

From: Pastor, Dr. David R. Downs
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To: Whom It May Concern:

Thank you for your inquiry about a person who was either excommunicated from our church or who formerly attended our church but who left and is now speaking disparagingly to you about our church. Please accept this letter of explanation in the spirit of Christian love in which it was written. We love having sweet fellowship with pastors and churches of like precious faith and practice.

Allow me to introduce our beloved church. God called my wife and me to come to Orlando 20 years ago to plant a truly biblical church which goes against the grain of the modern evangelical and reformed Baptist churches. Anyone who attends our church knows immediately how radically different we are from the modern evangelical church. When I finished seminary in the 1980's and began full time ministry I came to understand just how apostate modern evangelicalism really is. Both the Arminian branch and the Calvinistic branch of Christianity have largely become nothing more than synagogues of Satan. They have lots of good theology ruined by disobedience.

One major difference is that we take the Great Commission seriously. We go and train our disciples to go door-to-door evangelizing like Jesus trained His disciples to do (Luke 9 & 10). Christ's example was imitated by the early disciples (Acts 5:42), and Paul practiced the same model (Acts 17:17; 20:20). The persecuted church has done this for 2,000 years. We go up and down the neighborhoods in the hot Florida sun, with tears in our eyes, to compel lost sinners to come to Christ. We love the people God brings to us! We preach with passion that men should turn to God from their idols. We emphasize that God sent His Son, the glorious Lord Jesus, *to bless men* by turning them away from their iniquities. The modern notion that men can profess faith in Christ while continuing to live in sin is heresy. This doctrine is commonly known as "the carnal Christian doctrine."

You will look long and hard to find a church with an evangelistic zeal which burns hotter than Cornerstone Baptist. You will also drive many miles to find a church with a more loving fellowship than this one. God has been gracious to us in saving us from our wickedness and so we are very patient and longsuffering with others. Depending on the person, our church discipline may take months of pleadings before the incorrigible sinner forces us to send them out. However, if a man is divisive we only give one or two warnings before they are put out. That is the biblical command (Titus 3:10).

One example of our patient longsuffering is regarding a man who began teaching legalism. Legalism is a deadly heresy and his heretical views were beginning to infect the younger and weaker believers who were becoming judgmental and losing their joy. We had brought this man the gospel and rescued him out of an easy-believism church and

so we had a special love for his soul. Any church which puts in the hours of evangelism as we do understands the bond you feel for a man whom you meet doing "cold turkey" evangelism, who makes a profession of faith, and whom you disciple and nurture in the faith. There is more joy in heaven (and in our church) over one sinner who repents than in the ninety-nine who need no repentance. We thought he had repented so we rejoiced.

We noticed that this man had begun to take on some unbiblical views (e.g. sun glasses are a sin, high heel shoes are a sin, knee length skirts are a sin, etc.). We met with him hour after hour, week after week and tried to dislodge these legalistic views. We counseled him that he should read a number of books but after a few years he just got harder and more unteachable. He then adamantly announced that his views were not legalism! When thirty of our leaders sat down with him for a final meeting each leader spoke with tears streaming down their faces while he sat there unmoved. He forced us to disfellowship him. The devil has taken him in his snare.

He no longer attends, no longer is surrounded by warm, loving brothers who could guide and counsel him. He has refused to be reconciled to God and to this church. Now, he attends a theologically orthodox and spiritually dead morgue, going through the hypocritical motions and eating and drinking damnation unto himself each time he takes the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner (1 Cor. 11:29). He is further hardened in his apostasy by the wicked, false teaching pastor of that synagogue of Satan. This apostate pastor, instead of supporting our biblical, loving church discipline, and then going out and seeking the lost, instead fills his rapidly emptying church pews with disfellowshipped, unrepentant sinners and spends his time slandering and envying our church.

The purpose of this letter is to introduce and clarify our position regarding church discipline. Thank you for taking the time to read and patiently understand what we firmly believe and teach from the Bible.

First, I recommend that you please read the following position papers of our church. These can all be conveniently found on our website **CornerstoneOrlando.org**:

1. Church Discipline Principles & Procedures
2. Questions & Answers About Church Discipline & Disfellowship
3. Tell it to the Church & Hear the Church
4. False Accusations Answered
5. Restoration Steps

It will help you to understand our church's position if you will kindly consider the following points.

