

Appraisal of discipline in the Seventh-day Adventist church through the re-reading of Matthew 18:15-20

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Abstract

This paper reappraises the implications of Matthew 18:15-20 relative to the Seventh-day Adventist Church guidelines on dealing with its regular (baptized) members who err and or persist in their errors. Furthermore, the paper examines the overall structure of the book of Matthew 18 to provide an overview of the book to aid in a better appreciation of the contextual meaning of the passage under study. Ultimately the paper employs the exegetical tools of contextual/inter-textual study, historical background, and the etymology of the words "heathen" and "publican" to discuss the uniqueness of the Matthean text as it relates to the use of ecclesia, a term that is exclusively used by Matthew in the synoptic gospels. Finally, the paper examines the immediate context of Matthew 18:15-20 and explores the theological implication of the passage to define a Bible-based template for the application of disciplinary measures in the church. The research, if properly understood, holds the potential of great benefit for Church leaders in particular and the Church at large.

Keywords: Matthew 18, Seventh-day Adventist, Discipline, Church, Members, Ecclesia.

Introduction

The Bible is an invaluable guide for every Christian on how to deal with erring ones.¹ The principle of restoring sinners to the paths of righteousness outlined in the scriptures is unequivocally stated and it is anchored on the redeeming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. A drifting away occurs when an individual church member harbors or entertains the spirit of indifference for too long. The indifference soon gives way to lethargy, which should be visible to the community of believers and is indicative of the individual's danger of becoming a backslider who requires restoration. It is at this stage if not much earlier that the individual, who is on the verge of backsliding, requires the concerted effort of the church community at restoring him/her to the spiritual *status quo ante*. Invariably, this ought to be the case regardless of the magnitude of his/her spiritual shortfall.²

The Matthean account on the procedure for handling erring members, as contained in the eighteenth chapter of his gospel, is perhaps the best template for the Church in matters of discipline. This template, by its elaborate step-by-

¹General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventist, *Seventh-Day Adventist Church Manual*, (Silver Spring MD: Review & Herald's Publishing Association, 2015) 56.

²Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, (Ontario, Canada: Pacific Press, 1984), 7:260.



step articulation, comes close to being a doctrinal injunction considering its explicit directives and the categorical injunctions to the injured party before involving the church. Ultimately, this template goes on to spell out exactly what the church should do in the case of the erring brother refusing the mediation of the church, i.e., "Let him be unto you like a publican or heathen" (Matthew 18:20).

A cursory reading of this passage may lead to misconstruing its actual intent which, in turn, may result in misunderstanding its import and a contextual misapplication. The bone of contention in the passage under review is the instruction to treat the incorrigible erring one as "a publican" and "a heathen." The question that immediately comes to mind is, "Does treating the erring one as a publican and a heathen entail an act of abandonment and/or excommunication?" One may also ask, "What is the purpose and intent of the instruction to treat an incorrigible brother as a publican and a heathen *viz-a-viz* the plan of salvation in the gospel of Christ?"

In accentuating the restorative advantage accruable to disciplinary measures, Tyler Price proposes that, the passage should be viewed in the light of the erring not being cut off from the body of Christ but rather be severed from the fellowship of the community of believers³ thereby, offering them the opportunity to abhor their cause and consequently return to the path of true repentance and grace.⁴ Balthasar Hubmaier, collaborates with this stance by asserting that the said action of banishment should not be interpreted or deemed, as a means of expulsion of the stumbling believer from the Church but instead it should be a form of alienation within the flock with the intent of stimulating his/her consciousness for a crave of better and renewed relationship with God.⁵ A school of thought on the other hand subscribe to the idea of the literal application of the passage to suggest the treatment of the erring with contempt and fiendishness the same way the heathen and tax collectors were viewed and handled in the society.⁶ Moreover, an understanding of the term 'discipline' may be better appreciated in the light of its Greek rendition "*chatartizo*" which is used thirteen times in the New Testament to connote the idea of a restorative atmosphere that is intentionally created for the reclamation of a backslider.⁷

Church and Ecclesia

Ascertaining the meaning of words and their origin is significant in understanding the context as well as the intent of an author in every literary composition. The term "Church" traces its origin from the old English and

³ Tyler Price, A Restorative Model of Church Discipline
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337367152>, November 2019, 3

⁴ Ibid. 3.

