_discipline.php)

Leviticus 26:14-46 shows that God punishes those who violate His covenant and walk contrary to Him (verse 21) but promised to restore them when they accept the discipline and repent of their iniquity.

This section of the study will focus on the biblical and theological foundation of church discipline. Here we shall consider the concept of church discipline in the Old Testament, examining some case studies, appreciating the level to which they reflect the meanings, purpose, process and the benefits. Also, citing some cases in the New Testament and exploits Spirit of Prophecy writings (E. G. White statements) on the subject. Attention is giving to the role of church discipline in transforming the erring believer and facilitating spirituality.

Discipline derives from the Latin word “*disciplina*” which means discipline, method, science, study, teaching, instruction, education, and training.<sup>2</sup> In Hebrew Grammar, the verb יָסַר – (yasar) means “to chasten, to instruct, to admonish, to correct.” It also means ‘to let oneself be chastened or corrected or admonished.’<sup>3</sup> Another Hebrew word rendered discipline is מוּעָר (muwcar) It means instruction, correction, chasten, chastisement, check, bond, doctrine, and rebuker.<sup>4</sup>

The Greek word παιδεία (paideia) is the closest in meaning to discipline. It translated as: “chasten, chastening, chastise, chastisement.” The verb παιδεύω (paideuo) denotes “to train children,” suggesting the broad idea of education as in the Acts 7:22; Acts 22:3, and Titus 2:12. These means “instructing and

---

<sup>2</sup>Latin Dictionary and Resources. Accessed on 30 July 2020, <http://www.latin-dictionary.net/search/latin/disciplina>

<sup>3</sup>Joseph Thayer, Brown Driver and Briggs, *A Greek and Hebrew Lexicon* [CD ROM] (Canada, Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1993), s.v. “yachar.”

<sup>4</sup>James Strong, *Strong’s Greek/Hebrew Definitions*, [CD ROM], (BibleSoft, 2006). s.v. “muwcar”



to training that is gracious and firm. It could also mean training whether by correcting or admonishing. It could also mean to “chastise with blows or scourge by the command of a judge as used in Luke 23:16, 22.”<sup>5</sup>

The church of God has a great responsibility to help its members foster and nurture their saving relationship with Christ. It does this through teaching, preaching, prayer, fellowship, participation in communion service, community service, worldwide proclamation, care for one another, and visitation. Jonathan Leeman has identified two types of discipline. Formative Discipline and Corrective Discipline.

Formative discipline “helps to form the disciple through instruction.”<sup>6</sup> An aspect of discipleship, known as a corrective discipline, is the main thrust of this study. Corrective discipline is the measure taken by the church to reclaim an erring member and restore him or her to fellowship with the church and with Christ. It “helps to correct the disciple through correcting of sin.”<sup>7</sup> Both formative and corrective forms of discipline give balanced training in righteousness. The believer receives the nurture which the church can provide for their spiritual growth through discipline when he or she strays from the path of righteousness.

The Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy outlined in clearer language, the solemn responsibility that rests upon the people of God to maintain their purity, integrity, and

---

<sup>5</sup>Vine’s *Greek New Testament Dictionary* “Chastisement,” accessed 14 August, 2020, Gospelhall.org.

<sup>6</sup>Jonathan Leeman, *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2012), 27.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid

spiritual fervour. If a member grows indifferent or drifts away, the church must seek to reclaim them for the Lord.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Concepts of Church Discipline in the Old Testament**

Some discipline was carried out in the Old Testament by God directly from the days of Adam. Others were done under His instruction by the leader and community of God’s people.

#### **Adam and Eve**

Adam and Eve, the first humans created experienced God’s lavished love. They had the opportunity of face to face communication and warm fellowship with God. The first face they see was the face of their Creator (Gen 2:7; 2: 22-23). God blessed them and gave them dominion to rule over and care for his created world. “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and every living creature that moves on the ground”.

God appointed them their food: “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food” (Gen 1: 29). They received instructions from Him directly concerning their work and their food: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die” (Gen 2:17).

So Adam and his wife received the formative discipline. They knew how to live in their Eden home. Apostle Paul stated that Adam disobeyed and brought death

---

<sup>8</sup>General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, 19th ed.* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2015), 56.

(Rom 5:11, 14). Although, it was Eve that was deceive (1Tim 2:14). Adam became involved in the result of the deception- disobedience. He ate of the forbidden fruit. This very act incurred the wrath of God that led to the discipline. He meted out appropriate discipline to them after an investigation (Gen 3:9-19). And to Eve, the sanctions include; sorrows, pains of pregnancy and childbirth. And submission of Eve to the authority of her husband (Adam).

For the sake of Adam ground was cursed. Life was to become toilsome for Adam because God said “cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil, you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow, you will eat your food until you return to the ground since from it you were made, for dust you are and to dust, you will return” (Gen 3:17-19).

They were ultimately expelled from the Garden of Eden to prevent free access to the Tree of Life. It was not until the Lord had promised them a Savior and provided them with a garment of skin (Gen 3:15, 21).

This episode reflected the principles of church discipline, law and warning were given, there was an investigation, and verdict. Hope offered: the promise of a redeemer (Gen 3:15). This is a kind of ultimate restoration of the disciplined. Though they have lost the special privilege of dwelling in the Garden of God and face to face communion, God did not also forsake them while outside the Garden.

What impact did this discipline have on Adam and his wife? They forfeited their Eden home. However, they continued worshipping God despite the loss of their original home and face to face communion. The main lesson for humanity is that sin disrupts; deny us of our blessings; sin brings suffering and death.

## **Discipline of Cain**

Cain and Abel were asked to present an offering. Abel's offering was accepted, while Cain's offering was rejected because it did not meet the requirement. In anger, Cain slew his brother Abel despite God's warning to him (Gen 4:3-5). The Lord has cautioned him to control his feelings but he allowed his emotion to control him. The ugly result was the murder of his brother.

This story exhibits some concepts of church discipline:

1. God's warning before the offence of murder (Gen 4:6, 7)
2. An offence committed (Gen 4:8).
3. An interrogation/ investigation/fair hearing (Gen 4:9-10).
4. A verdict passed- He will be a fugitive and a vagabond (Gen 4:11, 12).
5. God showed him mercy- God preserved his life and also prohibited anybody to kill him, by putting a mark on him (Gen 4:15)

An assessment of this incident reveals that Cain was given the formative discipline through his parents. Ellen White provides some insight; So far as birth and religious instruction were concerned, these brothers were equal. Both were sinners, and both acknowledged the claims of God to reverence and worship. From outward appearance, their faith was the same up to a certain point. But beyond, the difference between the two was great. Cain had the same opportunity of learning and accepting these truths as had Abel. He was not the victim of an arbitrary purpose. One brother was not elected to be accepted by God, and the other to reject. Abel chose faith and obedience; Cain, unbelief and rebellion. Here the whole matter rested.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup>Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, Complete Published Ellen G. White Writings [CD ROM] Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1999.

## **Achan**

The discipline, though very drastic and severe serves as a strong deterrent to the community of God's people. And also restored the glory and honour of God.

## **Miriam**

The story of the murmuring and attack by Miriam and Aaron against Moses is clearly documented in Numbers 12. They complained against Moses for marrying a Cushite woman. Who was this woman? Was it Zipporah, the daughter of Jethro, the priest of Midian or was it another wife? "Some think a late marriage with a Cushite or Arabian; others because of Zipporah, whom on this occasion they called, in scorn, an Ethiopian woman, and who, they insinuated, had too great an influence upon Moses in the choice of these seventy elders."<sup>10</sup>

Ellen White explains that: "though called a Cushite woman, the wife of Moses was a Midianite, and thus a descendant of Abraham. In personal appearance, she differed from the Hebrews in being of a somewhat darker complexion."<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps Miriam and Aaron felt Moses does not involve them in the decision-making process as much as he was doing before the arrival of Zipporah. The election of the 70 elders who assisted Moses in the administration.

Their murmuring challenged Moses. Has God spoken through Moses alone, has He not also spoken through us? Moses was berated by his siblings, who have been highly honoured by God. One a prophetess, and the other the high priest, even the

---

<sup>10</sup>Matthew Henry commentary, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* [CD ROM] (Biblesoft, 2006).

<sup>11</sup>Ellen White, *Patriarch and Prophet*, (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1872).383, accessed on 10 September, 2020. <https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/84.1687#1741>

priesthood is entrusted to him and his descendants. This attack has the potential of making others look with contempt on Moses. God stepped in immediately. Summoning the three of them before the Tent of Meeting, He emphasized the uniqueness of Moses' office, and the high honour God has bestowed on him. God inflicted Miriam with leprosy and isolation from the encampment of Israel for seven days.

It is a corrective discipline with lessons for Miriam, Aaron and the entire community of Israel. It is a warning against jealousy and murmuring against higher authority. It is not right to harbour ethnic or racial sentiments towards others. In this discipline, God shows He is not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). God will not compromise with or support sin irrespective of who is involved. (Num 20:12; Deut. 3:23-26). Miriam was restored after seven days.

### **Concepts of Church Discipline in the New Testament**

Just as God disciplined some individuals and groups in the Old Testament, the practice continued in the New Testament with Jesus firmly establishing the procedure. Church discipline should show the spirit of love and care toward the erring member and strong desire for purity.

### **Church Discipline in the Light of Matthew 18:15-17**

The goal of church discipline is reconciliation and restoration. It is not to separate a member from fellowship. Or is it to shame him nor destroy him or her. Church discipline is a loving act aimed at winning a member from the path of sin and destruction back to righteousness and life.

Sin is very deadly and would hamper spiritual growth. It will deprive individual and group of God's promised blessings and ultimately lead to eternal death.

In Matthew 18:15-17, Christ outlines the procedure to followed to restore a member who has committed an offence against another person. He or she should acknowledge their sin and repent of it. Christ says “go to him.” So if his brother can approach him, make him see his fault, and the Holy Spirit enables him to humbly admit and asks for forgiveness, then he has won him. But if the offender resists and rejects the reconciliatory move or justifies his sin, the offended takes a further step. The offended should take one or two more persons to bring their wisdom to bear in the effort to make the offender see the reason to acknowledge his or her sin so that reconciliation can be achieved. The individual(s) invited to be part of this process can also serve as witnesses to efforts made.

If the offender did not cooperate with them, then “tell it to the church.” The church gets involved in the effort to win the offender. If the offender listens to the church, sees his or her fault, and asks for forgiveness, the church has won the battle to save a soul. But if he or she refuses to cooperate with the church, to acknowledge and repent from the sin, then he or she faces discipline. He or she becomes to the church like an unbeliever (a pagan), a tax collector. “Jesus uses a manner of expression here to indicate exclusion! The impenitent brother is “worthy” of this exclusion or discipline because of his choice to sin and remain recalcitrant.”<sup>12</sup>

While the goal of the several efforts is restoration, the basis of restoration is repentance. If genuine repentance is showed, mercy obtained, forgiveness effected, then restoration takes place. Where there is no repentance, a feeling of remorse, confession and turning away from the sin, discipline will be applied. This is a way the church shows her displeasure over the sin by the member.

---

<sup>12</sup>Warren E. Berkley, “*The Lord’s conflict plan: Matthew 18:15-17*” The Expository Files. <http://www.bible.ca/>

## **Church Discipline as Corrective Training and Holiness in Hebrews 12:4-11**

Hebrews 11 ended with an assurance that the heroes of faith will not go ahead of us to inherit the glorious kingdom but we will all go at the same time. Based on the assurance that God is preparing something great for us, we are to “throw off everything that hinders and sins which easily entangles, and ... run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” (Heb 12:1). We are to struggle against sin in every conceivable way like Jesus who endured the cross and there-after sit at the right hand of God.

It is in the context of struggling with a sin that the discipline of the Lord is introduced. Apostle Paul, citing the Book of Proverbs, wrote: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." (Heb 12:5-6).

The idea of Greek *παιδεία* (*paideia*) in Proverbs 3 refers to the “act of guiding for responsible living.”<sup>13</sup> Similarly, it is used to describe “rearing and guiding children toward maturity and in the case of believers, refers to God's fatherly ‘child-rearing’ of us, His spiritual sons and daughters.”<sup>14</sup>

“In Hebrews 12: 1-13 the writer joins the language of striving against sin with the metaphor of training for and running a race (that ends in the eschaton). The readers are to endure discipline as sons, not as enemy combatants. The correction for

---

<sup>13</sup>BDAG “*Paideia*”

<sup>14</sup>Precept Austin, Hebrews 12:7-10 Commentary, accessed on 18 August, 2020, [https://www.preceptaustinheb12\\_710/](https://www.preceptaustinheb12_710/)



disobedience shares a family resemblance to the training for obedience.”<sup>15</sup> The Bible provides abundant resources for training in righteousness (1Tim 3:16-17). Correction may be through rebuke, reproof or light punishment. The individual is encouraged to take the chastening of the Lord seriously since it is done in love. Those who accept it wholeheartedly partake of God’s holiness and reap a peaceful harvest of righteousness. How do you partake of God’s holiness by submitting to His discipline? We develop the character of Christ, suffer trials and experience hardship. Christ was not discouraged. Rather, He endured and triumphed. Adopting His attitude of patience, humility, faith, submission, love, and purity of life (Heb 2:18; 4:15; 5:7-9) is the right and appropriate approach.

In summary, Hebrews 12:4-11 has as its background the struggle against sin to ensure one partakes of the glorious things God is preparing for the redeemed. Chastening or discipline provides both the formative and corrective resources for spiritual development. It teaches the knowledge of God and also corrects when one deviates from the straight path.

### **Church Discipline is a Corrective Judgment in 1 Corinthians 11:32**

When we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we not be condemned with the world (1Cor 11:32). Self-evaluation and self-consciousness are very important in our relationship with God. As a member of the church, self-examination is an integral part of our preparation for communion service. If we judge ourselves critically, honestly, and objectively, we will not be judged. Kimble states that “the

---

<sup>15</sup>Ched Spellman, *The Drama of Discipline: Toward an Intertextual Profile of Paideia in Hebrews 12*, JETS 59/3 (2016), 487-506. [www.etsjets.org>JETSPDFs](http://www.etsjets.org/JETSPDFs)

concept of final judgment is thoroughly biblical and intrinsically connected to the concept of church discipline.”<sup>16</sup>

This type of self-judgment is necessary for accepting the corrective judgment of God in a church discipline situation. We must never forget that church discipline is done in the name of the Lord (1Cor 5: 4). When we fully submit to the training of the Lord and accept correction when we have sinned, we shall then escape the final condemnation reserved for unrepentant sinners.

