

Salvation & Restorative-2Corinthians2 & 1Corinthians5--9/7/2025

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Today as we gather in a sanctuary undergoing construction for expansion, God's has providentially led us to a timely reminder.

As we've had sad cases of church discipline this year, I have pondered when would be a good time to review that topic.

So as we prepare for the Lord's Table, we as elders decided we'd have a little refresher today on some of God's good purposes in discipline.

We want to recall how God's goal in proactive & corrective discipline is growth in what is good for His people.

That's true even if situations are hard or simple obedience seems hard.

We need to get away from the idea that anything that seems hard is necessarily bad or undesirable.

For example, does it seem hard to talk to others about sin or hell?

Obviously, we want to be humble & gracious, but just because those are heavy subjects does not mean we should avoid them.

In such situations, we must not assume that what seems most comfortable or popular is better than what God has commanded.

If we do, we miss out on God working in & through us.

But we all likely feel those tensions as we battle pride or self-protection & pray for wisdom of when & how to speak.

And there are also similar temptations for the church together where self-protective human wisdom has often prevailed.

One such temptation is the area of church discipline, the lifestyle of keeping Christians accountable to observe all that Christ commanded.

Of course, since that's part of the Great Commission in Matthew 28, making disciples & teaching them to observe all that I commanded, it should not be questionable or optional.

But when that teaching involves accountability to obey what Jesus has commanded, many churches have questioned it or opted out.

Yet that accountability of church membership is one of God's chief means of keeping us walking in faithfulness.

Jesus gave clear commands for it in Matthew 18:15-17, saying "*If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.*"

Though church discipline is often viewed as that 4-step process, I describe it as a lifestyle because it's something that we need in our relationships every day.

Step 1 is a completely private matter between two individuals & it is something we need to practice in relationships as an ongoing lifestyle.

I mean, if we're honest, we sin every day—or at least we have misunderstandings every day—& we need the kind of openness to give & receive questions & corrections as a part of life.

That requires humility & love & graciousness & patience, but it guards us from letting issues grow & bitterness build up & problems deepen.

But then Jesus went on to say that if an issue is not resolved 1-on-1, step 2 involves getting 1 or 2 others to help.

If sin has been verified by those others & the sinning person still does not repent, then it moves to step 3.

Of course, if there is repentance, then reconciliation occurs between people & there is no further need to continue.

There is a happy “winning” of a brother in that case.

But if a person persists in unrepentant sin, Jesus said in step 3 to tell it to the church so that the church might try to win them.

And lastly, if there is still no repentance, then step 4 is to treat that unrepentant person like a tax-collector or Gentile, like an unbeliever.

Jesus said next in Matthew 18:18 that doing so is agreeing with what’s already stated in heaven—that a person who is unrepentant in their sins is not His follower.

Yet even with that endorsement from heaven, when I started seminary over 30 years ago, it was nearly impossible to find a church that practiced church discipline.

Now after revivals of expository preaching & the true Gospel, many conservative churches still fail to practice discipline.

I have heard or read of so many church leaders who admit that they do not practice church discipline because they don’t think it will work.

They say people will not like it or people will leave, or that unbelievers will not come, or they make other excuses.

But historically, one of the marks of a true church, along with the Gospel, Scripture, & the ordinances, was church discipline.

Of course, everything in history is not right; but listen to this.

Historian Gregory A. Wills studied records of church business from Baptist churches from 1785-1900. [*Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, & Church Discipline in the Baptist South 1785-1900*, 12, in Albert Mohler, “Church Discipline”, in *Polity*, ed. Mark Dever]

He found “Churches held regular “Days of Discipline” when the congregation would gather to heal breaches of fellowship, admonish wayward members, rebuke the obstinate, &, if necessary, excommunicate those who resisted discipline.” [44]

Since they understood the heart’s temptations & sin’s deceitfulness, they regularly emphasized our need for spiritual protection.

Yet we realize today that many of you have said that you come from churches that never practiced church discipline.

So as we come to the Lord’s Supper, we thought it wise to take this morning to remember God’s design for discipline.

Although 1st Corinthians 11:23-32 is not a case of church discipline, it is a case of discipline by the Lord Himself.