⁵ Balthasar Hubmaier, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*. Edited and translated by H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989), 424.

⁶ Roger E. Dickson, *Dickson's Teachers Bible: International King James Version with Commentary and Encyclopedic Study Guide* (Cape Town, SA: Africa International Mission, 2001), 1109.

⁷ Carl J. Laney, "The Biblical Practice of Church Discipline." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148, no. 590 (April 1991): 353.

German word “*Kirche*” and in Scotland “*kirk*.”⁸ The old English version for Church, *cirice*, *circe* are the equivalent for Greek, *kuriakon* which was initially pronounced as *kuriakos* or *kyriakon*.⁹ The term *kuriakos* suggests something related to the Lord which by inference could also accommodate its usage in relative terms.¹⁰ There are over one hundred occurrences of the Greek term *ecclesia* in the Septuagint, an Old Testament Greek translation that was also common during the time of Christ.¹¹ The related Hebrew word *qahal* and the Greek *ecclesia* which, among other usages, could also mean assembly the same way as used in the Greek as indicated in the following passages: assembly of Prophets (1 Sam 19:20); assembly of Soldiers (Num 22:4); assembly of God's people (Deut 9:10). Its usage in the Old Testament particularly regarding the assembly of God's people invariably influenced its usage in the New Testament times to describe the newly found community (*ecclesia*) given the first Christians were mostly Jews who used the Greek translation of the Old Testament.¹² Suffice it to say that there must have been a very deep familiarity of the word *ecclesia* among the Greek-speaking Jews being the Septuagint translation for the word *qahal* which by translation means the congregation of the people of God.¹³ Further, Thayer defines *ecclesia* as “Any gathering or throng of men assembled by chance, tumultuously.”¹⁴

Matthean Gospel and Ecclesia

The three occurrences of the term “*ecclesia*” in the synoptic gospels are only recorded in the Matthean account (Matthew 16:18; 18:17a; 18:17b). The seeming hostile nature of the tone of the gospel to Jews as against the friendly tone towards the gentile has propelled some scholars to postulate that the author of the gospel could not have been a Jew.¹⁵ On the other hand, some scholars did not grapple with the question of accrediting the source to a Jew, Matthew as the anti-Jewishness is seen by them as a tool of an argument for Jewish Christian setting.¹⁶

⁸Webster's New Explorer Encyclopedic Dictionary (Federal Street Press: Spring Field, MA, 2006), 321; The Correct Meaning of "Church" and "Ecclesia"

livingword@aggressivechristianity.net Accessed September 18, 2020,

⁹Ibid., 321.

¹⁰Ibid., 321.

¹¹James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1961), 103

¹²Ibid., 103.

¹³R.T France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*, (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1998), 211.

¹⁴Thayer and Smith, "Greek Lexicon entry for *Ekklesia*" "The NAS New Testament Greek Lexicon," 1999.

¹⁵Scot McKnight, Grant R. Osborne, *The Face of New Testament Studies*(Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, 2004), 275; K.W Clark, The Gentile Bias in Matthew. "Journal of Biblical Literature," 66, 1947, 165-172; J.D.G Dunn, "The Question of Anti-Semitism in the New Testament Writings of the Period," in *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways*, ed. JDG Dunn(Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992; reprint Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 177-211.

¹⁶D.R.A Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, (Cambridge: University Press,1967), 147,148; G. N Stanton, Ezra, and Matthean Christianity. "A Journal of Theological Studies" 28, 1977, 67-83.