### **Church Discipline as a Method of Checking the Spread of Sin in 1 Corinthians 5**

This is the most striking case of church discipline in the New Testament. Paul writes in response to a report he received concerning a man who was in an incestuous relationship with his father’s wife. Paul described it as sexual immorality of the magnitude not even heard of among pagans (1Cor 5:1). He says the church is proud of this evil being perpetrated when they ought to have been grieved and removed the man from membership of the church.

Paul further said he has judged the man. Though he was not physically present, he was with them in the spirit. When they assemble (as in a Church Business Meeting) in the name of the Lord, and the power of LORD present, the man should be handed over to Satan that his flesh may be destroyed. But that his spirit is saved on the day of the Lord Jesus. Paul further condemned their boasting.

“A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (1Cor 5:6). In other words, evil practice will corrupt other members, other members who may try to imitate the

---

<sup>16</sup>Jeremy M. Kimble, *"That His Spirit May Be Saved: Church Discipline as a Means to Repentance and Perseverance"* (2013). *Faculty Books*. 158.  
[http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/faculty\\_books/158](http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/faculty_books/158)

immoral lifestyle. The sin will also affect the spiritual and moral standing of the church. They must purge the old leaven to have a new lump since they were truly unleavened (1 Cor 5:7). Paul concluded emphatically “Put away from your midst the evil person” (1Cor 5:12).

One can make a summary from the above passage:

1. Paul portrays sin in the body of Christ, the church, to be very grievous.

This should not be tolerated or accommodated, and it should not be treated lightly but considered as deadly as a contagious disease.

2. Sin should be dealt with drastically and urgently too, to check its spread and nip its influence in the bud. Hence, the use of the symbolism of leaven (yeast) that works through a whole batch of dough. Paul says: “get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast.”

3. The church will assemble in the name of the Lord and the presence of the LORD secured; they should judge the matter, condemning the evil in the strongest term, and remove the evil person from their midst. This is removing from membership and fellowship.

Paul is concerned about the purity and the preservation of the church.

“Concern for their purity and preservation should engage Christian churches to remove gross and scandalous sinners.”<sup>17</sup> Paul has used a very severe language: “hand him over to Satan that his flesh be destroyed and his spirit be saved in the day of the Lord.” This is not likely to be a death sentence.

Some think that handing over to Satan is to inflict the offender with disease and to be tormented with bodily pains.... But others think that delivering him to Satan

---

<sup>17</sup>Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* [CD ROM] (Bible soft, 2006).

for the destruction of the flesh is only meant of disowning him, and casting him out of the church, that by this means he might be brought to repentance, and his flesh be mortified.<sup>18</sup>

The goal of discipline is not to destroy but to reclaim and restore. If genuine repentance is secured then the goal is achieved. If he or she is restored to a new life in Christ, then he or she will be saved at the end as he or she maintains a faithful walk with the LORD.

### **Insight from the Spirit of Prophecy**

Ellen G. White wrote a lot about church discipline. She discussed the purpose, procedure or process, responsibility of the church, the effects of church discipline on the church and the individual, and importance of discipline, and other aspects.

1. She believed that church discipline is of God. It based on Christ's instruction in Matthew 18: "If the erring one repents and submits to Christ's discipline..."<sup>19</sup> In other words, church discipline is Christ's discipline.
2. Christ has authorized the church to act on His behalf. "Whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loose in heaven" (Matt 18:18). "This statement holds its force in all ages. On the church has been conferred the power to act in Christ's stead."<sup>20</sup>
3. Church discipline is about the preservation of order and discipline, the purity of the church and honour of Christ.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup>Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary*.

<sup>19</sup>Ellen G. White, *Testimonies Vol.7* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1872) 263, <https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/117.1473#1492>

<sup>20</sup>Ibid

<sup>21</sup>It is God's instrumentality for the preservation of order and discipline among His people. To it (church) the Lord has delegated the power to settle all questions respecting prosperity, purity, and order. Upon it rests the responsibility of excluding

4. Proper procedure be carefully observeobserve by the church in the exercise of discipline. Ellen White cautions against the hasty decision.<sup>22</sup> “No church officer should advise, no committee should recommend, nor should any church vote, that the name of a wrongdoer shall be removed from the church books until the instruction given by Christ has been faithfully followed. When this instruction has been followed, the church has cleared herself before God.”<sup>23</sup>

5. Ellen White believes that proper discipline goes beyond healing and restoration of the disciplined but includes the formation of characters that fits the member for membership of the heavenly family.<sup>24</sup>

### **Responsibility, Purpose, and Objective of Church Discipline**

The responsibility for disciplining an erring member rests squarely with the local church. It is a part of the discipleship function of the church. In other words, the

---

from its fellowship those who are unworthy, who by their un-Christ-like conduct would bring dishonor on the truth. Whatever the church does that is in accordance with the directions given in God’s word will be ratified in heaven.

<sup>22</sup>Christ has given special light as to how to deal with those who are erring, and with those who are unconverted in the church. There is to be no spasmodic, zealous, hasty action taken by church members in cutting off those they may think defective in character. Tares will appear among the wheat; but it would do more harm to weed out the tares, unless in God's appointed way, than to leave them alone.

<sup>23</sup>Ellen G. White, *Gospel workers*, (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1872) 501, accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September, 2020, <https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/35.2575#2575>

<sup>24</sup>Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1872) 264, accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September, 2020, <https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/117.1473#1492>. The Lord desires His followers to exercise great care in dealing with one another. They are to lift up, to restore, and to heal. But there is to be in the church no neglect of proper discipline. The members are to regard themselves as pupils in a school, learning how to form characters worthy of their high calling.

formative discipline as well as the corrective discipline provide the balanced nourishment for the spiritual growth of the members.

Church discipline has as its main goal the restoration of the erring member. Hence it is an act of love committed to the church that is conscious of the spiritual health of its members. Paul says “if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted” (Gal 6:1).

Ellen White commented on the approach of Joshua in searching out the sin that brought a woeful defeat on Israel from the hand of Ai and reproach to the name of God: “God holds His people, as a body, responsible for the sins existing in individuals among them. If the leaders of the church neglect to diligently search out the sins which bring the displeasure of God upon the body, they become responsible for these sins.”<sup>25</sup>

### **Purpose of Church Discipline**

1. To motivate erring members to repent so that he or she may be reconciled to the church and Christ.
2. To serve as warning or deterrence to other members who may be tempted to imitate the wrong act.
3. To maintain Christian ethical standard and doctrinal purity.
4. To maintain respect for God and His people in the eyes of society.
5. To obey God’s command concerning discipline.

---

<sup>25</sup>Ellen G. White, *Testimonies Vol.3*, (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1872) 269, accessed 10 September, 2020, <https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/119.1237#1237>.

6. The ultimate purpose is reclaiming for the Lord a member who has grown indifferent or drifted away.

One of the major objectives of church discipline is the unity of the church: “If there were no church discipline and government, the church would go to fragments; it could not hold together as a body”<sup>26</sup> It takes leaders who are spiritual, courageous, loving and having the unity, sanctity, and spiritual growth of the church at heart to uphold church discipline.

Where members do whatever they like without showing any commitment to their baptismal vows and the church standard, and no one holds them accountable for misconduct and violation of church standard, the church cannot speak with one voice, there is no unity. But where the church, in a business meeting, exercises church discipline on an erring member, then unity in the truth and fellowship will be upheld.

### **The Procedure of Church Discipline**

The standard procedure of church discipline is the one established in Matthew 18:15-18 by the Lord Jesus. Based on the value He attached to one soul “not willing that any of these little ones be lost” (Matt. 18:14), instructed the church to explore all possible ways to reconcile a member who has erred against his brother or sister. This instruction becomes critical in that the person offended takes the first step towards reconciliation.

The offended takes the first step at reconciliation. He or she meets his or her brother and sets the matter before him or her in the spirit of reconciliation. The intention is to get the erring brother or sister to acknowledge the offence and accept

---

<sup>26</sup>Ellen G. White, *Testimonies Vol.3*, 428,  
<https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/119.2002#2004>

the olive branch extended to him. If that is achieved, the case is over and forgiveness is secured. An erring member is gained.

Where this step fails, the offended is to take one or two more persons along with him. These employ their wisdom in conjunction with the offended to try to make the offender see his or her fault and the reason to change. They can also be witnesses to the fact that much effort has been made toward reconciliation. If this second step fails also, then the matter should be reported to the church. The church makes the final efforts to reconcile or make the offender admit his fault or candidly present the truth of the matter. If the offender respects the church acting in the name of the Lord and acknowledges his or her offence, the goal is realized. The victory is won. If he or she proves stubborn and irreconcilable, the church is instructed to regard the offender as a pagan or a tax-collector.

In some cases, the offence may not be directed against an individual member, it may be against the church, a violation of the law of God, or misconduct. A brother or sister who first learns of this might approach the offender first and try to convince the offender of the need to change or in case the news is making the rounds, find out the truth concerning the allegation. The offender could be advised and prayed with. If the matter is reported to the elder or pastor of the church then the elder or the minister invites him or her or visits as the case may be, to know the truth concerning the matter. If it is what the minister can deal with without making it public the matter ends.

If it is a case where the offender persists in a particular sin, he or she will be invited to the church after the case has been established. The offender is usually given a written invitation stating the offence, the date, and the place he is to appear before the church board to explain all he or she knows about the allegation levelled against



him or her. He or she is given at least two weeks' notice to prepare. The offender is neither to attend by proxy nor be represented by a lawyer. He or she may appear with his or her witnesses. The finding of the board is then recommended to the entire church in a business meeting. A disciplinary measure of either suspension for a specific period or removal from membership is recommended, based on established guilt. The church in business votes to accept the recommendation of the board or change it and takes a final decision.

### **Spiritual Benefits of Church Discipline**

The spiritual benefits of church discipline are manifold. The first is the total restoration of the disciplined member. This happens when the discipline has led to genuine repentance. As has been stated earlier, “the purpose of church discipline is the spiritual restoration of fallen members and the consequent strengthening of the church and glorifying of the Lord.”<sup>27</sup>

The most significant thing is the spiritual restoration of this fallen member rather than mere readmission to membership of the church or adding again his or her name back to the Church Record.

The second benefit is the cautiousness it creates in members who would not want to be embarrassed by invitation to the church board to answer for any allegation of misconduct. They learn to watch their lives and conduct closely.

The third benefit is that the leaders become more conscious of their spiritual life as they consider and administer church discipline. Paul says the spiritual members

---

<sup>27</sup>John MacArthur, “*Church Discipline*,” accessed September, 2020, <https://www.gracechurch.org/about/distinctives/church-discipline>.

should restore the one caught in sin while considering themselves so they don't fall into the same temptation (Gal 6:1-2).

The fourth benefit is that Church discipline brings about unity among church members as they unite together against evil and its spread in the body of Christ while standing in one accord for doctrinal purity and sanctity of the church. This inevitably leads to the spiritual growth of the church.

The fifth benefit is that it also allows the congregation to show genuine and deep love for the erring member and commitment to ensuring the straying one is brought back to the fold.

Finally, there are blessings of obedience. Church discipline is ordained by God. When the church obeys by carrying out this act of love, God's presence abides with His church and the fear of God is maintained as God is honoured.

### **Factors that Enhance the Positive Result of Church Discipline**

The factors that would enhance the positive result of church discipline are as follows:

1. Education about church discipline. The church members need to know the purpose goal, the process, and reasons for discipline (disciplinary offences), the spirit of should prevail in church discipline, and the benefits to the church, the erring members, and the society. There have to be deliberate efforts to teach and review these things from time to time.

2. Attitude towards erring member to be disciplined. The attitude should be that of love, compassion, patience, redemptive spirit on the part of the leaders and the fellow members. Though members must have a deep hatred for sin, they should also show apparent commitment to the restoration of the brother or sister caught in sin.

3. The understanding, and the attitude of the member-facing the discipline. He should be able to accept the disciplinary measure in good faith, seeing the discipline as an act of love designed for his restoration to true fellowship with the church and with Christ.

4. The process should be free from bias, partiality, and nepotism. The process should be seen as a redemptive act. It should be prompt. But the investigation should be thorough and transparent. No undue hurry and no unnecessary delay.

5. No one should try to unduly influence the process. Sympathizers will only cause harm. All should be in the spiritual mood to carry out this divine assignment. There should be unity against evil and total support for any activity meant for the spiritual and moral health of the church.

6. Proper Follow up. Proper follow up will include intercessory prayer, visitation essentially to show how much the church desire the disciplined member comes back to full fellowship. A word of caution must be sounded here. Some who are removed from membership for the reason of apostasy may attempt to persuade an unwary member to join them in error. Therefore, members must be prayerful and strong in their commitment to the truth.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter dealt with the biblical and theological foundation of church discipline. The driving force was to reveal first that God ordained church discipline and it was motivated by love and the desire to better the spiritual and the moral condition of the disciplined member. It is meant to turn the individual back to God. Others could also learn from disciplinary measures and be wiser, more conscious of their conduct. It was strongly emphasized that God has authorized the church to exercise

discipline on His behalf. The Apostle Paul even said God shares His holiness with his children through discipline (Hebrew 12:7-12).

The chapter looked at the concepts of church discipline in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament considering specific cases such as Adam and Eve, Cain, Achan, and Miriam. The study also considered the Spirit of Prophecy perspective of church discipline, the different emphasis of church discipline in various sections of the New Testament, and the goal, purpose, process, spiritual benefits, and factors that will facilitate the positive results of church discipline.

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Typically, the average Christian equates the words “church discipline” with punishment or being judgmental. This perception reflects the shallow and short-sighted view that modern culture, and the contemporary church, hold concerning the subject.<sup>1</sup>

Most articles on church discipline emphasize the validity and the usefulness of the church discipline especially as it relates to the unity and growth of the church, the restoration of the fallen member, and the honour of Christ. However, views differ on the approach and practice of church discipline. Some articles emphasize omission of church discipline, while others consider church discipline and grace; church discipline and spiritual growth, and church discipline and church growth.

