



# Church Discipline in Africa: A Biblical and Theological Analysis of its Significance and Practice

Mark Eshun <sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon Ghana.

## ABSTRACT

Church discipline, once a cornerstone of maintaining both the holiness and unity of the Church, has experienced a marked decline in contemporary Church life. A major reason for this shift is a fundamental misunderstanding of the term itself and its biblical and theological foundations. This paper, therefore, explored the significance and the theological foundation of Church discipline as a Christian practice. The paper analysed the practice of Church discipline in the African context. The data gathered for this research paper were from interview sessions with some church leaders, books, research articles, dissertations/theses on the subject, personal observations, examination of some Bible passages, and news published online. The result of the study showed that church discipline is not a mere punishment but restorative, aimed at guiding believers toward spiritual growth and reconciliation. There are various Bible passages that emphasize the practice of church discipline. The paper concluded by charging African churches to embrace church discipline as part of their worship. This paper offers valuable data and insights for future studies on Christian practice in a rapidly growing global Christian demographic.

### Correspondence

Mark Eshun

Email:

[markeshun77@gmail.com](mailto:markeshun77@gmail.com)

### Publication History

Received:

24<sup>th</sup> August, 2024

Accepted:

30<sup>th</sup> July, 2025

Published:

28<sup>th</sup> August, 2025

### To Cite this Article:

Eshun, Mark. "Church Discipline in Africa: A Biblical and Theological Analysis of its Significance and Practice." *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 11, no. 8 (2025): 426 - 441. <https://doi.org/10.38159/erats.20251184>.

*Keywords: Church, Discipline, African, Christian, Sin*

## INTRODUCTION

Discipline serves as the foundation for any society's growth and development. It is a cornerstone for developmental growth across all societal institutions. There is no institution that achieves advancement without exercising some level of discipline.<sup>1</sup> Church discipline has historically been a critical and foundational function within the life of the church, serving as a means of maintaining spiritual integrity and fostering accountability among believers.

Once a cornerstone for maintaining both the holiness and unity of the church, it has, however, experienced a marked decline in contemporary church life. In many Christian communities today, the practice of discipline in the church has become increasingly rare.<sup>2</sup> This diminished role has emerged as one of the visible failures of the contemporary church.<sup>3</sup> Significant factors leading to this decline are not only a matter of practice but also a fundamental misunderstanding of the term itself and its biblical and theological foundations. Many churches today, including African churches, have also struggled to reconcile the call for corrective discipline with the prevailing cultural values that prioritize

<sup>1</sup> Yisa Segun Zubairu, "Ecclesiastical Discipline as an Impetus for Christian Spiritual Growth in Africa," *Light in a Once-Dark World* 6 (2024): 229.

<sup>2</sup> Graham A Duncan, "Church Discipline-Semper Reformanda in Reformation Perspective," *HTS Theological Studies* 66, no. 1 (2010): 1.

<sup>3</sup> R. Albert Mohler, "Church Discipline: The Missing Mark," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 4, no. 4 (2000): 16.

tolerance and individual rights and freedom. According to Vang, the extreme focus of many churches on individualism and personal rights has seriously hampered a community's ability to exercise spiritual authority and church discipline.<sup>4</sup> As a result, the church's ability to effectively confront various sinful practices within its community has been compromised. The failure to properly understand and implement church discipline has significant implications for the spiritual health of the congregation, the sanctification of its members, and the witness of the church to the broader society. An action which used to be a central and integral practice in the early church has now been dismissed or ignored, often seen as an out-of-date practice and harsh in some contemporary churches. Church discipline, when rightly understood and applied, is not punitive but restorative, aimed at guiding believers toward spiritual growth and reconciliation.

While Church discipline has played a significant role in church growth and development over the years, a clear and comprehensive understanding of its restorative purpose, theological foundation and contemporary practical implementation, especially within diverse global contexts like Africa, remains underexplored and misunderstood. This has created a crucial gap in current scholarly discourse that this study seeks to address. This paper aims to fill this gap by exploring the significance and the theological foundation of church discipline as a Christian practice, highlighting that it is not a mere punishment but restorative, aimed at guiding believers toward spiritual growth and reconciliation.

The paper is structured to provide a comprehensive analysis of church discipline. It will begin by defining church discipline and identifying the various church discipline practices within the Christian community. Subsequently, the study will delve into the biblical and theological foundations of church discipline, tracing its origins and development through both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Finally, the paper will shift focus to a detailed examination of church discipline in the African context, discussing common practices, constitutional provisions in some African denominations, and critically analysing the obstacles hindering its effective implementation. The paper will conclude by reaffirming the importance of church discipline and offering recommendations for its compassionate and biblically balanced embrace in African churches.

### **Church Discipline and Its Significance**

Basically, Church discipline can be defined as the process through which sin within the church community is addressed and corrected.<sup>5</sup> Such a basic definition is very restrictive, as church discipline goes beyond the correction of sin. The subject of church discipline has many definitions. Many Church fathers and scholars have expressed their opinions on the meaning of church discipline. A few of such definitions will be considered here. According to the Expository Dictionary of the Bible, Lawrence Richards defined church discipline as “the loving action of the Christian community, committed to obedience, intending through discipline to help the brother or sister turn from sin and find renewed fellowship with God.”<sup>6</sup> Richards' definition of church discipline highlights that it is a loving and caring process where the Christian community helps a member turn away from sin and restore their relationship with God. The goal isn't punishment but guiding someone back to obedience and fellowship with God, ensuring they find healing and reconciliation in the process. It shows that discipline is about helping, not hurting, and is meant for spiritual growth and restoration.

According to Carl Laney, “Church Discipline refers to the confrontation and corrective measures taken by an individual, church leaders, or a Christian community concerning a matter of sinful behaviour in the life of a believer to produce conviction, sorrow, repentance, and restoration.”<sup>7</sup> When a believer sins, it's the responsibility of the church, its leaders, or fellow members to address the issue and offer correction. This process is meant to restore the individual to a healthy spiritual life, ensuring they repent from their sinful act and stay aligned with biblical teachings. Through discipline, individuals become conscious of their transgressions and are assisted in recovering their previous

---

<sup>4</sup> Preben Vang, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 2014), 68.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan. Leeman, *Understanding Church Discipline* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2016), 11.

<sup>6</sup> Philip Mutetei, “Church Discipline: The Great Commission,” *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 18, no. 1 (1999): 3.

<sup>7</sup> Carl Laney, *A Guide to Church Discipline* (Minneapolis MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1985), 14.

spiritual state. The practice of discipline imitates God's own nature, working to bring fallen believers who have strayed back into a complete relationship with the Divine.<sup>8</sup>

Rice's opinion on the subject of Church discipline is also worth noting. According to him, "Church discipline is a way in which individuals were brought to repentance and change of life. Its purpose was not only to maintain the purity of the whole church. Its goal was the reconciliation and healing of the persons involved, not their punishment."<sup>9</sup> Disciplinary measures within the church are exclusively directed toward believers, not those outside the faith. It operates solely within the fellowship where the transgressor maintains an established connection to the Christian community.