We mention that passage when we celebrate communion & it’s helpful to turn there to 1st Corinthians 11 to see the call for examination.

So follow along as I read 1st Corinthians 11:23-32. [READ]

We seek to follow these commands in remembrance of the Lord Jesus.

We evaluate ourselves so that we remember Him in a worthy manner & do not eat & drink judgment on ourselves.

We do not want to face discipline or judgment like the Corinthians.

Yet we must note here how God used that situation of discipline to leave us warnings through Paul.

So I want to note that as a 1st point today—a 1st of 3 goals of discipline we’ll outline—note 1st that one goal of discipline is examination.

One of God’s purposes in discipline is examination.

Of course, this passage is about discipline generally & not church discipline specifically.

But the principle applies that discipline calls for examination.

That's what Paul was calling for in 1st Corinthians 11:23-32 so write that passage down with this 1st point—1st Corinthians 11:23-32.

One goal of discipline is examination.

The Lord's discipline of weakness & sickness & even sleep or death of Christians at Corinth was an occasion for examination of themselves.

That's true of discipline in general also, whether the discipline is clearly for some sin we're hiding or ignoring, or it's not clearly linked to any sin as in Job's case.

Whether discipline comes in the circumstances God brings or in the confrontation God sends, it is a reason to examine ourselves.

And the Lord's Table is a time for such examination.

So we want to view such calls for examination as welcome blessings.

We want to remember that the goal of discipline is for our good, even as it is for parents with our own children.

Our goal is to train with positive, proactive discipline in our own lives & in our parenting & in God's design for His people.

Individually, that includes disciplines of grace like the Word & prayer & relationships & serving in the church.

Then there's also the means of corrective discipline with children & also with each other in the lifestyle of church discipline in the church.

That fourth step of church discipline is a fearful declaration of agreement with God's assessment of unbelief.

Yet the purpose behind even that sad step is the sinner's salvation & that's a 2nd goal of discipline to note today—2ndly it is for salvation.

God can use discipline (1) for examination, & (2) for salvation.

I want us to remember those salvation purposes by looking at a situation in the church at Corinth by turning to 1st Corinthians 5.

So write down 1st Corinthians 5 with this 2nd point & let's turn there to see the saving goal of discipline.

We want to be encouraged that God uses His commands in His sovereign grace according to His timetable.

And that can help us to trust & obey in any situation.

That may be in an uncomfortable evangelistic conversation that God later uses to bring someone to salvation.

Or it may be in church life in accountability to restore a brother or sister to faithfulness to Christ.

Look at 1st Corinthians 5 & let's read verses 1-13. [READ]

Like Jesus' clear instructions in Matthew 18, it is unmistakable how the Apostle Paul was saying to deal with unrepentant sin.

Verse 1 says that immorality was happening among them & immorality that was worse than pagans tolerated.

A man was sexually sinning with his father's wife.

That's warped & wicked even in the most debased societies.

Yet shockingly the Corinthians were arrogant about it rather than being broken & mournful over such horrible sin.

That was a shame on the name of Christ & His church & it was polluting any proper concern for holiness in the church & it was wrecking their testimony to the world.

And it was obviously raising questions of whether this man was genuinely saved & headed for heaven.

If he was continuing in such blatant sin, his life was screaming evidence that He did not know God.

Paul said that in the next chapter—in 1st Corinthians 6:9-11—such an immoral person is not in the kingdom of God.

Paul said that he had already judged this one & he said to remove him out of the church, to hand him over to the devil's domain.

That's step 4 in Jesus' words in Matthew 18, excommunicating or putting the unrepentant out of the community of believers.

But verse 5 is clear that salvation was the goal for the unrepentant one—it was so that his soul would be saved in the end.

Verses 6-8 explain how this practice is best for the church also because it protects the church from the leaven of sin.

The church is to be purified & warned when an unrepentant sinner is put out of the fellowship in this way.

That can save & keep others from similar dangers.

Such separation protects the church from being polluted by hanging out with someone who claims to be a Christian but does not live like it.

That kind of company is dangerous & needs to be avoided.

And verses 9-13 clarify how that applies, not as separation from the world, but as separation from such unrepentant so-called Christians.

Such separation is God's method to bring salvation to the unrepentant sinner & saving protection to the whole church.

