

Team Discipline



Topic

Church purity

Theme

The local church should maintain purity through church discipline.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will cooperate with fellow believers in helping the church maintain a pure testimony.

Materials

- Resources 1, 7, and 8
- Glass saltshaker
- Cup of dirt
- Dirty carpet remnant

Scripture Focus

1 Corinthians 5

Summary

A church must not be complacent about sin in its midst. For the sake of the church's testimony and its spiritual good, the members must practice church discipline.

Outline

- I. Serious Problems (5:1, 2)
 - A. Gross immorality
 - B. Tolerance of sin
- II. A Specific Procedure (5:3–5)
 - A. Paul's role
 - B. The church's role
- III. A Solemn Principle (5:6)
 - A. The principle
 - B. The illustration
- IV. Spiritual Purposes (5:7, 8)
 - A. Picture the Passover
 - B. Purify God's people
- V. A Sensible Practice (5:9–13)
 - A. Disassociate from unrepentant members
 - B. Distinguish between the church and the world

Memory Verse

"Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us"
(1 Corinthians 5:7).

GETTING STARTED

Ruined Potential

Show the class a half-filled, glass saltshaker.

ASK: What word or phrase would you use to describe this saltshaker's potential?

Mix some dirt into the saltshaker.

ASK: What word or phrase comes to your mind now that the salt is mixed with dirt? *Perhaps wasted potential or worthless.*

Like salt, Christians should enhance their community's taste for the gospel (Matt. 5:13). A believer's soiled testimony spoils an unbeliever's willingness to hear the gospel. That is what happened in Corinth. Paul confronted the Corinthians for committing and tolerating terrible sins. His message to them should encourage us to guard our testimony as a church and as individuals and to desire to help fellow members who have overcome with sin.

What's Your Toleration Level?

Display a carpet square or remnant with stains and dirt and food obviously stuck to it.

ASK: How tolerant are you of dirt and dust in your house? Do you have to have your floors vacuumed and your furniture dusted once a day, once a week, once a month, or just when someone comes to visit? (Q1)

ASK: Would you consider your filthy house as a reason to be proud? Explain. (Q2)

The Corinthians had a very dirty house in a sense, and they were proud of it. Their *dirt* was sin and their *house* was the church, the Body of Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul dealt with the church's need to purge out the sin by practicing church discipline, a practice that still has a place in today's church.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

The Bible presents the gospel so that sinners may be saved. Once saved, a Christian should share the gospel with others. He does this best by offering a verbal witness that is supported by his righteous life. Similarly, a church will find it easier to reach the world with the gospel when the conduct of its members compares favorably with Christian profession. Unfortunately, the Corinthian church's walk failed to support its talk. Unchecked sin blunted its testimony. The situation brought a stern rebuke from Paul.

I. Serious Problems (5:1, 2)

Paul had addressed one serious problem in the church, the problem of divisiveness. Now, in 1 Corinthians 5, he addresses another insidious problem—immorality.

Fornication (1 Cor. 5:1) originally referred to the use of a harlot but more commonly came to signify any form of sexual evil.

A. Gross immorality

Corinth was buzzing with gossip about a believer in the Corinthian church who had committed fornication with his *father's wife*—possibly his stepmother (5:1). The phrase *that one should have his father's wife* is usually a reference to marriage. Apparently the relationship was incestuous, a sin that was considered scandalous even in corrupt Corinth.

Paul underscored the heinousness of the believer's sin by stating that it was *not so much as named among the Gentiles* (5:1). The word *Gentiles* is a reference to unbelieving pagans. They engaged in immoral conduct, but they did not practice the particular sin that this man was engaged in. So how did the Corinthian believers expect their unsaved neighbors to believe the gospel in the face of such scandalous conduct by one of their fellow believers?