The significant role that church discipline plays in the growth of the Christian family must not be compromised. For John Wesley, Church discipline is important to real Christianity.<sup>10</sup> The implementation of church discipline stands as both an essential requirement for the growth and development of the church and simultaneously functions as a source from which peaceful relations among the believers emerge. The proper application of church discipline brings honor to God, while its neglect significantly dishonours Him.<sup>11</sup> Jay Quine's conclusion on the importance of church discipline is worth considering. According to him, Disciplinary practices within the church hold equal importance to proclaiming the "pure doctrine of the gospel," and "the administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ". Discipline in the church is not to be regarded as an option but mandatory, as it is a necessity if we are to obey the Scriptures.<sup>12</sup> Church discipline must be practiced regularly for the spiritual and moral welfare of the whole society and of sinful members, both clergy and lay, and to maintain a true Christian witness to the community.<sup>13</sup> The Church will only be able true and effective witness to the community if it is able to maintain holy living among the members. When members are able to prioritize holy living, their lives are able to attract others to join the Christian community.

Church discipline serves a threefold aim: honoring God's glory, preserving the church's integrity and purity, and fostering the spiritual wellbeing of its membership. It becomes a warning to the Church members and also enables the sinful believer to repent so that he can be saved.<sup>14</sup> Today's church stumbles not primarily from external persecution but from internal moral compromise, which negatively affects its wellbeing, influence, and effectiveness. Church Disciplinary actions must be implemented to restore the church to the sacred standing for which God intended it. Discipline must become an essential part of the Christian ministry.<sup>15</sup>

### **Common Church Discipline Practices**

Church discipline practices vary depending on the denomination, location, and cultural context. Some common church discipline practices may include: transfer, ministry supervision, laicization, suspension, deposition and excommunication. These practices are explained below.

Pastoral transfer is when a minister is transferred to a different church/congregation/ station within the same denomination to effect discipline. White has indicated that pastors who have been warned or demoted for misconduct are consequently transferred out of their stations.<sup>16</sup>

Ministry supervision as a church discipline practice is where a church leader is placed under the supervision of the authorities of the church. This is usually done so that the church leader who is at fault will be well-checked to avoid further indiscipline. In Zubairu's perspective on church discipline, supervision of members' behavior is an essential disciplinary measure. This view is founded on two biblical principles: first, that believers as disciples are shaped by how their conduct demonstrates obedience to the Word they've received (Matthew 15:11), and second, that authentic Christian faith

<sup>8</sup> Jacob A. Taggart, "A Call to Harms: Is Church Discipline for Today?," *Lynchburg, Virginia*, 2011, 3.

<sup>9</sup> H. L. Rice, *Reformed Spirituality: An Introduction for Believers* (Westminster: Louisville, 1991), 122.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Edward White, "John Wesley's Use of Church Discipline," *Methodist History* 29, no. 2 (1991): 113.

<sup>11</sup> Jay E Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline* (Zondervan, 1986), 18.

<sup>12</sup> Jay A. Quine, "Court Involvement in Church Discipline: Part 1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149, no. 593 (1992): 61; citing to the Belgic Confession and Don Baker, *Beyond Forgiveness: The Healing Touch of Discipline* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1984), 33.

<sup>13</sup> The Constitution of the Methodist Church Ghana, SO 150 (1).

<sup>14</sup> The Constitution of the Church of Pentecost, art. 25, sec 25.1.

<sup>15</sup> Zubairu, "Ecclesiastical Discipline as an Impetus for Christian Spiritual Growth in Africa," 236.

<sup>16</sup> Peter White, "Pastoral Transfers in Classical Pentecostal Churches in Ghana: Implications for Mission and the Pastoral Family," *Ghana Journal of Religion and Theology* 7, no. 1 (2017): 123-36.

must manifest through tangible good works (James 2:17). The church has a responsibility to actively oversee the conduct of each member as part of its disciplinary framework.<sup>17</sup>

Another form of church discipline is laicization. Laicization is an act of reducing one's rank from clergy to layman. According to Webster's New World College Dictionary, "Laicization means to dismiss a priest from his clerical state and reduce him to the lay state or secularize him. Laicization takes from a priest the licit use of his powers, rights, and authority."<sup>18</sup>

Suspension is another form of church discipline practice by which one is deprived of the privileges of membership in the church. It may be for a definite or an indefinite time. It includes temporarily relieving a church leader of their responsibilities and duties for a specific period, pending further investigation, counseling, and rehabilitation into allegations of misconduct. Suspension serves as a means to address wrongdoing, curtailing its spread and preserving the integrity of the church community.

Deposition simply means removing someone from a position of power, authority, or office. It represents a punitive ecclesiastical sanction that permanently removes a clergy member from their position and strips them of their authority to perform their clerical duties. Deposition is more severe than suspension. A member of the clergy who is deposed is entirely banned from the sacred ministry.

The most extreme form of Church discipline in the contemporary church is excommunication, where the offender is banished from the church community until a time when he or she repents. According to Luther, excommunication had always been used by the Church to discipline a few members who misconducted themselves.<sup>19</sup> Excommunication constitutes the process whereby an individual is excluded from participating in active ministerial functions within the church community.<sup>20</sup> Wyman Richardson defined excommunication as "a church's formal recognition and affirmation of the fact that a member has placed himself out of fellowship by consistent rebellion against God and His church."<sup>21</sup> John Calvin and many other reform theologians believed that excommunication is when a man is cut off from the assembly of believers.<sup>22</sup>

### **Church Discipline as a Theological/Biblical Concept**

One may ask if Church discipline has a Biblical or Theological basis. To see God's hand of discipline, one must search the scriptures and do a careful analysis of some of the biblical passages concerning how God handled people who acted against his will. Many Bible passages call for the discipline of sinful individuals. A careful exploration of some Bible passages indicates that there is more than a sufficient theological basis for the practice of church discipline. Both the Old and New Testaments provide fairly clear details on God's purpose regarding church discipline.

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

Discipline certainly existed in the Old Testament both before and after the exile of the children of Yahweh. From the opening pages of the Old Testament, God is seen exercising discipline by removing Adam and Eve from the Garden: "Therefore God sent him out of the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden, he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life" (Genesis 3:23, 24 ESV). This transpired after Adam and Eve went against God's earlier command. God's disciplinary action against the first humans manifested as expulsion from Eden, the imposition of labour and suffering as punishment for their disobedience. This expulsion from Eden is not simply a punishment; it is a

---

<sup>17</sup> Zubairu, "Ecclesiastical Discipline as an Impetus for Christian Spiritual Growth in Africa," 236.

<sup>18</sup> *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, s.v. "Laicize"

<sup>19</sup> Mpiyakhe John Kubeka, "Examining and Analysing the Traumatic Effects of Excommunication of the Male Clergy within the Pentecostal Church" (University of Pretoria, 2010), 17.

