

1 Corinthians 5

Sec 3. “Church censures are necessary, for the reclaiming & 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 honor of Christ, & the holy profession of the gospel, & for preventing the wrath of God, which might justly fall upon the church, if they should suffer His covenant, & the seals thereof, to be profaned by notorious & obstinate offenders.”

A. Some don't have the stomach for church discipline.

1. They might be very afraid to be a part of a church that would even think to excommunicate anyone.
2. Others may not want to serve on a Session because that would require them playing a part in voting to suspend or excommunicate someone because of unrepentant sin.

a. **Jude v3** says all Christians are to **“contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.”**

- 1) The Greek word **“contend”** here can also be translated as **“fight”** or **“struggle.”**
- 2) The Greek root word here is **“agonizomai”** from which we get the English word **“agonize”** & **“agony.”** Some things like church discipline can cause a Session & a congregation agony— intense grief & suffering— yet such agony is necessary according to God's Word.
- 3) Dr. Voddie Baucham in some of his online messages spoke of what many well-meaning Christians in practice believe to be the 11th commandment— **“You must be nice.”** That is why some are wrongly opposed to church discipline. Such opposition is contrary to God & His Word!

b. Paul commanded Timothy to **“Fight the good fight of faith” (1 Tim 6:12)**. Sometimes with combat, there is blood & gruesome injuries on both sides of the battlefield. Church discipline is part of that gruesome yet necessary fight.

B. Sec 3 says that “Church censures are necessary, for the reclaiming & gaining of offending brethren.”

1. As Paul said in **1 Cor 5:5** of the man guilty of incest: **“deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”**

- a. This passage leaves room for hope of salvation. We ought to pray for the “reclaiming & gaining of offending brethren” who have been excommunicated.
- b. Most scholars agree that **2 Cor 2** speaks of such a “reclaiming & gaining” of this once immoral man because he later demonstrated true godly sorrow for his sin (**v5f**).

2. If “offending” brothers or sisters are left to continue in unrepentant sin, it is likely they could die in unbelief even though they may be considered members “in good standing” because a weak & disobedient Session failed to do their duty of disciplining such a person.

C. Sec 3 continues to teach that church discipline is necessary “for deterring of others from the like offenses, for purging out of that leaven which might infect the whole lump, for vindicating the honor of Christ, & the holy profession of the gospel.”

1. This is language taken from 1 Cor 5. → Look at vv:6-8 again as we consider the illustration of baking bread.
 - a. In most cases having leaven or yeast “infect” or spread through an entire lump of dough is desirable; however, being “unleavened bread of sincerity & truth” is the goal for believers at the end of v8.
 - b. Thyatira was example of the leaven of wickedness infecting much of the lump in a church → Rev 2:18-23.
2. We ought to exercise church discipline for the purpose of “vindicating the honor of Christ, & the holy profession of the gospel.”
 - a. These two things go hand-in-hand.
 - b. Notoriously wicked, unrepentant people can negatively affect the witness of a church especially if church members are acting as “leaven” or an influence for others in the church to sin.

Sec 3 closes by saying that church discipline is necessary “for preventing the wrath of God, which might justly fall upon the church, if they should suffer His covenant, & the seals thereof, to be profaned by notorious & obstinate offenders.”

- Israel’s defeat before Ai because of the sin of Achan is a classic example from Joshua 7. Achan secretly took riches from the destruction of Jericho which was clearly forbidden by the Lord.

Sec 4. For the better attaining of these ends [of church discipline], the officers of the church are to proceed by admonition; suspension from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper for a season; & by excommunication from the church; according to the nature of the crime, & demerit of the person.

A. There are different levels of church discipline. Discipline should not go from no direct, personal warning (admonition) to excommunication.

B. → Look at 1 Thes 5:12-14. This passage can be interpreted as admonishment [lit. “warning”] as coming from the church leadership.

1. God gives a charge for elders & ministers to give an answer or account before the Lord in how they watch over the souls under their authority (Heb 13:17). Giving words of warning is their primary responsibility.

2. Gal 6 teaches that giving words of warning & challenge is the duty of all true Christians; vv1-2 says, “**Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you to will not be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, & thereby fulfill the law of Christ.**”

C. When someone does not listen to a formal warning from the Session, the next step is suspension from the Lord’s Supper “for a season.” Once the person repents, they are to be welcomed back.

D. If the 1st two levels of church discipline do not work, the next & final step is excommunication. This is a solemn declaration by the Session that the disobedient person is no longer considered a Christian.