



“Church Discipline”

Part II

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Discipline is never pleasant, but it IS necessary all throughout life. When we’re children, our parents discipline us because they love us and they want to train us to be the kind of people we should grow up to be.

Proverbs 13:24 “He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.”

Proverbs 29:15 “The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.”

A child who is never taught how to behave and is never corrected when he misbehaves will have trouble all of his life, and will likely deal misery to everyone else around him in the process. A person who is successful in life will learn self-discipline.

I Corinthians 9:27 “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”

Any civil and orderly society has a system of correction for those who break the law. We incarcerate lawbreakers, in part, to teach them to no longer break the law, and also to protect the rest of society from their lawless deeds. In principle, the same things are true for the family of God. For example, we are disciplined by the trials and challenges of life.

Hebrews 12:6 “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.”

In other words, through the trials of life that we are subjected to, God disciplines His children to remain faithful and persevere. We receive instructive training and discipline when the word of God is preached and taught. Just as our children have to be taught right from wrong, instructed in obedience and told *no* from time to time, so the Christian must be disciplined by the word of God. Many think that preaching and teaching should never have a negative element; that it should always be bright, cheerful, positive, and commending and never forbidding or consisting of rebuke or warning. Paul didn't agree with that though.

II Timothy 4:2 “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”

Sometimes, just as children don't always heed the instruction of their parents and must face disciplinary action, so the children of God sometimes rebel and must also be subjected to corrective measures. People, especially those in the world, recoil at the idea that a church would discipline its own members. We've even heard of lawsuits being filed in cases where scriptural discipline was carried out. The Bible plainly teaches that the church has a responsibility to the willfully, persistently errant and rebellious church member. In our study last week, we established that the Bible commands the church to discipline the ungodly within its own number. Today, we'll pick up where we left off. Let's look once again at our text passage, where Paul is speaking of an immoral man in the church at Corinth who was committing fornication. These are his instructions to the church on how to deal with the situation.

I Corinthians 5:4-5 “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”

The church at Corinth was faced with a number of serious challenges, largely due to their own background and culture. Corinth was a cosmopolitan city of the ancient Greek world, and it was rife with pagan idolatry and immorality, which two things go together by the way. The church experienced a number of growing pains as they struggled to come out of the culture of which they had been a part, and become a holy and separate people unto God.

A particularly startling and scandalous situation had existed among the church that involved a man and his stepmother; this man was committing fornication with this woman, who not only was not his wife, but was even his father's wife (**I Corinthians 5:1**). The behavior was so extraordinary that Paul says even the pagan Gentiles didn't engage in such a practice as that. To make matters worse, the church was indifferent at best about this man's sin, and was boasting of their strength as a church despite the fact that this man was living in open rebellion to the truth. Paul's instructions were very firm and very plain.

I Corinthians 5:5 “To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”

That means that they were to *turn him out of their number*—in other words, *let Satan have him back*. Put him back out in the world, so to speak, where he'll learn that his sinful lifestyle has separated him from God. So that, perhaps, he'll see the need to repent of his sin and his soul can be saved. I mean, that is the goal.

I Corinthians 5:6 “Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?”

Just as leaven affects the entire lump of dough, so this man’s sin will affect and embolden others in the church to sin, so he needs to be cut off in order to protect the church from his sinful influence. You can go back and view last week’s study to learn more about the reasoning of Paul telling the church to take this action, but we need to see that this was NOT an act of hatred, retaliation or spite; it was an act of discipline out of concern for the man’s eternal soul. Let me say this very plainly: a person will not go to heaven living an immoral life. Period.

I Corinthians 6: 9-11 “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”

You see, those behaviors simply cannot be tolerated in the life of a Christian—regardless of what our modern, liberal, hedonistic culture today says about it. Any church member is deceiving himself/herself who says that he/she can continue such sins without repentance and change, and still go to heaven. So the man in our text passage had to be taught that lesson and it had to be in the form of some tough love, you might say.

I Corinthians 5:11 “But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.”

