

## **Why Should We Practice Church Discipline?**

**Church discipline was an element of the apostle Paul's teaching.**

**Church discipline is when you stop hanging out with Christians in the church who are intentionally sinning after you have talked to them about their sinful behavior.**

**Church discipline aims to help steer people back to following God properly.**

**Excommunication was only the final option in the process (1 Timothy 1:20).**

**What Does The Bible Say?**

I can hardly believe the report about the sexual immorality going on among you—something that even pagans don't do. I am told that a man in your church is living in sin with his stepmother.

2 You are so proud of yourselves, but you should be mourning in sorrow and shame. And you should remove this man from your fellowship. (1 Corinthians 5:1–2 NLT)

**It should break our hearts when we see a fellow Christian in sin.**

6 Your boasting about this is terrible. Don't you realize that this sin is like a little yeast that spreads through the whole batch of dough? 7 Get rid of the old "yeast" by removing this wicked person from among you. Then you will be like a fresh batch of dough made without yeast, which is what you really are. Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for us. (1 Corinthians 5:6–7 NLT)

Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself. (Galatians 6:1 NLT)

**If we allow sin in the church, it may spread to others.**

9 When I wrote to you before, I told you not to associate with people who indulge in sexual sin. 10 But I wasn't talking about unbelievers who indulge in sexual sin, or are greedy, or cheat people, or worship idols. You would have to leave this world to avoid people like that. (1 Corinthians 5:9–10 NLT)

**Allow pagans to be pagans.**

**Christians are not to be isolated but separated.**

**How Can You Obey?**

11 I meant that you are not to associate with anyone who claims to be a believer yet indulges in sexual sin, or is greedy, or worships idols, or is abusive, or is a drunkard, or cheats people. Don't even eat with such people.

12 It isn't my responsibility to judge outsiders, but it certainly is your responsibility to judge those inside the church who are sinning. 13 God will judge those on the outside; but as the Scriptures say, "You must remove the evil person from among you." (1 Corinthians 1:11-13 NLT)

**We cannot avoid contact with sinners, but we can prevent contamination by sinners.**

**Three reasons why we need church discipline:**

**It helps the Christian that is sinning.**

**It keeps the church from allowing more sin.**

**It keeps up the respect from unbelievers.**

**Additional Notes:**

If you would like to use your home to disciple others, check out our training at [www.crosswaveschurch.com/host](http://www.crosswaveschurch.com/host). Cross Waves has produced short videos to train you how to use your home to reach others for Christ. So please check it out.

**Notes:**

Today's Insights To The Biblical World comes from Michael S. Heiser, Brief Insights on Mastering the Bible: 80 Expert Insights

on the Bible, Explained in a Single Minute, The 60 Second Scholar (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 49.

**Explore:**

That Paul is this letter's author there is little doubt. Even the most imaginative critics find no objection on this point. The apostle came to Corinth (Acts 18:1–18) on his second missionary journey (probably in the spring of a.d. 51 as the proconsulship of Gallio likely began later that year, in July). There Paul met Aquila and Priscilla who had left Rome in a.d. 49, when Claudius issued an edict ordering the expulsion of Jews from that city. The couple ran a tent-making business, a trade also practiced by Paul. Since no mention is made of their conversions, they were probably Christians when Paul met them. With a kinship along spiritual, ethnic, and vocational lines, Paul was naturally attracted to them.

According to his custom Paul attended the synagogue and took part in its services, seeking to persuade his hearers that Jesus is the Messiah. When the synagogue was closed to Paul, he went next door to the house of a synagogue listener who heard and believed, a Gentile named Titius Justus (Acts 18:7). He was one of many people in Corinth who belonged to the Lord.

David K. Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F.

Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 504–505.

## **Explore:**

### **Background and Purpose**

1 Corinthians is like listening to only one end of telephone conversation. It answers the following questions:

- How should we view church leaders?
- How should church discipline be carried out?

- Is it right for a Christian to take a fellow Christian to court?
- What does it mean to be free as a Christian?
- What are the spiritual gifts and which are the most important ones?
- What happens after we die?

Mark Water, *The Books of the Bible Made Easy, The Made Easy Series* (Alresford, Hampshire: John Hunt Publishing, 2001), 46.

### **Explore:**

From a human point of view Paul probably had reason to wonder if many saints would be found in Corinth. The ancient city had a reputation for vulgar materialism. In the earliest Greek literature



it was linked with wealth (Homer Iliad 2. 569–70) and immorality. When Plato referred to a prostitute, he used the expression “Corinthian girl” (Republic 404d). The playwright Philetaerus (Athenaeus 13. 559a) titled a burlesque play *Ho Korinthiastēs*, which may be translated “The Lecher.” And Aristophanes coined the verb *korinthiazomai* to refer to fornication (Fragment 354). According to Strabo (Geography 8. 6–20) much of the wealth and vice in Corinth centered around the temple of Aphrodite and its thousand temple prostitutes. For this reason a proverb warned, “Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth.”