There are views of church discipline, that emanate from a lack of proper understanding of procedures. Some based on prejudice arising from bad experiences with the abuse of the church discipline process.

John Calvin (1509-1564) “takes church discipline and unity as integral parts of the Christian church. Church discipline helps to unite church members around the truth of God’s Word. When effective, church discipline “builds the unity of the

---

<sup>1</sup>Richard David Long, *Restoring A Biblical Perspective: Equipping Leaders in the West Florida District of the Assemblies of God to Effectively Implement Church Discipline* (Doctoral Dissertation, 2015).

church as a unity in religious truths.... But if discipline is exercised with strictness and without compassion, tolerance and love, it can break the unity.”<sup>2</sup>

Adam Clarke described church discipline as the task of “reproving a brother who had sinned as a positive command under the law” (Lev 19:17).<sup>3</sup> Koranteng-Pipim posits: “Church discipline is a command of Scripture, a matter of obedience. In other words, as a command from God we do not need to question it but simply obey.”<sup>4</sup>

Ángel Manuel Rodríguez views church discipline “as disciplinary actions taken by the church to correct deviant behaviour on the part of church members.”<sup>5</sup> The church as a community of believers has boundaries. That is, a well-defined message, mission, and way of life, that contributes to its harmonious unity. And the achievement of common goals.”<sup>6</sup> He espouses that: “sanctions established to deal with dissidence that could threaten the well-being of the community and the spiritual experience of believers.”<sup>7</sup>

Nation A. Nation, explains that the church of God established for salvation “has rules and regulations which are used to guide the conducts of the members

---

<sup>2</sup>John Calvin, Cited by Pieter Strauss in his work, “Calvin's view on church discipline and unity: a South African perspective,” *Jour* 26/7/2010, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267559096\\_Calvin's\\_view\\_on\\_church\\_discipline\\_and\\_unity\\_a\\_South\\_African\\_perspective/citation/download](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267559096_Calvin's_view_on_church_discipline_and_unity_a_South_African_perspective/citation/download).

<sup>3</sup>Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary*, 6 volumes, (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1832), 5:184.

<sup>4</sup>Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, *Receiving the Word*. (Berrien Springs, MI: Berean Books, 1996). Accessed on 15 October, 2020, [http://www.anym.org/pdf/receiving\\_the\\_word\\_spipim.pdf](http://www.anym.org/pdf/receiving_the_word_spipim.pdf).

<sup>5</sup>Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, “*A life of Discipline*,” accessed on 28 October, 2020, <https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/church/life-discipline>.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, “*A life of Discipline*.”

which, diligently followed, can help achieve the mission of the church but when they are not enforced the mission will be futile.”<sup>8</sup>

Neil de Koning sees church discipline in the light of mutual accountability. According to him, one of the twelve (12) characteristics of a healthy church is the practice (of) mutual accountability.

It will take patience and practice for the church to attain and retain a healthy atmosphere of mutual accountability in a world that loves gossip on the one hand and says ‘it’s none of your business’ on the other. Practices of honesty in prayer and open confession of sin and forbearance among leaders, as well as strong, well-led small groups, will foster greater health in this vital area. When the whole church community sees itself as a hospital for sinners, there is less and less need to hide from each other. When we all admit our absolute dependence on the grace of God in Jesus Christ, then mutual accountability will permeate the life of the body healing and health.<sup>9</sup>

This shows that discipline is a way by which church members display accountability to one another and the church for their Christian conduct. Richard D. Long complements this view: “this mutual accountability, ultimately reflecting God’s care, represents a deep concern and a willingness to assume responsibility for the spiritual success of one’s Christian brothers and sisters.”<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup>Nation A. Nation, Ministerial Secretary, Port Harcourt Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church. Interviewed by the author, Port Harcourt 5 August, 2020.

<sup>9</sup>Neil de Koning, “*12 characteristics of a healthy church*” From the Report to Synod Ministries Priorities Committee Report Phase III. Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2020

<sup>10</sup>Richard David Long, “*Restoring A Biblical Perspective: Equipping Leaders in the West Florida District of the Assemblies of God to Effectively Implement Church Discipline*” (Ph.D. dissertation, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2015).

Some see church discipline from a negative standpoint. “Some perceive of discipline as turning someone away from the church. No one should ever get disciplined for not living up to some standard of super holiness. Practising church discipline will hurt the reputation of the church.”<sup>11</sup> Amanda and Greggson reject such reasoning as “uninformed, unbiblical and misguided.”<sup>12</sup>

Some people jettison church discipline because they think it is not loving. It will encourage legalism and discourage transparency. The church may lose people and become unpopular in the community.”<sup>13</sup> Others think it is judgmental, witch-hunting, scapegoating and shaming. As earlier mentioned, those who hold such views of church discipline either have suffered abuse of the church discipline process or they do not understand what church discipline is all about.

### **The Omission of Church Discipline**

Philip Mutetei observed that church discipline was a great omission in many countries. Many church leaders fear to discipline because it seems so unloving and may cause divisions within the fellowship.

He adduced these more reasons why church discipline is neglected and scarcely done: Discipline may lead to the loss of influential and wealthy members. It is feared because the church leaders themselves have skeletons in their closets so they fear to judge others for sins they have committed. There is also a great

---

<sup>11</sup>Sam Emadi and Caleb Greggson, “7 Reasons to avoid Church Discipline (and why they’re all wrong),” *Southern Equip*, January 24, 2020. <https://equip.sbts.edu/article/7-reasons-avoid-church-discipline-theyre-wrong/>

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Brad Wheeler, “Good and Bad Excuses Not to Practice Church Discipline” *9Marks* (April 4, 2018), accessed 4 November, 2020, <https://ftc.co/resource-library/blog-entries/good-and-bad-excuses-not-to-practice-church-discipline/>.



misunderstanding of the meaning, purpose and nature of church discipline. And finally, many see church discipline as condemning and excommunicating rather than lovingly restoring the wayward back into fellowship with believers.<sup>14</sup>

Mutetei establishes the necessity and the grounds for discipline. Jesus anticipated the power and authority of the church to exercise and maintain discipline (Matt 18:15-20). The church is enabled to follow the biblical principles and guard against the misuse of freedom in Christ. It works for the correction and restoration of the errant member.

Tim Crosby agrees with the submission of Mutetei: “for most churches today, church discipline is a forgotten art. Many pastors find it an uphill battle because church members tend to think of discipline as unloving.”<sup>15</sup>

Church discipline described as the backbone of the church. by Patterson: “A spineless body has trouble standing up for anything. This is true of the church – the church that lacks discipline can be trusted to stand for nothing divine...”<sup>16</sup> If the spiritual health of the church is to be ensured, church discipline is to be religiously observed and practised.

Don E. Galardi perplexingly reflected on the eclipse of church discipline in Evangelical Presbyterian Church. A pastor of one of the churches he investigated reported a statement credited to an elder who said: “we should drop discipline from

---

<sup>14</sup>Philip Mutetei, “*Church Discipline, The Great Omission: The proper Procedure for Discipline in the church,*” *African Journal of Evangelical Theology*, Issue 18.2 (1999), accessed 2 December, 2019, [www.thegospelcoalition](http://www.thegospelcoalition).

<sup>15</sup>Tim Crosby, “*Church discipline, the redemptive way,*” accessed on 26 August, 2020, <https://cdn.ministrymagazine.org/issues/2002/issues/MIN2002-10.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup>Ben Patterson, “*Discipline: Backbone of the Church,*” *Leadership*, 4 (1983): 11

our vocabulary.”<sup>17</sup> It is, however, not clear if he was referring to the term “discipline” or the concept of church discipline itself.

Richard Albert Mohler laments: “The decline of church discipline is perhaps the most visible failure of the contemporary church. No longer concerned with maintaining purity of confession or lifestyle, the contemporary church sees itself as a voluntary association of autonomous members, with minimal moral accountability to God, much less to each other.”<sup>18</sup>

Richard David Long attributed reasons for the neglect of church discipline to the “live and let live” mindset ingrained in the culture. Members ignore the problems needing discipline hoping the problem would disappear. The offender, the church, and the community subsequently suffer:

The offender suffers because he or she continues to walk in unrepentant sin, thinking the church does not care, thus jeopardizing his or her soul. The church suffers because other members become discouraged when leadership refuses to act. Moreover, this inaction is interpreted by some as a license to remain in rebellious sin themselves. Under these circumstances, wickedness spreads unchecked throughout the rest of the body. Finally, the community suffers because churches that fail to discipline no longer testify to the holiness of Christ and, in essence, become just another club.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup>Don E. Galardi, “*Corrective Church Discipline: A Study in Scripture, the Reformed Heritage, and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church*” (Doctor of Religious Studies, Trinity Theological Seminary, January, 11, 2006).

<sup>18</sup>R. Albert Mohler, *The Compromised Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 171.

<sup>19</sup>Richard David Long, “*Restoring a Biblical Perspective: Equipping Leaders in the West Florida District of the Assemblies of God to Effectively Implement Church Discipline*” (Doctor of Ministry, 2015), 3.

Bob Smieatana referred to church discipline as “one of the topics that churches rarely talked about.”<sup>20</sup> Though more members are aware of the importance of church discipline in the spiritual life of the Christians. Many still pay lip service to the issue. This is one of the main reasons for the study.

### **Church Discipline and Grace**

Church discipline awakens different images in the minds of people. To some, it evokes images of ex-communication, inquisition, witch-hunting, public trial, oppression and public disgrace. In others, it is a loving, positive image:

A reminder of a time when they were brought back into the fold after they had been involved in the sinful practice. For still others, it is a foreign term; it is something they have never encountered in a church. Whatever pictures the expression calls up... church discipline, exercised under the leadership of godly pastors, elders, and church members, is a mark of God-glorifying fellowship of believers (2 Cor 5; Gal. 6:1-2).<sup>21</sup>

Church discipline and grace are not two mutually exclusive terms. There is a very close relationship between them. According to Bonhoeffer: “Discipline in a congregation is a servant of the precious grace of God.”<sup>22</sup> He saw discipline as “one-

---

<sup>20</sup>Bob Smieatana, “*Church discipline focus of new survey*,” (Baptist Press, April 5, 2018). accessed on Oct. 15, 2020, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/church-discipline-focus-of-new-survey/>.

<sup>21</sup>Mark R. Littleton, “Church Discipline: A Remedy for What Ails the Body,” *Christianity Today* (May 8, 1981), accessed 19<sup>th</sup> October, 2020, [www.christianitytoday.com](http://www.christianitytoday.com).

<sup>22</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, Revised and unabridged edition (New York: Macmillan publishing Co., Inc., 1949), 260. Cited by Stefan Radu in “Church Discipline and Grace,” (DMin. Dissertation Projects, 2000), 12.

way grace is expressed or applied for the benefit of the erring members.”<sup>23</sup> Salvation is provided based on grace. Grace plays a key role in the restoration process of the sinner.

Galli sees grace in church discipline: “There is plenty of room for grace in church discipline which includes forgiveness and gently and patiently instructing those yet to be fully converted . . . in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, (2 Tim 2:25).”<sup>24</sup> This reflects the view of Jonathan Leeman: “Before you discipline, teach.”<sup>25</sup> The church needs to be taught doctrines of Christ. The members also need to know and understand the importance, benefits and process of church discipline.

The relationship between the doctrine of Christ and discipline was clearly stated by Greenslade. “As the saving doctrine of Christ is the soul of the church, so does discipline serve as its sinews, through which the members of the body hold together, each in its place.”<sup>26</sup> Church discipline, therefore, is vital in the application of the doctrine for the spiritual health of the body of Christ.

Charlie Bing described church discipline as a “Ministry of Grace and a family business.”<sup>27</sup> He continues: “As Christians committed to grace, we can face the reality of believers who sin. God teaches us to deal with it, not deny it or sweep it under the

---

<sup>23</sup>Ibid

<sup>24</sup>Mark Galli, “The Grace of Church Discipline,” *Christianity Today* (December 2016).

<sup>25</sup>Jonathan Leeman, “*Church Discipline: Medicine for the Body*,” accessed 20<sup>th</sup> October, 2020, [www.9marks.org](http://www.9marks.org).

<sup>26</sup>S. L. Greenslade, *Shepherding the Flock* (London, England: SCM Press, 1967), 72.

<sup>27</sup>Charlie Bing, “*Church discipline: A Necessary Partner to the Grace Gospel*,” *Grace in Focus*, Nov. 1998, accessed 20<sup>th</sup> October, 2020, [www.gracelife.org](http://www.gracelife.org)

carpet of ‘false profession.’ Since discipline has the goal of restoration, it is an extension of God's grace available to fallen believers.”<sup>28</sup>

“Church discipline is God's method of taking care of family business. It is as much a reality of church life as spanking or discipline is a matter of family life when raising children. It may not be pleasant; in fact, it may be quite unpleasant or embarrassing at times. But we are obligated to lovingly and graciously deal with it.”<sup>29</sup>

Grace enables church leaders to conduct themselves throughout the process “with integrity and godly sincerity . . . relying not on worldly wisdom but God’s grace” (2 Cor 1:12).<sup>30</sup>

Some people believe that emphasis on grace can provide coverture for sinners to persist in sin. Contrarily, a perfect understanding of grace, reveals that it serves important roles in spiritual development, repentance and the courage to exercise discipline.

Finally, grace extends hope and help people to repent and make changes in their lives for it is grace that “teaches us to say “no” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age” (Titus 2:10-11).<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ministry Tools Resource Center, “*The Power of Grace in Church Discipline*,” accessed 21/10/2020, <https://trainchurchleaders.com/practicum/grace-in-church-discipline.htm>.

<sup>31</sup>Ministry Tools Resource Center, “*The Power of Grace in Church Discipline*,” accessed 21 October, 2020, <https://trainchurchleaders.com/practicum/grace-in-church-discipline.htm>

## Church Discipline and Church Growth

Church discipline is not antithetical to church growth. It is a mark of a healthy church. Gregory A. Wills observed: “a church without discipline would hardly have counted as a church.”<sup>1</sup>

One of the reasons why most churches and church leaders avoid church discipline is fear that it will drive members away. Some say it will lead to the loss of wealthy members. For such churches and leadership, church discipline can never be considered a tool for growing the church.

