

# Why Church Discipline?

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**Bible Text:** 1 Corinthians 5:1-13  
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1 Corinthians 5. I would ask you to follow in your Bible as I read these verses aloud. Paul is writing by the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit. He addresses not just the elders and not just the elders and deacons, he addresses the congregation of the church at Corinth and he says in chapter 5,

1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans, a man has his father's wife. 2 And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? 3 Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit; and I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. 4 When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, 5 hand this man over to Satan so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord. 6 Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? 7 Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast, as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. 8 Therefore let us keep the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth. 9 I have written to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people - 10 not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, in that case you would have to leave this world. 11 But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls themselves a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater, or a slanderer, a drunkard, or a swindler - with such a man do not even eat. 12 What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? 13 God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."

Let's bow together.

*Lord, as has already been noted this morning, at this time of the year we move from thanksgiving and the praise and adoration that we offer to you in appreciation for all*

*that you have done in us and for us, we move from there into the celebration of Advent and this building has been prepared and decorated and, Lord, it's a festive season of the year, a joyful time. As we sing the music of Christmas, our hearts are lifted up as we remember who you are and all that you have done for us in coming into this world, and yet in the timing of things, we have a responsibility to attend to today that is not festive, it is not joyful, but it is needed. And we pray that as we look at this passage this morning, that your Spirit will teach us, help us to see that the action contemplated is, indeed, a loving action, a required action, an action that ultimately brings glory to your name and good to your people, to the individual, to the body, and even to the world. So while we may not rejoice in doing what we need to do yet, O Lord, we can be satisfied that we are doing the will of God and we can take pleasure in you for loving us so very very much. Strengthen your people, we pray. Grant repentance to hearts that are bent toward sin. Pour out your compassion and your favor, we pray, through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.*

If you closed your Bibles, would you open them again to 1 Corinthians 5. Sin happens. We above all other people ought to be able to recognize that and to confront that realistically, and yet very often we who dwell in the church don't want to acknowledge that. We want to think of sin as something that exists out there in the world, not in here in the church, not in here in our hearts. But sin happens. We all sin and we all sin every day. Sin happens everywhere, in the home and in the church because sin takes up residence in our hearts.

I've often called attention to a book by J. Adams that was published in 1972 titled, "Christian Living in the Home." That was in its time a revolutionary book. It changed the way that Christian authors began to deal with the realities of Christian living in the family. It was revolutionary and it was liberating. In the latter part of the 1800s well into the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, books that were written on the Christian family all presented the Christian family in an incredibly favorable light, and by that I mean that it presented it in the ideal. The Christian family was seen as a place where nobody ever had a grumpy day, nobody ever had a cross word, nobody ever disobeyed, no kids were rebellious, they didn't need to be disciplined because everyone was in love with everyone and everything was wonderful in the Christian home. Adams came along and on page 10 of his book he said, "What does a truly Christian home look like? Is it an idyllic place where peace and quiet, tranquility and joy continuously reign?" And the majority of authors up to that time said, yes, and Adams said, definitely not. The first and most important fact to remember about a truly Christian home is that sinners live there.

Believers had constructed a false façade, a false front around their homes. We presented a picture to each other, we presented a picture to the world, but behind those false fronts there were all kinds of things that were going on that needed to be addressed and Christian parents and Christian kids felt like failures because they weren't living up to the standard that the books said they should be living. Adams brought a bulldozer to the field and took it out and said let's really look at what we have and let's really deal with what's really there.

Sin happens in the home and sin happens in the church. We constantly need to encourage and to correct one another so that instances of sin don't become patterns of sin. The sinful act of the man reported here did not itself require excommunication. The sinful act of this man as bad as it was, and what does Paul say about it? It was of the kind that does not occur even among pagans. The sin that this man committed on the scale of badness was beyond what most pagans would accept but the sin in itself does not require his excommunication. What was it? It was his lack of repentance. It was the fact that this man sinned and he didn't care about it. This man sinned and he was determined to continue sinning. It was not an instance, it was a pattern. It was a way of life. And what made it necessary for the church to act was his willful continuation in it. And what was distressing to the Apostle Paul as an apostle was not that a church member or a professing Christian could do such a thing, we know that they can and we know that we can, what was distressing to the Apostle Paul was that this man could do it but do it openly and publicly and knowingly and the church did not care enough to call attention to it and to tell him to stop.