1. Legal Matters. We live in a society in which people, even professing Christians, are quick to bring lawsuits (1 Cor. 6:1-10)! Legal counsel has advised our church not to give out the names or to discuss any of the details of any person's sins once they have been disfellowshipped. We apologize if this frustrates you but we simply will not "give you our side of the story." We ask instead that you respect our position and extend to us the professional courtesy of trusting that our church loves and lives out God's word, and that

we have handled our biblical church discipline with due diligence. You no doubt have been told that we are harsh and unloving and have wronged someone. All we can say is that this is a lie. If you knew the godly quality of our leaders and the compassion in their counsel you would know this.

It is not uncommon for a disgruntled person to falsely accuse a church like ours, which practices church discipline, of being too quick or too harsh in our implementation of Matthew 18 (and many other relevant texts). Nothing could be further from the truth. We love the people whom God has brought to us. We do not spend many hours a week, in the hot sun, braving thugs and dogs, in crime infested neighborhoods just to turn right around and kick the person out of our church! **Any biblical pastor who regularly practices church discipline will immediately see from our church documents and policies that our church follows the biblical prescriptions for church discipline.**

Jesus taught us, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Therefore, in the spirit of the Golden Rule we ask that you handle our church the way that we handle your church in regards to church discipline. What I mean is this; we would not tolerate slanderous comments about your church from disfellowshipped people. The Bible does not teach that it is our privilege or responsibility to hear the disgruntled person's "side of the story" and then to contact their former church to get "their side of the story," to retry the case and to render a superior judgment than the church has already rendered.

It is the practice of our church toward your church to tell the disfellowshipped, disgruntled person who may visit us from your church they are not welcome in our church but are to return and resolve things with their church. Period. End of story. End of discussion. The only reason that you would treat us any differently in a church discipline situation than we treat you is that you have listened to slander about our church and have been poisoned toward us and so have secret bitterness towards our church and therefore do not trust us. God will bring every idle word into account. God hates slanderers, false accusers and gossips; they do not have eternal life (Prov. 6:12-19).

Each week that we observe the Lord's Supper in our church we warn the people that if they are at odds with their home church or have been excommunicated from another Bible believing and practicing church that they are not welcome to take the Lord's Supper with our church. We do not tolerate any person coming from a Bible believing church to come up to our leaders or our people and vent their frustration with their home church. We stop them in mid-sentence. It is not our responsibility to hear their complaint and try to determine whether their church handled discipline biblically.

Our consistent practice is that if a person has been excommunicated from a biblical church then that person must not speak to us about the matter but must return to be reconciled to their home church. God has not called me as a pastor to "grab a dog by the ears" (Prov. 26:17). I trust that their home church knows the sinner better than I do. It is pride to think that I would be able to second guess that person's own home church! It is pride for a pastor to desire to hear the sinner's side of the story, then to demand to hear the church's side of the story, and then to think that he has more wisdom than the church's

leadership team and can pass a more reliable judgment than the sinner's home church which has known him and disciplined him for months or years.

This is not a matter of "blindly" supporting a church's decision. Instead, it is a matter of one church, which claims to believe the Bible, supporting another Bible believing church's biblical act of church discipline, which was lovingly and patiently exercised by more than three dozen godly, well trained, and unified spiritual leaders.

2. The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689, chapter 26, paragraph 15. Occasionally someone or some church will attempt to justify their rejection of our local church decision to excommunicate an unrepentant sinner by appealing to the 1689. Just as they have misinterpreted Scripture to think that they have authority to reopen a case of a local church decision in a matter of church discipline, so too they have misinterpreted this paragraph from the 1689. The paragraph states,

"Again, a member or members of a church may be injured by disciplinary proceedings **not agreeable to truth and church order**. In such cases as these it is according to the mind of Christ that many **churches in fellowship together** should meet and confer together through their chosen representatives, who are able to give advice on the matters of dispute to all the churches concerned. It must be understood that the representatives assembled are not entrusted with any church power properly so called, nor have they any jurisdiction over the churches themselves to exercise discipline upon any churches or persons, or to impose their conclusions on the churches or their officers" (*The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, Rewritten in modern English, Carey Publications, 1975).

In order for this passage to apply to a local church the discipline must meet two conditions: 1) the discipline must **not be agreeable to truth** and church order, 2) the churches involved must be **"in fellowship together."** When a local church "binds" an unrepentant sinner, the Bible says that sinner has already been bound in heaven by God (Matt. 18:18). Any other church which decides to ignore that Baptist church's binding, and therefore rage against the decree of God, must prove that the binding is **"not agreeable to truth."**

This is a simple procedure. All that the other church needs to do is to read the documents of the disciplining church, which outline their church discipline procedure, to see if their procedure is "agreeable to truth." Our leadership is resolute that our clearly biblical church discipline procedure is followed carefully. Normally the unrepentant sinner who is seeking to sow discord among churches will complain that our church was abusive or harsh or did not follow our procedure, (which clearly is **"agreeable to truth"**). The other church is now put in the position of choosing who to believe. Will your church trust and believe our 35 leaders who are telling you that we do follow our discipline procedure? Or will your church believe the unrepentant sinner?