<sup>20</sup> Kubeka, "Examining and Analysing the Traumatic Effects of Excommunication of the Male Clergy within the Pentecostal Church," 8.

<sup>21</sup> Glenn G. Waddell, "The Meaning of Matthew 18: 17b in Its Historical and Literary Context and Its Application in the Church Today" (Reformed Theological Seminary, 2014), 4.

<sup>22</sup> George Montague King, "Church Discipline as Restoration: Guidelines for Its Implementation in the Seventh-Day Adventist Churches in the Caribbean Union," 1981, 351.

disciplinary action that reflects God's justice and His firm disapproval of sin.

Miriam's story in the Book of Numbers illustrates the discipline of separation from the congregation. Miriam and Aaron challenged and questioned Moses's authority and also criticised his marriage to a Cushite woman. This was the same thing as challenging God's authority (Numbers 12). God intervened by affirming Moses' authority and immediately punished Miriam with an outbreak of leprosy after rebuking her. Moses's intervention on her behalf spared her life, but God commanded that she be "shut outside the camp seven days" (v.14). Miriam spent seven days apart from the company of God's people. Significantly, the camp did not move onward in their journey until Miriam was allowed to return to the people of God.<sup>23</sup> This biblical passage is an illustration of church discipline as it talks about the consequences of challenging God-ordained authority and the importance of humility and obedience. It is a warning against the influences of pride, envy and discontentment within the Christian community. Miriam's restoration after the seven days denotes the goal of discipline, which includes repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation.

In Second Kings, Israel was punished with exile and ceased to exist as a nation because they sinned against the Lord. Second Kings 17 explains why the nation ceased to exist. The writer tells us that the Assyrian King invaded Israel, defeated Israel and carried them away to Assyria in the year 722 B.C. The sins of Israel have been described in the Bible verse below,

. . . the people of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had worshiped other gods and walked in the customs of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel, and in the customs that the kings of Israel had practiced (vv. 7, 8).

The mention of removal sounds like God's rejection: "So [God] removed them from his presence" (v. 18a); "he threw them away from his presence" (v. 20b); and "Yahweh removed Israel from his presence" (v. 23a). This removing meant exile from the land, but it meant more. Dale Ralph Davis gives a fitting summary: "I think we must understand that being removed/thrown away from Yahweh's presence is not only a matter of geography but of fellowship; it is not simply location but rejection. And nothing is sadder."<sup>24</sup> This biblical narrative is also an example of church discipline as it demonstrates the consequences of persistent disobedience and idolatry. The Israelites were disciplined due to their sinful acts. Persistent disobedience and idolatry within the Christian community are offences that necessitate church discipline. The church community must not tolerate such practices as they can contravene the sacred principles of spiritual integrity, holiness, and purity inherent to the body of Christ.

Yahweh's message through Samuel to the family of Eli indicated God's displeasure with our inability to discipline people for acting wrongly. Samuel was to convey God's message of judgment to Eli for failing to discipline his sons (1 Samuel 3:1-20). Despite devoting his whole life to God's service and holding the position of authority over all worship in Israel, Eli failed to properly manage his household responsibilities. Eli was blamed for remaining unconcerned and silent about the evil of his family, even though he had seen it.

The punishment for Eli can be seen in 1 Samuel 3: 11-14. Ignoring evil when one has the power to correct it is just as wrong as committing it by him/herself. This can be applied to a Church where people who sin are not disciplined.

Most of the Old Testament's prophets had a common message; speaking against the Israelites, and declaring God's judgment to the Israelites (kings, priests, and the people) and other nations so that they would turn away from their evil deeds which displeased YAWEH. What the prophets condemned was the false religious attitude that crept into the Israelite cult, combined with a formalistic and traditionalist concept of the ritual system. Ezekiel vehemently spoke against the priests who exploited the people and various secret practices in the temple. He described them as shepherds who seek their interest and feed on the sheep (Ezekiel 8: 34). Jeremiah condemned the Israelites for their apostasy:

<sup>23</sup> Robert R. Buchanan, "Church Discipline in the Local Church," in *A Position Paper Presented to the Members of Faith Baptist Church*, 2009, 8.

<sup>24</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Kings: The Power and the Fury* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2005), 246.

“they obeyed not, nor inclined their ear, but walked everyone in the stubbornness of their evil heart.” (11:8; 31:32). He observed that the Temple had devolved into mere ritualistic ceremonies where shallow displays of piety replaced genuine obedience to Yahweh's commands. During Hosea's era, the worship of Baal had become widespread throughout the Northern kingdom. They had made idols, and they had made sacred pillars to Baal (8:4-6; 10:1). Numerous pagan rituals were adopted by the people (Hosea 4:11,12), among them sacred prostitution, practiced in the belief that such acts would increase agricultural productivity (Hosea 4:13,14). It was for this reason that Hosea spoke against the Israelites. Micah spoke against the priests for commercializing their ministries and placing materialistic and economic consciousness far above Yahweh's interests (Micah 3:11). They were more interested in offerings than in doing what is just, loving mercy, and walking with God (6:6-8). Speaking against sinful practices and rebuking them within the Church is a practice of church discipline. The Church must not keep mute about various sinful practices that go on within the Christian community.

Ezekiel 3:20-21 calls believers to collective accountability in preventing other members of the faith from persisting in wrongdoing. Acting righteously demands candid and truthful confrontation with fellow believers to help them avoid spiritual death through sin. When such a confrontation occurs, the confronting believer is absolved of responsibility for the consequences, which then rest solely with the person who continues in their transgression.<sup>25</sup> Ezekiel was appointed as a watchman for Israel. He was not to remain unconcerned and silent. He was to warn the people to repent from their sins. God would hold Ezekiel responsible for His people if he failed to warn them of the consequences of their sins. This is another Old Testament passage that promotes church discipline. People who sin should not be allowed to wallow and die in their sins without being confronted and disciplined. While some may argue that Ezekiel's mandate was merely to warn the people of their sins, a closer exploration of the text reveals that warning and discipline are linked. In Ezekiel 3:20-21, the Prophet's warning was not a passive notification, but an active call to repentance, confronting the people with their sins and urging them to turn back to God.

