

# CHURCH DISCIPLINE

## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

The wish of God is that all who believe in Jesus should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16; John 6:39-40). However, one of the disheartening things in Christendom is how Satan keeps on stealing, killing and destroying those who at one time or the other accepted Jesus as their Lord and Saviour (John 10:10a). Man is in a race in this world and except some things of eternal values are enforced in churches, many are those who may not end well. Receiving eternal salvation is a two way process: First, God fashioning a way for everybody to tow towards clinching it. Second, the ability of every concerned person to do the needful to be saved.

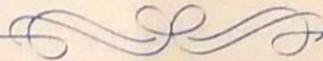
One of the major areas of which Satan steals, kills and destroys some believing Christians is in their nonchalant attitude towards embracing respect for basic church norms, rules and tenets and which in one way or the other lead to indiscipline in their walk with God. Many people worship God with gross acts of indiscipline. Among such people are those who by virtue of their improper upbringing and tutelage find it strange and uncomfortable to adapt with godly principles designed and put in place by the Church administration body. Such church principles are designed to make members conform to the image of Jesus Christ in holiness, righteousness and truth. There are also those who feel so much uncomfortable to obey simple Church laws because of the prevailing culture and norms in their country of birth and residence. Despite all these, God still expects the church to ensure that erring members are admonished or corrected in love to make them conform to His own standard.

The Celestial Church of Christ has her norms, rules and tenets as put in place by God through the founder, Rev. Pastor S.B.J. Oshoffa. In his days, Papa Oshoffa to a large extent did all he could to enforce discipline among church members even though there were still some dissidents who felt too big to be corrected. His successor in person of Rev. Pastor A.A. Bada also towed the same path especially by establishing and empowering a vibrant taskforce to enforce discipline, but upon his demise sharp divisions crept into the church with factions having different pastors, thus leading to gross indiscipline across the church rank and file. The church taskforce after Pastor Bada's practically became a toothless dog that could not hurt a fly because of the allegiance of churches to different pastors with different missions. With each factional pastor trying to woo parishes to himself, virtually nothing is in place to enforce discipline and adherence to basic norms, rules and tenets of the church at the state, regional, province, circuit, national and international levels. With such an anomaly, many shepherds and church members till today find excuses to do whatever they like.

In addition, 'money power' has promoted indiscipline in some parishes because of total dependence of the shepherds therein on the financial contributions of the erring parishioners. In such places, allegiance of members to the church norms, rules and tenets has been greatly eroded. Over the years, there have been reports of some arrogant and untrained parishioners confronting and insulting their shepherds without remorse for their actions.

Various acts indiscipline cut across the parishes of the Celestial Church of Christ all over the world. Such acts range from lack of conformity to the laid down sowing pattern of worship garments; female members wearing seductive dresses to church; abuse of prophetic and priest offices; wearing of earrings by male members; celebrating harvest programs with alcoholic drinks; spraying of money during church functions to mention a few.

It is in the light of the above that there is a need to look at how various acts of indiscipline for church norms, rules and tenets can be checked in the Celestial Church of Christ with a view to making the parishioners and shepherds conform to the image of Jesus Christ who is the author and finisher of our faith.



## CHAPTER TWO UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

### Discipline

First and foremost, the word 'discipline', according to the Advanced Learners Dictionary, is a practice of training people to obey rules or a code of behavior, using punishment to correct disobedience. The Webster Dictionary views at discipline from five angles as follows:

- a form of control that is gained by requiring that rules or orders are obeyed and punishing bad behavior.
- a way of behaving that shows a willingness to obey rules or orders.
- meting out punishment for bad behavior.
- ability to keep working at something that is difficult. In other words, a kind of self control achieved on something.
- an activity that is done regularly as a way of training yourself to do something or to improve your behavior

Discipline is a concept everyone is aware of, but few truly understand. The most successful people in life exert discipline on a daily basis. It is vital to every living being and without it, the world around us would be in chaos. To be a great and inspiring leader, you must constantly exercise restraint. Not giving into something you truly want is a sign of strength. Making the right decisions in life requires strict adherence to some guiding principles. Regardless of where you exert this self-restraint, either privately when no one is watching or in a public setting, it will help to promote achievement of your goals in your life.

### Qualities of A Disciplined Person

A disciplined person stands to possess the following qualities:

- Maintains self restraint
- Thinks very well before taking any action on the likely implications
- Always mindful of the pains of his actions or inactions may cause to his brethren and the society at large
- Ever ready to submit himself/herself to higher authorities for correction and punishments
- Places high values on the norms, rules and tenets guiding the establishment he/she belongs to
- Has a firm control of his mind and emotions
- Responsible and respectful.