The Concept of Discipline in the Biblical Perspective

The principles of the Scriptures remain the sole guide of the Church in every facet of its operation at every given era. The concept of Church discipline appears to have traced its origin from an era before Christ. This aspect of this research explores the scriptural windows to the practice of Church discipline taking into cognizance the Old and New Testaments periods.

Old Testament. Numerous shreds of evidence of discipline whether directly imposed by God or by a group of individuals under the dictates of God abound. The sins of the sons of Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu incurred the instant wrath of God (Lev 10); Jeroboam the son of Nebat rebellious act that met the punitive measure of God by being struck down (2 Chron 13); Jezebel's sin (2 Kings 9); Uzza's disobedience (2 Sam 6); the express command by God to put to death the false prophets (Deut 13); other numerous sins, sabbath desecration (Neh 13:15-22); adultery, bestialism among others that attracted punishment by death (Lev 20).

New Testament Era. The practice of discipline was observed among the New Testament Jews as evidenced in the miraculous healing of the blind whose parents entertain fears that they could be put out of the synagogue as legislated by the Jewish leaders (John 9:22). Further, the book of Acts contains the records of events that appear to suggest Church discipline, for example, the deaths of Ananias and his wife Sapphira which occurred as a result of willful disobedience to the laid down principles of giving (Acts 5). Other relevant passages include the summon of Stephen before the Jewish council which consequently led to his murder (Acts 7). The Pauline epistles also give some insights into Church discipline. Probably the most applicable among them is 1 Corinthians 5:1-12 in which Paul rebuked the Church of its tolerance of a member that was engaged in a sexual relationship with his stepmother. Paul clearly instructed that; such a person should be removed from among them. Also, speaking on those who stir controversy in the Church, the Apostle Paul recommends a disciplinary measure (Titus 3:10-11). Other relevant passages include 1Tim 1:19; 5:19-21; 2 Thess 3:14-15; Gal 6:1; 2 Cor 2:6-8).

The redemption of a sinner from the power of sin and its effect is very central to the general plan of salvation of humankind into the kingdom of God. (Col 1:3). Jesus reiterates the need for regeneration of character as a prerequisite to having access to the kingdom of heaven in his discourse with Nicodemus (John 3:1-5). Consequently, the children of God are invited to pursue a lofty standard of holiness by a daily experience of a consecrated life in Christ Jesus (1 Pet 1: 15, 16). However, as human plunges every effort in the realization of this aura of spirituality temptations will often assail him/her and the tendency to fall to sin becomes possible. In the light of this potential ordeal, heaven has made all the necessary provisions for the reclaiming of a sinner through Jesus the advocate (1 John 2:1).

The Two major sections (Old and New Testaments) of the Bible demonstrate the need to promptly deal with willful and rebellious sin. The emphasis on the need for the removal of sin through display measures that bring safety to the assembly of God's children is obvious in the Bible. For instance, while

addressing the Israelites on the covenant God required the uncircumcised to be cut off from His people given the fact that the uncircumcised has broken his covenant (Gen 17:14).

The Structure of Matthew 18

The eighteenth chapter of the book of Matthew begins with the account of the personality clash among the disciples of Jesus which attracted the intervention of their master. The quest for superiority ignited the spirit of struggle to find the most supreme spot in the mistaken kingdom of God (an earthly kingdom instead of heavenly). There was the spirit of rivalry among the disciples which was a potential threat to their unity and had the tendency to breed unbridled strife, envy, and unmitigated rivalry that will consequently nip the mission of the nascent body of believers off bud if left not unchecked. Jesus practically demonstrated to them the need to cultivate childlike humility as a prerequisite for having access to the kingdom of God (18:1-6). Jesus indirectly rebuked their ill-bred spirit of pride and unhealthy competition.