Josh Buice considers church discipline causes the church to grow “as the church sees it taking place regularly.”<sup>2</sup> He strongly believes that the church will grow spiritually, and that: “numerical growth will take place as the healthy church demonstrates a passion for God, a love for one another, a hatred for sin, and a love for their community.”<sup>3</sup>

Wesley McDonald conducted a study on church discipline and church growth. The amazing result was that church discipline, which he equated with “Soul Stewardship” was responsible for the growth.<sup>4</sup> “Soul stewardship seeks to restore

---

<sup>1</sup>Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South 1785-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 12. Cited by Josh Buice in his article titled “Does Church Discipline Prevent Church Growth?” *DBG* (Jan 12, 2017), accessed 18 August, 2020, <https://www.deliveredbygrace.com/church-discipline-prevent-church-growth/>.

<sup>2</sup>Josh Buice, “*Does Church Discipline Prevent Church Growth?*” *DBG* (Jan 12, 2017), accessed on 22 October, 2020, <https://www.deliveredbygrace.com/church-discipline-prevent-church-growth/>

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>According to him (Macdonald) “Soul stewardship involves a long-term commitment to careful, skillful, spiritual reclaiming of those slipping away, so that

people and thereby makes the church look good to God and the world. Proper church discipline and ‘soul stewardship’ are the same thing.”<sup>5</sup>

He carried out an inquiry in Pennsylvania Conference of Seventh-day Adventists to find why three churches in the Conference recorded a steady membership increase despite the high rate of apostasy. His finding was that the church works to reclaim those disciplined through repeated targeted visits and invitations during the annual evangelistic meetings. This plan is so effective that within 6- 12 months, about 50- 70 per cent of those disfellowshipped (removed from membership) for apostasy reclaimed.

His conclusion: “the three Pennsylvania churches illustrate, among other things, that God will bless those churches that show the full dimensions of His love. True love involves correction and discipline when necessary.”<sup>6</sup> Mark Weaver observed and strongly emphasized the existence of interconnectedness between leadership, church discipline and church growth:

Leadership and church discipline are inseparable from church growth because it takes leadership and church discipline to cause growth. If no one takes the lead in converting souls to Christ, there are no conversions. If there is no church discipline, there is nothing to teach the new convert ... nor steer him back to the correct path

---

ideally disfellowshipping will not be necessary; but when necessary, it will be carried out consciously and conscientiously in a spirit of proactive love.”

<sup>5</sup>Wesley McDonald, “Church Discipline and Church Growth,” *Ministry Magazine* (April, 2000), accessed 22 October, 2020, <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2000/04/church-discipline-and-church-growth>.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

should he stray. Therefore, the local church that wishes to grow biblically must endeavour to follow the will of God as it revealed in his Word.<sup>7</sup>

### **Church Discipline and Spiritual Growth**

Rather than being considered an act of punishment, church discipline is “an attempt to restore people to discipleship.”<sup>8</sup> This goal of restoration to fellowship with Christ and the church cannot be possible except by the influence of the Holy Spirit mingled with human affection.

Apostle Paul wrote: “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted” (Gal 6:1, NKJV). It is a spiritual exercise undertaken in the name of the Lord, by a spiritually-minded people. Therefore, proper discipline enables the church to show true love and care to the erring brother or sister.

The discipline exercise calls for sober reflection. As the church leaders and members discipline the brother or sister caught in a sin, they think deeply about themselves. No wonder Paul called on church members to watch themselves closely to avoid the same pitfall. While sympathy, love, compassion, patience and grace expressed, the spirit of fairness, justice, and truth be displayed.

---

<sup>7</sup>Mark Weaver, “Growth, Leadership, and church Discipline,” *Gospel Gazette* vol. 6 no. 11, (November 2004), accessed 22 October, 2020, [www.gospelgazette.com](http://www.gospelgazette.com)>page18

<sup>8</sup>General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Ministerial Association, *Minister's Handbook*, (Silver Spring, MD: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2009), 156.



Masikamu states clearly that “Church discipline is inevitable in every active Church that needs to lead its members to eternal life.”<sup>9</sup> The ultimate goal of church discipline is to help the member deal with the sin that calls for discipline. To help him or her see that sin in its true condition and feel a sense of remorse to overcome it.

Masikamu makes a beautiful summarization of the very essence of church discipline: “To sustain the integrity of the Church, to protect the innocent from harm, to protect the effectiveness of the witness of the Church, to warn and correct the careless, to bring the guilty to salvation, to rehabilitate the guilty, to restore to effective service those who are rehabilitated, and to protect the reputation and resources of the Church.”<sup>10</sup>

The positive impact created by appropriate church discipline has been acknowledged widely by many writers on the subject. According to Buice: “The church will grow spiritually when sin is confronted and properly dealt with.”<sup>11</sup>

The above statement is in harmony with the experience. Dan Serns shared concerning a disciplinary case he handled in one of the churches in his district.<sup>12</sup> According to the narrative, a certain woman was living in adultery. And for six years the church was willing to confront that blatant sin. One reason is that the

---

<sup>9</sup>Robert Masikamu, “The Role of Church Discipline to church growth,” accessed 25 September, 2020, <https://rmasikamu.wordpress.com/2013/07/25/the-role-of-church-discipline-to-church-growth/>.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid. Rehabilitation here should be understood as part of the restoration process.

<sup>11</sup>Josh Buice, “*Does Church Discipline Prevent Church Growth?*” DBG (Jan 12, 2017). Accessed on 22 October, 2020, <https://www.deliveredbygrace.com/church-discipline-prevent-church-growth/>

<sup>12</sup>Dan Serns, “Church Discipline Is Still Needed,” *Adventist Review online* (April 18, 2008), accessed on 30 October, 2020, <https://www.adventistreview.org/2008-1511-8>.

parents of the lady have been leaders of the church for years. They felt confronting her would drive her away from the church. They thought time would correct the sin as she continued to come to church. Her husband had complained many times to the elders until the woman stopped coming to church.

The pastor was informed about this situation by the first elder. The pastor convinced the first elder and other church officers that something can be done. The pastor in the company of the First elder paid three visits to her house in a bid to reconvert her and also educate her husband about Christ-like love. The attempt to get the woman to change her scandalous life failed. The pastor educated the church on the necessity of exercising discipline. The church in a business session voted to remove her name from the membership record. The effect is that the church “has learnt to grow in grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:8) through humbly submitting to His Word.”<sup>13</sup>

According to the article “the next few years we saw dozens and dozens of people added to the church.”<sup>14</sup> The numerical growth recorded is a reflection of spiritual renewal brought about by church discipline. This demonstrates that the word of God is the means of discipline. Calvin enumerates: “For the church, the primary means of discipline remains the Word. The Word must be used as a spiritual means of power to admonish and withhold someone from the Holy Communion.”<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Dan Serns, “*Church Discipline Is Still Needed*,” Adventist Review online (April 18, 2008), accessed on 30 October, 2020, <http://archives.adventistreview.org/article/1789/archives/issue-2008-1511/is-church-discipline-still-needed>.

<sup>15</sup>John Calvin, Cited by Pieter Strauss in his work, “Calvin's view on church discipline and unity: a South African perspective” *Jour* 26/7/2010,

## **Synthesis**

This chapter reviewed some available literature on a broad spectrum of church discipline ranging from different views or perspectives of church discipline, omission or neglect of church discipline, and church discipline and grace. The review is done on some materials on Church Discipline and Church Growth which focuses on the relationship between the diligent exercise of church discipline and its impact on numerical growth. The materials considered did not separate numerical growth from spiritual growth concerning church discipline. The reason probably could be subsumed in the fact that the whole essence of church discipline is total restoration, both spiritual and physical.

## **Conclusion**

Church discipline evokes different images in the minds of people. To those who have a negative perception of church discipline, the whole idea tantamount to witch-hunting, ex-communication, public trial and public disgrace. Such people may wish that church discipline be abolished because it is unloving, it divides the church, drives members away, and can hardly bring about spiritual or numerical growth.

The positive perception of church discipline has buttressed by copious statements about its importance, indispensability, and its blessings to the church that uphold its practice. Such blessings include, but not limited to unity, the credibility of the church, enhancement of its mission and restoration of erring members. The losses sustained by the church for the neglect of church discipline have been the highlight. Such as the spread of sin and wickedness, failure of the mission, and powerlessness like a spineless body.

---

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267559096\\_Calvin's\\_view\\_on\\_church\\_discipline\\_and\\_unity\\_a\\_South\\_African\\_perspective/citation/download](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267559096_Calvin's_view_on_church_discipline_and_unity_a_South_African_perspective/citation/download).

Church discipline is portrayed as compatible with grace because it is an opportunity for members to show love to a straying member by helping to restore him or her back to genuine fellowship. Church discipline was described as an extension of God's grace available to fallen believers. It is an instrument of church growth where it is carried out effectively with proactive love. The concern and care for an erring member and subsequent follow up after disciplinary action has taken place has proved a great tool for realizing the restorative goal of church discipline and growth.

There is abundant evidence that church discipline is ordained by God, to be an integral part of the discipleship process. The procedure for its practice is clearly specified by Jesus Christ who is the head of the church. The courage to confront sin promptly, with the wisdom of God and the help of the Holy Spirit are some of the insights gained in this review. Lack of courage is one of the reasons some disciplinary cases linger on the church board.

Another point that emanated from the review is the education of the church concerning the concept and practice of church discipline. Education will change members' feelings and attitude toward church discipline. With a well informed and spiritually minded congregation, church discipline can achieve its purpose of being a healthy church able to restore erring members.

CHAPTER 4  
METHODOLOGY AND DESCRIPTION  
OF THE LOCAL CONTEXT

This chapter will look at the history of the Port Harcourt District of Seventh-day Adventist Church, Port Harcourt Conference, Rivers state, Nigeria. We will also see the geography, demography, prevailing culture, history of church discipline in the district, research design and administration of questionnaires, presentation in line with the research question, analysis of data and conclusion

**History of Port Harcourt District**

Port Harcourt District is one of the districts in Port Harcourt Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church. It geographically located in Rivers State, in the Niger Delta region of the South-South of Nigeria. The Port Harcourt District is situated in the heart of the Port Harcourt city with membership consisting of males and females, children, youth and adults of different socio-economic status.

Rivers mission first organized in 1971 as a part of Rivers/South East Mission through the leadership of Pastor Willie Limejuice and Robinson W. Nwuzor (President, and Secretary/Treasurer respectively). Its headquarters located in Port Harcourt. This mission was reported to the East Nigeria Mission at Aba with Pastor K. F. Mueller as the Coordinator.

Rivers/South East Mission got transformed into Rivers Mission in 1973 when the workers in South East. Felt the need to be detached from Rivers and join the East

Nigeria Mission. Port Harcourt district came into existence “with the creation of Rivers mission in 1973”<sup>1</sup>

The steady growth and expansion of the Rivers Mission in membership, finance and infrastructure resulted in the attainment of conference status in 1993, two years earlier than the projected time. After 18 years of attaining conference status, within 2012 and 2013 Rivers conference reorganized into four administrative entities, namely; Rivers Conference, Rivers West Conference, Rivers East Conference and Bayelsa Mission. The mother conference, Rivers Conference was subsequently renamed Port Harcourt Conference on January 1, 2015.

It must be emphasized that the history of Port Harcourt district is inseparably bound to the efforts and missionary activities of Pastor and Mrs Jesse Clifford from England. The commencement of Bible classes by Pastor Jesse Clifford and his family at Aba in 1923. And the sending of Pastor L. Edmonds in 1926 to evangelize the core Niger Delta area became pointers to the establishments of early Seventh-day Adventist sister churches in the Rivers Province.

Jesse Clifford arrived Abua, Rivers State in 1923 in search of Loving Good. He found him. They worked together and opened a church in the house of Chief Amiofori in Otari, Abua. Clifford “relocated from Abua to Ogor Hill, Aba which became the cradle of Adventist work in Eastern Nigeria.” Later in the same year, he went to Elele where a church is planted. In 1928 through the effort of the two missionaries - Jesse Clifford and L. Edmonds and with the assistance of native converts, the work opened in Ogoni areas. Later, Mba people in Etche received the

---

<sup>1</sup>Dave Nyekwere, Anyalebechi Nnunukwe, Victor Nweke, *History of Port Harcourt Conference of Seventh-day Adventists* (Port Harcourt Conference Archive, 2018).

message. In 1929, the gospel went to Nchia, Eleme and established through one Benjamin Okereke, a tinker in 1930.

In the 1940s, “Elder Johnson Ogunka Wechie and his wife received the Adventist message in Aba and were baptized. He studied the Books of Revelation and Daniel where he got the understanding that Adolf Hitler and his Germany would lose the war (World War II).”<sup>2</sup> When he and his wife relocated to his home town in Nkpolu Oroworukwo he shared the message with some of his relatives, three of them joined him. The names of these new converts were Jeremiah Ejekwu, Onyema Woyi, and Francis Woyi. The four men were the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Mile 3.

Many more people believed the message when Hitler and his Germany lost World War II (Second World War). They started worshipping in Johnson’s mud house. The membership of the church increased. Johnson donated his father’s (Anyabelem) land to the church where it presently located.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Mile 3 organized in 1960 and the first Minister was Pastor N. W. Dinneya. This church flourished and became the mother church which gave birth to virtually all the churches that constitute the Port Harcourt zone of the Conference.

Port Harcourt district consists of seven churches at the moment, namely: Seventh-day Adventist church at Mile 3, Mile 2, Mgbuoshimini, D-Line, Eagle Island, GRA 1 and GRA 2. Mile 3 church is the headquarters of the district. The total membership of the district is about 1629.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>Chief Emeka Anyabelem, A member of Seventh-day Adventist church Mile 3, interviewed by the author, Port Harcourt 25 November, 2020.

<sup>3</sup>Port Harcourt Conference, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Camp Meeting Report, November, 2020.