ASK: What affect might a heinous scandal have on the witness of fellow believers? (Q3) *Their witness may be rejected as hypocritical. They will struggle to even gain a hearing with the lost.*

ASK: How might a fellow believer best counter such reactions? (Q4) *Explain that believers are saved from sin's penalty but not sin's presence. One day all believers will be perfect, but that day is still future. Jesus, on the other hand, did live a perfect life. His life is the only one that counts for a person's salvation.*

B. Tolerance of sin

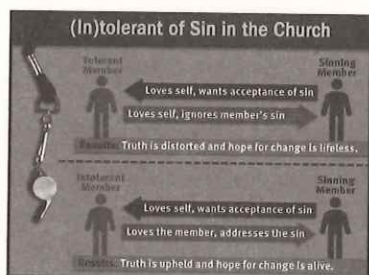
The dreadful sin in the church at Corinth should have appalled the church and compelled them to discipline the offender. Instead, they were *puffed up*, or smug and proud of their open-minded tolerance of the sin (5:2). They should have grieved that immorality had stained their testimony, but they took pride in their tolerance. They considered their lack of a judgmental attitude as evidence that they had reached a high level of spirituality.

ASK: In today's culture, which is often considered a bigger offense: a lifestyle that violates clear Biblical teaching or an intolerance of that lifestyle? (Q5) *Intolerance is often considered worse. For a growing number of people, intolerance is about the most immoral act a person could commit.*

ASK: What do we know about the Corinthian church that helps us understand this reaction (3:3)? (Q6) *The Corinthians were carnal Christians.*

Some churches want to portray only a positive atmosphere that leaves their worshipers feeling encouraged and upbeat. They accept everyone as they are but then don't encourage them to commit to Christ and grow in their likeness of Him. They tolerate sin in the name of love. But tolerating sin betrays an absence of true love because it distorts the truth that brings hope of freedom from the sin. Intolerance for sin, on the other hand, elevates the truth that victory over the sin is possible. Furthermore, intolerance for sin demonstrates that the sinner's spiritual wellbeing is important enough to confront his sin.

In the Old Testament, the act of marrying or having sexual relations with one's stepmother was forbidden by the Mosaic law (Lev. 18:8; Deut. 22:30).



RESOURCE: Display resource 7 to review the underlying love and desires involved in both tolerance and intolerance of sin.

II. A Specific Procedure (5:3–5)

Lovingly confronting sin in the church is sometimes messy, yet it is an absolutely necessary part of a godly, loving ministry. So Paul explained how and why Corinth's team church was supposed to carry out church discipline.

A. Paul's role

Paul, being with the Corinthians in spirit, tackled the Corinthian scandal because no one in the church seemed willing to do so (5:3). As the Corinthian believers' spiritual father, and with apostolic authority, he passed sentence on the guilty one. He had weighed the situation carefully and had decided the church should dismiss the offender.

B. The church's role

Ultimately church discipline is a congregational responsibility. Paul addressed the church, *when ye are gathered together* (5:4). It is not the prerogative of merely the pastor, deacons, or other leaders to discipline sinning church members. The assembled church owns this prerogative and bears the responsibility to act with the authority of the Lord of the church. It does so by applying the clear teachings of Scripture to the situation at hand (cf. Matt. 16:19; John 20:23). The congregation was to agree on this pronouncement during one of its formal gatherings.

READ: Galatians 6:1. **ASK:** What does the congregational responsibility in exercising church discipline imply about the spirituality of individual church members? (Q7) *They must have a good understanding of the Scriptures and be living in Spirit-led obedience to God. They must be meek and fully aware of their own propensity to give into temptations to sin.*

READ: Matthew 18:15–20. **ASK:** What are the three steps in church discipline? (Q8) *The steps include (1) speaking individually to the sinning believer to seek his repentance; (2) going back with one or two additional people if he is unrepentant; and (3) bringing the matter before the church if he still refuses to repent.*

The church at Corinth was supposed to agree to deliver the guilty member *unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus* (5:5). By agreeing to remove the man from the church's membership, the church was, in effect, classifying him as an unbeliever who was vulnerable to Satan's attacks on his life. Satan, of course, wants nothing more than to wreak havoc in a believer's life (cf. Luke 22:31, 32). But even Satan's influence in a believer's life is not outside God's sovereign power. God uses Satan's influence to motivate the sinner to repent. Ultimately God's goal is to lovingly restore the sinning believer.