### **Church Discipline from the New Testament**

Jesus Christ, in his earthly ministry, also talked about the need for church discipline. The Gospel of Matthew 18:15-17 serves as an essential Biblical basis for the practice of church discipline. Much attention is given to this passage due to the fact that the Lord Himself issues this guidance for church discipline. This text is the ground for both informal and formal acts of church discipline.<sup>26</sup>

The passage reads as follows:

<sup>15</sup> “Moreover, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. <sup>16</sup> But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’

<sup>17</sup> And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a gentile and a tax collector. <sup>18</sup> Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”<sup>27</sup>

Jesus Christ, through these teachings, described how the Church must treat believers who sin and go astray. The guidelines provided by Jesus Christ for handling sinful believers were meant for discipline and conflict resolution in the church so that the Christian community could live in peace. According to Him (Jesus Christ), if the believer who sins refuses to listen to personal confrontation and various loving efforts, there are stages of actions designed to bring the believer to repentance. If all pleas to repent are ignored, the matter goes public, i.e., to the church membership with the recommendation that he or she be treated “as a Gentile and a tax collector” (v. 17). In the Jewish custom, Tax collectors were viewed as traitors and thieves, in league with the occupying Roman forces. The Gentiles or non-Jews were seen as outside the covenant of God and considered unclean. They were not considered to be part of the mission of Christ. The Israelites saw the Gentiles to be outside

---

<sup>25</sup> Taggart, “A Call to Harms: Is Church Discipline for Today?” 15.

<sup>26</sup> Buchanan, “Church Discipline in the Local Church,” 9.

<sup>27</sup> Taggart, “A Call to Harms: Is Church Discipline for Today?” 15.

God's plans of salvation.<sup>28</sup> Fellowship and social interaction with either group were considered defiling. In Jewish practice, to associate with them was seen as risking spiritual contamination.

Art Azurdia states simply: "A Gentile was recognized as one external to the covenant community, and a tax-gatherer was regarded as an agent of the pagan government. Both were excluded from the religious life of the Jewish community."<sup>29</sup> Azurdia precisely identified the Jewish perspective and attitude regarding Gentiles and tax collectors. Both were barred not just from participating in Jewish religious activities but were effectively excluded from nearly all social interactions within the Jewish community. Laney's treatment of this issue is more thorough. According to him:

Gentiles were considered as outsiders with regard to the divine blessings promised Israel. A Gentile was not permitted to pass beyond the outer court of the temple into the sanctuary. The penalty for doing so, and thus violating the sanctity of the temple, was death. Tax gatherers, such as Zacchaeus (Luke 19:2-10), were Jews who collected revenue for the Roman government. They were regarded as traitors because they served Rome at the expense of their countrymen. Often, they overcharged people and pocketed the surplus. They represented foreign domination and corruption. Their unenviable, but lucrative, job made them the outcasts of Jewish society (cf. Matt. 9:10; 11:9; 21:31).<sup>30</sup>

W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison similarly state, "to treat someone as a Gentile and toll-collector would involve the breaking off of fellowship and hence mean exclusion from the community . . . [with] dire social and probably economic consequences."<sup>31</sup> This treatment implied being treated as a rebel and expelled from the fellowship of the church.<sup>32</sup> This practice of discipline has historically been referred to as excommunication.<sup>33</sup> Jesus indicated that the condition of excommunication should be when all other avenues of corrective action are exhausted and the victim blatantly and deliberately violates such.

Hebrews 12:1-14 presents a key New Testament perspective on church discipline. The text conveys, amongst other things, that discipline should be viewed positively as God treating believers as His children. God's discipline demonstrates His profound love and affection for His followers. He wants His children to administer discipline to one another and receive correction with receptive, non-resistant hearts. Should believers cease to be disciplined, they face the danger of being considered illegitimate children whom God might surrender to the consequences of their own wrongdoing (Romans 1:24).<sup>34</sup>

### Church Discipline in the New Testament

The Book of Acts also contains some narratives that depict church discipline. The first case of church discipline can be found in Acts 5:1-11. The passage there involves Ananias and Sapphira. The passage clearly shows that they lied to the Lord and His church. The consequence was sudden death. From Peter's response to Ananias's and Sapphira's claim; "*why have you let Satan fill your heart? You lied to the Holy Spirit and you kept some of the money for yourself*" (5:3), it can be concluded that Peter realized they were both lying. This could have been a strong case for them to be disciplined in church if they had not died. This act received severe judgment because deception, greed, and envy create devastating effects within the church community, hindering the Holy Spirit's effective operation.<sup>35</sup> People involved in such acts must be disciplined as lies within the Church can distort the peace and spiritual health of the Church.

---

<sup>28</sup> Kwaku Boamah, Ernestina E. Novieto, and Isaac Boaheng, *Introduction to Christianity: An African Reader* (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2022), 67.

<sup>29</sup> Art Azurdia, "Recovering the Third Mark of the Church," *Reformation & Revival* 3, no. 4 (1994): 61-67.

<sup>30</sup> Laney, *A Guide to Church Discipline*, 56.

<sup>31</sup> Davies W. D. and D. C. Allison, *International Critical Commentary, Matthew 8-18* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 785.

<sup>32</sup> Buchanan, "Church Discipline in the Local Church," 9.

<sup>33</sup> Waddell, "The Meaning of Matthew 18: 17b in Its Historical and Literary Context and Its Application in the Church Today," 1.

<sup>34</sup> Taggart, "A Call to Harms: Is Church Discipline for Today?" 17.

<sup>35</sup> *Life Application Study Bible, New Living Translation* (Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers Inc), 1824.

## Church Discipline in Pauline Thoughts

Paul also wrote extensively on the subject of church discipline and admonished the church to practice it to ensure holiness, restore erring believers, protect the flock from harmful influences and uphold the moral and ethical standards of the Gospel.

In 2 Thessalonians 3: 6-14, there was an issue with some people who were causing chaos within the Church.<sup>36</sup> In 2 Thess. 3:14, Paul gives a further direction on how the church should treat individuals who persist in disobedience: “If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. At the same time, do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother” (3:14-15) or admonish him as one of the family.<sup>37</sup>

This passage offers some important teachings and insight on the subject of church discipline. Some of the people were idle and engaged in gossiping. They were charged with spending their time at work. The Thessalonian church was solemnly charged to keep away from every fellow Christian who lived in idleness and thus neglected the guidance already given to the whole Church.<sup>38</sup> The disciplinary action Paul insisted upon involved community ostracism, which is considered to be a form of excommunication.<sup>39</sup> Stott has stated that the verb as used in 2 Thessalonians may imply different degrees of ostracism (a form of excommunication), ranging from the total separation as in Corinth to the more moderate avoidance of free and familiar fellowship as in Thessalonica.<sup>40</sup>

1 Corinthians 5:1-12 stands as a principal illustration of disciplinary action in the early Christian community and offers the most comprehensive framework for Paul's guidance to the church regarding church discipline implementation. Paul rebuked the Church at Corinth for tolerating a member who was involved in sexual relations with his stepmother.<sup>41</sup> Paul had heard that a member of the congregation of Corinth was having sexual intercourse with a woman who was not his wife. He was troubled to hear this, but he was far more troubled to hear that the other members were not taking any notice of this sin. They were forgetting the newness of life to which Christ had called them. Paul was telling the church to discipline a member who had offended against the customs of the church concerning the use of sexuality.<sup>42</sup> In dealing with the indiscipline in the church, Paul gave several instructions to the church at Corinth. He instructs the church: “Let him who has done this be removed from among you” (v. 2); “deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh” (v. 5); “cleanse out the old leaven” (v. 6); “not to associate with . . . or even to eat with” a sexually immoral brother (vv. 9-11); and “purge the evil person from among you” (v. 13). Paul warns in (verses 6-8) about the risks of neglecting church discipline. When church members who engage in sinful behavior are allowed to continue without correction, their actions can spread and influence others in the Christian community. It is important to address misconduct in the Church to protect the spiritual health of the entire congregation. The radical nature of this discipline is worth noting: the man is to be taken out of the fellowship of the Christian community. This is excommunication, being unable to take part in the Lord's Supper and therefore out of fellowship completely. Such a thorough discipline is important for the good health and spiritual growth of the Christian community.<sup>43</sup>