And the implication for the testimony of the Gospel to the world is that a Christian should live differently.

The world should be able to note the difference of a believer's life & that is the ground of removing the unrepentant.

The testimony of the church & the promised power of the Gospel are at stake in how a church deals with sin like this.

So this discipline also has a goal of salvation for the world, for those outside the church.

It is a witness to the world that the church is set apart with the distinctive power of the Gospel that changes lives.

That's a testimony to teach the world by being different.

Many in the modern church wrongly think the way to reach the world is to be like the world, but that's never been God's plan.

Rather, God has always meant for His people to be separate from the world, separate from the pagan nations around them.

That's how the church shines most brightly in the darkness.

It answers the criticism that the church is filled with hypocrites.

Sometimes that's just a lazy excuse to suppress the truth, but churches that fail to practice discipline are guilty of validating that criticism.

When unrepentant sin goes unaddressed, that is a shame on the name of Christ & a hindrance to the Gospel.

So as we saw in Acts 5, we need to recall that church discipline is a powerful evangelistic tool in God's plan.

The goal in church discipline is salvation, not only for the unrepentant, but also for unbelievers outside the church.

So among the many other things we could unpack from 1st Corinthians chapters 5 & 11 this morning, we can note how they demonstrate these 1st goals of discipline being examination and salvation.

Now finally today, let's turn to 2nd Corinthians 2 to see a 3rd goal of discipline in the outcome of a church discipline case.

And we could highlight other blessings of discipline in God's design like protection & purification, but I'm just noting 3 today.

The 3rd goal of discipline to note today is restoration.

2nd Corinthians 2 records the restoration of someone who had caused great sorrow & grief for the church & for Paul & his companions.

We don't know who this person was—it could have been the man disciplined in 1st Corinthians 5—but we can't be sure.

But we note that 2nd Corinthians 2 shows that a 3rd goal of discipline is restoration—that's point #3 today.

God uses discipline for examination, salvation, & restoration.

Look at 2nd Corinthians 2 & follow along in verses 1-11. [READ]

What's obvious here is that Paul had experienced sorrow & had caused the church at Corinth sorrow by what he wrote to them.

He had previously written for them to remove the individual that is brought up in verse 5, this certain one who had caused sorrow.

Yet here now Paul was exhorting the Corinthians to love & forgive & comfort this same one who had caused sorrow.

So this passage gives us what to hope & pray for & how to respond when God answers prayers for someone who has caused sorrow.

Of course, this passage also highlights is that you cannot escape the sorrow—we cannot escape the pain of people sinning because we live in a fallen world.

We cannot run away from or drown out the sad reality that people will disappoint us & that some professing believers will fall away & prove to be one of the unfruitful soils of Mark 4.

2nd Peter & Jude & Acts 20 & many other passages warn that even false teachers will rise up from within the church.

Until we reach heaven, we will face the heartache of watching some people backslide or walk away from the faith altogether.

The consistent warnings & illustrations of the NT show that.

I don't like such sorrow, but I do love when that sorrow turns to joy.

That is the kind of joy & comfort that 2nd Corinthians 2 calls for after this man had repented.

Sin is sorrowful, but there is a hope for joy & love after the sorrow.

There is a path of comfort that can overcome the sorrow.

Restoration is that pleasure after the pain & the triumph after the trial.

Restoration is when someone who strayed repents of sin & seeks forgiveness & returns to accountability.

Restoration is when God uses His methods of sorrow in a person's life to humble him to submit to God & be restored to fellowship.

Restoration is what Paul was calling for in 2nd Corinthians 2.

Verse 5 is clear that this man had caused sorrow by his sin & verse 6 is clear that some punishment was given by the majority.

The church had apparently acted to put him out of fellowship.

But now he had turned from sin & was seeking to be restored.

And Paul described it as a joy & said to forgive & reaffirm their love for him.

Rather than heaping sorrow on the person, they were to comfort him.

The comfort of forgiveness was to be applied in love just as Paul said that he had already forgiven him.

The sorrow of the church is overcome as they gladly forgive.

And the sorrow of the repentant is overcome as he is forgiven.

The Gospel says that when we come in repentance & faith to Jesus, His death washes away all sin.

And the Gospel promises that we are welcomed into God's family afresh in the wonders of grace we all receive.