Port Harcourt District is made up of metropolitan (city) churches. It located in Ikwerre land. The official language for preaching and teaching is the English language. There is also no one predominant culture in the district. It is a multicultural group. Membership of the District consists of people from different tribes and cultural backgrounds within and outside the state such as; the Igbos, Abuans, Ekpeyes, Ogbas, Ikwerres, Etches, Kalabaris, Okrikans, Yorubas, Edo people, Urhobos, Ibibios, Efiks and others including Ghanaians.

### **History and Practice of Church Discipline in Port Harcourt District**

Through the help of the church clerk the researcher took a sample from the church record of disciplinary cases from the time of church organization in 1960 till date.<sup>4</sup> The researcher investigated factors such as: the type of case; the pastor that presided over the case; the attitude displayed by the church toward the disciplined member; the effects of the discipline on the member— whether he or she becomes a better or worse Christian.

Of the twenty-eight (28) cases selected randomly, six (6) were adultery, sixteen (16) apostasy, one (1) disregard to constituted authority, two (2) financial misappropriation, and three (3) Fornication / illegal marriage cases. Out of the twenty-eight (28) cases, four (4 ) persons were shown love. Members visited them, spoke kindly about them and were friendly to them. Twenty-four (24) were not shown love, with members' attitude towards them being negative. Members gossiped about these disciplined members without encouraging them. Of all that were removed from membership, only (six) 6 returned, got restored, and became better church members.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup>Seventh-day Adventist church, Mile 3, Office of the Church Clerk, "Extract from Church Record," ( Port Harcourt, June, 2020).

<sup>5</sup>Assessment done by the church clerk in consultation with the elders.



The interesting findings were: (four) 4 persons returned, got restored, became better and more active in the church though not shown love.

The research is concerned about is the assessment of the extent to which members understand the role of church discipline in the spiritual life of the church. Do they truly understand and appreciate its contribution to spiritual consciousness of the church? And to what extent do they demonstrate that understanding? Are there some challenges with the practice of church discipline in Port Harcourt district. What can be done to bridge the gap between theory and practice if any?

### **Research Design**

The research design for this study is mixed. That is, qualitative and quantitative. The research instruments include questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire used in this study was first designed and used in 2019 at Valley View University, Oyibi, Ghana by the researcher. Its validation was done after some modifications to properly reflect the purpose of the study. The questionnaires consist of four parts. Namely: Section A-demographic information. Sections B contains both closed and open-ended questions requiring “Yes” or “No” answers and short explanations. Section C have closed-ended multiple statements on a 5-point likert scale. Section D requires the respondent to freely comment on the state of church discipline in the church. And also, make suggestions on ways to improve discipline in the church.

The study employed interview method also. Three senior ministers in the Conference Administration were interviewed. They include the incumbent President of Port Harcourt Conference, the incumbent Ministerial Secretary, and a retired pastor who has been a Conference Executive Secretary and Ministerial Secretary. All these three have previously served in the capacity of Conference Executive Secretary. The

reason to interview this category of Ministers is based on the desire to have a holistic view of the church.

### **Authorization to Conduct Research**

The President's permission letter authorizing the use of Port Harcourt district for the study was requested and obtained. Letters of consent obtained from AUA research department were given to the three personnel interviewed to sign. They gladly accepted to participate and granted interviews on different dates. The request and authorization letters are included in the appendix section of this study.

### **Statistical Treatment of Data**

This research presents the findings of the study, the interpretation from the questionnaire and interview on perception of members understanding of the role of church discipline in spiritual growth of Port Harcourt District of Port Harcourt Conference. The closing section presents the detailed findings of analyzed data collected from the field. The data analysis covers data collection procedures, data presentation, and description of findings, and conclusion. Except otherwise specified all tables and figures in this chapter are derived from the author's field survey of July 2020.

### **Administration and Collection of the Instrumentation Procedures**

Simple Random sampling was adopted in selecting participants for this study. The population consists of baptized members of the Seventh-day Adventist church, Mile 3 which represents Port Harcourt district. We have both male and female with ages ranging from 15-above 40. Marital status includes single, married and widowed. Participation was voluntary. Questionnaires administered during a church service, given to those who accepted to participate after a brief verbal introduction of the

purpose of the exercise. They were also assured that it would not take more than forty minutes. Deacons helped in distributing the questionnaires. Those who chose to decline participation were not compelled to take the questionnaires. Many could not afford to sacrifice such time.

A sample size of 250 respondents accepted the questionnaires distributed. Out of them, 235 filled and returned their questionnaires, but five questionnaires were not valid. The numbers well-completed (valid questionnaires) were 230.

### **Findings from Questionnaire**

*Table 1. Showing the Distribution of Respondents by Sex*

Sex	Frequency	Percent
Male	113	49.13%
Female	117	50.87%
Total	230	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2020

From Table 1 above, 113 of the respondents are male representing 49.13% of the total numbers of the respondents. 117 are female, which equals 50.87% of the sample size.

*Table 2. Showing the Distribution of Respondents by Age*

Age	Frequency	Percent
15-25	12	5.22%
26-39	73	31.74%
40-Above	145	63.04%
Total	230	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Table 2 above shows that 12 respondents are between age 15-25, representing 5.22% of the total number of the respondents. The respondents within age range of 26-39 are 73 which amounts to 31.74%, while those between age 40 and above are 145, representing 63.04% of the total number of the respondents.

*Table 3. Showing the Distribution of Respondents by Marital Status*

Marital Status	Frequency	Percent
Single	55	23.91%
Married	162	70.44%
Widowed	13	5.65%
Total	230	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Table 3 above shows that 55 of the respondents are single representing 23.91% of the total number of the respondents. While 162 respondents are married representing 70.44%, the number of respondents who are widowed stands at 13 representing 5.65% of the total number of the respondents.

*Table 4. Showing the Decisions of the Respondents on Necessity and the Importance of Church Discipline*

QUESTION	YES	NO
Q.6-Do you honestly think it is necessary to have a disciplinary procedure in the church?	230 100%	Nil
Q.7-Do you think a member invited to the board for misconduct should honour the invitation?	230 100%	Nil

Questions 6 and 7 are very crucial for testing the views of the respondents concerning the necessity and importance of church discipline. 100% of the respondents answered

“yes” to the two questions. Question 6 state: Do you honestly think it is necessary to have a disciplinary procedure in the church? When asked to give reasons for their choice on question 6, the reasons given by the respondents ranged from: “It helps to maintain the standard of the church,” “It brings order and moral uprightness” to “It makes members accountable to the authority of the church.”

Question 7 states: Do you think a member invited to the board for misconduct should honour the invitation? Some of the reasons obtained for saying “yes” to question 7 include: “To obey constituted authority;” “To have a fair hearing;” “To honour the Lord;” and “For his or her spiritual benefits.” Questions (statements) numbers 9, 18, 19, 23, and 24 indicate that church discipline is positive, redemptive and leads to restoration. Number 9: Church discipline brings sanity and fear of God in the church. Number 18: Church discipline is not witch-hunting but corrective exercise designed to make an erring member a better disciple. Number 19: I will be willing to submit to church discipline if I fall short of the standard of the church because I know it will help me. Number 23: Church discipline can make the church to be spiritually conscious and avoid careless conduct. Number 24: Church discipline can spiritually transform the disciplined member.

Questions (statements) numbers 9, 18, 19, 23, and 24 indicate that church discipline is positive, redemptive and leads to restoration. Number 9: Church discipline brings sanity and fear of God in the church. Number 18: Church discipline is not witch-hunting but corrective exercise designed to make an erring member a better disciple. Number 19: I will be willing to submit to church discipline if I fall

*Table 5. Showing Respondents Views of Church Discipline*

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	N/S	D	SD
9.	Church discipline brings sanity and fear of God in the church.	138	90		2	
10	Church discipline will produce good result if divested of petty politics and tribal sentiment.	150	80			
11.	Economic and social status of a member should be considered in the administration of church discipline.				80	150
12.	Church discipline has the support and blessing of Jesus Christ.	140	90			
13.	A church that disciplines her members appropriately will earn the respect of the community.	138	92			
14.	There should be neither preferential treatment nor victimization in the administration of discipline in the church.	150	80			
15.	The spirit of love and fairness should prevail in the course of exercising discipline on an erring believer.	152	78			
16.	The church that neglects discipline does so at the risk of allowing sinners to continue in sin, allowing members to fall into sin, and allowing God and His people to come to disrepute.	150	78			
17.	Church discipline is outdated, it cannot produce any positive change in a member's life.				90	140
18.	Church discipline is not witch-hunting but corrective exercise designed to make an erring member a better disciple	138	92			
19.	I will be willing to submit to church discipline if I fall short of the standard of the church because I know it will help me.	140	90			
20.	Church discipline can help an erring member turn from the path of death to the path of life.	140	90			
21.	Church discipline divides the church and drives members away from the church.				90	140
22.	Church board members must have the moral rectitude to handle disciplinary case impartially.	150	78		2	
23.	Church discipline can make the church to be spiritually conscious and avoid careless conduct.	140	90			
24.	Church discipline has the capacity to spiritually transform the disciplined member.	140	90			

Source: Field Survey, 2020

short of the standard of the church because I know it will help me. Number 23: Church discipline can make the church to be spiritually conscious and avoid careless conduct. Number 24: Church discipline can spiritually transform the disciplined member.

*Table 6. Showing the Percentage of Decisions on the Goal of Church Discipline*

Question/Statement	SA	A	N/S	D	SD
9, 18, 19, 23, and 24	138 60%	90 39.13%	Nil	2 0.87%	Nil

Source: Field Survey, 2020

In Table 6 above, the answers revealed that 99.13% (60% +39.13%) believe church discipline is redemptive and restorative. Only 2 out of 230 persons (0.87 %) disagreed with question 9 which states that church discipline brings sanity and fear of God in the church.

Questions (Statements) 10, 14, 15, and 22 represent factors that can enhance or hinder restoration. Number 10: Church discipline will produce a good result if divested of petty politics and tribal sentiment. Number 14: There should be neither preferential treatment nor victimization in the administration of discipline in the church. Number 15: The spirit of love and fairness should prevail in the course of exercising discipline on an erring believer. Number 22: Church board members must have the moral rectitude to handle disciplinary case impartially.

*Table 7. Showing the Percentage of Decisions on Effective Restoration*

Question/Statement	SA	A	N/S	D	SD
10, 14, 15, and 22.	150 65%	78 34.13%	Nil	2 0.87%	Nil

Source: Field Survey, 2020

In Table 7 above, the answers revealed that 99.13% (65%+34.13%) believe that if those factors that enhance restoration are in place, then church discipline will lead to the restoration of the disciplined erring member and bring about spiritual consciousness in the church. Only 2 persons disagreed with question (or statement) 22 which reads: “church board members must have the moral rectitude to handle disciplinary case impartially.” Whether those two respondents consciously disagreed

with that statement or unconsciously tick disagree is another point to ponder upon. If it is a conscious decision, the questions to ask will be: Do they believe that church board members cannot possess the moral rectitude to handle a disciplinary case impartially? Or could it be that even if they do, other factors could still not allow restoration to take place?

### **Summary of Findings**

The purpose of this research is to assess members' understanding of the role of church discipline in spiritual growth which manifests in true physical and spiritual restoration of the disciplined erring member and spiritual consciousness. The findings from data analysis shows members acknowledged the necessity, relevance and importance of church discipline. They also affirm that church discipline is redemptive and would bring about restoration of the disciplined erring member. They agreed with the fact that restoration will only take place if certain conditions are met.

These conditions outlined by respondents in the section d of the questionnaire shows that Port Harcourt district believes that restoration will be possible and the fear of God will be seen in the church if there are no tribal, ethnic, or political sentiments. They commented that this will also occur if the church is seen to truly correct in love, if the case is properly investigated, and dispatched promptly and if the procedures outlined in the Church Manual are carefully followed. This will be true also if proper education is given from time to time; if members can be neutral and objective during the vote of discipline at the business meeting, if discipline is mixed with compassion, and if those disciplined will receive church discipline with an open mind.

The questions that has not been answered are: Do members truly understand the purpose of church discipline and its spiritual blessings to the church including



spiritual growth? Do they know their roles in the process of church discipline? If yes do they play these roles effectively?

Comments gathered from many of the respondents revealed that church discipline system is no longer effective. In the word of one of the respondents “ I notice those days when I was much younger, church discipline was handled very well and people were conscious of what they do because wrong doing will attract dismembership (removal of membership). But today due to lack of discipline people behave out of proportion ...” That statement confirm the claim of slackness in the practice of church discipline. Another respondent stated “church discipline in the church today is like a play thing (unserious), and lacking in producing the desired result.” Still another wrote: “Failure to practise church discipline undermines the preaching, discipling and evangelism ministry of the church.”

My conclusion is that though members believe church discipline is redemptive, brings restoration to the disciplined erring member and cause spiritual consciousness and growth in the church. They also identified some challenges relating to attitude and handling of the church discipline process, suggesting the existence of a gap between belief and practice.

### **Interview Session**

The interview was requested and granted by the three ministers carefully selected in consideration of their experience in church leadership. The three of them have had the opportunity of occupying the office of the Executive Secretary of the Conference at one time or another. Apart from that office, two of them have been the Ministerial Secretary of the conference and the third is an incumbent Conference President at the time of this study. Their ministerial career and work experience have made them become church policy custodians. They could talk from leadership

vantage point when it comes to church discipline as church administrators and experienced field pastors.

They were approached one on one by the researcher to participate in the study. Each of them obliged and proceeded to give a date that was convenient for the interview. As earlier mentioned, they signed consent forms agreeing to grant interview lasting no more than 45 minutes. The interviews conducted in office settings. At least seven questions were put to them in a kind of semi-structured interview.

### **Findings from the Interview**

Seven questions were put to each of the participants. The questions are as follows:

1. Please explain sir, why do you think church discipline is important to church life?
2. What are the main goals of church discipline?
3. How can you convince the average church member that church discipline is biblical, ordained by God ?
4. What can the leadership do to make members believe that church discipline is for their good?
5. What can the leadership do to make church discipline effective?
6. How can you make the average member that he or she is an example of an influence of a fellow member?
7. Do you believe that church discipline can truly bring restoration to any disciplined erring member?