Further, Jesus discusses the mission of the church in tending and reclaiming the lost in the parable of the lost sheep. He emphasized the need for the Church to channel all its efforts towards seeking the strayed ones (7-14). The next discourse is on settling a dispute and dealing with the erring ones. It also draws a line of action should the erring refuse to subject to the authoritative voice of the Church (18-20). The response of Peter opens up another page of discourse on the measure of forgiveness where Jesus alluded to the limitlessness of forgiveness (21-22). The chapter concludes with the parable of the forgiven debtor who in turn did not forgive his debtors and consequently risked the pardon earlier granted him by his former creditor (23-35). From the above structure, the entire chapter of Matthew 18 focuses on the three essential elements (humility, reconciliation, and forgiveness) that perpetually contribute to the growth of the Church at every given era of its existence.

Analysis of Matthew 18:15-20

Matthew 18:15-20 is the range of the immediate context which forms part of 18:1-32 (the larger context). The passage begins with a new instruction, “moreover, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him alone. If he hears you have gained your brother.” (vs. 15). This imperative though different from what he earlier said in the preceding verses, but is closely related in the train of thought to the discourse of the parable of the lost sheep as contained in the larger context. A deep concern is here expressed by Jesus on the need to work for the good of those who have gone astray (vs 12) as the potential candidates of heaven.

The contextual emphasis of this passage is on forgiveness and reclaiming the backslidden whose condition should not be seen as irreparable. While it is important to engage in this effort of redirecting the lost to Jesus, the need to observe the highlighted steps (engaging more than a witness) is highly recommended. The practice of meeting the offender in private is embedded in

the standard Jewish custom of dealing with the offender as shaming him publicly immediately after the offense was considered an act of sin.¹⁷

“As a heathen or Tax collector.”The seeming difficulty in interpreting the contextual meaning of “publican” and “heathen” has endangered a great deal of scholarly efforts and with varied conclusions on the application of the imperative contained therein. For instance, Roger Dickson postulates that in as much as the tax collectors and heathen were shunned by the Jews this statement is suggestive of proffering a workable tool for dealing with the offended that persist in their wrong without adhering to the counsel of the constituted Church authority.¹⁸ Wielding a scholarly stance in opposition to this position is Nichol who opines that, “This does not mean that he [sinner] should be despised or shunned or neglected.”¹⁹ Credence is further lent on this by the voice of White who echoes that the erring should be treated with compassion and tenderness as a sheep that has gone astray seeking for redirection back into the fold. ²⁰This idea parallels the pattern of corrective measures that form a confluence between discipline and love as presented in Hebrews 12:4-13. The amalgamation of these two basic principles in administering discipline is essential in fulfilling its ideal goal. In his treatise, the author of the book of Hebrews further aptly highlights the import of discipline by stating that those who are not disciplined are not fittingly grafted into the family of God’s children; for the demonstration of God’s love for His children is reflected also in the chastisements they experience from Him (vs 8). It is however, worthy of note that it is not God’s desire to subject his children to a perpetual state of alienation from the full fellowship of the Church but rather to spur him/her to experience a healthier spiritual condition.

The idea of establishing a matter before more than a witness (18:15) is a reaffirmation of what is contained in Deuteronomy 19:15 “One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimonies of two or three witnesses. The testimonies of the witnesses will either set the accused free (loosed) or make him imprisoned (bound). The original rendering of this statement in the Greek text for the phrases ἔσται δεδεμένα and ἔσται αὐτελευμένα (would have been bound and would have been loosed respectively) as against the “would be bound” or “would be loosed” as used by some conveys the idea of having any earthly decision being determined or guided by the decision above.²¹ By implication, the ratification of the Church’s decision in heaven is dependent on its adherence to the laid down principles in the Bible in the cause of treating the erring.

¹⁷Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, (InterVarsity: Downers Grove, 2014), 90.

¹⁸Roger E. Dickson, *Dickson’s Teachers Bible: International King James Version with Commentary and Encyclopedic Study Guide* (Cape Town, SA: Africa International Mission, 2001), 1109.

¹⁹“As a Heathen man and a Publican” [Matthew 18:17] *Seventh-Day Adventist Bible Commentary* (SDABC) rev ed, ed, Francis D. Nichol (Washington DC: Review & Herald, 1976-1980), 5:448.

