

BIBLICAL CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Text: 1 Corinthians 5:6-13

Introduction:

1. Lack of biblical discipline is a symptom of a carnal, worldly church. There are very few churches today with the courage to deal with sin Scripturally. The message of 1 Corinthians 5 is therefore as relevant today as it has ever been for the church. A church that desires God's blessing and power must deal biblically with sin and error in its midst.
2. Albert Mohler Jr observed, "The decline of church discipline is perhaps the most visible failure of the contemporary church. No longer concerned with maintaining purity of confession or lifestyle, the contemporary church sees itself as a voluntary association of autonomous members, with minimal moral accountability to God, much less to each other...the present generation of both ministers and church members is virtually without experience of Biblical discipline...By the 1960s, only a minority of churches even pretended to practice regulative church discipline...Consumed with pragmatic methods of church growth and congregational engineering, most churches leave moral matters to the domain of the individual conscience."¹
3. In this message we will briefly review the last message covering the first 5 verses and then finish our exposition of the chapter.

I. THE CONTEXT OF THE INSTRUCTION ON BIBLICAL CHURCH DISCIPLINE (VS. 1-5)

The Corinthian discipline case forms the backdrop and catalyst for the Apostle Paul's vital teaching on the subject.

A. The Report of Sin in the Church (Vs. 1)

The facts of the discipline case were well known and well established ("commonly reported"). It was...

1. A Sexual Sin (Vs. 1a)
2. A Scandalous Sin (Vs. 1b)
3. A Sordid Sin (Vs. 1c)

B. The Rebuke of Sin in the Church (Vs. 2-3)

1. The rebuke of the culprit (Vs. 1)
2. The rebuke of the congregation (Vs. 2-3)

C. The Remedy for Sin in the Church (Vs. 4-5)

The remedy was for the church to come together and under the authority of Christ, discipline the erring member.

¹ Cited by D. Cloud, *1 Corinthians Commentary*, p. 125. Note that Albert Mohler is a Southern Baptist.

II. THE CLEANSING OF BIBLICAL CHURCH DISCIPLINE (VS. 6-8)

A. The Reproof of their Attitude (Vs. 6)

At the root of their inaction was a lax and light view of sin. The Apostle Paul draws on a well-known Old Testament figure of leaven to drive the point home.

1. The rebuke of their pridefulness (Vs. 6a)
 - a. Their inner attitude of pride ("puffed up" Vs. 2) found expression in outward boasting. They were arrogant and self-confident in the face of grievous sin. Leon Morris observes, "It shows that the Corinthians did more than merely acquiesce in the situation. They were proud of their attitude."
 - b. The light and loose attitudes towards sin in the modern church reveal its deep-seated carnality.
2. The rebuke of their foolishness (Vs. 6b)
 - a. The Apostle Paul draws on the familiar picture of leaven to further highlight how dangerous and destructive their attitude was.
 - b. The nature of leaven is that it only takes a "little" to leaven the whole lump of dough. All it takes is a little sin or error to be tolerated in a church and very soon it exerts its corrupting influence upon the whole. In the Corinthian context, the sin of one immoral member was having a corrupting effect upon the whole church.
 - c. The church that underestimates serious sin in its membership will pay a heavy price in the end. The same goes for doctrinal leaven. Jesus warned of "the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" in reference to their "doctrine" (See Matt. 16:6, 11-12. See also Mk. 8:15; Lk. 12:1). Concerning false doctrine, the Apostle Paul warned the Galatians "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." (Gal. 5:9)
 - d. Illustration: One rotten apple can spoil the whole barrel. The rotten apple must be removed speedily before it spoils the other apples.
 - e. Note: You can learn a lot about the spirituality and maturity of a church or an individual believer by their response to sin and error. There are plenty of believers who are prepared to condemn sin in theory but they fail to take an actual stand against sin. Actions speak louder than words!

