

Biblical Church Discipline

1 Corinthians 5:1-13

A. I want to bring a series of studies on this passage of Scripture, *plus* the supporting passages that set forth the principles of church discipline. By way of introduction, there are two things that must be briefly considered.

B. Salvation and being joined to and being a part of a visible church of Jesus Christ are inseparable in the New Testament. They are never apart or divorced.

1. Explain salvation from the foundation of the world unto glorification.
2. Explain the nature & centrality of the visible church in the redemptive purposes of God to bring all of our salvation to completion.
3. These are seen together in the following verses:

“ . . . And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” Acts 2:47

“Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.” Ephesians 3:21

“These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth.” 1 Timothy 3:14-15

C. The Protestant Reformation brought about not only a recovery of biblical and apostolic salvation, but it also instituted a return to a scriptural church. The Reformation set forth three (3) marks of a New Testament church:

1. The centrality of the worship of God and the ministry of the Word. i.e. preaching & teaching of true doctrine & exposition of the Holy Scriptures. e.g.
Luther & Calvin preaching through books of the Bible.
2. The proper administration of the ordinances (sacraments) of baptism & the Lord’s Supper.
3. The right application of church order, government, and discipline.

D. Having said that let us consider several aspects of church discipline before turning to an exposition of 1 Corinthians 5:1-13. This I will do in the form of questions.

I. What Attitudes Prevail Today That Must Be Avoided?

A. Ignorance. Most evangelical Christians today have never heard of or thought about church discipline. They would have the foggiest clue as to what it is all about or if the Bible teaches such a thing.

B. Neglect.

1. Churches do not practice this biblical teaching and allow an “anything goes policy.”
2. Most churches today do not care how its members, if it even has a membership, live and behave either in public or privately another. Financial and sexual scandals, plus other personal atrocities abundant in many churches and very little, if anything, is done about them.
3. The attitude conveyed is “Whatever an individual does is his business and nobody is to be concerned about it.”
4. Illustration of Pastor Walt Chantry talking with an adulterous woman. “I don’t care what the Bible says, I’m going to do what makes me feel good.”

C. Abuse.

1. Some churches have recovered this biblical teaching, but have gone overboard.
2. All sorts of wrong reasons are used to discipline people: dress standards, use of different versions of the Bible, disagreement with church leaders over personal differences, etc. All of which must be avoided.
3. The only grounds of church discipline are clear violations of Scripture. This will avoid abuse and unlawful use of a biblical truth.

II. What Are The Types Of Biblical Church Discipline?

A. Interpersonal — Matthew 18:15-20.

B. Open & scandalous — 1 Corinthians 5:1-13.

- C. Doctrinal & heretical — Titus 3:10-11 (NOTE: Titus is instructed as an elder to handle this. Thus, these matters are not for the church to decide, but for the elders to handle).

III. How Are These Types to Be Administered?

First step: 1. Admonition (either private or public) Romans 15:14; Colossians 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:14. Admonish = “to put one in mind.”

Second step: 2. Reprove or rebuke (private or public) Matthew 18:15; Ephesians 5:11; 1 Timothy 5:20; Titus 1:9. Rebuke = “to speak sharply to another in such a way as to bring him to conviction & confession.”

NOTE: These may necessitate the suspension of membership privileges such as input in church matters, and observance of the Lord’s Supper.

Third step: 3. Excommunication Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:2, 11, & 13. Excommunication = “To cut off communion & fellowship” of those who persist & do not repent.

IV. Why Are The Churches Of Jesus Christ To Exercise Church Discipline? (6 reasons)

- A. To glorify God by obeying the instructions given in His Word (Matthew 18:15 ff.; et al).
1. The true essence & existence of the church is dependent upon its obedience to Christ. e.g. If the government commanded the church not to evangelize or baptize, the church must obey God if it is to essence a true church.
2. The early churches did not invent this teaching & practice, God commanded it in His Word!
- B. To reclaim offenders and see them restored to right standing before God and man (Matthew 18:15 — “to gain a brother” and 1 Corinthians 5:5 — “to save his soul”).