That’s how they were to deliver this man over to Satan. That is, they were not to continue in fellowship with this man, or anyone who lived unrepentant in sin. They were to withdraw from him. Someone says, *but the world is full of such behavior. Much of it is considered completely normal in our world today. We work, go to school, perhaps even have people in our own families and under our own roofs who live this way or that, and we don’t withdraw ourselves from them!* But, the Christian is different, don’t you see? That’s the point that Paul makes.

I Corinthians 5:9-10,12-13 “I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world...For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.”

He says that God will take care of the people who aren’t members of His fold. They are condemned in the final judgment outside of the Lord Jesus Christ. It’s up to those of us who are IN the body to judge the behavior of those who are, as well, IN the body. Let’s notice some important points about this extreme measure of corrective discipline.

First, it IS an extreme measure, to be carried out in extreme circumstances. It’s not an act of punishment to be meted out on someone who makes a mistake or who succumbs to temptation, then repents of their sin and receives God’s forgiveness. That’s not what is under consideration here.

I Corinthians 5:1 tells us that this man *had his father's wife* and the Greek verb that Paul uses here indicates that this man was *continuing to live in this sinful condition*. This was just the way he was living. Secondly, he was not at all repentant at this point for what he was doing, and neither was the church. Paul indicts them as well.

I Corinthians 5:2 “**And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.**”

There was no repentance; he was blatantly living in sin and the church was even looking the other way. So, the man AND the church were both the objects of Paul's very stern rebuke.

Notice that, thirdly, withdrawal of fellowship was a last resort to be carried out in the case of specific sins that others might be emboldened to commit. Those sins included sexual immorality, covetousness (those who stole from or defrauded others), idolatry (the worship of pagan gods or idols), railers (those guilty of blaspheming or speaking evil of others), drunkenness (Christians given to strong drink or intoxicating drink), and extortioners (related to covetousness, including those who take things by force from others). Paul says that church members who continue in such sins are to be withdrawn from by the church (**I Corinthians 5:4-5**). That means not to keep company with them, not to eat a meal with them, not to have fellowship with them.

We can also read that those who teach divisive false doctrines and who work to divide the congregation are to be marked and avoided or rejected.

Titus 3:10 “**A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject;**”

Romans 16:17 “**Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.**”

Paul also taught that Christians are to withdraw themselves from a member who *walks disorderly*.

II Thessalonians 3:6 “**Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.**”

In its context, this passage is referring to a brother who refused to work and instead was a busybody in the church.

Churches would save themselves a great deal of grief and misery in the long run if we would heed the apostles' instructions in the matter, and not allow such individuals to disrupt and destroy the work of God, as they have so often been allowed to do because we are too timid, too afraid that someone might get upset. Friend, God's way works—to not only provoke repentance, but to protect the body of Christ, too. It's when we ignore God's way that we ask for trouble, and we prolong and further complicate the difficulties that sin presents to a congregation of the church.

Fourthly, notice that discipline is designed to produce repentance. When the erring member does repent, we are to immediately receive him back into our fellowship and restore him with love and grace. Paul wrote again to the Corinthian church after this man's repentance, telling them to forgive him and comfort him.

II Corinthians 2:7 “So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.”

So, the case at Corinth had a happy ending. The discipline apparently accomplished what it was designed to accomplish, and this man repented of his sin. Of course, that should be the goal and desire of every church that loves each other and desires peace with God and one another. Discipline, unfortunately, becomes a necessity in some cases. It is an integral part of God’s plan for keeping the church pure and for training and disciplining members to be what they ought to be.

I doubt that I have to tell you that there are many objections that people often raise to the scriptural teaching of church discipline. The first is the most common, and it is the drumbeat of those of our modern culture, who really don’t know much of what Jesus said about anything. But they’re always at the ready to quote our Lord when He said this:

Matthew 7:1 “Judge not, that ye be not judged.”