B. The Requirement for their Action (Vs. 7-8)

They were to:

1. Purge out Impurity (Vs. 7)

1 Corinthians Series

- a. The practice of the purging (Vs. 7a). The word “purge out” means “to cleanse thoroughly”.
 - i. “First aorist (effective) active imperative of *ekkathairō*, old verb to cleanse out (*ek*), to clean completely. Aorist tense of urgency, do it now and do it effectively before the whole church is contaminated.” (A.T. Robertson)
 - ii. The reference is to Ex. 12:18-20; 13:6-7; the Jewish household was enjoined to remove all leaven in preparation for the Passover. This signaled the complete break with the old manner of life in Egypt, and their entrance upon the new life they were designed to enjoy in fellowship with God. (W.E. Vine)
 - iii. This purging is not optional; it is a command. “Purge out” is the Greek aorist imperative which is like a military command. Churches that fail to deal soberly, decisively and biblically with moral and doctrinal leaven are in disobedience to Christ and His Word. Any pastor who accepts a leavened lump is in rebellion against God. Any believer who stands in the way of leaven being biblically dealt with in the assembly is in rebellion against God.
 - b. The purpose of the purging – “that ye may be a new lump” (Vs. 7b). When a church takes Biblical steps to purge out leaven, it has a purifying and renewing effect on the assembly.
 - c. The position of the purging – “as ye are unleavened” (Vs. 7c). This is a reference to their position in Christ. Positionally they were unleavened and they are being urged to act in a manner consistent with their position. A people who are pure in Christ should deal with impurity in the assembly.
 - d. The picture motivating the purging (Vs. 7b). Paul appeals to the type of the Passover demonstrating that the call to deal with sin is rooted and grounded in Christ’s redeeming work. Just as the children of Israel of old were to purge out leaven in preparation for the Passover, so the New Testament church is to purge out leaven by virtue of Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross.
2. Practice Purity (Vs. 8)
- a. The reference to “the feast” again draws on the Passover picture as the Apostle further enlarges the instruction concerning purity in the church. The feast of unleavened bread in Israel was for seven days, which is the number of completion. It pictures the ongoing life of purity for the believer. We are to live an unleavened life. It means the Christian life is lived in the spirit of continual purging. It means the cultivation of an atmosphere and culture of purging in the local church. When a church stops being a purging church, it is on the path to apostasy.

1 Corinthians Series

- b. “As a feast lasting seven days was connected with the slaying of the paschal lamb; so a life of consecration to God should be connected with the death of our Passover – Christ.” (Hodge)
- c. The reference to “the feast” is probably also a reference to the Lord’s Table, the Christian feast based on the Passover feast. The church is to be purged of leaven before observing the Lord’s Table feast.
- d. The church is exhorted to not keep the feast with the leaven of sin but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

III. THE CASES FOR CHURCH DISCIPLINE (VS. 9-13)

The Apostle now provides some clarification on the candidates for church discipline. The church had misunderstood an instruction from a previous letter from the Apostle Paul concerning the application of separation to fornicators and other serious sin.

A. To whom Church Discipline Does Not Apply (Vs. 9-10)

- 1. The Apostle draws a distinction between the unbelieving, unsaved world and that of the church. To withdraw from every unsaved fornicator, covetous man, extortioner or idolater would be practically impossible; the believer would have to depart this world. The phrase “yet not altogether” means “not in all circumstances”. Paul fully expected that situations would rise in which believers must necessarily be involved with unsaved, immoral men. (Gromacki)
- 2. Discipline is exercised within the household of faith. The standard for the individual who names the name of Christ is much higher. As believers we have to interact with non-believers in various aspects of life (e.g., employment). The non-believer living in sin needs conversion not church discipline.²
- 3. Note the reference to those “within” and those “without” (Vs. 12-13).
- 4. Illustration: Correction in a family. As parents you have jurisdiction over your own household, not over another.

B. To whom Church Discipline Does Apply (Vs. 11-13)

- 1. The Sins requiring Discipline (Vs. 11)
 - a. “not to keep company” = means not to mix together or associate with. There is to be a definite withdrawal of fellowship from professing believers (“any man that is called a brother”) caught up in serious sins that bring public disgrace to the name of Christ.
 - b. Six specific sins requiring disciplinary action are listed:

² Note: A non-believer may need to be removed from the assembly if necessary for the protection of the flock (e.g., a wolf in sheep’s clothing, predator) but as a general principle, disciplinary action usually applies to believers.

