

# Church Discipline, Communion, and Life - 1 Cor 5:1-13

**Introduction** – Consider the way the world handles the word, “love.” It would seem that love and discipline could never be understood except as opposites. And the world has learned this from the church which adds words like “open,” “affirming,” and “tolerance” as synonyms for love. But the Scriptures teach us that discipline is a form of love (Prov 13:24). To hate correction is to give oneself to death (Prov 15:10). A church that does not discipline unrepentant members of its congregation is a church that does not love the members of its congregation. Like AIDS, such a church has no ability to fight off infections, moral or doctrinal. Church discipline is a grace to the congregation and its communion with Christ. It is also a grace to the impenitent, for it is a way to speak the truth in love to those who are walking on the road of damnation.

**Do Not Tolerate Unrepentant Sin** (vv1-2) – Paul judges the man given to sexual immorality (*porneia*, a word with broad meaning covering all kinds of sexual impurity) and calls the Corinthians arrogant for not judging him. Notice, it is arrogant (according to Scripture) to be tolerant (according to the world). To imitate Paul (4:16) and Jesus means to speak hard words to the church when necessary, when they want to hear it and when they don't (2 Tim 4:24). Biblical grace is not freedom to sin; it is freedom and power from sin (Rom 6:1-2, 12-14). Grace lifts us up, out of the deep morass of immorality. Abuse of such grace plunges us deeper than even the unbelievers will go.

**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.*” These hard words reveal one of the purposes of church discipline. “Flesh” here means the rebellious orientation away from God. Rom 8:13, Gal 5:24, and Col 3:5-6 command believers to mortify the flesh and its desires – and church discipline is one of the means the Spirit employs to accomplish this. Excommunication is the last step of a patient and loving effort to bring someone back to Christ.

**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 (Matt 18:18).

**Five Reasons for Discipline** – The Scriptures give us reasons to practice church discipline.

**1 - To Obey and Glorify God** (Matt 5:16) – Obedience glorifies God and we know from His Word that God intends discipline for His church (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.

**2 - 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. This answers the objection that discipline is harsh and unloving. The goal is not to destroy the offender; the goal is to protest the fact that the offender is destroying himself or herself. It is not unloving to wake someone up in the middle of the night because their roof is on fire, even if they complain of being so rudely awakened.

**3 - 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.

**4 - 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.

**5 - To Deter Against Further Sin** (1 Tim 5:20, Eccl 8:11) – The consequences for sin deters others. If you are struggling with sin, observing the discipline of others will aid you in that struggle. The objection here is that one might think that they would never want to tell “those elders” about their spiritual problems. But the issue in discipline is *always impenitence*, not whether someone struggles with sin – because we all struggle with sin.

**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. The person is exiled (ex) from the Table of the Lord (*communion*). He or she must also be denied in a more general way from all communion which that Supper seals; the person is no longer a brother or sister in Christ. 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. They are (usually) welcome to come to church, to sing with us, to hear the Word preached with us, to be welcomed by us. He or she is denied one fundamental thing – the ability to define for themselves what it means to be a Christian.

**A Disciplined Congregation has Life** (Heb 12:4-13) – Consider this passage not only on the individual level, but to the congregation as a whole as well. This chastening, this discipline, is painful and grievous, but afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness. Here is our opportunity to weep together, to grieve together, to trust God together, to fear God in His holiness together, to rejoice in the free gift of grace together, to thank God for His mercies which are new every morning together, to pray together, to confess to one another, to hold one another up in the life which is ours in Christ together. Together, we can “*strengthen the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees.*” We can make straight paths for our feet, walking in the Way that is Christ all the Way to God our Father.