They say, *you see? We should simply leave it to Jesus to do the judging!* In other words, leave each to his own. My friend, that is not what Jesus was speaking about. In fact, **verses 2-5** of that same chapter go on to show that Jesus is talking about *hypocritical judgment*. He’s talking about judging the speck in another person’s eye while you have a beam in your own eye. That is, not holding ourselves to the standard by which we judge others. It’s very true that if a person is committing adultery, he/she has no business trying to correct someone else who is living in sexual sin. But, Jesus isn’t condemning the discernment of holy vs. sinful living, because on another occasion He said this:

John 7:24 “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.”

He commands us to judge righteously. In another case that we’ve been discussing, Paul spoke about judging.

I Corinthians 5:12-13 “For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.”

The judgment that takes place in **I Corinthians 5** is entirely different than the kind of judgment and the circumstances of judgment that Jesus speaks of in **Matthew 7**. Consequently, heeding the teaching of Paul is not judging in the sense that people today think of judging. God has already judged the rightness or wrongness of the behavior under consideration in His word. We look to His word as the rule for how we are to live and walk. We are merely to apply the teaching of His word to our own lives first, then the lives of our brethren.

Then there is the objection of *the parable of the wheat and the tares*. Some allege this parable nullifies Paul’s teaching in **I Corinthians 5**. I’ve heard this objection raised many times. Jesus had been talking about *planting the seed of the kingdom in the hearts of men*. He then branches out from that parable to tell another one.

Matthew 13:24-30 “Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and

brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn."

Is Jesus teaching here that sin should be allowed to continue in the body of Christ? Can we really imagine that that would be the lesson that He was trying to impart to His disciples? Is He really saying that Christians should turn a blind eye to wickedness because God will judge it in the end anyhow? That God will simply take care of it, so who are we to judge? Well, the best thing to do is to let Jesus explain His own words. He explains the parable to His disciples a few verses later.

Matthew 13:37-38 "He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one;"

You see, the *field* isn't the church; He isn't talking about letting wheat and tares grow together in the church. He's talking about the kingdom of God coexisting in the world with the kingdom of Satan. The disciples were under the misguided notion that when Jesus became King of His kingdom, He would destroy His enemies right then by force; that He would eradicate the world of sin and evil. Jesus is teaching them that, rather, evil will continue to exist in the world until the end of time.

The enemies of Christ and of His kingdom would still be here in the world, even yet while Jesus Christ ruled in the hearts of men as King. We are to try to gather the *wheat* out of the world, as it were, and when the end comes, the Lord is going to separate and mete out eternal judgment on those outside of Jesus Christ. The *tares* that are under consideration here are not erring church members; they are people out in the world, who don't believe in Jesus.

So, Jesus is not talking about church discipline; He is talking about the church existing in the midst of an ungodly population of sinful men. When you understand that that's what Jesus is saying in this parable, it makes perfect sense when you lay it alongside what Paul said. Let's read it again:

I Corinthians 5:9-13 "I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators (speaking of Christians who are committing fornication): Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world (the wheat and the tares are going to coexist in the world, this planet in which we live). But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without (that is, the tares, out in the field of the world) God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves (that is, those in the church) that wicked person (speaking of the rebellious Christian, who is a brother/sister in Christ)."

The church has a responsibility to the world that is different from its responsibility to its own members. There is a distinction. Our responsibility to the world is to preach the gospel to them and to introduce

them to Jesus in order that they might become a child of God. Our responsibility to the rebellious and unruly church member is to discipline them as Paul prescribes, in order that they might be corrected to live the holy and righteous life that Christ has called them to live.

As much as you may be tempted to times, it's not your place or mine to discipline another person's child, but we discipline those within our own family. We discipline an errant church member because he/she is part of the family of God, and we want them to be saved. Those who are outside the body of Christ are called to repentance by the preaching of the gospel. When they meet Jesus and are converted to Jesus, they leave sin behind. If sin returns and they become guilty of persistent, unrepentant sin, the apostle Paul prescribes what is to be done. It's not an act of hatred or spite; it's tough love, because we want them to be saved, and we want the church, the bride of Jesus Christ, to remain holy, pure, without spot or blemish before the Lord.

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