The responses to the above questions are grouped into three themes in line with the purpose of this research. And the three themes are shown below:

Theme 1-The importance and relevance of church discipline to the spiritual health of the church (Questions 1, 2, 3).

Theme 2-Important roles of leadership in realizing the goal of church discipline (Questions 4, 5, 6).

Theme 3- The reality of restoration of the disciplined erring member and spiritual growth of the church through church discipline (Question 7).

Theme one: The importance and relevance of church discipline to the spiritual life of the church.

Responses of the first participant (PPC):<sup>6</sup> Church discipline exists because of the need for order. And the church is a disciplined organization. Therefore, church discipline is put in place to correct and streamline things so that the interest of the church is not jeopardized. It is to correct errors, excesses and undesirable conducts of church members. In fact, church discipline exists for the maintenance of the moral and spiritual health of the church.

The main goal of church discipline is correction of any deviation from the standard of the church and restoration of the erring one back to the standard. When rightly pursued church discipline restores the confidence of the members and the public in the moral standing of the church. It is for the good of the church and the individual member.

Church discipline is ordained by God. The policy books especially, the church manual contain the counsels and the instructions of God as contained in the Bible. To convince the members that church discipline is of God, one must follow the policy in disciplining the erring one. Transparency and openness are very essential. We have to

---

<sup>6</sup>Anyalebechi Nnunukwe, President, Port Harcourt Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church, interviewed by the author, Port Harcourt 12 August, 2020.

discipline in love and also educate members in order to remove misconceptions about church discipline.

Responses of the second participant (MS):<sup>7</sup> The church is established for salvation. We can not pursue salvation without applying the rules and regulations (Ten Commandments). The mission will be baseless without following those rules of God in Exodus. When we discipline, we also restore and profer solution for redeeming that person being disciplined.

The main goals of church discipline is to ensure we obey God. Church discipline brings about unity and love because it brings people together and facilitate good relationship. Church discipline is very important to church life because it changes your direction, changes your orientation, and brings us back to our senses.

To convince the members that church discipline is biblical, we teach them the scriptures and also let them search the scriptures for themselves so that they will discover the ways of the Lord for themselves. Following the ways of God will make the members to comport themselves. Church discipline gives credibility to the mission of God. The case of Ananias and Sapphira who were disciplined for lying to the church and to God had a positive impact in the new church. People learnt a great lesson that lying and coveteousness are evil.

Responses of the third participant (RMS):<sup>8</sup> Church discipline is there as a corrective measure to bring people back to the right way like sheep. All sheep are not

---

<sup>7</sup>Nation A. Nation, Ministerial Secretary, Port Harcourt Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church. Interviewed by the author, Port Harcourt 5 August, 2020.

<sup>8</sup>Samuel W. Amadi, Former Ministerial Secretary, Port Harcourt Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church, interviewed by the author, Port Harcourt 10 August, 2020.

the same. You will see stubborn ones. When they go astray, you use your rod or cane to bring them back again. We do not discipline to kill them or drive members away. Rather with church discipline you bring the erring one back to his senses.

Church discipline is biblical. Matthew 18 is relevant as we think of church discipline in the Bible. The focus of church discipline is reconciliation and restoration. But members think in different directions. Some may see discipline as punitive but may come to see where the leader is going. The Holy Spirit will help him or her to feel remorse and will come back if he or she is a child of God.

Summary: The importance and relevance of church discipline lies principally in its goals of correction, reconciliation and restoration of the erring member back to the moral and spiritual standard of the church. The mission for which the church is established is impacted by the spiritual health of the church. When discipline is exercised on an erring member in accordance the the policy and biblical provisions, it brings him or her to their senses if the influence of the Holy Spirit is truly welcomed.

Church discipline will remain relevant as long as it is ordained of God, brings unity, love and togetherness among the congregation, and inspires confidence of the church members and the community in the moral standing of the church. Church discipline brings about spiritual consciousness among the church with reference to the case of Ananias and Sapphira cited by the second participants.

Theme two-Important roles of leadership in realizing the goal of church discipline. Responses of the first participant (PPC): Leadership must ensure a well planned programme is put in place to restore and to redeem. There should neither be any unnecessary delay nor any frightful hurry in the matter of discipline. Any accused member should be invited and given a time to explain himself or herself. If the matter concerns two party, the leadership should hear out each party separately and then

together thereafter. Set up committee where necessary. The aim is to get the facts of the matter. No gap should be allowed when a member is disciplined. Leadership should reach out to the disciplined erring member. Communication must be opened and counseling and prayer are needed. Church discipline must be done in love. Education is very important. Leaders must educate members to the effect that church discipline is for their good and also to ensure that standard of the church is maintained. Church discipline is not meant to disgrace the individual rather is a way the church expresses disapproval for the act that is not in line with the standard of the church.

Response of the second participant (MS): Leadership must see church disciplinary issues as spiritual rather than administrative. When a member falls into sin, the leaders should see it as spiritual setback and go secretly into prayer on behalf of the member, encourage, and seek for ways of restoring the spiritually deficient member. Some leaders see church discipline as administrative—just passing through administrative processes such as interview, appearing before elders' council, church board, and finally church in business. Members should be made to understand we are fighting against principalities and powers.

Leaders should discipline in love and ensure the disciplining is done in line with the policy. Transparency in the process is also very crucial so that should any member resist the discipline, or goes to court as was the case of one of the members disciplined for adultery, the church will be vindicated. The judgment of the church was upheld by the Conference President who intervened in the case.

Response of the third participant (RMS): Leaders should ensure church discipline is not administered in anger or out of hatred. Rather, church discipline should be done in love. Also, members should also be made to understand that they

should show concern and compassion to the disciplined erring one so as to win him or her back to the church. It is the role of leadership to educate the church concerning the spiritual benefits of church discipline. The spirituality of the church is the most important.

Summary: Leadership has important roles to play in ensuring the church discipline produce the result of restoration of the disciplined erring member to the standard of the church and to a better relationship with the Lord. The roles include transparency, openness, thoroughness in investigation while ensuring promptness. The spiritual welfare of the erring member is of utmost importance. Therefore, the leaders should see disciplinary matter as a spiritual matter which must be approached with prayer, counseling and encouragement. Leadership must educate the church membership concerning the spiritual benefits of church discipline to the erring one and the church. Members must also be educated on the importance of showing concern and compassion to the disciplined member.

Theme three: The reality of restoration of the disciplined erring member and spiritual growth of the church through church discipline. Response of the first participant (PPC): “In my experience, I have seen majority of people who went through church discipline restored. It is true that some may see disciplinary action as a disgrace and may attribute their problems to the elder or pastor. Some may be hardened, bearing grudges, and become critical of the church. Human beings differ. But more of those disciplined have been transformed.”

Responses of the second participant (MS): Church discipline is a means of correction, changing attitudes and behaviour. It can restore someone to spiritual consciousness. When one is disciplined, you go home and reflect over your life. One could resolve never to embark on any such behaviour that has brought reproach to the

church and disgrace to the individual. It could make one become alert to temptations. (This participant used his own experience as an example. He said that he learnt from the disciplinary measure meted out to him and that it help him to became a better Christian and now a senior minister).

Response of the third participant (RMS): Church discipline is truly redemptive. Though some may see it as witch-hunting, especially if they perceive it was done out of malice, anger and hatred, the truth is that church discipline can bring restoration and spiritual growth not only for the person disciplined but even the other members who witness the church business session. A case of church discipline which brought restoration and transformation is the one involving one Amadi of Rukpokwu. He consented to drop one of his two wives at the point of his admission into the church. That was the condition the church gave him before he was baptized. He was baptized along with his first wife. About a month later, he was found to have impregnated the second wife he dropped earlier. At the church business meeting some members of the church became emotional, trying to sympathize with him. They wanted to overturn the verdict of removal from membership voted and recommended by the church board. Through the intervention of the Holy Spirit, the church was able to secure a majority vote for removal from membership. The disciplined member continued to attend church services after the discipline. Within one month, the man reported that the joy and peace he felt after the discipline far exceeded his previous experience. He confessed that if he had been let go without that discipline, he would have been denied the opportunity of becoming a happy Christian. The disciplinary measure built him up spiritually. It became a turning point in the church, and the testimony went far and wide. He acknowledged that the church was right and that he



was wrong. He has asked for forgiveness and Spirit of God gave him boundless peace and joy.

Summary: Church discipline has the capacity to bring restoration and transformation to be disciplined erring member if the leadership and members do their parts faithfully. The role of the disciplined member is very crucial. If he or she would reflect on the reason for the discipline and allow the Holy Spirit to minister to him or her restoration is bound to take place. Though there are some instances where those disciplined hardened their heart, bearing grudges, and became critical of the church, there are however, many instances of true restoration. Majority of persons disciplined have not only been restored to a happy and rich spiritual lives but also fostered a better relationship with the church and with Christ. The experiences shared by two of the ministers, who chose to be specific, are testimonies to the fact that church discipline can indeed restore effectively and create spiritual consciousness in the church.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter dealt with the description of the Port Harcourt district of Port Harcourt Conference the Seventh-day Adventist church used as a case study in this research on church discipline. It also touched on geography, demography, prevailing culture, the history of church discipline in the district, research design and administration of questionnaires, presentation and analysis of data gathered through questionnaires and interview sessions, interpretation and detailed discussion of findings and conclusion.

A mixed design composed of questionnaire and interview was adopted for the research. A sample size of 230 selected through simple random sampling was used for the study. The findings from questionnaires show that 100% of the respondents

believed that church discipline is necessary and important and relevant to the church. 99.13% believe that church discipline is positive, redemptive and restorative. Port Harcourt district believe restoration will occur if the church is seen to truly correct in love, if the case is properly investigated, and dispatched promptly and if the procedures outlined in the church manual are carefully followed. This will be true also if proper education is given from time to time; if members can be neutral and objective during the vote of discipline at the business meeting, if discipline is mixed with compassion, and if those disciplined will receive church discipline with an open mind. Fear of God will be seen in the church if the leadership possess the moral courage to be impartial, the spirit of love and fairness prevails in the course of exercising discipline on an erring believer, and if there is no tribal, ethnic, or political sentiments.

The free and voluntary interviews granted by three senior ministers of both field and top leadership experience provide some insights on the position of the church leadership concerning church discipline. Their answers to the seven questions put to them, individually grouped into three themes, were in harmony with views of the membership disclosed through the questionnaires.

On the first theme- The importance and relevance of church discipline to the spiritual health of the church, the ministers strongly agreed that church discipline remains important and relevant due to its goals of correction, reconciliation and restoration of the erring member back to the moral and spiritual standard of the church. The impact of the spiritual health of the church on its mission; its roles in bringing unity and togetherness among the congregation; and the way it inspires confidence of both church members and the public in the moral standing of the church are strong reasons in favour of its relevance to the church today.

On the second theme- Important roles of leadership in realizing the goal of church discipline, the ministers strongly admitted that leadership have important roles in ensuring that restoration of the disciplined erring members is achieved and spiritual consciousness is created through church discipline.

Concerning the third theme- the reality of restoration of the disciplined erring member and spiritual growth of the church through church discipline, the ministers are unanimous in their stand in favour of the fact that church discipline can actually bring about restoration and spiritual growth.

It must be emphasized that membership of Port Harcourt district and leadership of the Port Harcourt Conference are united in their view about the necessity, relevance, and realizability of the goal of church discipline, the restoration of the disciplined erring member. They also agree on the fact that spiritual consciousness would be raised and church will grow spiritually.

If indeed there is a good understanding of the importance of the church discipline and its spiritual blessings, why do many resist church discipline? What about the slackness in the practice of church discipline? These issues will be resolved in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### ANALYSIS AND PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

In the previous chapter, the conclusion drawn was that church discipline is necessary, relevant, and important to the spiritual life of the church. Restoration will take place in the life of the disciplined erring members given the right conditions and that spiritual consciousness would prevail in the church as a result of effective church discipline. The views of members and leadership represented by the ministers interviewed are in harmony

The task in this chapter is to suggest some practical solutions to challenges connected some negative attitude to church discipline and slackness in the practice of church discipline. The major complaints are as follows:

**Resistance to Church Discipline:-** Many members resist church discipline by threatening to go to court; by prolonged absence from the church; trying to cause division among members; by trying to unduly influence the minister and or board members; and by alleging to be a victim of witch-hunting or set up.

**Taking sides:-** Members take side with one or the other party in a case brought before church board.

**Boycott of business:-** Members boycott church business meeting, especially during voting in disciplinary case.

**Favoritism and Suppression of Some Cases :-** Some escape discipline because their cases are not brought up. Some Ministers and other church leaders do show favoritism and partiality.

Withholding vital information/ Lack of Cooperation:- Members withhold information necessary for speedy dispatch of cases thereby causing cases to linger. Also lack of cooperation from the affected member or other members does not only elongate the investigation time but causes speculations to flourish.

Lack of courage:- Some pastors lack the courage to pursue a disciplinary case through church discipline. This especially demoralize members and causes sins to multiply

### **Addressing the Attitude Challenge**

Gizachew Hailegebreal see attitude as “an individual's predisposed state of mind regarding a value and it is precipitated through a responsive expression towards a person, place, thing, or event which in turn influences the individual's thought and action.”<sup>1</sup> If we think positively about a thing, a person, a concept or a value, we relate positively to that particular object. Conversely, if we dislike it, we relate negatively to it, or avoid, or condemn it. If members are better informed about the goal, purpose, procedure, and the blessing of church discipline their attitude are likely to change.

The attitude of the members and the leaders of the church towards a member caught in sin sends a message true essence of church discipline. if they show genuine love and compassion from their body language, look on their faces, words, comment about him or her, and by action. The Apostle Paul has said that the members who are spiritual should restore in a kind, compassionate and wise manner the person who has fallen. If members gossip about the erring member, speaks unkindly, being impatient,

---

<sup>1</sup>Gizachew Hailegebreal, “Attitudes vs. Perceptions: Can these 2 terms be used interchangeably?” accessed 31 May, /2021, [https://www.researchgate.net/post/Attitudes\\_vs\\_Perceptions\\_Can\\_theses\\_2\\_terms\\_be\\_used\\_interchangeably#](https://www.researchgate.net/post/Attitudes_vs_Perceptions_Can_theses_2_terms_be_used_interchangeably#)

the impression communicated is that church discipline is not a gracious, loving act intended to help member come to repentance and be reconciled to fellowship. Therefore members must display genuine compassion, relating naturally, not in a hypocritical manner, but pray fervently for genuine repentance and grace and humility to acknowledge his or her sin.

