

A Sample Letter to Your Congregation

The following letter reinforces the biblical principle that every member in the body of Christ is subject to church discipline as taught in Matthew 18: 15-20, including those in leadership. I provide this as a template for you to use in your own effort to contend for church authority within your own congregation.

To: (fellow congregants or leaders)

I'm writing to bring an urgent matter to your attention. The Bible clearly teaches that all Christians are subject to church discipline as described in Matthew 18: 15-20. No one in the body of Christ should be exempt from this biblical mandate. It is a loving and redemptive process—one our Lord has given every congregation to exercise when necessary as a means by which individual members and entire congregations can resolve issues of sin in a redemptive fashion, maintaining the integrity of the Church, and thereby provide a compelling testimony to a watching world.

At [CHURCH/ORGANIZATION], it appears that lay members of the congregation have been entirely removed from this important process. Instead others, who are not even members of our local body of believers, are hired or invited to advise the church without the authorization of the congregation and to assume a role only those in the congregation should exercise. At the very least, the congregation should have the opportunity to address and manage its own affairs. In the congregation's effort to do so, it is reasonable for someone other than a local member of the church to help facilitate this process (at the church's request), but such an individual(s) is not authorized by Scripture to impose any decision that disregards the autonomy and ultimate authority of the congregation. Such authoritative decisions are the exclusive privilege and responsibility afforded each individual member of a congregation and by extension, that particular congregation as a whole.

When a church neglects this responsibility, the consequences can be devastating. Brothers and sisters, God has provided, in the congregation, sufficient gifts, aptitudes, and callings necessary to evaluate, discern, investigate, and determine matters regarding its own affairs. The spiritual aptitude and responsibility inherent in each congregation to navigate these waters has been provided by Christ, for the body of Christ, to the glory of Christ. The Scriptures indicate Jesus has tremendous trust and absolute confidence that each respective congregation is equipped by the Holy Spirit to manifest His wisdom, counsel, and disposition regarding difficult issues that may confront a congregation. The problem is: *we have been taught otherwise.*

While there may be several expressions of church polity that ascribe to the biblical principle of *congregational authority*, we should never allow any form of polity to usurp the fundamental and ultimate authority of the congregation. If we do so, it is to our own peril. A congregation that refuses to

embrace and apply one of the most important aspects of its ministry—church discipline—will eventually become an accomplice to their own demise. When a congregation ignores these clear tenets of the faith and instead chooses passivity and denial, such a congregation is surely in danger of losing its integrity and witness to a watching world.

If our individual response to this responsibility and admonition by Christ is to say nothing, do nothing, remain passive, and acquiesce saying, “The leaders will handle it,” then we are effectively enabling poor leadership and shirking our responsibility as members of our local church. This does not reflect well on our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The Bible says the Church is the *pillar and foundation of the truth* (1 Tim 3:15 NIV). It portrays the Church as robust, indwelt with the power and presence of Christ, and replete with all the gifts of the Holy Spirit necessary to manifest Christ’s supernatural wisdom, counsel, and disposition in our respective churches (1 Cor. 12). Brothers and sisters, God has not called us to be a band of cowering, emasculated people who are at a loss to judge rightly our own affairs. Rather, we are to reflect Christ’s wisdom and authority as an engaged and informed congregation.

I want to challenge and encourage each one of us to study the Scriptures. We must not allow our loyalty to the Word of God to be trumped by our allegiance to a certain way of doing church that negates a vital biblical doctrine. We must be like the Bereans. We must diligently study passages relevant to the topic at hand (Acts 17:11). At a minimum, we must answer the following question: “Does the church have authority?”

Rise up church! We need to get involved. We need to ask questions. We need to challenge individuals, including leaders, and speak the truth in love regarding this very important matter. We need to insist that our leaders and congregation follow the course and remedy God has prescribed in His Word. We need to embrace the mantle God has placed upon us as the body of Christ.

Stand up church! We are the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). We are *not* the body of Elijah. We are *not* the body of John the Baptist. We are *not* the body of Paul, but *we are* the body of Jesus Christ! (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:27) To be associated with the Name that is above all names should tell us something about who we are as a people. We are *the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.* (Eph. 1:22, 23).

Let’s act like it.

Your brother/sister in Christ,