Look at it. "It's actually reported." That word "actually" implies that, "I can hardly believe my ears." That's the force of it. "I can't believe that this is actually making the rounds, this is reported throughout the other churches in the world. It is known, it is public, it is out there, that there is sexual immorality among you and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans, a man has his father's wife. And you are proud!" Such a thing might be reported but the church should be dealing with it but you're not dealing with it. The church is proud. It reminds me of many churches today, frankly, that publicize that sinners of a particular variety are welcome here. Well, there is a sense in which all sinners are welcome to come and sit under the preaching of the word but that's not exactly what they're saying. They're saying certain sinners are welcome to come here and continue in their sin and we are proud to welcome you. We are inclusive. We are a welcoming church. And maybe that was part of the pride of Corinth, we are a welcoming church, anybody can come here, but I think that in the context probably what Paul was getting at is they were so hung up on their spiritual gifts, that's what they were so proud about, they were so proud of their spiritual giftedness and yet they were not dealing with the sin in their midst. That's what was distressing to the Apostle Paul. They shared an all too common attitude: we all sin, so what's the big deal? Sin is no big deal. John MacArthur says when we cease to be shocked by sin, we lose a strong defense against it.

So Paul calls the church to take action. He's not suggesting here when you read the language of this passage, he's not telling them, "This is my advice. This is my counsel." No, he speaks with authority as the apostle of Christ and he invokes the authority of Christ himself to tell the church... Don't be judgmental. And yet Paul in this context says, "I've already judged. Even though I am not physically present," verse 3, "I am with you in spirit and I have already passed judgment on the one who did this just as if I were present." This is open and shut, he says. This is clear. This is not a cloudy issue. This is not in the gray zone. This is clearly black and white and the church cannot fail to make a judgment about this man's behavior and you must do it.

There are at least three things in this passage that make church discipline necessary. Those three things are: Jesus' love, Jesus' death and Jesus' justice. His love demands that the church act. His death demands that the church act. And his justice demands that the church acts.

First then: the persistent love of Jesus requires the church to exercise church discipline. The persistent love of Jesus requires the church to exercise church discipline. By the love of Jesus, I mean first of all, his love for you, not your love for him. The love of Christ produces love for Christ. Your love for him is but your response to his great love for you. Remember what John says in 1 John, "We love," what? The King James implies "him" but it is broader than that, "we love because he first loved us." There is the order. It's not that we choose to love Jesus and then he loves us in return, it's that he chooses to love us and then we love him in return. Indeed we cannot even know love except as we see and experience the love of Christ.

You all know John 3:16. In various translations, sometimes I blend them but, "God so loved the world that," what? "He gave his one and only Son, or his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." But do you also know 1 John 3:16, that's John 3:16. Do you know 1 John 3:16? This is how we know what love is, Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. That's what it means to love. John 3:16, God loved, he gave, the Father gave his Son. 1 John 3:16, Jesus loved and he showed that, he demonstrated that by laying down his life for us.

In Ephesians 5, Paul extends that concept of love to marriage, not to marriage yet but later in chapter 5 he does, "Be imitators of God," verses 1 and 2, "therefore as dearly loved children and live a life of love just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." And Paul personalizes all of this in Galatians 2:20 where he says, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me."

Why did Christ do that? Why did Jesus come into the world? That's what we're going to celebrate in Advent season, right? Why did Jesus come? Why did he do that, condescend to become a human being, born as a baby? Why did he condescend to go through those growing up stages into manhood and then as a man offer himself as a substitute to die for others? Why? The answer is that he gave himself as a sacrifice for our sins and for forgiveness, a sacrifice for sins that provides forgiveness, and yes, that's true but as wonderful as that is, it's not the whole of his purpose. In Ephesians 5:25-27, Paul writes, "Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." And that's what we've seen, Christ loved the church, he gave himself up for her. Christ loved the church, he died for her, he died to provide forgiveness for sin but the rest of the verse goes on, verse 26, "to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word and to present her to himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."