This open & public seeking of forgiveness showed that nothing was hidden & that Paul could call the whole church to forgive.

That was a protection from gossip & bitterness & slander & other attacks of Satan that may arise in such a situation.

Even in this example of restoration, we see how God's methods are a protection against enemy attacks.

In those ways & more, restoration brings the joy & love that overcomes the sorrow.

And let me add that these texts can be both a warning & a welcome.

They warn us to have humble hearts receptive to counsel.

We should take that seriously & receive that eagerly & also follow God's design & be willing to offer it to others.

These texts also warn those who may be wandering spiritually.

Maybe you do not really love Christ—maybe you are turned to the world & wanting a path other than faithfulness to Christ & His church.

Maybe you're not sharing Christ & soaking in His Word & drawing near in prayer & singing His praise.

Maybe you're not seeking accountability & instead you are drifting.

Please listen because these texts tell you something I want you to know—Christ & His church are here for you.

The church is here to love you & shepherd you & care for your eternal soul & your salvation & sanctification & protection.

But if you don't want that & don't listen, we are always ready to forgive & comfort.

Even if you reach a time when you've walked away after not listening to rebuke or even sadly rejected church discipline, we are still here.

Maybe you are a young person who will move & fall away or you have not yet committed to Christ & His church & you are waiting to slide out & escape accountability.

Listen—we love you & are praying for you & we want what is spiritually best for you and for your greatest joy.

You need to know that God is like the father in the prodigal son story on the porch looking eagerly & beckoning you to come home & be restored.

Hear me as a pastor that we will be figuratively standing on that porch with the love of God in Christ, longing for you to come home.

We will be watching & praying & waiting for you to repent & be restored so that we can rejoice with you.

So if that is you who strays, then don't think twice about whether you should come back no matter what you have done.

We are eager to welcome you to the cross of Jesus Christ and forgive you and restore you to the body of Christ.

We want you to have godly sorrow unto repentance because that leads to salvation & restoration.

So let today be a warning never to stray from Christ & His church & let it also be a welcome always to return to Christ & His church where there is love & forgiveness.

Never let your pride keep you from returning to the counsel & care of the people who have loved & prayed for you.

Of course, your day of death may come sooner than you think.

But until that day, God in Christ & His church are always ready to restore the prodigal when he comes home to God & His Word.

And now as you all may have suspected when you saw today's topic, I share these truths because we need to practice them.

I share these truths because we have opportunity to restore someone who was publicly disciplined from this church three years ago.

But God has not given up on him & has brought Doug Richards to repentance over his sins.

So now Doug is seeking restoration to this body of believers.

The elders and I have had interactions & meetings with Doug & we are thankful to forgive him.

He has been open & honest & teachable & has spoken with honor & gratitude for the testimony of this church.

So now I'm going to let Doug Richards come up & share with you what he has already shared with the elders.

Doug, share with us & know that I'm praying for you. [Doug SHARE]

Some of you may have questions about why we wanted Doug to share with you publicly on a Sunday morning.

We wanted him to do so for his own good—to allow you to hear from him & thereby to prevent gossip & questions.

We wanted to allow him to show the openness he's shown as he's sought restoration & followed our care & counsel.

And we wanted you all to be able to share our joy after past sorrow & to share our love that overcomes sorrow.

We wanted you to be able to forgive & comfort him.

We wanted you to understand afresh God's goal of restoration so that you would be encouraged in how God uses what He commands.

So we can thank God together & we can celebrate & practice the riches of His grace to us in the Gospel with one another.

We as elders welcome your questions & are thankful that we could have such confidence in your loving response today.

So I pray that our look at 3 goals of discipline from 1st & 2nd Corinthians is a fresh encouragement as we apply it.

I pray that you see God's wisdom in His ways to work in His time.

I pray you are encouraged to trust His Word in every situation.

So let's praise Him together & recommit ourselves to the holy testimony that He calls us to be to reach a lost world.

And let's recommit to His plan for accountability to protect our eternal souls & our testimony to the world.

Pray with me as we now examine ourselves to remember the Lord's death until He comes again.

Take a minute to pray quietly & then I'll lead us in prayer as the men come to prepare to serve us at the Lord's Table.