III. A Solemn Principle (5:6)

A. The principle

Sin that is allowed to fester in the church has a tendency to spread and affect

See Acts 5:1–11, 1 Corinthians 11:28–34, and 1 Timothy 1:18–20 for examples of God allowing hardships and even death in the lives of sinning believers.

Bear in mind that God intended the examples in Acts to send a message to the rest of the believers in the newly begun church age that serving God is to be done with honesty and sincerity and for the glory of God.

the church's members and ministry. Paul understood this principle and used an illustration to help communicate it to the Corinthians.

Your glorying is not good, Paul informed the church (5:6). Instead of recognizing the evil and destructiveness of the offending church member's flagrant immorality, the Corinthians prided themselves in ignoring it. Perhaps they considered themselves strong enough to resist being affected by the sin.

B. The illustration

Paul illustrated the principle by stating that *a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump* (5:6). Leaven is yeast. When added to a lump of dough, it by nature affects the whole lump. It is active and cannot stay dormant. Paul's point is that unchecked sin in the life of just one church member will by nature spread through the church.

ASK: What does leaving a sin unchecked communicate to the church members about the seriousness of sin? (Q9) *It communicates that sin is not serious enough to deal with and that it is not a threat to the rest of the church.*

ASK: What do you predict would happen in a church that downplays the seriousness of sin? (Q10) *An increasing number of members would become increasingly involved in sinful practices.*

Unchecked sin can also destroy the church's testimony. The unsaved community may perceive the whole church as hypocritical and unholy.

ASK: How might a church restore its testimony following a scandal? (Q11) *It must be honest about the situation, upright in its handling of all the details that follow, and consistent in its obedience as it goes forward.*



IV. Spiritual Purposes (5:7, 8)

In verse 7 Paul identified the Corinthian believers as *unleavened*, a reference to what they were in Christ. Positionally all believers are *unleavened*, or righteous, in God's sight (2 Cor. 5:21). However, from a practical standpoint, the Corinthian believers needed to *purge out therefore the old leaven* (1 Cor. 5:7).

A. Picture the Passover

Paul connected the leaven illustration to the Jewish Passover. The Passover commemorated not only the sparing of Israel's firstborn but also Israel's deliverance from Pharaoh and Egyptian bondage. In commemorating the Passover, each Jewish family conducted a solemn search for leaven in its household. If they found any leaven, they disposed of it. This purging preceded their offering of a Passover lamb in the temple.

The Corinthians, too, had been set free from slavery by a Passover; Christ, the believers' Passover, was sacrificed for them (5:7). How could they tolerate the leaven of sin in their house, knowing that Christ died to redeem them from sin?

ASK: How is Christ like a Passover lamb? (Q12) *His blood was shed as a substitute for the sinner. He died in place of the sinner just as God accepted the death of*

A description of the origin of Passover is found in Exodus 12 and 13.

a Passover lamb instead of a firstborn son at the time of the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt (cf. Exod. 12:1–13).

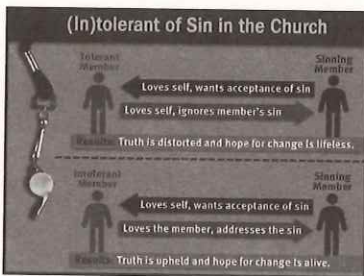


RESOURCE: Display resource 8. **ASK:** How does the correlation between the Passover and the Christian life help you see the importance of dealing with sin in the church? (Q13) *It helps us to reflect on the seriousness of the judgment of God and on the appropriate response to His mercy.*

B. Purify God's people

Paul urged the Corinthian church to keep on observing the purity related to Passover. The sins of the old life did not belong in the lives of God's redeemed people. Instead of possessing an evil disposition and practicing sin, the believers were summoned to lives of pure motives and integrity. Their daily living was supposed to mirror the truth they proclaimed (5:8).