So why did Christ come into the world as a baby? Why did Christ grow up to become a man? Why did Christ offer himself as a sacrifice for sins on the cross at Calvary? Not

only to blot out our sins from the past, not only to provide forgiveness, but he did all of that to make us holy; that we might live holy lives; that we might be a holy people. Cleansing her by the washing with water through the word with the objective of presenting herself, presenting her, presenting us to himself as a radiant church, a glorious church. That's really what the word "radiant" means, it's the picture of light beams emanating from the sun, it radiates. We are to reiterate the glory of God to reflect the glory of God as the image bearers of God. Without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. Jesus Christ was born and lived and died and rose from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the Father to make you and me holy.

In Revelation 1:4-6 in the letters to the churches, Jesus says, "Grace and peace." Sorry, this is the introduction. John writes, "Grace and peace to you from him who is and who was and who is to come and from the seven spirits before his throne and from Jesus Christ who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and has made us to be a kingdom of priests to serve his God and Father. To him be glory and power for ever and ever. Amen." To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins. At what cost? By his blood. Jesus paid the price to set us free and he wants us to be free from sin. He doesn't want us to be entangled again in the sense that once held us captive.

Romans 6:8-14, we looked at this passage recently. "If we died with Christ," verse 8, "we believe that we will also live with him, for we know that since Christ was raised from the dead he cannot die again. Death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died he died to sin once for all but the life he lives he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness, for sin shall not be your master or sin shall not have dominion over you because you are not under law but under grace." Do you get the picture there? Paul is telling us in Romans 6 that Christ purchased us, Christ by our involvement, by our union with him in his death and resurrection, just as he died to sin and was raised to newness of life, so we should reckon, we should account, it's an accounting term, we should count ourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Then he gets very particular in how we do that. Sin is not usually a matter of one big decision. Sin that originates in the heart and the mind usually is a series of decisions that we make and Paul is telling us, "Don't let sin, you don't have to let sin reign, don't let it reign in your mortal body. Don't offer the parts of your body to sin but offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness." Are you tempted to look at things you should not look at? Don't give your eyes to the devil. But if you are tempted, recognize that you are tempted and offer your eyes afresh to God. Job said he made a covenant with his eyes not to look at a woman inappropriately. Make a covenant with your eyes, make a covenant with your hands, make a covenant with your feet not to go places that you shouldn't go. Make a covenant with the various parts of your body, offering each one of them up to

God according to the specific temptation that you're dealing with. For sin shall not be your master. Sin shall not have dominion over you. Sin may still be a powerful tempting force in your life but the power, the dominion of sin, the right of sin to rule over you is broken by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and that power that raised him from the dead will keep you from sin if you call upon him.

Where then is the love of Christ displayed in 1 Corinthians 5? I have known people that have come to this passage, I have talked with people who have come to this passage, I have heard people tell me that there is no love here; that church discipline is a hateful act, it's a mean act; that it's something that says we hate the person who is being disciplined. Where is the love of Christ here? Don't you see it?

Paul says it's reported that there is an open sinner among you committing a sin of a kind that does not occur among the pagans. He chastises the church, "Instead of dealing with it, you're proud. Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?" Then he says this, "Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit and I have already passed judgment on the one who did this just as if I were present."

Then in verse 4, "When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus," this is the whole church he is writing to. There are some churches that put disciplinary action in the hands of the elders. We do not and this is why we do not. The elders may initiate disciplinary action but the elders do not have the authority under Christ to simply excommunicate people according to their judgment, but as it's the church that receives members into its bosom, it's the church that must disfellowship them as well. So "when you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit and the power," the word translated "power" there can be translated "authority, and the authority of our Lord Jesus is present." So this action that is to be undertaken is not an action of Paul, the individual, nor even Paul, the apostle, nor is it an action of the church on its own authority. Paul is calling the church to do what Christ would have done. Paul is calling the church to exercise the authority of Jesus Christ. It has a delegated authority but Christ is the one.

