

Church Discipline – 1 Cor 5:1-13

1 Cor 5:1-13; We're at the tail end of a mini-series on the church, as part of our Built To

Last theme for the year; Biblical principles for a church built to last
And having looked at church membership last week, this week we turn to church discipline; Which probably conjures up all kinds of thoughts in your mind
Most of which are uncomfortable I imagine, and some of which are probably unbiblical
Either b/c u've heard horror stories, or nothing at all; It's a completely unfamiliar topic

➤ So let me start with a definition to ensure that we're all on the same page
Church discipline is the means of dealing with blatant, unrepentant sin in professing believers

Blatant in that it's outward and obvious; And unrepentant b/c they refuse to *acknowledge* it, past or present; Or refuse to confess it; Or they're still in it
Whatever the case, church discipline is the last-ditch means of dealing with it, in those who profess to be a follower of Christ

What it *isn't*, is a witch hunt; Where we *look* for things wrong in each other
Nor do we make assumptions that can't be proven; Or carry it out just to be punitive – punishment for the sake of punishment, or retribution
And it's certainly not a determination of someone's salvation
Rather, it's a determination of their fitness or lack thereof, to be a part of a local church

➤ And as uncomfortable as it is, it's *biblical* – the church has the authority/responsibility to carry it out; First given by Jesus in Mt 18, and here reaffirmed by Paul
It's biblical and it's *necessary* – b/c sin and sinful people grieve/quench the Holy *Spirit*
And on top of that, you could add purifying, protective, and loving as we'll see
All of which means it's a foundational rock on which to build a church to last

And while many passages in the Bible refer to it, 1 Cor 5 gives us a pattern to follow based on a real life example; The *first* part of which, is to . . .

1. Mourn the situation (v1-2a)

When it becomes known that someone in the church is living in sin – we should mourn;
Grieve; Ache
Not gossip; Not succumb to voyeurism, where you want to know everything you can about it, b/c you love other people's dirt and demise
And we certainly shouldn't be arrogant; Like the church in Corinth; V1-2a

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. [2] And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn?

Somebody in the church was having sex with their mom or stepmom; Willful, blatant, ongoing sin by a professing believer
Something even the *unbelievers* wouldn't do; The pagans

➤ And as if *that* wasn't bad enough, the church was fine with it; *You are arrogant!* Paul says in v2; You act as if it's okay; As if you're *above* the way of Jesus
As if your freedom in Christ means you can do anything you want
And that you occupy the higher ground b/c you're "showing grace"

They weren't showing grace; They were enabling someone; And sinning themselves in doing so; When you enable someone to continue in sin, you sin
And the church in Corinth wasn't even sheepish about it; They were arrogant

When instead, they should have been weeping; They should have been *grieving* the situation; *Ought you not rather to mourn?* Paul says (v2)
Shouldn't you be filled with grief – that deep anguish of the soul that goes hand in hand with a righteous disdain for sin?
Shouldn't it trouble you to no end to see the name of Jesus dragged through the mud?

➤ If we ever have to bring a situation to you where a professing believer in our midst is living in sin – it should grieve you; You should mourn
B/c anything else simply *compounds* the trespass, and *adds* to the sin among us
That's the first exhortation in this pattern to follow

2nd, is to . . .

2. Remove them from the church (v2b,6-8)

When someone is guilty of blatant, unrepentant sin among us, it's our responsibility to remove them from our midst
V2b – *Let him who has done this be removed from among you*; As in kicked out;
Denied participation; Refused entry
Or as Paul says it in v13, at the end of his instruction – *Purge the evil person from among you*
And then, in between, in v7, *cleanse out the old leaven*; A metaphor referring to the fermented dough they used, to cook bread; Dough that's literally starting to rot