²⁰Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Washington DC: Review & Heralds, 1980), 345.

²¹Ibid., 345.

"Where two or three gather." Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. (Mat 18:19 NAS) "For where two or three have gathered together in my name, there I am in their midst." (Mat 18:20 NAS). The contextual meaning of this statement may not be far from the two witnesses mentioned in the preceding verse (15, 16). Thus, the gathering of the two is to resolve a matter of dispute. The Jewish judicial system requires the two witnesses to be the first to execute the judgment of the court (Deut. 17:7) and or "offer prayers at the Jewish execration given at the Jewish excommunication or they could represent a prayer for repentance and consequent forgiveness of the excommunication person."²²

By turning down the counsel of the Church the erring has separated himself from the constituted body of believers and relegated his status to the level of the tax collectors and or heathen.²³ However, this does not imply that the erring should be neglected as the heathen and tax collectors were not exempted from the plan of salvation as demonstrated by Jesus when confronted while eating and associating with sinners and tax collectors (Mark 2:13-17). The inclusive nature of the work of salvation wrought by Jesus has necessitated putting every machinery in place to ensure an in-reach effort towards reclaiming the erring one just as it could be done to a heathen or tax collectors who are in dire need of a Savior. Meanwhile, the members need to exercise caution so as not to share in the sin by either participating or condoning the evil through any form of false sympathy while making this effort.²⁴

The assembly in the Roman cultural milieu had as one of its functions among others a community Centre where important decisions were taken inclusive of meting punitive measures on the erring member of the community. This disciplinary measure assumes varied forms and degrees depending on the gravity of the offense (public beating and or dismissal of the erring member from the community).²⁵

Assessment of Disciplinary Procedures in the Seventh-day Adventist Church

Whereas the Seventh-day Adventist Church emphasizes the nurture and care of its members, it leaves no stone unturned in safeguarding the purity of her faith within the ambit of Holy Writ. The injunction of Christ regarding how a Christian ought to deal with an offending brother as found in the book of Matthew 15:18-20 is strongly upheld by the Church and has been its guiding principle in the area of discipline. The Church is not oblivious of the fact that it has been saddled with a lofty responsibility of the care of human beings who are God's properties, purchased with the precious blood of Christ, and as such,

²²Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* 91; Roger E. Dickson, *Dickson's Teachers Bible: International King James Version with Commentary and Encyclopedic Study Guide*, 1109

²³"As a Heathen man and a Publican" [Matthew 18:17] *Seventh-Day Adventist Bible Commentary* (SDABC), 5:448.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 448.

²⁵Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 91.

every form of impulsive and or prejudicial spirit should be shunned to circumvent dimming their hope. ²⁶ Commenting on the steps as outlined in Matthew 15, Ellen G. White sounds a word of caution in the choice of words while addressing the offender as quoted in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church policy book thus: "Go to the erring one, with a heart filled with Christ's love and sympathy, and seek to adjust the matter. Reason with him calmly and quietly. Let no angry words escape your lips. Speak in a way that will appeal to his better judgment."²⁷

Moreover, if this effort fails the need to repeat it by involving other witnesses as stipulated in the passage must be applied before the matter is finally brought before the Church should the previous procedures be in a stalemate.²⁸ The Church at a duly called Church board meeting reserves the exclusive prerogative of dropping the name of the erring member from its record books should he maintain his defiant position. However, no group of people or committee should vote for the dropping of the erring membership without exhausting these steps.²⁹

Reasons for Church Discipline

Several reasons for one to be subjected to discipline are enumerated in the Seventh-Day Adventist policy book. Among these is a denial of faith in the fundamentals of the gospel or beliefs of the church or teaching contrary to the same. Violation of any of the laws of God as found in Exodus 20:1-17 which among others include worship of idols, heterosexual relationship, Sabbath-breaking, and habitual falsehood. It also requires disciplinary actions for the production or distribution of pornographic materials, physical violence including violence in the home circle, and any act of fraud or willful misrepresentation in business. Other reasons are; disorderly conduct that bears reproach upon the Church, and Persistent refusal to recognize the constituted Church authority and the manufacture or sale of alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs, or their usage.