The second condition is that the church making the request to reopen the case be a church with whom our church is **"in fellowship together."** Because we believe that an "Achan in the camp" (Josh. 7) will remove the covenant community blessing of God and bring

judgment upon our whole church we are careful with whom we will and will not fellowship. Any church which chooses to side with the unrepentant sinner against our biblical church discipline, and the decree of God as stated in Matt. 18:18, is certainly a church which is in sin, and with which we are not interested in fellowship. That rebellious, proud church is an "Achan in the camp."

A more appropriate passage which does apply to anyone who has a disagreement with their home church would be **chapter 26, paragraph 13 in the 1689**, which says,
"Any church members who have taken offense at the behavior towards them of other church members, and who have *obeyed* the instructions laid down in Scripture for dealing with such cases, *must refrain from disturbing the peace of the church*, nor should they absent themselves from church assemblies or the administration of church ordinances on account of their being offended by certain of their fellow-members; but they must wait upon Christ in the further proceedings of the church" (ibid. pg. 58).

3. Full Disclosure. Our Church obeys the Great Commission, and consequently is very aggressively evangelistic. We believe and teach that any church which does not regularly go out into all of the world, beginning in their own neighborhoods, and evangelize, sounding the warning alarm by warning the wicked to turn from their wicked ways, forfeits the right to be called a church. Furthermore, any professing Christian who refuses to fervently and persistently obey the Great Commission forfeits the right to be called a "Christian." Rather, he has bloody hands (Ezek. 3:16-21; 33:1-11; Acts 18:6; 20:18-27). His hands are dripping wet with the murdered blood of souls.

Teams from our church are out evangelizing most days of the week. All of our leaders go out every week at least and evangelize the way Jesus and the disciples trained their churches to evangelize. All of our members make a covenant vow to actively evangelize, person to person, in obedience to the Great Commission. This means that we have hundreds of guests & professions of faith every year. We require all of those guests who are interested in joining to spend at least six months to a year going through an "Essentials" class getting to know us (and the commitment we believe Christ demands of all who would become followers of Christ and members of a biblical church) before we allow them to join our church.

No one joins our church without both us knowing them and them knowing us. No one can honestly say that they did not know what we teach about any essential doctrine or lifestyle practice, including our church discipline procedures. Not only does every member understand what we teach but they have openly covenanted their full agreement with what we teach. The person who has come to you and is speaking disparagingly about this biblical church, if they were a member, vowed before God and our church that they agreed to our church discipline policy, and that they would submit to it.

4. Full Agreement. Everyone who does join our church has been taught for months what we believe theologically on all of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. They are also taught what we believe and practice regarding church discipline. Each person who

joins understands and agrees fully to the process of church discipline and restoration which we teach from the Bible, and which are clearly stated in our position papers and documents. It is disingenuous for a person to leave our church saying that they never believed what we teach. If they never believed what we teach then they lied to us because we would never have allowed them to join if they did not say they were in unity with us.

It certainly is a person's right to choose later to turn from those doctrines and practices which they once told us that they upheld (see position paper, "*Questions to Ask Yourself Before Leaving a Church*"). If they do so choose then they are obligated to let us know that they have changed their views and then leave on good terms without either attempting to draw away any of our disciples after them (Acts 20:30) or speaking disparagingly about us to anyone else, especially to another church.

This point of full agreement is an important point, relevant to this issue. Our church is a "no secrets" "what-you-see-is-what-you-get" kind of church. We told them what we expect of them and what they can expect from us. That included church discipline and restoration procedures. If they have been with us a while then they have also seen it in action. It is evil and deceptive for a person later to complain about what they agreed to in their own covenant vows. It is especially serpent-like to attempt to stir up discord between two churches. Sadly, some pastors fall into Satan's trap on this point. You as a pastor may not agree to our church discipline and restoration procedure but the person who is slandering us has agreed and has signed a covenant vow to that effect. The fact that you may disagree is irrelevant.

5. Final Court. Baptist churches like ours have always believed that the local church is the "Supreme Court." If a person does not like how the biblical church discipline (to which they were in full agreement when they joined) was applied to their case, there is no higher court of appeals. The Bible teaches that the final step in church discipline before "delivering that person to Satan for the destruction of the flesh" (1 Cor. 5:5) is that the local church, as represented in their leaders, is to "bind on earth what is bound in heaven" (Matt. 18:18). This is a function of *a local church*.