## Church Discipline in the African Context

The Christian faith arrived on the African continent through the Bible and the teachings of the early Christian missionaries.<sup>44</sup> Since its arrival, believers across Africa have drawn on biblical teachings to form their theological perspectives, divine understanding, and approaches to societal concerns. The Bible has given African Christians a way to understand who God is and why humans exist. They use

---

<sup>36</sup> King, “Church Discipline as Restoration: Guidelines for Its Implementation in the Seventh-Day Adventist Churches in the Caribbean Union,” 28.

<sup>37</sup> John Stott, *The Message of Thessalonians: The Gospel and the End of Time* (Leicester: IVP Academic, 1994), 192.

<sup>38</sup> Ronald. A. Ward, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Waco, Tex: Word Books, 1982), 171.

<sup>39</sup> Stott, *The Message of Thessalonians: The Gospel and the End of Time*, 193.

<sup>40</sup> Stott, *The Message of Thessalonians: The Gospel and the End of Time*, 193.

<sup>41</sup> Waddell, “The Meaning of Matthew 18: 17b in Its Historical and Literary Context and Its Application in the Church Today,” 26.

<sup>42</sup> John Hargreaves, *A Guide to 1 Corinthians* (London: SPCK, 1991), 55.

<sup>43</sup> David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians: Life in the Local Church* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 72.

<sup>44</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture Upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992).

the Bible as a guide for making moral and spiritual choices when facing problems in their personal lives and communities.<sup>45</sup> One significant Biblical principle embraced by African churches is church discipline. Church discipline is not a practice exclusive to Western churches, as African churches also prioritize and implement church discipline. It is a common practice that can be observed in many African churches, across various denominations and countries. It is a vital aspect of African Christianity.

African churches employ diverse forms of church discipline to address issues of misconduct that go on in the church. Some common church discipline practices among some African churches include suspension, excommunication, church transfer, ministry supervision, deposition, laicization and others. Another form of church discipline commonly practised in some African churches is the withdrawal of fellowship from a minister who has engaged in misconduct like teaching false doctrines, engaging in sexual immorality, and giving false prophecies and spiritual directions. This disciplinary measure is often taken after repeated confrontations and warnings have failed to bring about repentance and change. The primary reason for this is to protect the congregation from the harmful influence of the individual's misconduct. Below is a response from a leader in the Church of Pentecost on the type of practice:

Where an officer or member decides to teach erroneous doctrines, the leadership of the church will sit the person down and talk to him or her. If the person remains adamant, the church may not excommunicate the individual but will withdraw from the person's activities so that other members will not be affected by her wrong teachings.<sup>46</sup>

Various names are given to different disciplinary measures in Africa. For example, in the Ghanaian Akan context, excommunication is *edziyi*. The name of Suspension is *twes3n*. When the typical Akan person says *we yi wo edzi*, it means the individual has been excommunicated. Some may also interpret it as the individual being sacked from work. This could be a result of several reasons. It could be on the grounds of indiscipline, disobedience, or going against the doctrines of an organization, among others. The individuals involved may include ministers, caretakers, deacons, stewards, members, etc. Such individuals are normally summoned by church leaders to answer questions with regard to their actions. They are disciplined if found guilty.

Across the African continent, churches prioritize maintaining holiness and accountability within the body of Christ. Church discipline has helped to maintain moral standards among members of African churches, as well as uphold the values of the church. This was affirmed by Eric Nyamekye during an interview session with a radio station in Ghana.<sup>47</sup> According to him, "Excommunication as a church discipline has helped to uphold the values of the Church of Pentecost and instilled discipline in its members."<sup>48</sup> He further explained that the church has grown spiritually over the years due to its firm stance on discipline, which included excommunication. He alluded to the fact that excommunication was also practised by Apostle Paul in the Bible, and this ensured that the Church remained disciplined. This interview occurred following a period when the Church of Pentecost received criticism for its treatment of members who sinned, especially those involved in fornication.

In relation to the importance of church discipline in African churches, Jim Roberto Olang found that church discipline is greatly more important to the spiritual growth of the church than its contribution to financial and numerical growth. He recommended that church discipline should be encouraged as a tool for effective spiritual growth and discipleship in churches.<sup>49</sup>

In Africa, where Christianity has experienced significant growth, churches have developed constitutional provisions to guide disciplinary processes. The inclusion of church discipline in the constitution and church manual of many African churches serves as tangible evidence of their

<sup>45</sup> Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong, "The Bible and Public Theology in African Christianity.," *Journal of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics & Theology (MOTBIT)* 5, no. 5 (2023), 74-75.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with a leader in the Church of Pentecost, On 14<sup>th</sup> June, 2024.

<sup>47</sup> Apostle Eric Nyamekye is the Chairman of the Church of Pentecost.

<sup>48</sup> Radio interview with Apostle Eric Nyamekye on Adom Online on 24<sup>th</sup> April, 2020.

<sup>49</sup> Jim Roberto Olang, "The Relevance of Church Discipline to Church Growth in Kenya: A Case of Selected Citam Assemblies in Nairobi" (Africa International University, 2020).

commitment to the practice of church discipline. These churches show their commitment to keeping their communities holy, honest and orderly by creating clear rules for discipline. Such a constitutional document establishes clear guidelines for leadership to address moral lapses, misconduct and indiscipline. For the sake of clarity and understanding, a sample of the constitutions of some African churches will be highlighted. This is being done so that the reality of church discipline in African churches will be appreciated.