Process of Discipline in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church

There are two ways by which disciplinary measures are observed depending on the gravity of the offense and the circumstances surrounding it; by a vote of censure or removal from membership.³⁰ The vote by censure is usually carried out when the degree of the offense is not considered too grievous to attract the displeasure of the Church by removing the name of the erring from the church records.³¹ This act accomplishes a twofold purpose of expressing disapproval of the disgrace brought upon the Church and it provides the opportunity of transformation of character, repentance as well as a space for grace to work on

²⁶Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, 2015, 56

²⁷Ibid., 57.

²⁸Ibid., 57.

²⁹Ibid., 57.

³⁰Ibid, 63.

³¹Ibid., 63.

their pitfall.³² The period of the censure ranges from one to twelve months based on the nature of the offense. It is noteworthy that the decision of the Church board is not implemented until a recommendation is made to the entire Church baptized membership at a duly called business meeting presided by an ordained or licensed minister where the final decision will be taken to this effect based on the majority vote.³³ The censured member may be reinstated after the expiration of the censure when he demonstrates the fruit of genuine repentance.

However, in the case of removal of name readmission into the Church entails rebaptism.³⁴ In a situation where the disciplined member feels unfairly treated by the local church without any effort by the church to review the case after appealing, he could appeal to the higher organization (conference executive committee) for reconsideration of his case.³⁵ If after a scrutiny of the case by the conference executive committee it has been discovered that an injustice has been inflicted on the member in question the committee may recommend a reinstatement into the membership as the former action is rescinded.³⁶ This effort enhances the Church's objective as it stimulates its consciousness of being an institution where justice, equity, and fairness should prevail. Consequently, a climate of amity is very likely to assume a robust and ebullient embrace among the membership as against a frosty and fractured relationship that could ensue.

The Theological Significance of Matthew 18:15-20 in the Contemporary Church Discipline

The Scriptures as a guide of faith have clearly outlined the steps to be taken in the process of administering discipline. The most important principle for the application of Matthew 18:15-20 in the contemporary Church as it relates to the matters of disciplinary measures for redemptive purpose rather than merely satisfying the requirements of the Church policy in imposing the discipline. A collaborative effort to this effect is made by Waddel-Glenn who asserts that "Every step of Matthew 18 must be taken with the purpose of and heart inclined toward promoting repentance, reconciliation, and restoration to the covenant community."³⁷ The position assumed by the unrepentant, "heathen" or "tax collectors" places the church in a higher state of responsibility in ensuring the salvation of the strayed member just as they could to a heathen for whose purpose the church exists. Speaking in this direction, Wyman L. Richardson postulates that, "It was after all, to Gentiles and Tax collectors to unworthy people, that the hope of the gospel was offered in Christ. So we are now to treat our fallen brother as a missionary would treat one who has not heard. We are to explain the gospel to them, reintroduce them to what it means to be a Christian, and plead with them for their return."³⁸

³²Ibid., 63.

³³Ibid., 64.

³⁴Ibid., 67.

³⁵Ibid., 67.

³⁶Ibid., 68.

³⁷Ibid., 68.

³⁸Wyman Lewis Richardson, *Walking Together: A Congregational Reflection on Biblical Church Discipline*, (Eugene, OR: Wipe & Stock, 2007), 101.