RESOURCE: Display resource 7 again. Emphasize the fact that church discipline upholds truth and demonstrates sincere love.



V. A Sensible Practice (5:9–13)

Paul had previously written to the Corinthians before about matters pertaining to godly living. Although the previous writing was not an inspired New Testament letter, Paul referred to it in giving an important order.

A. Disassociate from unrepentant members

Do not *company with fornicators*, Paul commanded (5:9). To *company* means to mix yourself with. The Corinthian Christians were commanded not to mix socially with those who engaged in immoral sexual conduct. Instead of fellowshiping with an immoral church member, the Corinthians were supposed to exercise church discipline and stop associating with the member (5:11–13).

In verse 11 Paul enlarged his command to include disassociation from the *covetous*, those greedy of gain and eager to take advantage of others; the *idolater*, who worships another god; the *railer*, who abuses others; the *drunkard*; and the *extortioner*, who seizes more than is his.

The Corinthian Christians were not even supposed to eat with such persons so long as they remained unwilling to repent of their sin. The ban included barring offenders from fellowship at church members' tables at home and from the Lord's Table. Of course, once the offenders repented, the church was to restore them to fellowship lovingly and promptly.

ASK: What might happen if church members continued to fellowship with a disciplined, unrepentant believer? (Q14) *The church members might be influenced by the disciplined believer's sin; they might create a false perception that the person's sin was not that serious or offensive; they might undermine that effects intended by the discipline.*

Note that Paul described situations where eating together would constitute

Christian *fellowship*—thus giving credibility and comfort to a rebellious person who professes to be a Christian. Paul forbid any fellowshipping. However, the ban does not mean a church member would be forbidden from eating with the disciplined believer if he were a family member or co-worker. Such meals would have a different purpose.

B. Distinguish between the church and the world

Some believers in Corinth misunderstood Paul's command to disassociate from disciplined believers. They mistakenly applied the ban to any unbeliever outside the church. Paul explained that the ban extended only to interpersonal relationships in the church family, among professing believers. It would be impossible to sever all contact with sinners unless one were to separate himself from the entire world, which is not what Paul intended (5:10).

In verses 12 and 13 Paul reminded his readers that believers are not responsible for the judging of unsaved persons; God will handle that responsibility. However, believers in a local church are responsible for the disciplining of their own. They ought to remove offenders from the fellowship.

While it is true that a believer can ruin his own testimony and the testimony of his local church by sinful behaviors, it is equally true that God can forgive and restore the repentant one's life. Studying this portion of 1 Corinthians should increase the desire of the wayward child of God to repent and return to the church without being fearful that he will be ridiculed and exiled.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Sin in My Life

All of us are part of our local church. Together we form one body of Christ. But before worrying about sin in someone else's life, we should look at our own lives.

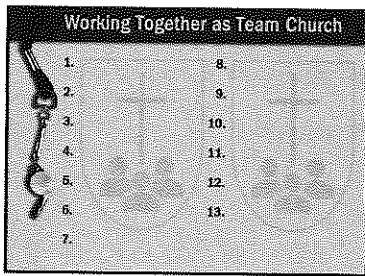
ASK: Are you tolerating sin in your life? If so, deal with that sin first. (Q15)

Sin in the Church

ASK: What are some reasons that a church might hesitate to handle a potential church discipline case in a Biblical manner? (Q16) *The person involved may be influential, may make large donations, or may have many family connections in the church; or the people may simply be uneducated or unwilling to deal with the situation.*

ASK: What could our church do to be ready to discipline members when situations arise? (Q17) *Teach on the process of church discipline; have measures in place to hold each other accountable for our lives; teach on our responsibilities to each other as part of God's body.*

Encourage your class to value church discipline as a deterrent from sin and as an opportunity to draw erring fellow believers back to a good relationship with God within the church.



Summary and Memory Verse

Use resource 1 to review the response for this lesson: Maintain a pure testimony.

Encourage your learners to memorize 1 Corinthians 5:7. Give them an opportunity to quote the verse in class next week.