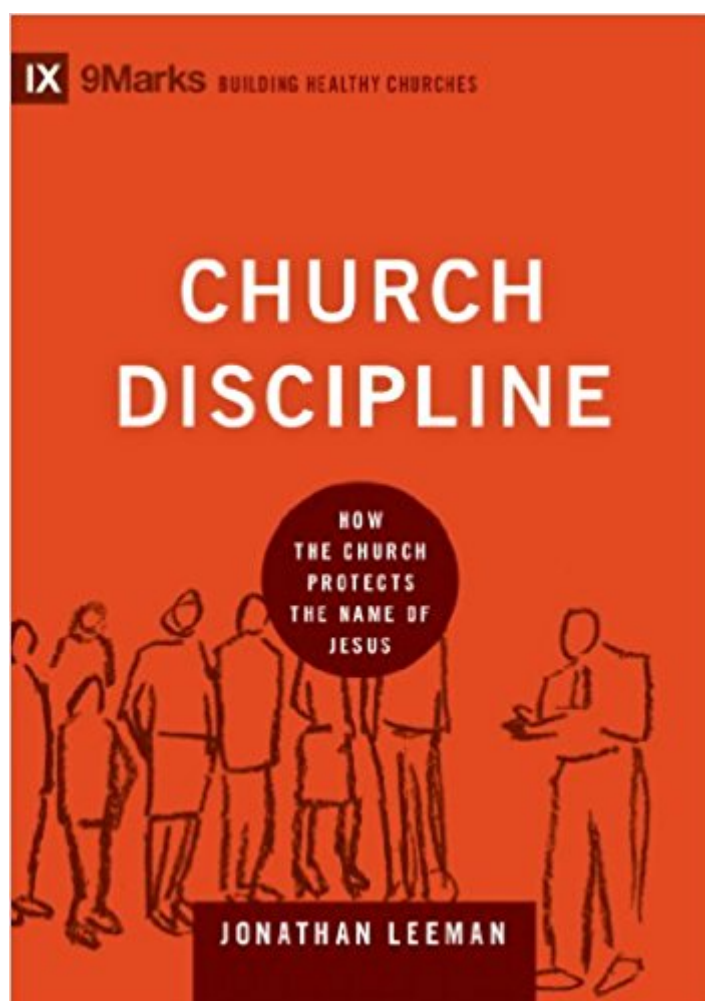


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# Church Discipline: How The Church Protects The Name Of Jesus (9marks: Building Healthy Churches)



## Synopsis

Church discipline is essential to building a healthy church. So how exactly do we practice church discipline? Jonathan Leeman helps us face the endless variety of circumstances and sins for which no scriptural case study exists, sins that don't show up on any list and need a biblical framework to be corrected appropriately in love. Here is a contemporary and concise how-to guide that provides a theological framework for understanding and implementing disciplinary measures in the local church, along with several examples of real-life situations and the corresponding responses.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Leeman airs the dirty laundry of our lives and talks about how to clean it up. He ventures into the tough area of pastoral application, which is sure to rouse good discussions, but again and again I found myself convinced. You will not fail to be helped by this book. Brief and biblical, wise and practical—this is the book on church discipline we've been looking for."—Mark Dever, pastor, Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, DC; president, 9Marks "Far too few biblically grounded, pastorally sensitive books on church discipline remain in print today. I know of none that is as exegetically accurate, practically relevant, and filled with real-life case studies of how churches should deal with a wide variety of common situations. On top of all this, Leeman is helpfully succinct and remarkably clear. Highly

recommended!

•Craig L. Blomberg, Distinguished Professor of New Testament, Denver Seminary

“This book is an outstanding, one-of-a-kind theological work. Leeman has shown that church discipline is an essential dimension of the disciple-making process, and thus an extension of the preaching of the gospel itself. He shows that our overly-narrow focus on the number of decisions we might actually be hindering us from guiding people in the repentance that leads to life. I believe this will be the definitive work on church discipline, and our elders plan to use this work as our guide.

•J. D. Greear, pastor, The Summit Church, Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina; author, *Gaining by Losing: Why the Future Belongs to Churches that Send*

“One of the most neglected activities in the church today is the ministry of loving, courageous, and redemptive church discipline. This book provides a clear vision and practical guidelines for this vital aspect of life together in the body of Christ. I have seen many people freed from entangling sin by churches that lived out these principles, and I pray that more and more churches will recommit themselves to this restorative ministry.

•Ken Sande, president, Relational Wisdom 360; author, *The Peacemaker*

“Until such a time as the church of the Lord Jesus Christ becomes, by definition, a disciplined church, it will remain largely the undisciplined church. Leeman, of 9Marks, has provided another perceptive and important guide to establishing a healthy church through the exercise of unique Christian responsibilities, love, and discipline. The pastor with a desire to see a healthy church will profit immensely from this read.

•Paige Patterson, president, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Jonathan Leeman has become a discerning reader of the contemporary church. He combines biblical truth with sage counsel in this much-needed book on church discipline. If you’ve been afraid of that subject in your church, or unsure of how to lovingly correct sinning saints, this book provides the biblical argument and practical advice you need to get started well. This book will fire your imagination, stir your soul, and light your path.