NOTE: There is definitely a punitive element in discipline and this must never be forgotten, but the main concern is corrective and restorative.

- C. To maintain the purity of the church and her worship (1 Corinthians 5:6-8; 1 Timothy 3:14,15; Ephesians 5:27; the Pastoral Epistles).
- D. To vindicate the honor & integrity of Christ.

“If the church does not discipline, it leaves a false impression in the minds of the world. ‘The church allows sin, so God must allow sin also’.” -Daniel Wray-

- E. To deter others from sin (1 Timothy 5:20). Notice the argument from the greater to the lesser.
- F. To prevent Christ from setting Himself against a church (Revelation 2:12-29, esp. 16, 22, 23).

“Church censures are necessary for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren; for deterring of others from the like offenses; for purging out of that leaven which might infect the whole lump; for vindicating the honour of Christ and the holy profession of the gospel; and for preventing the wrath of God, which might justly fall upon the church, if they should suffer his covenant, and the seals thereof, to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders.” - *Westminster Confession of Faith*- (30:3)

V. Who Is To Be Disciplined?

Church discipline becomes necessary and is to be exercised on those who violate 4 things: truth, love, unity & law.

- A. When Christian **truth** is violated by those who reject essential doctrines of the faith (1 Timothy 1:19&20, 6:3-5; Titus 3:9-11; 2 John 7-11).
- B. When Christian **love** is violated by serious private offenses (Matthew 18:15-20).
- C. When Christian **unity** is violated by those who form divisive factions which destroy the peace of the church (Romans 16:17-18; Ephesians 4:1-6).

NOTE: These pertain to practices, arguments & strivings over non-saving doctrines.

- D. When Christian **law** is violated by those living scandalous lives (Titus 1:16; Exodus 20:1-20 & their NT counterparts).

VI. What Are Some Objections To Church Discipline?

- A. Church discipline is not loving. It would be more loving to let Christ deal with them *or* work patiently with them and lead them gradually out of sin.

Answer: Hebrews 12:6; Revelation 3:19.

- B. To discipline someone would be “judging” and Matthew 7:1-5 tells us not to judge.

- Answer:**
1. Matthew 7:1-5 speaks of condemning, not making an assessment & obeying divine commands.
 2. The spiritual/saved judge all things (1 Corinthians 2:15).
 3. 1 Corinthians 6:1-5.
 4. Judgment must begin at the house of God (1 Peter 4:17-18).
 5. If a person breaks the Law of God and it is seen by the church & scripturally action is taken, that is not

judging!

- C. To exercise church discipline will hinder the growth of the church.

- Answer:**
1. Yes, this is true to a degree and for a time (see Acts 5:12-14).
 2. However, it will not in the long haul (see the rest of the book of Acts).
 3. Furthermore, it must always be remembered and never forgotten that it is the Lord Jesus who adds to the church, not the church adding to itself (Acts 2:47).

VII. How Is Church Discipline To Be Approached?

- A. With **Conviction** (Conviction that this is commanded by God in His Word.)

B. With **Courage** (Popular opinion or the “faces” of people cannot be feared. The greatest fear ministers should have is displeasing their God & Father in heaven.)

C. With **Caution**

1. *Gather* all the facts. Make sure you have, not only, *all* the information, but the *correct* information.
2. *Guard* your heart and attitude. Do not let anger or vengeance drive you.

D. With **Compassion**. Forthright tenderness will carry the day. Do not be heavy-handed, but remember it could be you that is in this sin and situation.

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An Exposition Of 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

I. The Occasion For Writing This Section Of Scripture

v. 1

- A. “commonly reported” = heard of by other churches because it is talked about among themselves. The news had gone out from the church and had become common knowledge everywhere else.
- B. “fornication-sexual immorality”
- C. Of such a nature that the practice was not known among the Gentiles.
- D. That a man should take his father’s wife.
1. The man was a member of the church and this took place after he came into membership.
 2. “The fact the father is dead cannot be assumed.” -Lenski- (p. 207)
 3. The woman was probably his stepmother.
 4. The man & his stepmother were now living as husband & wife.