### Church Discipline and Respect for Rules/Norms/Tenets

Having established the basic definition of discipline and the qualities of a disciplined person, church discipline can then be defined as personal or corporate control at ensuring conformity to the laid down norms, rules and tenets. Church discipline also involves having a total respect for all guiding principles in the bible. It is also to be as a template of which all members will be aware of the corrective and punitive measures as a guide to prevent them from going against the laid down church norms, rules and tenets. The purpose of church discipline is the spiritual restoration of fallen members and the consequent strengthening of the church and glorifying of the Lord.

However, there cannot be discipline if parishioners refuse to respect church norms, rules and tenets. By definition, respect is a positive feeling or action shown towards someone or something considered important, or held in high esteem or regard. Respect conveys a sense of admiration for good or valuable qualities. As good as respect can be, there are those who find it difficult to observe church norms, rules and tenets, thus establishing the high level of personal indiscipline. A similar thing happens in the society at large where some motorists refuse to respect traffic laws. Hence, it is not surprising to discover that he who frequently and deliberately breaks traffic laws is not likely to obey simple church norms, rules and tenets.

### Forms of Church Discipline

1. Formative discipline: This kind helps to form the disciple through instruction ( 1 Timothy 4: 12-16; 2 Timothy 4: 1-5)
2. Corrective discipline : Helps to correct the disciple through correcting sin (Matt. 18:15-17; ; Eph. 5:11; Titus 3:10; 2 Thess. 3:14-15; 1 Cor. 5:1-13).

### Reasons Churches Should Practice Discipline

1. Church discipline is biblical.
2. It promotes the health of the church.
3. It clarifies and beautifies the church's witness before the nations.
4. It warns sinners of an even greater judgment to come if they refuse to truly repent.
5. Most importantly, church discipline protects the name and reputation of Jesus Christ on earth.

### Principles For The Process of Administering Church Discipline

1. The process should involve as few people as possible
2. Church leaders should lead the process.
3. The length of the process depends on how long it takes to establish that a person is characteristically unrepentant.
4. Individuals should receive the benefit of the doubt until the evidence indicates otherwise. The bible says: "One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at

- the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established" (Deut. 19:15)
5. Leaders should involve and instruct the congregation as appropriate. In this situation, information should be disseminated on a need for the congregation to know the basis. The church may also need to go public so that her image is not compromised in case of a public allegation.

### Aims of Church Discipline

Church discipline aims to do the following for erring members:

- (i) Warn
- (ii) Save
- (iii) Protect
- (iv) Present a good witness to Jesus.

In the Celestial Church of Christ, there ought to be procedures to follow to make members become disciplined before God. Since the ultimate aim is not to throw the water away with the baby (**Galatians 6:1**), corrective steps as outlined by Jesus should be followed. First and foremost, before any corrective disciplinary measures can be adopted, it is necessary to categorize the acts of indiscipline into two:

- (a) Acts of indiscipline committed by an individual but not open to the church members
- (b) Serious acts of indiscipline deliberately committed by an individual right in the church to the full glare of other parishioners. Also are acts of indiscipline committed in the public but that can smear the name of the church.

In enforcing discipline across the rank and file of the church, the church administrative body must stand firm without compromise. This may be handled using the corrective measures provided by Jesus in Matthew 18: 15-17. These corrective measures are in four steps.

Step 1: Telling the erring person his sin alone

Step 2: In case he still proves unrepentant, some witnesses can be taken along to tell him where he has gone wrong

Step 3: Telling it to the church

Step 4. Peradventure he still proves stubborn, he can then be treated as an outcast.

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## CHAPTER THREE ENFORCEMENT AGENTS OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

With regards to the constitution of the Celestial Church of Christ, the enforcement of church discipline in the local parishes lies with the **PAROCHIAL COMMITTEE** together with the shepherd in charge. This body is expected to rise up and correct with love all acts of indiscipline among the church members.

By extension, at the International/National/Provincial/Regional/Circuit/state levels, **TASKFORCE** as it used to be in the days of Rev Pastor Bada should be reintroduced to enforce discipline. The duty of the task force is to go round the parishes without prior information. Recommendations for disciplinary actions for erring churches who fail to correct anomalies should be made by the taskforce to the presiding pastor's representatives.