"When I am with you in the spirit and authority of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord." That sounds horrible, doesn't it? I don't think it's supposed to sound pleasant but let's not make it something it's not either. When Paul says "hand this man over to Satan," he's not wishing for evil things to befall that person, he is saying this man has been, Colossians, transferred into the kingdom of light, into the kingdom of Christ from the kingdom of darkness, and given his behavior, his profession of faith is rendered not credible by the lifestyle he's living. The lifestyle he's living is not consistent with the profession of faith he makes therefore the church is to take the action. Having received him into its bosom, the church is now to take the action of taking that man and sending him out of the church back into the kingdom of darkness, back into the kingdom that is ruled by Satan, back into the realm of the evil one.

"So that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord." What's the ultimate purpose of this disciplinary act? It's not a matter of booting the offender out. It's not a matter of dismissing him, "Good riddance." It's not a matter of getting rid of somebody, it's a matter of placing them into that realm for the specific purpose that being denied the benefits of church membership, being denied the benefits of Christian fellowship, being denied the benefits of gathering at the Lord's supper, that being denied that which he formerly had may lead him to repentance and so his spirit be saved on the day of the Lord.

Discipline is not, as it is, excommunication is not as it is practiced in the Roman church, kind of walking the plank. The church is the ark, you're on the boat, you're safe and excommunication is you walk the plank and it's a judgment about your heart and your eternal state. We don't make a judgment about the heart. We don't make a judgment about the eternal state. We can't see the heart so we can't judge it. We make a judgment about an individual's behavior and we say this behavior is not acceptable according to the Scriptures. This behavior is not the behavior of a disciple of Jesus Christ. This behavior is not consistent with a profession of faith and therefore since you insist on continuing in this direction, since you insist on continuing this behavior, we therefore withdraw fellowship from you and no longer recognize you as a part of the visible church. We make no judgment about your heart, that's between you and God, but in taking this step, if your heart is indeed in the hands of the Lord in a saving way, you will come to repentance and we will be happy to restore you at that time.

That's what's involved here. The purpose of church discipline ultimately is the salvation of the offender. That's the goal. That's the hope. That's the expectation. And we see that the discipline of the church is the discipline of Christ. The church is carrying out his discipline with a delegated authority. And Jesus loves his people so much that he will not sit by idly and watch as those who have been set free from sin resume their bondage to the things that formerly controlled them.

Revelation 3:19 in one of the letters to the churches, Jesus declares, "Those whom I love," remember the rest? "Those whom I love, I rebuke verbally and discipline, so be earnest and repent." He's not cutting them off in the sense of, "I wash my hands of you. I want nothing more to do with you." No, it's, "I love you. I rebuke you when you sin. I discipline you. I correct you when you go astray so be earnest and do," what? "Repent." It's a call to repentance. "Here I am. I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I'll come in and eat with him and he with me." The goal is fellowship but that fellowship cannot take place where there is willful persistent sin dominating somebody's life.

So the goal of that discipline is fellowship. The goal of the discipline is repentance. The goal of the discipline is restoration. In Hebrews 12:4-17, the Scriptures say, "In your struggle against sin, you have not resisted to the point of spilling your blood and you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons." Listen to the encouragement. It's not encouragement that you might expect to be encouragement. "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline and do not lose heart when he rebukes you

because the Lord disciplines those he loves and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Do you catch the point? The point he's making is that the Lord's rebuke and the Lord's discipline is itself an evidence of God's love.

He goes on to say, "Endure hardship as discipline. God is treating you as sons for what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined and everyone undergoes discipline, then you are illegitimate children and not true sons." Do you catch what he's saying? Parents discipline their children. Children, are you listening? Your parents discipline you, your parents correct you because they love you. Your parents rebuke you, they tell you things that you have done wrong because they love you. And sometimes when we're growing up we have friends that they don't get the same treatment, their parents don't correct them verbally, their parents don't correct them physically, their parents don't spank them, their parents don't correct them and we think, "Man, I wish they were my parents." Don't you ever wish that because what the Bible says here is that the children who are illegitimate, that is their parents don't care; the ones that are not disciplined, their parents don't love them enough to discipline them. They run loose, they do whatever they want because nobody cares what trouble they get into or how they harm themselves. But your parents rebuke you, your parents verbally talk to you, your parents correct you because they love you. And that's what God does with us. God doesn't just let us run our own course and do whatever we want to do because he loves us too much.