II. The Attitude Of The Corinthian Church

v. 2

- A. The church had not taken any action
- B. Why? “Did this man occupy such a prominent place in the congregation that the members did not venture to challenge his crime?” -Lenski- (p. 208)
- C. Paul rebukes the congregation for being prideful and not mourning.

“This indicates the motive that ought to underlie proper Christian disciplinary action: grief over the devil’s success, sorrow for our congregation because it suffers such disgrace, mourning for the soul of the sinner who has been overwhelmed with sin and guilt.” (*Ibid.*, p. 208)

- D. He further rebukes them for not acting at once & putting him out of the church.

NOTE: When the church tolerates open, flagrant sin in its midst, in essence, it is saying to the world, God will allow you to get away with sin; there are no repercussions for your actions and there will be no day of judgment!

III. The Divine & Apostolic Directives Given To The Church v. 3-5

A. Though absent physically, Paul is with them in spirit. (i.e. When united in some important matter with friends we often say, "I am with you in spirit.")

B. Paul has already judged what should be done.

C. He set forth a formula of what must be done:

1. "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" = in the authority of Christ
2. "When being duly assembled"
3. "along with my spirit"

"Why is his [Paul's] presence in a duly called meeting of the congregation so essential? Because not even an apostle can of himself and by himself excommunicate a person from a Christian congregation. No pastor can expel a member no matter what the member has done. Expulsion is an act that can be performed only in a meeting in a duly called meeting of the congregation. . . They in and of themselves have the full right and the power to act " -Lenski- (p. 212, 213)

NOTE: However, there is one notable exception: Titus 3:10-11 (damnable doctrine)!

4. "by the power of the Lord Jesus" = with the actual power of Christ

"The Corinthians are enabled to take such a drastic action against one of their members because they have the power of their Lord." (*ibid.*, p. 213)

5. "to deliver such a one to Satan" =

". . .means negatively to expel from Christ's and positively to relegate to Satan's kingdom. . .let us remember that this is a court action, a judicial verdict. By his crime and his impenitence, the man placed himself into Satan's power."

NOTE: The man would not hear the church, God's ordained servant for his blessing, now he would be turned over to Satan, God's ordained servant for destruction!!!

6. "for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" = this may be the means that God will use to bring the sinning one to Christ so as to be saved on the Last Day.

IV. An OT Illustration Of The Directive

v. 6-8

- today, said
is
- A. “Your boasting is not good” = the church was even boasting about the fact they had not taken action. One Lutheran, (I spoke with) like many churches that they would not practice discipline, but love & grace win the day. This boasting and unbiblical.
- B. Paul uses the imagery of the OT Passover:
1. Of removing all leaven, for a little infiltrates the whole loaf.
 2. Purge it out.
 3. Just as Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us, to save us from sin, therefore put out sin from among yourselves.
 4. “keep the feast” = 2 things:
 - a. “The festival or feast we are to celebrate embraces the entire Christian life — an attractive figure, indeed.” -Lenski- (p. 223)
 - b. Secondly, the Lord’s Supper.
 5. If this is not done, it was corrupt sincerity & truth on the part of the members of the congregation (v. 8).

V. Further Explanations & Clarifications Of The Directive

v. 9-13

- A. Paul had written to the Corinthians not to keep company with sexually immoral people (v. 9).
- B. He now writes & clarifies what he means (v. 10-11).
1. Not those of this world
 2. But anyone named a brother.
 3. Not even to share the most common necessity of life — eating.

Lessons:

1. That which even the world acknowledges as evil, must never be tolerated in the church.

2. When a church, in the name of love, refuses to exercise church discipline it is filled with ungodly pride or dominated by fear of man.
3. Each member of the church should cultivate a holy fear of God and strive never to commit such acts as would require the church to deliver him over to Satan.
4. The influence of sin not dealt with permeates the whole body.
5. Those who are excommunicated constitute a unique class of people. (e.g. A Christian can fellowship and eat with other Christians and even the unbelieving, but not the excommunicated.)
6. What a glorious privilege given to the church to make righteous judgment, therefore we must be prepared to take this solemn responsibility seriously.

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