Members need to understand clearly the purpose of church discipline. it goes beyond the restoration of the disciplined erring members. It includes also redeeming the image of the church and restoring the glory of God who name has been reproached by the public sin (or sin exposed). It give credibility to the mission of church and wins the respect of the community. Church discipline is not just about the fallen member, it serves as a deterrent to other members so that the do not imitate the sinful act.

If members understand the destructive nature of sin, they will act redemptively, not by covering up sin or supporting the wrong act. They will not try to downplay the seriousness of the sinful act, but by weeping for the member involved That is where the statement of Paul becomes most relevant:“But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted” (Gal 6:1). One can be careless because you communize or rationalize the sinful act.

It is very important that members know and acknowledge that the church has the responsibility to correct an erring member in love. The church suffers the consequences of allowing sin spread and fester. That is why Jesus says “tell it to the church” (Matt.18:17). Ellen White cautions “God holds His people, as a body, responsible for the sins existing in individuals among them. If the leaders of the

church neglect to diligently search out the sins which bring the displeasure of God upon the body, they become responsible for these sins.”<sup>2</sup>

Making salvation and right relationship with Christ a priority is key in understanding church discipline. If the erring members prize his salvation and being with Christ above shame and status, he or she will cooperate with the church who seeks through church discipline to lead him or her back to the right track. In the same vein, members will not try to take sides or cause distraction if they truly realize church discipline is for the benefit of the erring one, the church, and the glory of God.

### **Addressing the Slackness in the Exercise of Church Discipline**

Slackness in the exercise of church discipline manifests in a number of ways. When cases linger in the board or even becomes swept under the carpet. When member's sins are overlooked. When leaders cannot frankly address the sinful act of members. When those who have escaped discipline are given church offices, there is slackness. When allegations are not properly investigated and rooms are given for criticism and people are annoyed. There is slackness favoritism and partiality are noticed in the handling of church. When youth take laws into their hands.

There should be revival and fasting and prayer for the entire church. This will show the people their true spiritual condition and the danger of remaining in that condition be emphasized. Teachings about church discipline should be done for the people to know what it is all about. it must be clear that God originated it. : “My son,

---

<sup>2</sup>Ellen G. White, *Testimonies Vol.3*, (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1872) 269, accessed 10 September, 2020, <https://m.egw writings.org/en/book/119.1237#1237>.

do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in (Prov 3:11-12).

It is a means of partaking in his holiness because discipline as instruction or education, is a discipling process. The idea of Greek παιδεία (paideia) in Proverbs 3 refers to the “act of guiding for responsible living.”<sup>3</sup> It is used to describe “rearing and guiding children toward maturity and in the case of believers, refers to God's fatherly ‘child-rearing’ of us, His spiritual sons and daughters.”<sup>4</sup>

Discipline is painful at present, through endurance, one reaps harvest of righteousness (Heb. 12:1-11). Though exercising is a daunting task, leaders must be courageous and consistently pursue this part of holiness and glory for the innumerable blessings.

Finally, slackness in carrying out discipline stems mainly from wrong attitude which leads many to resistance by employing various diversionary tactics that tends to frustrate the process of church discipline. Biases, partiality, and lack of courage to push through disciplinary issues in spite of knowledge of its importance and immense blessings has been a great challenge. Therefore the minister and the board members should ask for the power of the Holy Spirit to do what is right.

---

<sup>3</sup>Bible Dictionary of Ancient Greek “*Paideia*”

<sup>4</sup>Precept Austin, Hebrews 12:7-10 Commentary. Accessed on 18 August, 2020, [https://www.preceptaustinhebrew12\\_710/](https://www.preceptaustinhebrew12_710/)



## **Making Church Discipline Effective and Result Oriented**

This is the core of study. Church discipline is generally agreed to be redemptive and leads to restoration of the disciplined erring member and create spiritual consciousness in the church if rightly handled.

Having addressed the attitude challenge and the slackness in exercising of church discipline I will suggest ways to make church discipline more effective and result oriented.

**Exemplary leadership and transparent conduct:-**Leaders must be above board. And their commitment to the salvation and godly living must be clear to all and sundry. Jesus rebuking hypocrisy, says “why do you tell your brother let me remove the speck of sawdust in your eye when there is a log in your own eye. You hypocrite, first remove the plank in your eye so you can see clearly to remove the speck in your brother’s eye (Matt 7:4,5). If this principle undergirds the exercise of church discipline, those who try to resist will have no reason to do so since such responsible and godly leadership will have the support of the church and God as well.

**The charm of Compassion and love:-**True compassion and love for the member invited to face the disciplinary process will give assurance that the leadership is committed to the restoration of the erring member. This kind of spirit is very likely to have the cooperation of the erring member.

**Church Discipline Education:-**Though many have a fair idea about the importance of church discipline to the spiritual life of the church yet the minister has the duty to educate his congregation the theological principles undergirding discipline, the goal, the purpose, the procedure, what constitute disciplinary offences, the blessings of diligent application and the consequences of its neglect. He should

avenues to share the package. Such avenues should include periodic seminar, quarterly sermon on discipline, baptized members class. Seminars should be held for church board members concerning the spirit and attitude required of the practice of discipline.

**Strict Compliance with Church Policy Procedure:-**Procedure of church discipline is spelt out in the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual on pages 63-68. Other churches have their policy books. They should be strictly followed for guidance in the exercise of discipline so as not to create room for objections and controversies.

**Timely dispatch of disciplinary cases:-**While hasty approach should be avoided, unnecessary delay should not be allowed in handling any disciplinary case. There should be a way of giving feedback to the congregation to ensure they are carried along. They are more likely to give their cooperation if they understand where the leadership is heading.

**Taking Sin Seriously:-**Sins should not be tolerated. It does not only amount to compromise to tolerate sins that even the unbelievers find scandalous but it is a denial of the of the gospel's power to transform lives. This is a disservice we can not afford to do.

**Fair and Impartial Administration of Discipline:-**Partiality, nepotism, and favoritism certainly demoralizes members wherever it shows up in the world. It is not to be seen in the church. The leadership must ensure impartial treatment of all members. this will increase the credibility of the church and confidence in church discipline practice.

**Securing the Influence of the Holy Spirit:-**The Holy Spirit is the agent of change. He is the one that convicts of sin (John 16:8). His presence must be sought in prayer, in meditation and in fasting so that He can influence every thought, word and

action. With genuine love for the erring member and a sincere desire to see him or her change, the Holy Spirit will bring success.

Transformed life:- A life transformed through the exercise of church discipline is the clearest evidence of an effective church discipline practice. Though individual responds differently sometimes to similar situation, more will respond positively most of the time if the disciplined erring member accepts the discipline in good faith and with an open mind he or she will be restored and will encourage others.

Follow up Programme:- Proper follow up will include intercessory prayer, counselling, visitation essentially to show how much the church desire the disciplined member comes back to full fellowship. A word of caution must be sounded here. Some who are removed from membership for the reason of apostasy may attempt to persuade an unwary member to join them in error. Therefore, members must be prayerful and strong in their commitment to the truth.

## CHAPTER 6

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research study sought to provide answers to a number of questions raised in chapter one: Do members truly understand the role of church discipline in spiritual growth? What are the factors that can enhance or hinder successful restoration? What can be done to make church discipline effective and acceptable to all?

The above questions provided road map for the journey to assess members' understanding of church discipline's role in spiritual growth using Port Harcourt District as a case study. Port Harcourt district of Seventh-day Adventist church, a part of the Port Harcourt Conference in the Rivers state of Nigeria was selected as the population for the study. Through a simple random sampling method, sample size of 230 respondents for the study was drawn from Mile 3 church, the headquarters of the district. A mixed research design of questionnaire and interview was used in gathering data for analysis.

The result of the data analysis shows that 99% of the respondents believe that church discipline is redemptive and could lead to the spiritual transformation of the disciplined erring member. Church discipline can also cause spiritual growth of the church if the spirit of love and fairness prevails in the course of exercising discipline. It will bring sanity and fear of God when it follows the procedure and principles outlined in the scriptures and church policy. Three key ministers, church administrators of the Conference granted interview on the importance and relevance of church discipline to the spiritual health of the church. They stressed that church

discipline remains important and relevant due to its goals of correction, reconciliation and restoration of the erring member back to the moral and spiritual standard of the church. The impact of the spiritual health of the church on its mission; its ability to bring unity and togetherness to the congregation; and the way it brings the erring one back to their senses as they reflect over the wrong that brought discipline is very good for the spiritual vivacity of the church. The fact that church discipline make both members and the public to repose confidence in the moral standing of church are few among many reasons in favour of its relevance to the church today.

Despite the level of understanding and acknowledgment of the importance church discipline's role in the spiritual life of the church, the research through the preliminary (free comment) session have observed slackness in the practice of discipline and a high level of resistance to church discipline in actual practice. The kind of resistance is not mainly confrontational but subtle in nature. Such practice as avoiding voting time of business meeting, prolonged absence from church to avoid appearing before the board, trying to unduly influence board members or the minister taking.

Furthermore, some even threaten to go to court in order to discourage the church from proceeding with the disciplinary procedure. Others withhold vital information that might help speed up investigation process. Suppression of some cases and the lack of courage to pursue disciplinary cases are likely part of the reasons for slackness in the practice of discipline.

The focus of chapter five, therefore, was suggesting practical solutions to these problems beside addressing the above challenges the study suggested ways to make the practice of church discipline more effective. The suggestions are as follows: Exemplary leadership and transparent conduct; showing compassion and love; church

discipline education; timely dispatch of disciplinary cases; taking sin seriously, securing the influence of the Holy Spirit; a transformed life (as clearest evidence); and having a well planned follow up programme and implementing same will bring the needed fruit of church discipline.

### **Conclusion**

This research carried out basically to assess the members' understanding of the role of church discipline in spiritual growth. The study has established both members and leadership believe that church discipline is important and conducted in line with the biblical procedure will lead to the restoration of the disciplined erring members and spiritual growth if the church displays the right attitude and create the right condition.

The study also discovered based on the information from the free comment section of the questionnaire that there is a gap between belief and practice since many members put up resistance to church discipline for a number of reasons. There is also slackness in the practice of church discipline. Practical solutions suggested, if carefully followed, will drastically reduce these problems

Church discipline as a gracious tool, in the hands of righteous and courageous leadership, and informed and spiritually minded congregation, will do more to guarantee effective and result oriented church discipline.

### **Recommendation for Further Study**

The research focused on the perception of members' understanding of the blessings that church discipline can bring to the church: restoration of disciplined erring member and spiritual growth and consciousness of the church. The research could not however, measure the degree of slackness in the practice of church discipline and resistance. There is also the need to know if members see a connection

between church discipline and salvation. It my hope that further study will consider this important concern. The researcher there recommends as follows:

1. That a combination of formative and corrective discipline should be consistently practise since it will yield a better result in restoring the disciplined erring member and creating a spiritually conscious church.

2. Development of the sustainable strategy for an all-inclusive education about the purpose of church discipline for both church leaders and members. Well-packaged educational workshops and seminars for church leaders and members are highly crucial.

3. Church leadership should neither avoid discipline nor discipline in haste and hatred.

4. The ministers and church board members should be firm and stedfast when in the right course and not allow anyone, no matter their level of connections, to sway or intimidate them to do the wrong.

Church discipline be introduce slowly and wisely where it has been abandoned for whatever reason because of its importance.

## APPENDIXES



## APPENDIX A

### LETTERS

Seventh-day Adventist Church,  
Rukpokwu,  
Rukpokwu District.  
August 2, 2020.

The President,  
Port Harcourt Conference of  
Seventh-day Adventists,  
466/468 Ikwerre Road,  
Rumuokwuta - Port Harcourt.

Sir,

#### **Permission to Conduct Research in Port Harcourt District**

I bring you Calvary greeting in the Name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

I write to obtain your permission to conduct academic research on church discipline in Port Harcourt Conference. My chosen population is Port Harcourt district. It will involve administering questionnaires to members and perhaps a brief sensitization talk.

The main purpose of the research is to find out the extent to which the church in Port Harcourt Conference believes and accepts church discipline as a corrective and restorative measure and its role in the spiritual health of the church and its membership.

This research is the final thesis of my Master of Divinity Programme with Adventist University of Africa (AUA), Kenya.

Thanks for your usual cooperation.



**Pastor Victor Oamen**

*Leader, Rukpokwu District.*

SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST  
CHURCH  
IN NIGERIA

Port Harcourt Conference



Secretary

#466/468 Ikwerre Road  
Rumuokwuta, P.O. Box 111,  
Port Harcourt, Rivers State.  
Tel: 08937988782, 08187430660  
E-mail: chisahnat@gmail.com  
web: www.portharcoutconf.org

Wednesday, December 16, 2020

The Church Board Chairman  
Seventh-day Adventist Church  
Nkpolu-Oroworukwo (Mile 3)  
Port Harcourt District.

Beloved brethren,

**PASTOR OAMEN, VICTOR EBHODAGHE -- PERMISSION TO CONDUCT  
RESEARCH WORK IN MILE 3 CHURCH**

I bring you greetings of love, in Jesus' name

The above named has been a Conference-sponsored student at Adventist University of Africa (AUA), Kenya (Valley View, Accra Campus). He is at his final stage to submit the required thesis for his Master of Divinity programme.

Accordingly, he has since applied for permission to carry out the Research in Port Harcourt Conference, using Mile 3 Church as his "population" needed for interaction, interrogation and adequate response to his questionnaire in the area of Church Discipline.

Sequel to the above, the Administrative Committee of Port Harcourt Conference, at its meeting of September 9, 2020, (*Action No. 20:127*) voted to grant him the permission to carry out the research at Mile 3 Church.

Please assist and cooperate with Pastor Victor Oamen to enable him conclude his academic research in record time. Thank you.