However, whoever is chosen to be a member of the Parochial committee or taskforce must ensure personal compliance with discipline because you cannot correct or recommend people for disciplinary actions if you don't come with clean hands. Shepherds must unite with the parochial committee members and vice versa with a common objective of wiping away acts of indiscipline from the church. Their work is basically to call erring church members to order, make them comply with laid down tenets and codes of conducts and come out with disciplinary measures as standards without bias, fear and undue favoritism.

The Bible says:

**"Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?" (Romans 2:21-23).**

## Expected Attributes of Members of the Enforcement Agents (Parochial Committee/Taskforce) of Church Discipline

These members must possess the following attributes:

1. They must come with clean hands at all times to earn respect
2. No eye service or favoritism to cover the wrongs of erring persons in the process in enforcing discipline
3. No hidden agenda whatsoever is asserting discipline
4. They must be humble, gentle and peaceful but very firm in establishing discipline
5. They must be upright
6. They must have integrity in their relationships and in how they treat others in the church
7. They must be spiritually mature .
8. They must be respectable
9. They must be an example to the flock
9. They must not authoritarian
10. The must be able to correct open sin



### CHAPTER FOUR COMMON ACTS OF INDISCIPLINE IN THE CELESTIAL CHURCH OF CHRIST AND THE RECOMMENDED DISCIPLINARY MEASURES

In the Celestial church of Christ, acts of indiscipline cut across the rank and file. As church members are guilty, likewise are some shepherds. In some of the parishes of the church, total compliance with norms, rules and tenets is somehow not embraced. Among the acts of indiscipline commonly established in many parishes together with the recommended disciplinary measures are stated in Table 1.

**TABLE 1:**

#### ACTS OF INDISCIPLINE AND RECOMMENDED DISCIPLINARY MEASURES

	COMMON ACTS OF INDISCIPLINE BY MEMBERS IN THE CELESTIAL CHURCH OF CHRIST	RECOMMENDED DISCIPLINARY MEASURES
<b>A</b>	<b>AMONG THE SHEPHERDS</b>	
1	Charge and bail syndrome	The erring shepherd should be made to face disciplinary committee set up by the State Evang/Regional Head/Diocesan Head/Pastor and should be given a fair hearing. However, if found guilty, he may be sanctioned as deemed fit . The disciplinary measures may include: (i) strict warning if the offence is at first instance (ii) imposition of monetary fine (iii) suspension from being a cleric for a time period deemed fit by the disciplinary committee (iv) demotion in rank and office.
2	Abuse of church fund and property	-ditto-
3	Sexual immorality	-ditto-
4	Entering altar without loins	-ditto-
5	Non-prophet shepherds wearing prophetic garments every time	-ditto-
6	Deceitfully extorting church members financially	-ditto-

7	Harassment of church members	-ditto-
8	Prescribing and doing un-celestial spiritual works for people	-ditto-
9	Encouraging acts of indiscipline among church members	-ditto-
10	Drinking alcohol and encouraging members who drink it	-ditto-
11	Spiritual manipulation	-ditto-
12	Established case of membership of evil secret society	-ditto-
13	Divide and rule method of running a parish either by the shepherd	-ditto-
14	Shepherds travelling out of their country of residence without approval from higher authorities	-ditto-
<b>B</b>	<b>AMONG THE PAROCHIAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS</b>	<b>RECOMMENDED DISCIPLINARY MEASURES</b>
15	Insubordination or any other gross act of indiscipline by any member of the parochial committee to the shepherd	The parochial committee to suspend such a fellow from participating in their meetings.
16	Member(s) being inactive	(i) Warning at first instance (ii) removal as a member
17	Embezzlement of church fund	(i) Restitution of embezzled money (ii) Removal from office
	<b>AMONG THE PROPHETS/PROPHETESSES</b>	<b>RECOMMENDED DISCIPLINARY MEASURES</b>
18	Abuse of the prophetic office by prophets in terms of prescribing and doing un-celestial spiritual works for people	(i) Stopping church members from having access to such erring prophet (ii) Suspending the erring prophet from church between 3 and 6 months
19	Prophets taking church members out for messages during the sermon	The shepherd and head of prophets in each church to wade in to stop such.
20	Established case of charge and bail	(i) To be given first warning to desist. (ii) Barred from writing their prophecies. Can be suspended as well
21	Turning personal houses into spiritual clinics for consultation	(i) To be given first warning to desist. (ii) Barred from writing their prophecies. During worship sessions (iii) Suspending the erring prophet from church between 3 and 6 months
22	Established case of membership in evil secret societies	Suspension from church until it is proven that they have denounced such societies
23	False prophets especially those wearing prophetic garments but are non-prophets	A committee comprising members such as the state/regional/diocese/ shepherd/real prophets should call such people and warn them to derobe immediately.
24	Taking church members out for personal prayers without the knowledge and approval of the shepherd	(i) To be given first warning to desist. (ii) Barred from writing their prophecies. (iii) Suspending the erring prophet from church between 3 and 6 months