The act of carrying out disciplinary measures has some benefits that cannot be undermined. One of the benefits is stressed by E.G White thus: "The evil must then be made to appear as it is, and must be removed that it may not become more and more widespread.³⁹ Another blessing that is accruable to this effort is it enhances the spiritual growth of the church and its prosperity.⁴⁰ In some cases, the corrected erring members appreciate this measure as they come to the understanding that they have been severed from the strings of evil.⁴¹

Benefits of Church Discipline

There are benefits accruable to disciplinary actions. Disciplinary measures serve as a tool to deter others from trailing the path of the transgression. In his case, such individuals and the community of believers are protected from such shortfalls. This is articulated in the admonition of Apostle Paul to Timothy thus: "Them that sin rebuke before all that others also may fear" (1 Tim 5:10). This fear should not be taken from the standpoint of intimidation but as an avenue to provide the erring with an opportunity to become more deeply rooted in the faith as they take the religious teachings and instructions with a more sense of seriousness. Moreover, church discipline offers the church the opportunity of experiencing a more solid and better relationship in its spiritual experience: "Purge out, therefore, the old leaven that ye may be a new lump" (1 Cor 5:7). Thus, when church discipline is administered in love and under the laid down instructions as contained in the scriptures, it has the potential of benefiting the church of the preservation of its spiritual and moral integrity.

Repentance and Consequences

The act of punishment has a redemptive purpose. However, the Bible teaches that forgiveness does not necessarily remove the consequences of sin. When Eve and Adam sinned, God exercised his act of mercy upon them by promising them salvation, but he ousted them out from the Garden of Eden (Gen 3: 16-19). God offered a warning to them ahead about the baleful result that will attend any form of disobedience. (Gen 2: 16, 17). God was angry with the children of Israel when the ten spies bore report that was displeasing to God which eventually engendered an open rebellion. At the intervention of Moses, God said: "I have pardoned according to thy word: But as truly as I live...surely they shall not see the land which I swore unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me to see it." (Num 14:20-23). Despite the fact they were forgiven but were left to face the consequences of their action; they lose entrance to the land of Canaan.

Another important point of reference is how God handled the case of David after committing the sins of murder and adultery. Having been Confronted by Nathan with his sins, David prayed for forgiveness, and his prayer is recorded in Psalm 51:1-19. However, the prophet Nathan declared that "because by this deed thou has given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die" (2 Sam 12:13, 14). On another

³⁹Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 7: 236.

⁴⁰Ibid., 667.

⁴¹Ibid., 667.

certain occasion, God said to the children of Israel through his prophet, referring to the Babylonian captivity, "I will not make a full end of thee, but correct thee in measure, yet will I not leave thee wholly unpunished (Jer 46:28). The foregone have demonstrated that repentance does not preclude an act of corrective measures through punishment in the context of redemptive purpose. The Bible reveals the fundamental truth that God's judgment is always prompted by love (Pr 3:11). Suffice it to mention from the foregone that, the central purposes of the punishment of God are corrective and redemptive nature.

Recommendation

Having examined the contextual meaning of Matthew 18:15-20 relative to the Seventh-Day Adventist Church procedures for discipline the following recommendations are proffered:

- a. Discipline should be actuated by love regardless of the enormity of the offense.
- b. Before meting out any discipline the Church should ensure that the laid down principles which include the efforts of the witnesses are followed. No case should be treated at the Church board without observing these steps.
- c. The congregation should by no means excommunicate the erring member but should endeavor to engage every means of winning him back into the fold.
- d. The Church should intentionally devise ways of encouraging and giving hope to the strayed by forming committees to this effect.
- e. The church should guard against any form of sentiment that could permeate the fabric of its decision in disciplinary related matters to enhance unity and peaceful coexistence among the members.

Conclusion

The gospel of Matthew provides the Church with a viable blueprint on Church discipline. The Church is a place where the salvation of men is given a paramount priority. As good as it, the Church may be in proving a loving atmosphere for the growth of its members, efforts are put in place to ensure the maintenance of a lofty standard of abhorrence of sin that has the tendency of bringing reproach to the cause of God and consequently dims its appellation "Light of the world." All avenues for saving the lost as outlined in the scriptures should be exhausted to provide the erring with the opportunity of repentance as a candidate of heaven.

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