

Church Discipline

Sunday, September 28, 2025

Start with Application Testimony

- **Last week's exhortation:** Challenge the selfishness inside you. Humble yourself. Act in love towards others in the church this week.

INTRO

- **We are going verse-by-verse, in a topical study through I & II Corinthians**
 - **Current Topic:** Church Relationship - The holy work of being the Body of Christ.
 - As we have been learning about Church Relationship, one reality that has emerged is how much effort it requires, especially in regards to devotion, humility, patience, and love. But the constant reminder is that our love for Jesus cannot be separated from our love for one another. According to Him, they are one in the same.
 - In today's lesson, we are going to look at two passages to learn about the process and necessity of Church Discipline. While the sinful man referenced in 1 Corinthians 5 and the one in 2 Corinthians 2 are probably not the same person, and the situation not the same situation, these two passages together do show us both ends of the same process: how to discipline someone who won't repent and how to restore someone after they do repent.

READ

1 Corinthians 5 CSB

¹ It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and the kind of sexual immorality that is not even tolerated among the Gentiles—a man is sleeping with his father's wife. ² And you are arrogant! Shouldn't you be filled with grief and remove from your congregation the one who did this? ³ Even though I am absent in the body, I am present in spirit. As one who is present with you in this way, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who has been doing such a thing. ⁴ When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus, and I am with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ hand that one over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. ⁶ Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little leaven leavens the whole batch of dough? ⁷ Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new unleavened batch, as indeed you are. For Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. ⁸ Therefore, let us observe the feast, not with old leaven or with the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. ⁹ I wrote to you in a letter not to associate with sexually immoral people. ¹⁰ I did not mean the immoral people of this world or the greedy and swindlers or idolaters; otherwise you would have to leave the world. ¹¹ But actually, I wrote you not to associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister and is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or verbally abusive, a drunkard or a swindler. Do not even eat with such a person. ¹² For what business is it of mine to judge outsiders? Don't you judge those who are inside? ¹³ God judges outsiders. **Remove the evil person from among you.**

2 Corinthians 2:5–11 CSB

⁵ If anyone has caused pain, he has caused pain not so much to me but to some degree—not to exaggerate—to all of you. ⁶ This punishment by the majority is sufficient for that person. ⁷ As a result, you should instead forgive and comfort him. Otherwise, he may be overwhelmed by excessive grief. ⁸ Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him. ⁹ I wrote for this purpose: to test your character to see if you are obedient in everything. ¹⁰ Anyone you forgive, I do too. For what I have forgiven—if I have forgiven anything—it is for your benefit in the presence of Christ, ¹¹ so that we may not be taken advantage of by Satan. For we are not ignorant of his schemes.

EXAMINE

#1 | The Church has the authority and responsibility to discipline its members

1. We have a responsibility to one another in the Church that is different from our responsibility to unbelievers.

a. 1 Corinthians 5:12–13 *“For what business is it of mine to judge outsiders? Don’t you judge those who are inside? God judges outsiders...”*

i. We must hold one another to a higher standard than we do unbelievers, as fellow brothers and sisters who know the truth and belong to Christ.

1. *This is a weighty thing. God reserves judgment for the unbeliever, but calls us to judge (evaluate and correct) one another in the church.*

2. This authority belongs to the church congregation – Pastors and Elders merely provide direction.

- a. 1 Corinthians 5:4 *“When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus, and I am with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus...”*
 - i. The Church congregation must be in agreement when Church Discipline is necessary.
 - 1. *This protects the process from personal vendetta, ego, or power grabs. Church Discipline is not something anyone has the authority to do unilaterally.*
 - 2. *While Pastors and Elders can remove someone from positions of leadership – the congregation must agree to remove someone from the Church.*

3. Who receives discipline and how?

- a. Church discipline is for professing members or regular attenders who persist in public, significant, unrepentant sin.
 - i. *Sins like public sexual immorality, drunkenness, divisiveness, false teaching, abuse, exploitative behavior, etc.*
 - ii. *It’s not every time someone is caught in sin or struggling with sin. It is their refusal to repent that leads to church discipline.*
- b. The process of church discipline is laid out by Jesus in **Matthew 18:15-20**
 - i. *Go privately to your brother or sister. (No pastor or elder needed.)*
 - ii. *If they won’t listen, take one or two others to confirm facts and appeal. (Preferably pastors or elders, due to the next step.)*
 - iii. *If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the whole church. (Leaders help bring it before the congregation.)*

- iv. *If refusal continues, the congregation removes them from fellowship until repentance. (Jesus is giving this authority to Church in Matt 18:18-20)*

#2 | Church Discipline is about holiness and repentance

1. Church Discipline is limited to rebuke and then removal from fellowship if necessary.

- a. 1 Corinthians 5:2 “*...Shouldn’t you be filled with grief and remove from your congregation the one who did this?*”
- b. 1 Corinthians 5:13 “*...Remove the evil person from among you.*”
- i. The Church doesn’t have the authority to restrict or control people’s lives – it just has the authority to remove people from within it.