### **The Church of Pentecost, Ghana**

According to the Constitution of the Church of Pentecost:

An Officer or member of The Church who commits any of the following offences shall be disciplined in accordance with the principles of The Church; (a) Habitually visiting questionable places (b) Falling into open sin (c) Embracing or spreading false doctrine (d) Divorcing wife or husband (e) Marrying more than one wife (f) A sister getting married to a married man (g) Disobeying and showing disrespect to the Church authority at any level (h) Practicing immorality. Depending upon the gravity of the offence committed, an offending officer or member; may be publicly rebuked, may be suspended from taking active part in all Church programmes and activities, shall not partake of the Lord's Supper, shall not minister or witness on the platform of the Church, etc, may be removed from office, the office of Elder, Deacon or Deaconess may be revoked by the appointing authority. In extreme cases, an offending member/officer may be excommunicated from the Church by the Executive Council on the recommendation of the Area Head and the Area Executive Committee.<sup>50</sup>

Philip Osei-Korsah shared insight into the practice of church discipline in the Church of Pentecost. According to him, a member of the Church of Pentecost who misconducts himself or herself sexually or in any other form is disciplined by any of the following, depending on the seriousness of the offence: interdiction, public rebuke, suspension. The Executive Council may, in the worst-case scenario, excommunicate a violating member or officer from the church.<sup>51</sup>

### **The Seventh-Day Adventist Church**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church's official handbook says: "If a member falls into sin, sincere efforts must be made to reclaim him."<sup>52</sup> The manual doesn't specify exactly what these attempts should be or how to implement them. Individual pastors and congregations need to decide for themselves what steps to take to restore the member. However, the manual does make clear that when serious sins occur, the church must take disciplinary action. There are two ways by which this may be done: (1) By a vote of censure and (2) By a vote to disfellowship.

The decision to censure happens at a properly scheduled church meeting, whether the person is there or not. Censure can last for one, three, six, or nine months. During this time, the member can't vote in church elections or hold any positions. They can't be transferred to another church while censured, but they can still attend Sabbath School, join in worship services, and take part in the Lord's Supper. The most serious form of church discipline is disfellowshipping (excommunication), which means removing someone completely from church membership. According to the church manual, this should only happen after all attempts to help the person change have been unsuccessful.<sup>53</sup>

### **The Methodist Church, Ghana**

According to the Constitution of the Methodist Church, Ghana, the following are the prescriptions for a member of the Methodist Church under discipline:

---

<sup>50</sup> The Constitution of the Church of Pentecost, art. 25, sec 25.2 to 25.3.

<sup>51</sup> Philip Osei-Korsah, "Sexual Misconduct Suspension: The Impact of Guilt in Members of The Church of Pentecost, Ghana," 2023, 3-4.

<sup>52</sup> General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists. *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*. Review and Herald Pub Assoc, 2005.

<sup>53</sup> General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists. *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*. Review and Herald Pub Assoc, 2005.

Whenever a disciplinary action is taken, the name of the disciplined member shall be placed on a list of *Members under Discipline*. While a member is on this list, he shall be excluded from the Lord's Supper and from all business meetings in the Society and Circuit but shall be encouraged to continue to attend public worship; at regular intervals, the Leaders' Meeting shall give prayerful consideration to all names on the list of *Members under Discipline*. A name shall be removed from the list when restoration to full church fellowship can be recommended by the Leaders' Meeting, or when, for any reason, it is clearly of no use to keep the name on the list.<sup>54</sup> It shall be an offence for a Minister to commit the following: immorality, habitual neglect of duty, disobedience to the discipline and order of the church, disseminating doctrine contrary to the church's doctrine, unministerial conduct, maladministration, failure to comply with financial directives and others.<sup>55</sup>

The disciplinary measures for such misconduct include: interdiction and suspension, among others.<sup>56</sup>

### **The Presbyterian Church of Ghana**

According to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana:

The application of the discipline of the church shall be based on the Holy Bible. It shall be to the glory of God, the purity of the Church and the spiritual benefit of members, including erring members. The discipline shall be administered in faithfulness, love and tenderness. It shall consist of the appropriate censures of the Church to those whose conduct shall have given occasion for it.<sup>57</sup>

The Presbyterian Church of Ghana may apply any of the following censures to offending members of the Church as a form of discipline;

- a. The Church may admonish an offender by stating the offence and exhorting the offender to greater rectitude.
- b. In the event of a member of the Church committing an offence under the Criminal (Code) Act of the country, the Church shall not intervene in the due processes of the Law but shall exercise Spiritual oversight of the member in any eventuality.
- c. Rebuke, which is a severe form of censure.
- d. Suspension from communion as a censure.
- e. Suspension from office/position as a disciplinary measure.
- f. Disposition as a censure.
- g. Excommunication which is a formal exclusion from the fellowship of the Church.<sup>58</sup>

### **The Struggle to Maintain Church Discipline**

Despite the important contribution that church discipline has made towards the growth of African Churches, some African churches have struggled to practice church discipline in their congregations. While several reasons can be attributed to this happening, three major factors that have contributed to the inability of some African churches to practice church discipline include the negative perception towards discipline, the nature of membership of African Churches, and an individual's contribution to the church. These are explained below.

One of the obstacles hindering some African churches from the practice of church discipline is the prevailing negative perceptions that some Africans have about discipline. Unfortunately, church discipline is often viewed by some Africans solely as an act of punishment, reprisal or public shaming rather than an avenue for correction and restoration. Due to that, Churches are often reluctant to

---

<sup>54</sup> The Constitution of the Methodist Church Ghana, SO 169 (1 and 2).

<sup>55</sup> The Constitution of the Methodist Church Ghana, SO 156 (1 to 7).

<sup>56</sup> The Constitution of the Methodist Church Ghana, SO 156 (1 to 7).

<sup>57</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana Constitution, art. 33, sec 1 to 4.

<sup>58</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana Constitution, art. 34, sec 1 to 9.

implement disciplinary measures, fearing that they will be perceived as judgemental, harsh or unloving. This has created an environment where sin and misconduct go unaddressed in some African churches. This position has been affirmed by Hector Garcia. He posits that in Zambia and probably most of Africa, discipline is often viewed negatively due to cultural understandings surrounding retribution and cultural authority.<sup>59</sup> Culturally, in the African context, discipline is associated with punishment, revenge or retribution. When someone is disciplined, it is often seen as a way to shame or humiliate them, rather than to help them learn from their mistake. For example, in some African societies, individuals who commit certain offences may be expelled or banished from their communities. These individuals are forbidden from returning. This traditional approach to discipline is commonly perceived as punishment for the individuals. The public nature of these banishments, performed before the entire community, deliberately creates humiliation and dishonour for the offenders. This cultural understanding is deeply rooted in traditional African societies, where authority figures such as chiefs or elders carry significant power and control. In this context, discipline is often utilized to maintain social order and respect for authority.

The nature of membership in many African Churches is another obstacle hindering some African churches from the practice of church discipline. In many African cultures, family ties and community relationships are extremely strong. As a result, people attend a particular church because of their family members or friends who are already part of that Church. This can make it difficult for members to be disciplined when they misconduct themselves. When someone needs to be disciplined, it is not just the individual's issue, but also affects their entire family and social network. It can lead to conflict, gossip and even splits within the Church. For instance, if a leader disciplines a member who has a large, influential family, it could lead to resentment and division within the Church. Some church leaders are also afraid of losing influential family members to other churches, hence the failure to maintain discipline.