25	Prophets who refuse to attend prophetic services	(i) To be given first warning to desist. (ii) Barred from writing their prophecies. (iii) Suspending the erring prophet from church between 3 and 6 months
26	Prophets who deliberately give premeditated false messages to cause disharmony, infighting	Suspending the erring prophet from church between 3 and 6 months
<b>C</b>	<b>AMONG THE CHOIR MEMBERS</b>	<b>RECOMMENDED DISCIPLINARY MEASURES</b>
27	The choir members unnecessarily elongating the thanks offering by refusing to stop when asked to.	The Choir master should be given strict warning to make corrections to avoid sanctions
28	The choir instrumentalists leaving the church auditorium while the sermon is going on, especially during harvest celebration	(i) The Choir master should be sanctioned for failing to control the erring instrumentalists. (ii) The erring instrumentalists must be publicly queried right in the church worship session.
29	Choir members who deliberately refuse to attend rehearsals and want to compulsorily enter the choir stage	Suspension from choir for a given period not more than 3 months
<b>D</b>	<b>AMONG THE PREACHERS</b>	<b>RECOMMENDED DISCIPLINARY MEASURES</b>
30	Abuse of the church pulpit by preachers especially those who use the opportunity to settle scores, rebuke others, blackmail and cause division among members	(i) Stopping erring person from preaching until there are signs of remorse. (ii) The shepherd must be empowered to stop such erring preachers even in the course of making the sermon.
31	Preachers staying on pulpit far beyond time allocated (45 mins maximum) except the Shepherd gives grace	(i) Preachers must be given signal when they have 5mins more to stay on pulpit. (ii) Those who deliberately flout the order after the 3 <sup>rd</sup> time must be suspended from the pulpit for a period of 3 months
32	Preachers mounting pulpit on Sundays without overall robe	No one should be allowed except the Shepherd gives the grace
33	Preachers moving round in the church when preaching.	The Shepherd should call the preacher to order immediately during his sermon and command him to go back to the pulpit.
<b>E</b>	<b>AMONG THE YOUTH MEMBERS</b>	
34	Disrespect for the shepherd. For example, not willing to comply with the Celestial norm of kneeling down while addressing the shepherd in the church	The erring youth member should be called upon and lectured why it is good to adhere to such a Celestial norm.
35	Feeling to big to be corrected	At such an instance, such a person should be rebuked in the church openly by the parochial committee and the shepherd for others to learn

36	Deliberate acts of arrogance to church elders	Such a person should be called upon and warned seriously. A repetition of such an act after being warned should earn the erring person open rebuke by the parochial committee and the shepherd for others to learn
<b>F</b>	<b>ACROSS ALL CHURCH MEMBERS</b>	<b>RECOMMENDED DISCIPLINARY MEASURES</b>
37	Male elders that are non – clerics wearing the regalia of ordained clerics	(i) Those who are already into it should be advised against such (ii) All church parochial committees must be empowered to prevent members from doing such (iii) Any erring shepherd who allows such should be sanctioned
38	Church members using ranks not officially given to them by anointment	They should be derobed without favour
39	Church male elders and shepherds sitting in the altar on Sundays without full regalia	Shepherds to correct must live by good example by ensuring he complies first and then caution erring church members
40	Church male elders and shepherds entering the altar on any day without loins	Shepherds and sidemen must live by example and enforce others to comply
41	Church male elders hugging in the altar during service	The shepherd and sidemen in each church to wade in
42	Female members using un-celestial type of lace on their sultanas	(i)The women council in churches must be empowered to stop such acts. (ii) frequent announcement (iii) Shepherd's wife to live by example (iv) Shepherds in churches to ensure strict compliance without bias and favour.
43	Female members avoiding sanctification after menstrual cycle	The shepherd must watch and teach adequately to make corrections
44	Indecent dressing such as wearing of transparent sultanas, seductive dresses especially by the female members	(i) The women council in such a church to be fined for condoning such attitude. (ii) Erring female members must be called privately and corrected (iii) The parochial committee must be firm on this correction without bias and favour
45	Excessive make up by female members during worship sessions	Respected adult female members not guilty of such act should be empowered in each church to deal with such a situation by correcting erring members with love
46	Members who are above 10 years and are non-prophets wearing four corner garments	They should first be educated on the dangers in such act after which they should be given a maximum grace of 1 month to sew the proper garment
47	Male members wearing earrings to the church premises	Erring members no matter who they are must first be called upon privately for correction after which if there are no changes they may be openly corrected during service.