2. Removal from Church fellowship is a very serious thing – meant to honor the holiness of God and be a final resort to encourage repentance.

- a. 1 Corinthians 5:4-5 “*When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus... hand that one over to Satan...*”
- i. Removal from fellowship places a person outside the protective care of the Body of Christ and the blessing of God’s grace shared among His people.
1. *Essentially this is handing a person over to the consequences of their rebellion against God.*
- b. 1 Timothy 5:20 “*Publicly rebuke those who persist in sin, so that the rest will be afraid.*”

- i. Christ gives the Church this authority to promote obedience to Him and holiness before God.

- 1. *Removing the unrepentant also purifies the congregation of open disobedience to Jesus.*

3. The aim of Church Discipline must always be to encourage repentance.

- a. 1 Corinthians 5:5 “...hand that one over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” (See also 1 Timothy 1:20)

- i. The goal and expectation must be that the person will listen and change, be restored and healed. We must never desire to beat someone down or write them off.

#3 | The Church must be eager to restore and redeem

1. We must never inflict more pain than is necessary.

- a. 2 Corinthians 2:6–8 “This punishment by the majority is sufficient for that person. As a result, you should instead forgive and comfort him. Otherwise, he may be overwhelmed by excessive grief. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him.”

- i. We must never write someone off and be done with them – such an attitude is against Christ and His Gospel. (Isaiah 50:1–2)
- ii. We must watch and pray, ready to rally around our brothers and sisters when they repent and return to Jesus.
 - 1. *In other words, we must act towards others in their repentance, exactly the same way Jesus acts towards us in ours.*

- iii. As the discipline was public, the restoration must be even more public and celebrated.

2. We must carefully guard ourselves and our relationships.

- a. 2 Corinthians 2:10–11 *“Anyone you forgive, I do too. For what I have forgiven—if I have forgiven anything—it is for your benefit in the presence of Christ, so that we may not be taken advantage of by Satan. For we are not ignorant of his schemes.”*
 - i. Bitterness, anger, and unforgiveness are Satan’s most common and effective strategies. When we give into them, we open a door for him to attack us and give him a grip to hold onto.
 - ii. Therefore, forgiveness and mercy is one of our most powerful weapons against the enemy and his ability to attack us both personally and corporately.
 - 1. *When we combine this with a passion for holiness and the willingness to rebuke and correct one another, we create a strong, safe Church that can defeat the enemy and expand the Kingdom of Heaven.*

REFLECT

Let’s take a moment to pray

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide our attention and lead our conversation, helping us see and understand what He wants us to apply in our lives.

APPLY

Process the passage together with these questions:

- Why do you think God gives the church—not individuals—the responsibility for discipline?
- How can a church practice discipline without becoming harsh, judgmental, or controlling?
- How can we guard ourselves against bitterness and unforgiveness after discipline has taken place?
- What do you think it communicates to the world when a church practices both correction and forgiveness faithfully?

Where we want to “land the plane”

- Church discipline is not about shaming or controlling people – it’s about protecting the holiness of God’s people and calling one another back to life in Christ. When someone refuses to repent, the church must take it seriously, not out of anger but out of love. At the same time, we must always be ready and eager to restore the repentant, celebrating their return just as Jesus celebrates ours. A church that practices both correction and forgiveness is a church that is safe, strong, and a clear witness to the grace and truth of Christ.

Exhortation for the Week

- Prepare your heart to both give correction to, and receive correction from, your brothers and sisters in the church.

FOOTNOTES

1. **The significance of removal from fellowship as it relates to Communion.**

As the literal yeast was removed from the house during the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Ex. 12:15–20; 13:1–10), so that which it illustrated, sin, was to be removed from the house of God, the local church, during its “Festival of Unleavened Bread,” a continual observance for a Christian who has found in Christ’s death on the cross the once-for-all sacrifice of the Passover Lamb (cf. John 1:29; Heb. 10:10, 14). This was nowhere more true than in the celebration which commemorated that sacrificial act, the Lord’s Supper, the quintessential act of fellowship for Christians. Probably Paul meant to exclude the unrepentant Christian from this meal in particular. *David K. Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” in The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 514.*

2. **Was the person in 1 Corinthians 5 the same guy in 2 Corinthians 2?**

Whether he was a member of the Corinthian church or someone visiting them is not clear. Paul did, however, regard him as a Christian. What this individual did to cause grief is uncertain. In the past many writers identified him with the incestuous man whom Paul had judged (1 Cor. 5). Relatively few now hold this view because of the severity of that judgment (cf. 1 Cor. 5:5) when compared with this situation, and the unlikelihood that 1 Corinthians is the letter referred to in 2 Corinthians 2:3–4. Paul’s diffidence in this verse suggests the more likely alternative that his authority as an apostle was affronted or challenged at some point in the course of his painful visit (v. 1). The Corinthians apparently failed to make the connection between a challenge to Paul’s authority and their own spiritual well-being. They had regarded this as a personal problem requiring no action on their

parts, a view which Paul had dispelled in his letter and which they now realized. *David K. Lowery, "2 Corinthians," in The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 558.*