In many African churches, the ability to discipline certain individuals is often hindered by their significant contributions to the church, both financially and in terms of influence. In some cases, the offending individuals may have played an important role in the church's growth, whether through substantial monetary donations, funding church projects, or providing resources that have been critical for the church's operations. Additionally, their leadership positions or social standing within the community may further complicate matters, as their influence extends beyond the walls of the church. Sometimes, church members and even pastors are proud that such wealthy, well-known, and culturally recognized people are members of their congregations, so they may be reluctant to confront these individuals due to the fear of losing essential support or causing division within the congregation. Due to this, the church's moral and spiritual standards are often compromised, as the need for discipline might be overshadowed by the individual's contribution and reputation. The pursuit of cultural relevance, status, and power may cause an African church to drift from its Christ-centred foundation, making it unable to recognize when its influential members clearly contradict and compromise core Christian teachings. They gradually risk becoming blind to violations of their essential message by influential members.<sup>60</sup>

### **A Call for Balance**

The constitutional positions of the Protestants and Pentecostal churches provided above affirm the truth that African Christianity practices Church discipline as part of their worship. While some African Churches have formalized church discipline factored into their constitutions and church manuals, others adopt a more flexible approach. Such churches usually address disciplinary issues on a case-by-case basis, confronting disciplinary matters as and when they happen.

Rev. Elliot's study on the Baptist Church in Ghana reveals that disciplinary measures are sometimes implemented in an ad-hoc manner. He cites the example of a Deacon who was asked to step down from his position after engaging in misconduct. In other cases, counselling sessions are

---

<sup>59</sup> Hector Garcia, "My Thoughts on Church Discipline in Zambia," ZambiaHunt, 2024, <http://www..zambiahunt.com/2024/06/21/my-thots-on-church-discipline-in-zambiae>.

<sup>60</sup> Vang, *1 Corinthians*, 64.

offered to members who have misbehaved, providing them with guidance and support.<sup>61</sup> Nyasulu has also highlighted the practice of church discipline in Malawi and DR Congo.<sup>62</sup> In his work, he indicated that some of the practices that attracted disciplinary measures in Malawi included involvement in witchcraft, consulting diviners and involvement in a dance related to spirit possession. According to him:

Reports would come to the church that parents whose children were accused of witchcraft went to consult witch doctors to find out if indeed their children were witches, and they would be summoned to appear before the discipline committee of the church, and later to the Kirk Session for suspension from Holy Communion and other leadership roles in the church. The church even disciplines those who have been involved or are implicated in the scene, especially by consulting diviners or those involved in a dance related to spirit possession, which is believed to have some witchcraft elements. In its attempts to discourage the belief in witchcraft, the church disciplines those who have either gone for divination or accuse others of witchcraft by suspending them from taking Holy Communion for a period of time. Sometimes, if there is evidence that one is indeed a witch, depending on the accepted evidence, such people are also exempted from taking Holy Communion for some time until they repent, they will no longer be involved in such acts.<sup>63</sup>

The life of an individual in Africa who has been disciplined by the church for misconduct is marked by depression, sickness, thinking, loneliness, trauma, stigmatization, and disgrace. Some of them use it as a basis to leave the church entirely as they terminate their membership. They go on to fellowship with other churches. To the extreme, some even stop going to church at all. They make such a decision because they feel the church treated them unfairly or could not find a better way to handle the situation.

The sad event is that in some cases, the persons involved are not being permitted to explain themselves for their side of the story to be known. In some African churches, such individuals are welcomed back into the church community and even restored to their post if they are later found not to be guilty. Research conducted by Mpiyakhe John Kubeka indicated the need for churches to offer pastoral care to individuals who have been excommunicated due to a particular misconduct. Kubeka also holds the view that the accused need to be given a chance to be listened to before they are axed or stabbed.<sup>64</sup> He affirmed the emotional conditions like depression, sickness, thinking, loneliness, trauma, and stigmatization that people who are excommunicated endure. Nyamekye's charge to the Church of Pentecost on how sinful members are handled is worth noting.<sup>65</sup> According to him:

Even though Pastors and Elders of the Church must suspend and excommunicate youth found culpable in accordance with the rules of the church, it must be done in a way which will not throw the culprit into despondency and depression, which leads to abortion and suicide. When a young lady who is not married gets pregnant, she becomes fearful and depressed, especially when she is a member of the Pentecost Church, for fear of being suspended and disgraced. The Church should find a way to counsel such people instead of rebuking them in public. Pastors and Elders must adopt measures to establish good relationships with members of the Church to easily identify those going through depression for biblical counselling, which will make the individual resilient enough to bounce back.<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Rev. Elliot, a leader in a Baptist Church in Ghana on 26<sup>th</sup> March, 2025.

<sup>62</sup> Rt. Rev Timothy Kabulunga Nyasulu, PhD, is the Vice Chancellor of the University of Livingstonia. He is the current Moderator of the CCAP General Assembly (Livingstonia, Blantyre, Nkhoma, Harare and Zambia Synods). He has taught for many years and held positions in institutions of higher learning. He has served in many government and non-governments boards of directors.

<sup>63</sup> Timothy Kabulunga Nyasulu, "22. Witchcraft Accusation and Church Discipline in Malawi," *OKH Journal: Anthropological Ethnography and Analysis Through the Eyes of Christian Faith* 4, no. 1 (2020): 122-123.

<sup>64</sup> Kubeka, "Examining and Analysing the Traumatic Effects of Excommunication of the Male Clergy within the Pentecostal Church," 64.

<sup>65</sup> Apostle Eric Nyamekye was the Koforidua Area Head of the Church of Pentecost. He is currently the Chairman of the Church of Pentecost.

<sup>66</sup> Eric Nyamekye, "Pentecost Must Be Merciful to Fornicating Youth," Ghana Web, 2017, <http://ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/Pentecost-must-be-merciful-to-fornicating-youth>.

While Church discipline is essential for maintaining the spiritual health and integrity of African Churches, there is a growing concern that overly rigid disciplinary approaches may drive sinning members away from the church. In response to this, many are advocating for an approach that balances discipline with mercy and compassion. There is a theological dimension to this call as it is rooted in the example of Jesus Christ, who consistently showed kindness, empathy and forgiveness to those who had erred, rather than condemning them outright. As recorded in the Gospels, Jesus' interaction with sinners, such as the woman caught in adultery (John 8:10-11), the tax collector Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), and others, demonstrated His willingness to extend mercy, forgiveness, and restoration to those who have strayed. Such an approach creates a safe environment where members feel encouraged to confess their sins, seek forgiveness and receive guidance and accountability as they strive to live a Holy life.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the discussion, the following recommendations are given to foster the effective implementation of church discipline.

African churches and Christian communities should embrace church discipline as a restorative, biblically mandated practice, not merely as punishment. It is crucial for African communities to transform negative perceptions that view discipline solely as punishment, reprisal, or public shaming, developing instead a positive understanding that emphasizes correction and restoration. Embracing this ensures the spiritual health and integrity of the congregation, honoring God and maintaining a true Christian witness.

