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Biblical Church Discipline - 1 Cor 5:1-13

Introduction – “*Harsh discipline is for him who forsakes the way, and he who hates correction will die*” (Prov 15:10). Discipline is a form of love and obedience (Prov 13:24). But who believes in biblical love and obedience today? Church discipline is rarely practiced today. As with all topics, when we come to this, we need to carefully turn to the Scriptures for guidance and protection.

Do Not Tolerate Unrepentant Sin (1 Cor 5:1-2) – Paul judges the man caught in sexual immorality and calls those who do not judge him arrogant. Toleration of sin is biblical arrogance. This is contrary to our popular spin on the terms “tolerance” and “arrogance.”

Deliver Such a One (vv3-5) – Paul instructs the leaders of the church to do “when you are gathered together” what he, as an apostle of Christ, had already done. They are to judge this man. They are to deliver him over to Satan “*for the destruction of his flesh.*” But Paul still hopes that even here, these actions will be used by God “*that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*”

Purge Out the Old Leaven (vv6-8) – Paul now uses the imagery of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, or Passover, to describe how we should live. The church is one loaf, one body. And, just like “one bad apple spoils the barrel,” so, “*a little leaven leavens the whole lump.*” You can’t keep the old leaven in the lump. You can’t keep the unrepentant sinner in the body. We cannot have fellowship with God as a corporate body when there is unconfessed sin in our midst. The Passover was a celebration of being brought out of Egypt, and the great sin of Israel was that some of Egypt (idols) were brought out with them. Our Passover, Christ, has been sacrificed for us and we have been delivered from our bondage to sin. We must not keep some of that old leaven in our feast, but rather the new, unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Getting it Backwards (vv9-10) – We are often guilty of removing ourselves from any relationship with those who are outside the church because they are in sin, while indulging unrepentant sin inside the church. Paul has commanded quite the opposite.

Do Not Keep Company (vv11-13) – First, notice the list. But for the grace of God goes each and every one of us. Some of these sins are easier to spot than others, and all require wisdom to judge. But the kind of judgment, considering all the texts on church discipline, is not the kind an individual is to render, but rather the community under the authority of God. When we look at where this quote in verse 13 comes from in the OT (i.e. Deut 17:12), it is used as a declaration of God through the leaders addressing an egregious, unrepentant situation. When the church exercises this authority, what is bound or loosed by the church on earth will have been done in heaven as well; not only in our individual hearts, and not only in this one single church, but in the courts of God and heaven.

The Reasons For Discipline – The Scriptures give us reasons to practice church discipline.

To Obey and Glorify God (Matt 5:16) – We see that God intends there to be church discipline (Matt 18:15-19, Rom 16:17, 1 Cor 5, 1 Thess 5:14, 2 Thess 3:6-15, 1 Tim 5:20, 6:3-5, Tit 1:13, 2:15, 3:10, Rev 2:2, 14-15, 20). We do not do it on our own authority, but submissive to the Word of God which is to His glory.

To Restore the Offender (1 Cor 5:5, Gal 6:1) – Restoration is not promised, but it is one of the purposes and, by God’s grace, can be the outcome. And so like every other step of discipline, the goal of putting the offender out is to bring him back in and the motivation is love.

To Maintain the Purity of the Church (1 Cor 5:6-9) – Sometimes the offender is not restored, but biblical discipline always contributes to the purifying of the church, and prevents the profanation of the Lord’s Table (1 Cor 11:27). Biblical discipline provides the answer to the common objection of ‘hypocrites’ in the church.

To Prevent God from His Discipline (Rev 2:14-25) – If we ‘put up with’, and ‘allow’, and refuse to discipline, then God will come and discipline us.

To Deter Against Further Sin (1 Tim 5:20, Eccl 8:11) – If you are struggling with sin, open, godly discipline of others will aid you in that struggle.

Discipline: Practically Applied - We must not misunderstand what is happening in discipline or in a formal excommunication. It is not shunning and avoiding. It is not refusing to ever be together. It is refusing to be together on their terms; as though nothing was wrong or nothing had changed.

Formal Change in the Supper - The individual under discipline is denied access to the Lord's Supper. He or she must also be denied in a more general way from all communion which that Supper seals. The individual may demand to be considered a Christian, but the objective declaration has been removed - the gospel is to be preached.

Charity at All Times - The offender is not to be denied kindness, courtesy, nor the duties owed to him by others. The law of love still applies. However, with fear and humility, we must obey the Lord and "*put away from yourselves the evil person.*"

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