Consequently, when *a local church* exercises church discipline on a sinning, professing Christian that person has already been "bound in heaven." This is not an action which another local church has the power or authority to change. When a local church, acting upon the authority of Christ, excommunicates a person God sees that person as already excommunicated! For another church to ignore that discipline does not change the fact that they have already been bound in heaven.

"The act of the congregation when rightly taken in disciplining one of its members is in reality the act of the church at large represented in a particular locality. **The discipline of one church should therefore be respected by other churches.** For, in the final analysis, all true disciplinary action **is the exercise of authority by the Lord of the church.** The Corinthian discipline was 'with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Co 5:4b), and similar authority is seen in the reference to the heavenly ratification of the

disciplinary act and the presence of Christ in their midst (Mt 18:18-19)." (Robert Saucy, *The Church in God's Program*, 122)

There is no "next step" of "tell it to another church and try to get them to see your side and vent how hurt you feel by your home church." For another church to second guess the disciplinary action of a biblical local church is arrogance and pride. Imagine, a church thinking that they can come in after the fact and overturn the verdict of a local church! God has not given them that authority.

Furthermore, they have done nothing to bring that sinner from the dregs of society and sin like we have done when we first reached out to them. They have not had the long term relationship with the sinner like we have. They have not been deeply wounded by the divisive and destructive sins of the sinner like we have. They have not wept and prayed with and for the sinner, sometimes from many months, like we have.

We have over 30 leaders, elders, and 7 deacons who have all been tested for at least 3 years or more before being put into office who know the sinner and who have labored to turn that sinner from the error of his ways. All of our leaders, elders, deacons, and small groups have gone through all of the pain, hearing the story and deliberating on how to handle this sinner in the most loving manner and yet in a way that protects the sheep. Then this new church wants to retry the case!

It is important that you understand how we feel so perhaps an analogy would help. Compare this to a rape case in which your daughter is the victim. One court hears all of the evidence, examines all of the witnesses, gathers the DNA samples, and drags the poor rape victim through all of the character assassination and embarrassing details. The qualified jury deliberates and comes to a decision and finds the rapist guilty. Should the rapist then be allowed to go to another court and talk them into opening the case all over again? If the rapist does not get the verdict he wants at the second court can he drag the case to a third? Are you feeling good about the rapist and his shyster lawyer being allowed to drag the case (and your daughter) to a fourth court which reopens and retries the case? They interview the witnesses all over again. They also get another sleazy lawyer to drag your daughter, the rape victim, through another character assassination. How long should this be allowed to go on? When does your daughter, the victim ever get closure? When do her wounds finally heal? What if the rapist repeatedly does all this knowingly just to continue hurting and inflicting pain on the victim?

God forbid! May it never be! No, no, a thousand times no! God's wisdom prevails at our church. If a person comes to our church from another church where they were excommunicated then they need to go back and reconcile in the manner in which that home church directs them. They need to submit to their God ordained leaders (Heb. 13:17). The excommunicated sinner must follow the reconciliation process outlined by their offended church. That is the process we follow toward other churches like yours and the process we expect them to follow toward us. That is the Golden Rule by which we treat your church.

6. Separation. If it truly is your church's desire to glorify God, build unity with a sister church, and minister to souls then this is the procedure we follow toward you because it is the biblical pattern. We, in turn, expect you to follow this procedure towards us. We are the offended party, not you. It is our hope and prayer that you will honor our church discipline as we would yours. If you do so, then you will have gone a long way in restoring peace, trust, and unity among our churches.

On the other hand, if it is your determination to ignore God's decree and side with those who have been bound over to Satan and to welcome them into your fellowship then our church is bound by 1 Corinthians 5:11 to refuse any fellowship with you. Those pastors or churches who willfully disregard the biblical church discipline of a biblical church like ours are self-willed and we do not desire any fellowship with them. And may God quickly remove your candlestick (Rev. 2:14-16). For any professing Christian to willfully and intentionally fellowship with a disfellowshipped person puts that professing Christian in sin. This would mean that we are then obligated to refuse to fellowship with that sinning church or Christian.

Your responsibility before God is to tell the sinner to stop slandering our church to you and to begin the reconciliation process with us. Stop listening to their side of the story. Stop being among Korah's allies. Just because this person may have attempted to recruit you as an ally into their "fight" do not allow them to put us at odds.

Tell them, "Go back, and submit to the leaders God put over you, and to whom you vowed to submit in your membership covenant" (Heb. 13:7, 17).

Sr. Pastor Dr. David R. Downs

Associate Pastor Marc Brashear