For a hundred years after 146 b.c. no one cared to make the voyage to Corinth. The city was destroyed because of its revolt against Rome. Only a few columns in the temple of Apollo survived the razing. All its citizenry was killed or sold into slavery.

But this favorable location did not go unused for long, as Julius Caesar refounded the city as a Roman colony in 46 b.c. In 27 b.c. it became the governmental seat for Achaia, from which seat Gallio as proconsul would allow Paul's proclamation of the gospel. It was onto this new stage, which nonetheless preserved the vices of the old, that Paul stepped in a.d. 51.

David K. Lowery, "1 Corinthians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 504–505.

**Explore:**

History reports that one of the most prominent lo- cations in

Corinth in the first century was a temple dedicated to Aphrodite, the goddess of love and sexuality. Unfortunately, the sexual promiscuity that permeated this place had so shaped the hearts and minds of the residents that the pull toward immorality continued even after a person became a Christian.

While the Greek term for “sexual immorality” in verse 1 could refer to several illicit sexual behaviors, in this case it was a very specific transgression. Word had gotten to Paul that a member of the church at Corinth was carrying on an incestuous relationship with his stepmother (verse 1). This was an act not only prohibited by Roman law, but also forbidden in the Old Testament. (Leviticus 18:8; Deuteronomy 27:20).

While the issue was extremely troubling to the apostle, it did not seem to disturb the Corinthian believers at all. Scholars often attribute this nonchalant attitude to a distorted understanding of grace. The arrogance mentioned in verse 2 was linked to the wisdom and knowledge of which the Corinthians often boasted.

Godly wisdom and its corresponding response, however, would have been grief, discipline, and even excommunication.

In opposition to the Corinthians' indifference to the matter, Paul was compelled to act. As the founding apostle and pastor, he passed judgment on the matter, as if he were present with them (verse 3). His instructions to the Corinthian believers were very specific (verses 4-5). Doing this in the name of the Lord Jesus expressed the authoritative nature of Paul's instructions as he ordered the congregation to expel the man from among them and deliver him to Satan. This expression was code for exclusion from the congregation, which would put him into the sphere of the world where Satan and his demons hold influence and sway. The intent of this action was for the man to realize the error of his ways and choose to turn and repent.

There were no mixed signals from Paul as he addressed this situation. He could not believe the church had not dealt with this

sinful practice of in-cest taking place among them. Even more, he was appalled that instead of being saddened by this scenario, they were boasting about it or more likely joking or jesting about what was taking place.

In verse 6, Paul alluded to the boasting of the Corinthian church members. Apparently, the body of believers would boast of its achievements while ignoring the obvious failures within. Paul urged discipline in this situation for the good of the one who was sinning, but also for the good of the church as a body. Drawing from the Old Testament festival of Passover and the practice of removing all leaven from one's house, Paul urged the removal of sin based upon the nature of leaven or yeast. The Hebrews metaphorically understood that leaven represented whatever had the power of corrupting. Therefore, there was a danger in allowing this individual and his sinful practice to remain in the congregation. Just as leaven would grow and move pervasively

through the dough until it had overtaken it, so would this one sin affect the entire church.

**Explore:**

Allowing a church member to continue in sin hinders his growth and can hinder a church's efforts to carry out its mission. God established the church to make disciples and transfer the faith.

**Explore:**

Church Discipline

While not an identity marker like baptism and the Lord's Supper, the practice of church discipline was nonetheless an important element of Paul's teaching concerning the church. The apostle spoke frequently about church discipline, highlighting a significant disconnect between the Pauline churches and the contemporary Christian community, in which church discipline is generally a neglected practice. The apostle deemed church

discipline a fitting response to various sins, and it took various forms (Rom 16:17–18; 2 Thess 3:14–15; 1 Tim 1:20).

Public rebuke was a common practice for Paul (Rom 16:17; 1 Cor 5:4–5; 1 Tim 1:20). Other forms of discipline included warning and admonition (1 Thess 5:12–14), withholding of fellowship (2 Thess 3:6), and abstaining from association, particularly during the church's gathering around the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 5:11–13). All discipline reflected the holy love and loving holiness of God and the command of Jesus Christ (see Matt 18:17–18; Heb 12:6, 11).