*[6] Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven [a little sin] leavens [or influences] the whole lump? [7] Cleanse out the old leaven [get rid of the sinful person] that you may be a new lump [a new people], as you really are unleavened [as you really are pure, and righteous, and clean in God's sight]. For Christ, our Passover lamb [our atoning payment], has been sacrificed [IOW in dying for us, he not only *paid* for our sin, but *removed* our sin]. [8] Let us therefore celebrate the festival [worship together] not with the old leaven [not with sin in our midst], the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth [genuine repentance and integrity].*

Sin in our midst affects us all; It doesn't even have to be blatant
When one sins, we *all* have a problem
We're not *responsible* for their sin, but we're affected; That's the idea here
Like in a family is adversely affected when a husband breaks out in anger
Or when a daughter gets pregnant out of wedlock; Everybody hurts

And the same is true in the body of Christ – when one sins, we're *all* affected
And if it's left unchecked, it will *hurt* us all; Sometimes in ways we're not even aware

Which is why, when there's sin in the camp, we have to remove it; Preferably by repentance, but if necessary, by church discipline
By excommunicating the person; That's the theological word for it
Not even allowing them to enter the doors, let alone be a part of the ministry

➤ It's like **Prov 22:10** says – *Drive out a scoffer* [someone who's unappeasable either by their words or their actions; another blatant], *and strife will go out, and quarreling and abuse will cease*. IOW remove them from the church, and the pain will stop
It's uncomfortable to *think* about, and even *harder* to do*****

But absolutely necessary if we're going to *preserve* our “unleaven-ness;” Our purity
Absolutely necessary if we're going to *act* like the people we *are* as it says in v7
If we're going to *be* holy, as *he* is holy
We *have* to remove people who profess Jesus as Lord and Savior, yet live in blatant, unrepentant sin; God's obviously passionate about it, and we should be too

3rd, along with that, is an even harder pill to swallow

3. Deliver them to Satan (v3-5)

That's the 3rd part of this pattern to follow in church discipline; Coming from v3-5

Right after saying – Let this person *be removed from among you* . . .

He says in v3 – [3] *For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing.*

By virtue of their common bond in Christ, and their mutual fellowship in the Spirit, he was *with* them

And they could carry out the discipline just as if he were there physically
Especially, since he had *already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing*
He had already reached a verdict; And was now encouraging them to follow suit

One of the principles for which, is that matters of this nature should be *leader-initiated* and *leader-led*

Notice that *Paul* is the one who addresses the issue; And *Paul* is the one who leads them through the process of responding

Which means this is not for individuals to do on their own

This is not something that should be unilaterally implemented, or done apart from the direct involvement, guidance, and counsel of church leadership

➤ But it's not just on the leaders; The church has some responsibility too
[4] *When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus* [i.e. under his authority and with his guidance] *and my spirit is present* [one more assurance that he's leading this], [4b] *with the power of our Lord Jesus*, [5] *you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh*
Wow; If that wasn't so explicit, I wouldn't preach it; And many don't anyway

When someone is guilty of blatant, unrepentant sin in our midst – it's our responsibility as a church to hand them over to Satan

To force them *out* of the church, and into the world; Out of safety, and into the lion's den; Into the sphere and influence of Satan's demonic throng

And the *way* we do that, is by withdrawing and withholding our provision and protection
Provision and protection that most often comes in the form of encouragement, and accountability, and discipleship, and love, and care; It's no more
Like throwing a person to the wolves in the middle of the wilderness
Or out of a boat in the middle of sharks; That's what it means to turn them over to Satan

➤ And the purpose, at least initially, is to allow Satan to destroy them *physically*; Or as it says in v5 – *You are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh*
Essentially, a free pass for Satan to afflict them with weakness, sickness, suffering, and maybe even death; That's how seriously God takes the purity of his church

But as I said from the top, it's not just punitive; It's not just punishment for the sake of punishment; Rather, it's punishment for the sake of redemption
It's punishment to save their soul; That's the *ultimate* purpose

➤ Look at the last phrase of v5 – *You are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord* [the day of judgment when Jesus returns].