*Compliments of the Season,*

Pastor Ekezie, Echendu Chimaovu  
Executive Secretary

xc: Conference Officers  
Pastor Victor Oamen.

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear respondent, the following questions are designed to elicit your confidential views concerning church discipline. This is purely for research purpose. Therefore feel free to supply your honest answers to the questions. Thanks for your cooperation.

SECTION A- DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

✓ (Tick appropriately)

- 1. Sex: Male [ ]. Female [ ]
- 2. Age: 15-25 [ ]. 26-39 [ ]. 40-above [ ].
- 3. Marital status: Single [ ]. Married [ ]. Widowed [ ].
- 4. Your position in the church: Pastor [ ] Elder [ ] Deacon/Deaconess [ ] Youth Ministry [ ] Other church officer [ ]. No position [ ].

SECTION B

- 5. Have you ever sat in the church Board handling a disciplinary case in the church? Yes [ ]. No [ ].

- 6. Do you honestly think it is necessary to have a disciplinary procedure in the church? Yes [ ]. No [ ].

2b. If yes, give

reason(s).....

.....

.....

- 7. Do you think a member invited to the board for misconduct should honour the invitation? Yes [ ]. No [ ].

3b. Give reason(s) for your

answer.....



- 8. Have you ever been disciplined by the church? Yes [ ]. No [ ].

SECTION B- indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements. **Strongly Agree (SA); Agree (A); Not sure (NS).**

**Disagree (D); Strongly Disagree (SD);**

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	N/S	D	SD
9.	Church discipline brings sanity and fear of God in the church.					
10.	Church discipline will produce good result if divested of petty politics and tribal sentiment.					
11.	Economic and social status of a member should be considered in the administration of church discipline.					
12.	Church discipline has the support and blessing of Jesus Christ.					
13.	A church that disciplines her members appropriately will earn to respect of the community.					
14.	There should be neither preferential treatment nor victimization in the administration of discipline in the church.					
15.	The spirit of love and fairness should prevail in the course of exercising discipline on an erring believer.					
16.	The church that neglects discipline does so at the risk of allowing sinners to continue in sin, allowing members to fall into sin, and allowing God and His people to come to disrepute.					
17.	Church discipline is outdated, it cannot produce any positive change in a member's life.					
18.	Church discipline is not witch-hunting but corrective exercise designed to make an erring member a better disciple					
19.	I will be willing to submit to church discipline if I fall short of the standard of the church because I know it will help me.					
20.	Church discipline can help an erring member turn from the path of death to the path of life.					
21.	Church discipline divides the church and drives members away from the church.					
22.	Church board members must have the moral rectitude to handle disciplinary case impartially.					
23.	Church discipline can make the church to be spiritually conscious and avoid careless conduct.					

24.	Church discipline has the capacity to spiritually transform the disciplined member.					
-----	---	--	--	--	--	--

**SECTION D**

Please comment freely below, on what you think about the way church discipline is handled in the church today. Make your suggestions for improvement.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Jay E. "Handbook of Church Discipline." Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1986.
- Amadi, Samuel W. Former Ministerial Secretary, Port Harcourt Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church. Interviewed by the author, Port Harcourt 10 August, 2020.
- Anyabelem, Chief Emeka. A member of Seventh-day Adventist church Mile 3. Interviewed by the author, Port Harcourt 25<sup>th</sup> November, 2020.
- Austin, Precept. Hebrews 12:7-10 Commentary. Accessed on 18/8/2020 [https://www.preceptaustinheb12\\_710/](https://www.preceptaustinheb12_710/).
- Berkley, Warren E. "The Lord's conflict plan: Matthew 18:15-17" The Expository Files, <http://www.bible.ca/>.
- Charlie Bing, "Church discipline: A Necessary Partner to the Grace Gospel." *Grace in Focus*. Nov. 1998. Accessed 20/10/2020, [www.gracelife.org](http://www.gracelife.org).
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. "*Cost of Discipleship*." Revised and unabridged edition. New York: Macmillan publishing Co., Inc., 1949. Cited by Stefan Radu in "Church Discipline and Grace." D.Min. Dissertation Projects, 2000.
- Buice, Josh. "Does Church Discipline Prevent Church Growth?" *DBG*. Jan 12, 2017. Accessed 22, October, 2020. <https://www.deliveredbygrace.com/church-discipline-prevent-church-growth/>.
- Calvin, John. Cited by Pieter Strauss, "Calvin's view on church discipline and unity: a South African perspective." *Jour* 26/7/2010. Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> October, 2020. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267559096\\_Calvin's\\_view\\_on\\_church\\_discipline\\_and\\_unity\\_a\\_South\\_African\\_perspective/citation/download](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267559096_Calvin's_view_on_church_discipline_and_unity_a_South_African_perspective/citation/download)
- Cheong, Robert K. *God Redeeming His Bride: A Handbook for Church Discipline* Scotland, UK: Christian Focus, 2013.
- Clarke, Adam. *Clarke's Commentary*, 6 volumes. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1832.
- Crosby, Tim. "Church discipline, the redemptive way." Accessed on 26<sup>th</sup> August, 2020. <https://cdn.ministrymagazine.org/issues/2002/issues/MIN2002-10.pdf>.
- Emadi, Sam and Greggsen, Caleb. "7 Reasons to avoid Church Discipline (and why they're all wrong)." *Southern Equip*, January 24, 2020. <https://equip.sbts.edu/article/7-reasons-avoid-church-discipline-theyre-wrong/>

- Galardi, Don E. "Corrective Church Discipline: A Study in Scripture, the Reformed Heritage, and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church." Doctor of Religious Studies, Trinity Theological Seminary, January, 11, 2006.
- Galli, Mark. "The Grace of Church Discipline." *Christianity Today*. December 2016.
- General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, 19th ed.* Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2015.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Ministerial Association, *Minister's Handbook*. Silver Spring, MD: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2009.
- Grace Church, "Church Discipline." Accessed 4 December, 2019. [www.gracechurch.org](http://www.gracechurch.org).
- Greenslade, S. L. *Shepherding the Flock*. London, England: SCM Press, 1967.
- Hailegebreal, Gizachew. "Attitudes vs. Perceptions: Can these 2 terms be used interchangeably?" Accessed 31 May, /2021. [https://www.researchgate.net/post/Attitudes\\_vs\\_Perceptions\\_Can\\_theses\\_2\\_terms\\_be\\_used\\_interchangeably#](https://www.researchgate.net/post/Attitudes_vs_Perceptions_Can_theses_2_terms_be_used_interchangeably#)
- Henry, Matthew. Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry Bible Commentary (Complete)*, Galatian 6. Accessed April 16, 2021. <https://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary.php?com=mh&b=48&c=6>.
- Keil Karl Fredreich and Franz Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament: New Updated Edition, [CD ROM] Biblesoft, 2006.
- Kimble, Jeremy M. "That His Spirit May Be Saved: Church Discipline as a Means to Repentance and Perseverance." 2013. *Faculty Books*, 158, accessed 15 August, 2019. [http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/faculty\\_books/158](http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/faculty_books/158).
- Koning, Neil de "12 characteristics of a healthy church." From the Report to Synod Ministries Priorities Committee Report Phase III. Accessed 1 October, 2020. <https://network.crcna.org/elders/characteristics-healthy-church>
- Latin Dictionary and Resources. Accessed on 30 July 2020. <http://www.latin-dictionary.net/search/latin/disciplina>
- Lawless, Chuks. "12 Reasons Churches Don't Practice Church Discipline." Accessed 11 July, 2019. <https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/252470-12-reasons-churches-dont-practice-church-discipline.html/2>.
- Leeman, Jonathan. "Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus." Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2012.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "10 Things You Should Know about Church Discipline." Accessed on 10 September, 2020. <https://www.crossway.org/articles/10-things-you-should-know-about-church-discipline/>.

- Littleton, Mark R. "Church Discipline: A Remedy for What Ails the Body." *Christianity Today*. May 8, 1981. Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> October, 2020. [www.christianitytoday.com](http://www.christianitytoday.com).
- Long, Richard David. "Restoring A Biblical Perspective: Equipping Leaders in the West Florida District of the Assemblies of God to Effectively Implement Church Discipline." Doctoral Dissertation, 2015.
- MacArthur, John. "*Church Discipline*." Accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 2020. <https://www.gracechurch.org/about/distinctives/church-discipline>.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *MacArthur New Testament Commentary on Matthew 16-23*, Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1988
- Masikamu, Robert. "The Role of Church Discipline to church growth." Accessed 16<sup>th</sup> November 2020. <https://rmasikamu.wordpress.com/2013/07/25/the-role-of-church-discipline-to-church-growth/>.
- McDonald, Wesley. "Church Discipline and Church Growth." *Ministry Magazine*. April, 2000. Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 2020. <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2000/04/church-discipline-and-church-growth>.
- Ministry Tools Resource Center. "*The Power of Grace in Church Discipline*." Accessed 21 October, 2020. <https://trainchurchleaders.com/practicum/grace-in-church-discipline.htm>.
- Mohler, R. Albert. *The Compromised Church*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998.
- Mutetei, Philip. "Church Discipline, The Great Omission: The proper Procedure for Discipline in the church." *African Journal of Evangelical Theology*, Issue 18.2 (1999): 107-128. Accessed 2 December, 2019. [www.the gospelcoalition](http://www.the gospelcoalition).
- Nation, A. Nation. Ministerial Secretary, Port Harcourt Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church. Interviewed by the author, Port Harcourt, 5 August, 2020.
- Nnunukwe, Anyalebechi. President, Port Harcourt Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church. Interviewed by the author, Port Harcourt 12 August, 2020.
- Nyekwere, Dave. Nnunukwe Anyalebechi, Nweke, Victor "*History of Port Harcourt Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*." Port Harcourt Conference Archive, 2018.
- Patterson, Ben. "Discipline: Backbone of the Church." *Leadership*. 4, 1983: 11.
- Pipim, Samuel Koranteng. "The Gospel of Tolerance vs. Church Discipline." *Adventists Affirm*. Nov. 15, 2004. Accessed August 5, 2016. <http://www.adventists.org/article/121>.



- \_\_\_\_\_. *Receiving the Word*. Berrien Springs, MI: Berean Books, 1996. Accessed on 15 October, 2020. [http://www.anym.org/pdf/receiving\\_the\\_word\\_spipim.pdf](http://www.anym.org/pdf/receiving_the_word_spipim.pdf).
- Prager, Dennis cited by Robert Bretsch in “Soft touch” church discipline March 1994, *Ministry Magazine*. Interview in Door, November/December, 1990, 11. Accessed 4 December, 2019. <https://www.ministrymagazine.org>.
- Pratte, David E. “Church discipline: Chastisement of Erring members.” Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> October, 2020. [https://www.gospelway.com/teaching/church\\_discipline.php](https://www.gospelway.com/teaching/church_discipline.php).
- Rodríguez, Ángel Manuel. “*A life of Discipline*.” Accessed on 28<sup>th</sup> September, 2020. <https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/church/life-discipline>.
- Serns, Dan. “*Church Discipline Is Still Needed?*” Adventist Review online. April 18, 2008. Accessed on 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2020, <http://archives.adventistreview.org/article/1789/archives/issue-2008-1511/is-church-discipline-still-needed>.
- Seventh-day Adventist church, Mile 3. Office of the Church Clerk, “Extract from Church Record.” Port Harcourt, June, 2020.
- Smieatana, Bob “*Church discipline focus of new survey*.” Baptist Press, April 5, 2018. Accessed on Oct. 15, 2020. <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/church-discipline-focus-of-new-survey/>.
- Spellman, Ched. “The Drama of Discipline: Toward an Intertextual Profile of Paideia in Hebrews 12.” *JETS* 59/3 2016 487-506. Accessed 18 August, 2020. [www.etsjets.org](http://www.etsjets.org)>JETSPDFs.
- Strong, James. *Strong’s Greek/Hebrew Definitions*, [CD ROM]. Biblesoft, 2006. s.v. “muwcar”
- Targgart, Jacob A. “A Call to Harms: Is church discipline for today?” *Journal for Baptist Theology & Ministry*, Vol. 7, Number 2 (Fall 2010):105. Accessed 10 December, 2019. [https://www.nobts.edu/baptist-center-theology/journals/journals/JBTM\\_7-2\\_Fall\\_2010.pdf](https://www.nobts.edu/baptist-center-theology/journals/journals/JBTM_7-2_Fall_2010.pdf).
- Taylor, Justin. “*Church Discipline: Principles and Reasons*.” Accessed 2 December, 2019, [www.the.gospelcoalition.org](http://www.the.gospelcoalition.org).
- Thayer Joseph, Driver Brown and Briggs, *A Greek and Hebrew Lexicon* [CD ROM] Canada, Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1993. s.v. “yachar.”
- Vine’s Greek New Testament Dictionary “Chastisement.” Accessed 14 August, 2020. [Gospelhall.org](http://Gospelhall.org).
- Weaver, Mark. “Growth, Leadership, and church Discipline,” *Gospel Gazette* vol. 6 no. 11, (November 2004), accessed 22 October, 2020. [www.gospelgazette.com](http://www.gospelgazette.com)> page18.

- Weidmann, Josh. "The Biblical Mandate and Procedure for Church Discipline." Accessed on 11 August, 2020. <https://www.joshweidmann.com/biblical-mandate-procedure-church-discipline/>.
- Wheeler, Brad "Good and Bad Excuses Not to Practice Church Discipline." *9Marks* April 4, 2018. Accessed 4 November, 2020. <https://ftc.co/resource-library/blog-entries/good-and-bad-excuses-not-to-practice-church-discipline/>.
- White, Ellen G. *Gospel workers*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1872. Accessed 20 October, 2020, <https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/35.2575#2575>.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Patriarch and Prophet," Accessed on 10 September, 2020. <https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/84.1687#1741>
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Testimonies for the church vol. 3*, Complete Published Ellen G. White Writings [CD ROM]. Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Testimonies*, volume 7. Accessed 20 August, 2020. <https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/117.1473#1492>.
- Wills, Gregory A. *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South 1785-1900*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Cited by Josh Buice in his article titled "Does Church Discipline Prevent Church Growth?" *DBG*, Jan 12, 2017. <https://www.deliveredbygrace.com/church-discipline-prevent-church-growth/>.