The purpose of discipline, in that regard, was redemptive (2 Cor 2:4; Gal 6:1). Excommunication was only the final option in the process (1 Tim 1:20). Thus, the act of discipline was intended to be carried out in love and humility in order to restore the wayward back to fellowship. Sometimes moving toward repentance included shame (2 Thess 3:14) and sorrow (2 Cor

2:7). Yet Paul warned against excessive punishment that might bring about excessive grief (v. 7). Discipline protected the church from decay (1 Cor 5:6). Paul understood that discipline served as an important reminder of the propensity toward sin and also produced a zeal for holiness in the believing community (2 Cor 7:11).

David S. Dockery, “The Church in the Pauline Epistles,” in *The Community of Jesus: A Theology of the Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2013).

### **Explore:**

In 1 Corinthians 5:7-8, Paul referred to the Pass-over and encouraged the Corinthians to keep the festival. While the Corinthians understood what Paul was referring to, it was more important for them to recognize Christ as the fulfillment of the



Jewish Passover. In the Old Testament sacrificial system, after the lamb was killed, they kept the feast of unleavened bread. We must do the same, not only seven days, but all our days. The life of the Christian must be one of “unleavened bread”—a life of sincerity and truth, free from sins and vices.

### **Explore:**

What we recognize as 1 Corinthians is likely the second letter Paul wrote to the church, as 1 Corinthians 5:9 intimates. In reality, Paul wrote at least four letters to the church of Corinth: the Lost Letter (1 Corinthians 5:9), 1 Corinthians, the Severe Letter (2 Corinthians 2:4), and 2 Corinthians. God, in His sovereignty, chose to preserve only the two epistles we have as inspired Scripture. In the “lost letter,” commentators believe Paul may have instructed the Corinthians to collect a contribution for the poor believers in Jerusalem, leading them to ask the apostle for clarification. Paul’s response to their

questions is recorded in 1 Corinthians 16:2. It is also possible that this first letter recorded Paul's intention of visiting them on his way to Macedonia. While there are many questions surrounding the letter, what is clear is that the Holy Spirit did not pre-serve this writing for the church today, as He did 1 and 2 Corinthians.

### **Explore:**

The nature and number of Paul's contacts and correspondence with the Corinthians after his first visit in A.D. 51 is subject to considerable debate. A defense for the scheme of events to be presented may be found in several of the works cited in the Bibliography.

1. The length of Paul's stay on this first tour of ministry was one and one-half years, after which he sailed in the fall of A.D. 52 to Ephesus enroute to Jerusalem. Priscilla and Aquila accompanied Paul to Ephesus where they remained to meet and instruct the

gifted Alexandrian Apollos whom they subsequently sent on to Corinth for ministry there (Acts 18:18–28).

2. While Apollos was ministering in Corinth (Acts 19:1), Paul returned to Ephesus on his third missionary journey in the fall of A.D. 53 for a period of about two and one-half years (Acts 19).

It was probably during the early part of Paul's ministry in Ephesus that he wrote the letter mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9, a letter misunderstood by the Corinthians (5:10–11) and later lost.

3. Paul learned of this misunderstanding and of further problems in the church at Corinth from the household of Chloe (1:11).

Then an official delegation—Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (16:17)—brought Paul specific questions on issues dividing the church. First Corinthians was written, probably in A.D. 54 or 55, to address these matters.

4. But apparently this did not resolve the problems in the church. It is possible that Timothy was the bearer of this news (4:17; 16:10). Paul then decided to revisit the church which he called in 2 Corinthians 1:15 and 2:1 the “painful” visit (cf. 2 Cor. 13:1, which speaks of a third visit, the last leg of Paul’s third missionary journey), because of the action of the man referred to in 2 Corinthians 2:5 and 7:2.

5. After his second visit and return to Ephesus, Paul sent a letter borne by Titus, which it grieved him deeply to write (2 Cor. 2:4) apparently because of its disciplinary nature (2 Cor. 7:8–9).

6. After the silversmiths’ riot Paul left Ephesus bound for Troas to meet Titus. Because Paul could not find him there, he anxiously pushed on to Macedonia, apparently with grave concern about Titus’ safety (2 Cor. 2:12–13; 7:5). There he met Titus who brought good news about the general well-being of

the Corinthian church but bad news about a group opposed to Paul.

7. From Macedonia Paul wrote 2 Corinthians and followed it up with his third visit during the winter of a.d. 56–57 (Acts 20:1–4).

David K. Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 504–506.

### **Question 1 of 5**

Why should we be thankful that we have the completed Bible?

## **Question 2 of 5**

What does it mean for a person to strive to be pure spiritually?

## **Question 3 of 5**

Why is it necessary to limit association with a believer continuing in sin?

## **Question 4 of 5**

How can one person's sin affect an entire church?

## **Question 5 of 5**

Why is it essential for a church to deal with ongoing sin by a church member?