The goal of church discipline is not condemnation, but salvation; And that's the only thing that should keep us sane when turning someone over to Satan

Just b/c God calls *us* to be done with them, doesn't mean that *he* is

Nor does it mean there's no way back; There is

It may be long and arduous, and they may very well lose their *life* in the process, but it's possible to get back; Their *spirit* may be saved, even if their body isn't

It's the 3rd exhortation in this pattern to follow, when it comes to church discipline

And then 4th, is to . . .

4. Cut off contact (v9-13)

Mourn the situation; Remove them; Deliver them to Satan; And cut off all contact
[9] *I wrote to you in my letter* [a letter either not preserved by God for his Word, or not considered necessary by the early church] *not to associate with sexually immoral people—[10] not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world* [IOW it's impossible to avoid blatantly sinful people]. [11] *But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother* [either is, or professes to be, a believer] *if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.*

One of the final and *ongoing* responses to a professing believer who has been removed from our church – is to cut off contact with them

To cease any and all association with them; Like it says in v11 – *I am writing to you not to associate with them*

Whether it's social, work-related, religious, or otherwise; Have *nothing* to do with them
Don't even eat with them it says (11b); Meaning, don't even hang out with them on an *informal* basis

It's like Jesus said in Mt 18:17; We are to treat them as a sinful outsider, no longer a *part* of our fellowship, and no longer *fit* for fellowship

Or as Paul said in **Titus 3:10-11** . . .

As for a person who stirs up division [another form of blatant, unrepentant sin], *after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him* [cut off contact], [11] *knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.*

Hard words; And even harder to do; But necessary; For all of us

Otherwise, we risk subverting the very process that God has ordained, to maintain the purity of his body and save a sinner from condemnation

Your misguided attention, when disassociation is warranted and needed, may actually hinder the very thing God is trying to do

It's incumbent upon *all* of us to cut off contact*****

➤ And then, in v12-13, Paul gives us one final push

For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? [13] God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."

Making judgment calls about sinful *sinners*, those *outside* the church, is not for us; That's God's purview

But determining the guilt of those *inside* the church, is; And purging them from our midst by cutting off contact, is too

B/c sin in the camp, sin in the church, is a big, big deal (**Summary**)

➤ That's church discipline; And if you're wondering how that would unfold in our church, here's a 6 step process that we put together as elders; These aren't hard and fast . . . But general guidelines to keep us on track and honor the Lord

1. *Gather and establish the evidence as an elder board*

If a situation came to our attention, step 1 is to get the facts; Giving the benefit of the doubt until proven otherwise

2. *Privately warn the sinful person in a meeting with 1 or 2 elders* (Gal 6:1; Mt 18:15-17)

A time where they would sit down with the person, identify their sin, urge them to stop, and warn them of the next steps if they didn't

We believe that shows patience, and demonstrates love (2 Tim 4:2)

3. *Rebuke them as a full elder board*

A time where we would warn them of the *eternal* consequences of continuing in sin (Heb 10:26-27) . . .

And strongly discourage them from participating in communion (1 Cor 11:27-32)

4. *Rescind their privilege to serve or lead in any ministry, and communicate it to those involved* (2 Thess 3:13-15)

5. *Withdraw their freedom to participate in any ministry, and publically tell the church* (Mt 18:18; 1 Tim 5:22)

This is where I would read a summary of their sin and situation in our services or in a member meeting, and hope that the public exposure would bring them to their knees

They can attend services at this point, but that's it

6. *Retract their membership, refuse them entry, and disassociate with them* (1 Cor 5:13; Titus 3:10; Prov 22:10; 2 Chron 36:15-16; 2 Jn 9-11)

That's the process we would take to exercise church discipline in our midst

Something I hope we never have to do, but something we are responsible for nonetheless, should it become necessary; And should someone . . .

Repent at any point in the process, we would welcome them with open arms

Pray – Lord, keep us from this, by keeping us from sin; And should the occasion arise, give us courage; And use this time of communion now, to remind us of the price you paid for the purity we enjoy