•Thabiti Anyabwile, pastor, Anacostia River Church, Washington, D. C.; author, *What Is a Healthy Church Member?*

“Many different ideas enter the minds of Christians when they hear the words church discipline—punishment, judgment, critical, unloving, excommunication. Jonathan Leeman sets the record straight by explaining what Jesus meant when he first introduced this concept of spiritual accountability. Leeman explains the purpose of church discipline and why it is necessary. The case studies illustrating situations requiring church discipline are worth the price of the book!

•J. Carl Laney, Western Seminary; author, *A Guide to Church Discipline*

Jonathan Leeman (PhD, University of Wales) is the editorial director for 9Marks and an elder at Capitol Hill Baptist in Washington, DC. He has written for a number of publications and is the author or editor of a number books. He is also an occasional lecturer at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and teaches adjunctively for the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Jonathan lives with his wife and four daughters in a suburb of Washington, DC.

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Discipline isn't a popular idea among many of America's evangelical churches. Although some understand the need, others have set the practice aside, fearing that it'll damage their efforts to reach the lost and the hurting. "Church leaders want to reach outsiders, but this good desire produces a bad temptation--to slim down the gospel to something skinnier," writes Jonathan Leeman in *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus*. "It's comparatively easy to talk about God's grace, unconditional love, and faith. It's harder to talk about God's holiness, Christ's lordship, a Spirit-given repentance, and the new covenant reality of the church. All of these things make demands on a person. They produce the need for accountability. And when you build a church on a gospel that makes few demands and offers little accountability, church discipline just doesn't make sense." (Location 149)

In this short book, Leeman connects discipline with discipleship, offering a gospel-centered framework, practical case studies of how to approach particular situations and solid advice for church leaders seeking to bring about a proper emphasis on this difficult aspect of discipleship and growing in godliness. It should be noted upfront: this is not a book for those looking to be convinced of the need to practice church discipline; it's for the church leader who is already convinced. This approach has its strengths and weaknesses, but overall, readers will be left more or less satisfied. A key strength is readers don't need to go through an exhaustive apologetic for the practice, although Leeman offers a broad definition of discipline. He writes, "In broad terms, church discipline is one part of the discipleship process, the part where we correct sin and point the disciple toward the better path. . . . a Christian is disciplined through instruction and correction, as in a math class where the teacher teaches the lesson and then corrects the students' errors" (Location 287).

Leeman's connecting of discipleship and discipline is extremely important as one can't be a disciple without discipline. We err and thus require correction

and instruction. That's what church discipline offers. From that perspective, it seems odd that anyone would be uncomfortable with such a practice, doesn't it? How could a genuine disciple not want to grow more and more into the image of Christ? How can we do such a thing apart from loving, corrective discipline? Indeed, he says as much himself: "Formal church discipline works best when members already know how to give and receive loving correction. They do it in their homes. They do it over lunch. They do it gently, carefully, and always with the good of the other person in mind. They don't offer corrective words selfishly--just to 'get something off the chest.'" (Location 797) Perhaps most challenging is Leeman's assertion that "by abstaining from discipline . . . we claim that we love better than God loves. God, after all, 'disciplines those he loves,' and 'he punishes everyone he accepts as a son' (Heb. 12:6, NIV)" (Location 259). Some readers will take issue with this--these are incredibly strong words. But they're ones we need to seriously consider. If God disciplines those he loves, why would we not do likewise, in accordance with Christian conduct and character? Does a loving father avoid disciplining his children? If we answer no, then we cannot avoid acknowledging the necessity of discipline within the church. It's no wonder then, Leeman's emphasis on church membership in the context of discipline. Indeed, it's fair to say that discipline doesn't really happen outside the context of church membership. But what is church membership? "It's a declaration of citizenship in Christ's kingdom," Leeman writes. "It's the declaration that a professing individual is an official, licensed, card-carrying, bona fide Jesus representative" (Location 479). Thus, if one is a church member, he is subject to the authorities placed over him by Christ (that is, his local church). This is something I fear many of us fail to really understand, particularly in a highly individualistic culture such as ours. But, Leeman writes, "Congregations need to understand therefore that part of being a disciple of Christ is knowing how to be corrected and taught by other disciples of Christ. Pastors need to encourage church members to build relationships with one another in which correction and instruction are normal. They should teach them that a gospel-grounded individual learns how to invite correction, and how to tenderly give it." (Location 1436) While there's great strength in how Leeman has set up the need for discipline in the context of love for one another, some readers might struggle with his emphasis on discipline in the context of a congregational polity. It makes sense that this would be the focus of his study as this is the model of governance his church follows, but for those of us in churches following a different structure, much of the practical aspects of case studies don't apply. I would have loved to see a little more of the practical outworking of discipline from an elder-led context to balance things out; but really, this is a minor qualm. Church discipline isn't something that the church can give up, no matter how noble our desire to eliminate as many barriers as possible to people coming to Christ. "Local churches exist,

in part, to protect us from ourselves. It's the brothers and sisters around us who love us and are committed to our good that help us to see the things we cannot see about ourselves. We are not the world's experts on 'us'" (location 1448). For the good of others, the good of ourselves, and for the sake of Christ's name, we must be willing to practice church discipline. If you need a guide to help you get started in teaching your congregation about the importance of this practice, this book will be a great blessing to you.