Church leaders (Pastors, Elders, and Governing Bodies) should actively and consistently implement church discipline, offering pastoral care, and ensuring fair processes that include listening to those being disciplined. Balanced discipline with pastoral care, mercy, and compassion should be encouraged to guide believers towards repentance, reconciliation, and spiritual growth rather than driving them away.

Influential members and sponsors within the church should recognize that personal contributions and status do not exempt them from church discipline, and understand that failing to address their misconduct compromises the church's spiritual integrity. They should understand that their financial contributions or social standing within the church do not place them above accountability. When misconduct is overlooked due to a person's status, it conveys that certain individuals are above correction, and this distorts the church's commitment to church discipline. Members of influential families and social networks within African churches should also actively support the church's disciplinary processes, recognizing that family ties and social standing should not exempt members from accountability, and prioritize fostering an environment where spiritual integrity is upheld over personal connections.

Individuals undergoing church discipline should engage actively and openly in the disciplinary process, understanding that its ultimate goal is restoration and spiritual growth, and communicate their perspective to church leaders, especially when feeling unheard or mistreated, rather than withdrawing from the community. They should seek to make their side known and to understand that the intended outcome of discipline is their spiritual recovery and reintegration, not permanent banishment.

## **CONCLUSION**

The paper has attempted to demonstrate that church discipline is very important as far as the spiritual health and growth of the Church is concerned. In understanding the meaning of church discipline, it must not be regarded as an act of mere punishment but as an avenue for restoration, aimed at guiding believers toward spiritual growth and reconciliation. Christian communities, including African Churches, must regard church discipline as an important Christian concept as it has a Biblical and Theological foundation. The various Bible passages that emphasise church discipline imply that God desires Christian communities to address various sinful practices that go on in the Church. God requires believers to show concern for fellow believers who misconduct themselves. African believers must embrace church discipline as an action of paramount importance for character formation. The

prevailing negative perceptions that some Africans have about discipline must be changed. A positive perception and attitude must be developed towards church discipline. Influential members within the Christian community must be confronted when they misconduct so that their sinful practices do not affect the growth and health of the Church.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Jay E. *Handbook of Church Discipline*. Zondervan, 1986.
- Azurdia, Art. "Recovering the Third Mark of the Church." *Reformation & Revival* 3, no. 4 (1994): 61–67.
- Bediako, Kwame. *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture Upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and Modern Africa*. Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992.
- Boamah, Kwaku, Ernestina E. Novieto, and Isaac Boaheng. *Introduction to Christianity: An African Reader*. Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2022.
- Buchanan, Robert R. "Church Discipline in the Local Church." In *A Position Paper Presented to the Members of Faith Baptist Church*, 2009.
- Davies, W. D., and D. C. Allison. *International Critical Commentary, Matthew 8-18*. New York: T&T Clark, 2004.
- Davis, Dale Ralph. *2 Kings: The Power and the Fury*. Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2005.
- Duncan, Graham A. "Church Discipline-Semper Reformanda in Reformation Perspective." *HTS Theological Studies* 66, no. 1 (2010): 1–6.
- Garcia, Hector. "My Thoughts on Church Discipline in Zambia." ZambiaHunt, 2024. <http://www.zambiahunt.com/2024/06/21/my-thots-on-church-discipline-in-zambiae>.
- Hargreaves, John. *A Guide to 1 Corinthians*. London: SPCK, 1991.
- King, George Montague. "Church Discipline as Restoration: Guidelines for Its Implementation in the Seventh-Day Adventist Churches in the Caribbean Union." Andrews University, 1981.
- Kubeka, Mpiyakhe John. "Examining and Analysing the Traumatic Effects of Excommunication of the Male Clergy within the Pentecostal Church." University of Pretoria, 2010.
- Laney, Carl. *A Guide to Church Discipline*. Minneapolis MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1985.
- Leeman, Jonathan. *Understanding Church Discipline*. Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2016.
- Mohler, R Albert. "Church Discipline: The Missing Mark." *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 4, no. 4 (2000): 16–27.
- Mutetei, Philip. "Church Discipline: The Great Commission." *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 18, no. 1 (1999): 3–28.
- Nyamekye, Eric. "Pentecost Must Be Merciful to Fornicating Youth." Ghana Web, 2017. <http://ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/Pentecost-must-be-merciful-to-fornicating-youth>.
- Nyasulu, Timothy Kabulunga. "Witchcraft Accusation and Church Discipline in Malawi." *OKH Journal: Anthropological Ethnography and Analysis Through the Eyes of Christian Faith* 4, no. 1 (2020): 122–28.
- Olang, Jim Roberto. "The Relevance of Church Discipline to Church Growth in Kenya: A Case of Selected Citam Assemblies in Nairobi." Africa International University, 2020.
- Opuni-Frimpong, Kwabena. "The Bible and Public Theology in African Christianity." *Journal of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics & Theology (MOTBIT)* 5, no. 5 (2023): 74–84.
- Osei-Korsah, Philip. "Sexual Misconduct Suspension: The Impact of Guilt in Members of The Church of Pentecost, Ghana," 2023.
- Prior, David. *The Message of 1 Corinthians: Life in the Local Church*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993.
- Quine, Jay A. "Court Involvement in Church Discipline: Part 1." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149, no. 593 (1992): 60–73.
- Rice, H. L. *Reformed Spirituality: An Introduction for Believers*. Westminster: Louisville, 1991.
- Stott, John. *The Message of Thessalonians: The Gospel and the End of Time*. Leicester: IVP Academic, 1994.
- Taggart, Jacob A. "A Call to Harms: Is Church Discipline for Today?" *American Journal of Biblical*

*Theology*, 2011.

Vang, Preben. *1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 2014.

Waddell, Glenn G., "The Meaning of Matthew 18: 17b in Its Historical and Literary Context and Its Application in the Church Today." Reformed Theological Seminary, 2014.

Ward, Ronald. A. *Commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians*. Waco, Tex: Word Books, 1982.

White, Charles Edward. "John Wesley's Use of Church Discipline." *Methodist History* 29, no. 2 (1991): 112–18.

White, Peter. "Pastoral Transfers in Classical Pentecostal Churches in Ghana: Implications for Mission and the Pastoral Family." *Ghana Journal of Religion and Theology* 7, no. 1 (2017): 123–36.

Zubairu, Yisa Segun. "Ecclesiastical Discipline as an Impetus for Christian Spiritual Growth in Africa." *Light in a Once-Dark World* 6 (2024): 229–42.

#### **ABOUT AUTHOR**

Mark Eshun is a Minister in the Methodist Church, Ghana. He holds Master of Divinity (MDiv) from Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon-Accra, Bachelor of Education (Economics and Mathematics), and Master of Education (Administration in Higher Education), all from the University of Cape Coast. He is a member of the Wesley Methodist Church, Assokor in the Sekondi Diocese of the Methodist Church, Ghana. Mark's research interest is in African Christianity, Missiology, Biblical Theology, and Church history.