1 Corinthians Series

- i. Fornication – “a fornicator”. To be caught up in sexual immorality as a professing believer is a most serious offense. A light response to such sin by the church is blatant disobedience to the clear command of Scripture. A soft response actually works against the erring believer’s repentance. A Biblical response brings reproof to their conscience and may result in their repentance.
- ii. Covetousness – “or covetous”. “Old word for the over-reachers, those avaricious for more and more.” (Robertson). The word “signifies those who are greedy of gain, whose aims are governed by self-interest, or by desire to get an advantage over others.” (W.E. Vine) The word means “greedy”. A reputation for greed as a believer brings disgrace on the name of Christ. Things like corrupt business practices, stealing and misappropriation of church funds would be grounds for church discipline.
- iii. Idolatry – “or an idolater”. The idolater was a Christian who participated in the heathen festivals. You should not have a buddha in your backyard as a believer! Idolatry goes beyond just idols to anything that usurps the rightful place of God in your life.
- iv. Railing – “or a railer”. The word refers to someone who abuses and reproaches others with hurtful language. The same word is translated “reviler” in 1 Cor. 6:10. Verbal abuse has no place in a believer’s life. Godly reproof spoken in love is appropriate. Plain spokenness and boldness for the truth is appropriate. But tearing into someone with abusive, fleshly and degrading speech is wicked.
- v. Drunkenness – “or a drunkard”. Drunkenness is a feature of the unsaved world (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Drinking intoxicating liquor as a believer is a serious matter! The safest way to not get drunk is to not drink. The so called “moderate” drinkers who claim to drink without getting drunk are LIARS! The real story behind the scenes for most “casual drinkers” is one of deep defeat to the bottle.
- vi. Extortion – “or an extortioner”. Webster defines extortion as “the act or practice of wresting anything from a person by force, duress, menaces, authority, or by any undue exercise of power; illegal exaction; illegal compulsion to pay money, or to do some other act.” The same Greek word is translated ‘ravening’ in reference to false prophets (“wolves in sheep’s clothing”) in Matthew 7:15.

1 Corinthians Series

The Hebrew word for extortion in the Old Testament also contains the idea of “oppression”. Illustration: Forced bribes in Ghana.

2. The Specifics of the Discipline (Vs. 11a, b)
 - a. Don't associate with the erring believer – “not to keep company”.
 - i. The same word is translated “have no company with” in 2 Thess. 3:14 – “And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and **have no company** with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.”
 - ii. We are commanded withdraw from disorderly³ believers in 2 Thess. 3:6 – “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye **withdraw yourselves** from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.”
 - iii. Barnes notes, “A “disorderly walk” denotes conduct that is in any way contrary to the rules of Christ. The proper idea of the word used here (ataktōs), is that of soldiers who do not keep the ranks; who are regardless of order; and then who are irregular in any way. The word would include any violation of the rules of Christ on any subject.”
 - b. Don't fellowship with the erring believer – “with such an one know not to eat”.
 - i. This would include a prohibition on participating in the Lord's Table but goes beyond that to having a meal with the individual. Social contacts with such a “brother” are forbidden. Eating a meal together is a part of Christian fellowship and was a prominent part of the early church (e.g., the love feasts).
 - ii. “The injunction involves an abstention from inviting such to one's house or accepting his invitations. The injunction would also apply to the Lord's Table.” (W.E. Vine)
3. The Sphere of the Discipline (Vs. 12-13)
 - a. Those without the church are judged by God.
 - b. Those within the church are to be judged by the brethren within the parameters of Scripture and under the authority of Christ (Vs. 4)
 - c. “put away” = the verb literally means “lift up out of”. They were to take decisive action (verb is aorist imperative). (Gromacki)

Conclusion: One nineteenth-century theologian put it well when he said, “When discipline leaves a church, Christ goes with it.” Will you stand for biblical discipline?

³ Out of step/rank with the Word of God; rebellious.