Leeman is clear from the outset that this book is not intended to convince you of the case for church discipline and thus skips discussing this major issue. He does note this and gives a small section to the issue but I wish he would have explained the texts a little more - but again, that is not the purpose of this book. His main thesis of church discipline being protecting the name of Jesus was felt throughout the book. He spends the beginning portion of the book setting a framework for discipline and trying to explain what it should look like. He then spends the vast majority of his time giving different scenarios that could happen within the church and how he believes the Bible calls us to act in each. I found these scenarios very helpful as it gave a very practical and hands on view of church discipline. Overall this was a quick and easy read. Assumes church discipline (which I agree with) and congregational baptist polity (which I slightly disagree with). Good application through "case studies." This will not be a likely reference source when dealing with the issue but would be a good thing to give to a lay member of the church to better understand the issue.

Excellent book on Church Discipline. Jonathan Leeman has really thought through the subject of "Church Discipline," and has written a book every church member, elder and pastor should read.

My greatest disappointment is that this book lacks biblical scholarship to support its many bold statements. Here we see a theology for "church discipline" built on almost entirely on just two passages: Matthew 18:15-20 and 1st Corinthians 5. The former, and this is not discussed, is not even delivered from Christ to his Church. The Matthew 18 sequence of discipline is pronounced by the Lord before the church existed and was commissioned (later in Mt 28). This raises a red flag too large to ignore. Leeman makes many a supposition that are never explained by scripture, including: Saying as an explanation of Matthew 28, "Jesus authorizes the local church to use the keys of the kingdom to stand in front of a confessor, to consider the confessor's confession, to consider his or her life, and to announce an official judgment on heaven's behalf."

That passage appears rather to tell the church to "go into all the world and make disciples." If not this passage, then what other scripture describes the church as "confessor"? This is never explained. Also: "The local church, in other words, has heaven's authority for declaring who is a kingdom citizen and therefore represents Jesus's name on earth." No scripture follows. Also: "We should remember that the local church's power is declaratory. A church does not make someone a citizen of the kingdom. But it does have the responsibility for declaring who does and who does not belong to Christ's kingdom." No scripture follows. In this invention of responsibility (to identify who is a legitimate believer and who is not) Leeman acts as though he is oblivious to Romans 8:19-23 and Revelation 20:15 that suggest instead that only the Lord knows whose name is written in the book of life. There are further assertions that flow apparently only from human logic, "somewhere there is a line in between sins that you expect of Christians, and sins which make you think that someone may not be a Christian." How is this consistent with James 2:10 that puts any one sin on the same level as the whole of the Law? And how does sinning make you not a Christian? Has Leeman ever read Romans 7 and Paul's own struggles with sin? Leeman's book will lead the church way out onto thin ice. Where is the call for grace like we see in Joseph, "a righteous man, who sought to put his wife Mary away privately when he thought she was guilty of adultery? Where is the call to "let he who is without sin be the first to cast stones" when Jesus intervened when the "local body" sought to discipline an adulterous woman according to the law? Matthew 18, as rightfully later described by Leeman, as needing to involve "the least number of individuals as necessary. In this passage, the sin problem is mentioned first one-on-one, then with two or three witnesses, then with the local assembly the "ecclesia." But the emphasis by Christ in telling this passage is not to explain a pathway to discipline, rather he places the focus on finding any and all means to try and lead someone to repentance--all with discretion and honor in mind. Christ's mission when he delivered these words was first and foremost to call the sinner to repent. During this, Christ's first visit to Earth, he came to save. When he returns again, it will be to judge. We, as his church awaiting that return, ought to avoid judging others and focus our efforts on leading people to the good news, that they too can be forgiven. We should fear the judgment of God, not the judgment of his local body. Yes, the world is

watching the Church. What will they see? A bunch of self-righteous judges? Or a body that shares the undeserved grace that they themselves received? We need the Church to be a safe place for sinners. The "bruised reed will in no way be cast out" there. Yes, there is a place for church discipline. It is mentioned in scripture among the early acts of the church. Its existence is undeniable. But I am still waiting for a scholarly and scriptural exposition on that subject and how it makes sense in the context of the church's mission to a lost world. I fear that Leeman's book is simply a shiny object that will be grabbed with glee, then misapplied by well wishing and immature believers. The world is watching. Will they see Christ in the Church? Or someone's idea of Christ? Christ humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:7, 8).

This was very helpful to the congregation. It gave insight into how to deal with various issues that impact the church members. It helps in positive correction. It also leaves the individuals whole and positive about their spiritual lives.

Nine Marks rarely misses the mark and they are spot on here.

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