He says in verse 9, "Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live? Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness." That's why God disciplines us. He wants the best for us. He wants us to share in his holiness, to be holy as he is holy.

Then verse 11, "No discipline seems pleasant at the time but painful." Is that true, kids? You can shake your head. You don't have to tell me the details but it's true, isn't it, when you are disciplined, we don't enjoy that. It's not fun. "No discipline seems pleasant at the time but painful, later on however it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Therefore strengthen your evil arms and weak knees, make level paths for your feet so that the lame may not be disabled but rather healed. Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy. Without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. See to it that no one is sexually immoral or is godless like Esau who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterwards, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected and he could bring about no change of mind though he sought the blessing with tears." See to it. We have a responsibility in the church to see to it, that no one misses the grace of God; to see to it that no one is sexually immoral or living a godless life.

The goal in 1 Corinthians 5 is that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord. Such love demands a response and Jesus said, "If you love me, do," what? "Keep my commandments and my commandments are not grievous to you." The love of Jesus, your love for him and his love for you, demands that you live a holy life that is obedient and



pleasing to him, and if you do, and that is if you do not, that you will receive corrective discipline from the church as true and legitimate sons.

Secondly, the redeeming death of Jesus requires the church to exercise church discipline. Verses 6 through 8, "Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast, as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth."

We don't have time to turn there but you'll remember broadly we preached through Exodus not very long ago, at least I don't think it was very long ago. I guess it has been a while but we preached through Exodus and you remember the Passover, you remember how God brought a judgment upon the land of Egypt, warned the people that he was going to send the angel of death through the land and the firstborn in every home would die. The Israelites, however, God made a distinction between his people and the Egyptians and the Israelites were to sacrifice a lamb and that lamb was a substitute for the firstborn. They were to put blood on the doorposts and the lintel of their homes and when the angel of God came bringing death, what would the angel of God do at every home where blood of the lamb had been applied to the doorpost and the lintel? He would pass over that home. That's where we get the name Passover. Paul makes the point here and the Passover was really a festival in two parts. There was the meal, it was the covenantal meal of the Old Testament, that was to be remembered and that day was to be a day celebrated throughout all generations, but then the second part of it is that that festival, the festival of Passover was followed immediately by the Feast of Unleavened Bread and do you remember what that festival was about? The people were to go through their homes and they were to remove all leaven. Leaven was a picture of sin. What does leaven do in bread? Leaven is the agent that causes bread to rise, right? And if you don't have leaven in the bread, what kind of bread do you have? Flatbread and that's why our communion bread is a flatbread, matzoh, it's a flatbread made without leaven. And the leaven was symbolic of sin. The picture was that the lamb has been sacrificed, God has spared that home, God has brought salvation and therefore there is to follow the festival of Unleavened Bread with the removal of sin and the eating of bread that is free of leaven.

Paul is making the application here to the Corinthians that Christ, verse 7, "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed." He has paid the price with his blood. He has brought salvation. The judgment of God will pass over those who are in Christ. Then he makes the application, "Therefore," verse 8, "let us keep the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth." And clearly he's not talking here about the physical Feast of Unleavened Bread. He's not commanding us to keep that festival in the same way that the Jews did, but he's telling us that the symbolism is very important. We have received the salvation of the Lord therefore the rest of our lives are to be a life living the festival of Unleavened Bread, seeking out and destroying and removing sin from our lives so that we don't eat the bread

of malice and wickedness, but the bread of sincerity and truth, or if you will, of holiness. That's the point he's making.

Spurgeon says according to the apostle, "If the leaven of evil is permitted in a church, it will work its way through the whole of it." A little leaven goes a long way, right? "The leaven of evil living too is equally obnoxious in the church. Tolerated in one, it will soon be excused in another and a lower tone of thought with regard to sin will rule the church. The toleration of sin in the church soon leads to the excusing of it and that to the free indulgence of it and to the bringing in of other sins yet more foul."