48	Drinking alcohol and entertaining guests with it during church programs	(i) Affected churches must be heavily fined. (ii) Shepherds of such churches must identify the culprits and preach against it heavily. (iii) Open rebuke
49	Spraying of money during church programs in the church	(i) Church parochial committee to stop and discourage such acts (ii) Erring churches to be fined heavily
50	Making and receiving calls during service	Confiscation of phones which can only be retrieved with a fine
51	In-house physical fights and use of sharp abusive words among church members	(i) The parochial committee must settle grievances without bias and favour (ii) unrepentant members must be suspended (iii) letters of apology from erring members at the completion of terms of punishment
52	Children loitering in the church during service	Parents to pay fine
53	Abuse of church fund by church member/ or parochial committee member(s)	(i) Erring member to refund with interest. (ii) Erring member must not be allowed to touch church fund again
54	Abuse of church property e.g choir musical instruments, church bus	Erring member must be sanctioned as deemed fit.
55	Church members loitering about the premises during worship session	The shepherd and sidemen in each church to wade in
56	Holding of meetings when the service is on	The shepherd and parochial committee to wade in and stop.
57	Side talks by members during sermon	Erring members must first be warned before open correction during service.
58	Deliberate spreading of falsehood and rumours with the intent to cause disharmony	Erring members should be identified and rebuked by the parochial committee
59	Fight for seniority among members	The shepherd and parochial committee to straighten records of seniority among the church members
60	Church members attending services without bible	Churches must stop proving bible for members. They should be made to see why they must appear before god with their bibles.
61	Back biting among members	Erring members must be sanctioned as deemed fit
62	Open acts of insubordination and arrogance from church members to shepherds	(i) withdrawal of such erring members from taking part in church programs (ii) where the erring member has no remorse, he or she can be suspended unto a period of 3 months after which there must be evidence of repentance and letter of apology.
63	Disregard for organogram in the Diocese either by the shepherd or Parochial committee members or church members in making reports over all issues	Complainants must be made to reroute their reports appropriately
64	The male laities competing with shepherds in the church	A communiqué from the HOD to address this. Parochial committee to enforce the communiqué
65	Junior shepherds not honouring the senior shepherds	The Diocese must create a data base to straighten records of seniority.
66	Rowdiness during church programmes	The sidemen must be empowered without fear to correct erring members

## CHAPTER FIVE BENEFITS OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

In churches where discipline is well established, there are some benefits. These benefits are listed as follows:

1. Church discipline calls a professing believer out of sin. For instance, a man in the Corinthian church was having an affair with his father's wife, and the church approved of it. Paul commanded the church to exclude the man so *that* the man might repent, be saved, and come back to the church (1 Cor. 5:5).
2. Church discipline warns other Christians about the danger of sin. Paul told Timothy that if a church member sins, he/she should be rebuked publicly so that the rest may stand in fear (1 Tim. 5:20).
3. Church discipline purifies the church as a whole. Paul writes, "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" (1 Cor. 5:7). Excommunicating an unrepentant member keeps sin's destructive influence from spreading and results in a purer, holier, healthier church.
4. Church discipline presents non-Christians with a more faithful corporate witness. (Matt. 5:16, John 13:34-35).
5. Church discipline promotes the glory of God. Christians should be conspicuously holy, not for our own reputation but for God's (1 Peter 2:12). As the church increasingly reflects God's loving and holy character, we put God's glory on display for all to see. This is why God made us (Gen. 1:27, Isa. 43:6-7, Eph. 3:10)
6. Church discipline ensures the preservation of the gospel in its purity, and obedience unto the commands of Christ in its integrity
7. No church can, without the faithful exercise of discipline, hope for God's blessing (Rev. 2:14, 3:16).
8. The Church must be preserved from public scandal and bringing dishonour upon the name of Christ.
9. The hands of the obedient and faithful are strengthened by discipline when the disobedient are reprovved, convinced and persuaded.
10. The offenders are distinguished from the visible body of the Lord's people, so that they cannot do further damage by public reproach or influence in relation to the Church.
11. Saves erring church members (James 5:19-20 1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15)
12. Sends the correct message to those in the church (Acts 5:11; 1 Timothy 5:20)
13. Keeps the Church pure (1 Corinthians 5:6-7 Deuteronomy 13:5 Ecclesiastes 8:11)



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