The death of Jesus requires that we root out sin in our own hearts and in our church, and the acceptance, the toleration, toleration leads to acceptance, acceptance to embracing, embracing to normalizing. So we have churches that are filled with people who are living ungodly lives and nobody cares enough to say anything or do anything about it. Paul's point is that we must, for the sake of the church, this offending professing brother must be put out of the church because if he is allowed to remain a member in good standing of the church at Corinth while he is committing such gross immorality, then he becomes the reason, he becomes an excuse for everybody else to pursue their sins with impunity.

Thirdly, the unfailing justice of Jesus requires that the church exercise church discipline. The unfailing justice of Jesus. Verse 9, "I have written to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people - not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, in that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater, or a slanderer, a drunkard, or a swindler - with such a man do not even eat." Paul is clearly saying that our relationship to this offending brother in 1 Corinthians 5 must change. He must be disfellowshipped. He must be put out of fellowship. "Do not associate with" doesn't mean shunning in the sense that we have nothing to do with him, some people take it that way, you don't even speak to that person. No, that's not what we're saying. Paul says if we were going to disfellowship all people who commit immorality, then we could have no relationship with anybody in the world. That's not what he's saying. He's not saying we have to withdraw from the world but we are putting this man back into the company of the world and therefore we relate to him, Matthew 18, as to an unbeliever. We no longer consider this individual to be a member of the body of Christ. He may be in his heart, we don't know, God knows that but judging his behavior, we judge his behavior is not consistent with the believer and therefore we remove from him the identification as a believer and the fellowship that we extend to believers. We treat him as we treat an unbeliever.

How do we treat unbelievers? Do we still respect them? Yes. Do we still show a measure of friendliness toward them? Yes. Do we want them to sit under the preaching of the word? Yes. Do we want them to join us at the Lord's supper? No. Do we want them to vote in church meetings? No. Do we want them to hold church office? No. Can we have fellowship with them in the same way that we did before they were disciplined? No, because there is an issue. You who once professed Christ have now denied him and we

cannot extend to you the same relationship that we had before until you repent of that and are restored to the fellowship of the church.

But while Paul's primary concern here is for those within the church, there is also a message for those outside the church. Look at it in verse 12, "What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. 'Expel the wicked man from among you.'" Your exercise of disciplining someone in the church sends a message to the world that God is going to judge them one day. The church's action is a witness to the world of the judgment of Christ. You must not think that because you're not a member of the church that you are free to do whatever you please. You may not know or experience the love of Jesus and therefore you have no interest or desire to be holy, you are not subject to the discipline of the church so you may think you're free to pursue a life of sin with no consequences, but God will judge those outside, even as the church judges those who are inside. No one escapes judgment. The world as well as the church is subject to the word and to every pronouncement of that word and that will bring you face-to-face one day with this very same Jesus.

In John 5:22, the Scripture says that, "The Father judges no one but has entrusted all judgment to the Son that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned. He has crossed over from death to life. I tell you the truth, the time is coming and is now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live, for as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself and he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man." Jesus calls us to hear and to believe and to cross over from death to life.

Church discipline, then, is a manifestation of Christ's love, it's a requirement of his death, and it's a testimony of his justice, and church discipline serves to benefit the offender by calling him to repentance, serves to benefit the church by not allowing leaven to permeate and affect others, and church discipline even benefits those who are outside. Expel the wicked man from among you. This is what God calls us to do as the body of Christ.

John MacArthur comments that, "Discipline is difficult, painful, and often heart-rending. It is not that we should not love the offenders but that we should love Christ, his church, and his word even more." Put it in perspective: do we love Christ? Do we love his word? Do we love his church even more?

Let's pray.

*Lord, we thank you for every word that your Spirit has caused to be recorded. It has been written for our learning, for our benefit, for our encouragement, for our correction, for our training in righteousness. We pray that your Spirit will bless this congregation, bless this body of believers, strengthen us in our hearts and our minds, increase our love for you and for your people and for your word. May we be obedient to you in all things through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.*