

# Church Discipline and Restoration

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[ 0 : 00 ] 1 Corinthians 5-11 will be the main preaching text for this morning's sermon.

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 and you are arrogant. Fought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. 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. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, 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.

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump as you really are unleavened.

[ 1 : 18 ] For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

I write to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people, 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.

But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother 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.

May God add a blessing to the reading of his word. Would you please be seated? In our world right now, what we see a lot happening is cancel culture, where someone is removed, their status, their words, their opinions are removed from society, whether they are a politician, an athlete, or a celebrity.

Anyone who attempts to speak with authority on an issue that does not agree with popular opinion is canceled, and what they say is often labeled as hate speech.

[ 2 : 37 ] But you know, there really isn't anything new under the sun in speaking of cancel culture. Jesus was, if you recall, canceled by his culture. The Pharisees were constantly hunting him down, challenging and questioning his authority to say and to do the things that he did.

Jesus told us that we shouldn't be surprised when culture seeks to do the same thing to his church. He said in John 15, 18 through 19, If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you are of the world, the world would love you as its own.

But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. If you recall, the world hated and hates Jesus because he testified, as he said in John 7, that its deeds were evil.

And so again, they questioned his authority to be able to give such testimony in order to discredit him, to discredit his reliability.

[ 3 : 54 ] They were ultimately willing to attempt to cancel him by putting him on the cross.

But three days later, we know he rose from the dead, proving that he truly is the Son of God, that he truly has authority to say all the things that he said, that they are absolutely true, and that he has authority over life and death.

Still, and though many have come to believe in him after his resurrection, through the testimony of his many disciples, opponents continued to arise and continue to question the authority of his disciples as they preached and taught and did amazing things in Christ's name.

If you recall, Jesus had given them this authority to do that prior to his ascension, but the world continued then as it continues today, trying to cancel the name of Jesus Christ, trying even to cancel his church.

But as was the case then, so the case continues to be today that Christ has prevailed, and so will his church.

[ 5 : 25 ] However, the world continues to disregard the authority of Christ, and it continues to disregard the authority that he has given to his church.

Even followers of Christ refuse to recognize his full authority and are often offended when his church confronts them in their sin.

Some churches are afraid to carry out the authority that our Lord has given to them when it comes to confronting sin in the life of their own members.

They are afraid that doing so might mean that that member cancels them, leaves the church, or they're afraid to do it because it's just uncomfortable.

They don't want to offend, and maybe they don't think that the sin is really that big of a deal, to do anything about it. And so, as we've read in 1 Corinthians 5, 1 through 11, this is a text inspired by the Holy Spirit, written by the Apostle Paul, and it's directed not so much to the so-called believers who were engaged in the sinful lifestyle, but to the rest of the church in Corinth for doing nothing about it, refusing to do anything about it.

[ 6 : 56 ] A church member was guilty of a sin that not even, Paul says, your pagan, non-Christian neighbors would tolerate. The church's toleration of such a sinful lifestyle severely, he said, weakened their testimony to those neighbors, to the world.

Paul called the church out for their willingness to let such sin go unnoticed and undealt with.

He told them that they should mourn over such a situation. But when a church ceases to be shocked by sin and thinks sin in the body is okay, what happens eventually is that they lose their ability to defend against it.

And their gospel testimony is tarnished. Whenever sin is not repented of, it increases and it spreads and it's deadly.

It is the responsibility then of all church members, all church members, not just the pastor or the leaders of the church to confront sinful behavior and practices amongst members in the body.

[ 8 : 19 ] We are to all confront sin and confront one another. Without having an attitude of self-righteousness when we do that, without prying unfairly into one another's lives, we are required to continually be on the lookout for any sort of immorality that threatens the purity of the Lord's body, which is His church.

Should such things be found, our first reaction should be to mourn over it and to mourn over it until it is biblically dealt with.

So here's the main idea for this morning's message. As we're speaking of the purpose of church membership, the Bible instructs the church to discipline its members when they persist in unrepentant sin for the sake of their restoration, and that's important.

We can't forget that. For the sake of their restoration and the church's purity. Now, church discipline. I can tell.

You can feel the room in a way. When we think of those words, often they invoke within us negative feelings, especially for those of you who have been part of the church for some time.

[ 9 : 54 ] You hear those words, and you might recall a heated business meeting where people stormed out of the sanctuary, maybe never to be seen in that church again.

When you hear those words, it does not instantly fill you with warm, fuzzy feelings inside, does it? But it shouldn't, when we hear those words, cause us to turn a blind eye for fear of having to confront members in ways that we know are uncomfortable.

And so I think a lot of churches have avoided church discipline altogether for that reason. But the Bible warns us that in so doing, we sin by refusing to obey our Lord's instructions about a matter that He cares an awful lot about.

We sin when we turn a blind eye to sin in our church. We should seek the purity of the Lord's bride, His church, when we seek to follow His prescribed methods to maintain our purity by seeking restoration of our members when they persist in unrepentant sin.

Again, to turn a blind eye is to tarnish our witness of the gospel. It is to tarnish the name of our Lord who has saved us.

[ 11 : 27 ] And you don't want to do that, do you? I hope you don't. We don't want to be known as a church like that, do we? A church that doesn't practice what they preach?

A church that talks the talk but doesn't walk the walk? And so, this morning, I want to answer three questions from Scripture about church discipline.

And I pray that as we go through that this sermon will be used by the Lord to motivate all of us to seek restoration of unrepentant church members and to maintain the purity of our church.

So, the first question that we're going to go to Scripture for an answer is what is the purpose of church discipline? What is the purpose of church discipline?

So, according to the Bible, church discipline has at least five purposes. At least five. First, church discipline aims to expose.

[ 12 : 40 ] It aims to expose. Sin, like cancer, loves to hide in the body. Church discipline exposes the cancer like a good doctor would in order to find it, in order to remove it quickly before it continues to spread.

In verses 1 and 2, Paul does just that. He exposes this issue in the Corinthian church. He draws attention to it. He says, a man and a woman are engaged in a sinful relationship.

He exposes also the sinfulness of the church for not doing anything about it. Look again there. He says, it is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you and a kind that is not even tolerated amongst those who normally tolerate such things.

A man has his father's wife and you're arrogant, meaning you're not doing anything about it. You think that you're okay. You think that you're hip or cool or whatever. He's pointing out the tragic situation.

not only the sin, but the church not doing anything to confront it. Paul doesn't beat around the bush either here, does he?

[ 14 : 04 ] Saying something like, hey, guys, I don't want to rock the boat. I don't want to make anybody feel uncomfortable, but I think there's an issue.

Maybe you should deal with it. You see, Paul didn't care that this couple or even the leaders of this church might be offended by the fact that he was exposing this situation and by the fact that he was exposing their poor handling of it.

He cared about how this situation was offensive to Christ. That's what mattered to him most. He cared more about how it tarnished the testimony of his church.

And so, likewise, we cannot be more concerned about offending one another than we are about offending our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, we expose it. Secondly, church discipline aims to warn. If you look at verse 5, Paul tells them what they are to do.

[ 15 : 21 ] He says, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. So, what he's telling them is that if you don't act soon on this matter, Satan's destructive ways will only continue, continue to fester, continue to grow within your congregation, eating and eroding you all from the inside out.

College, I worked at a golf course and I was on the grounds crew. We'd do all kinds of things, lots of cutting grass, but also just any kind of lawn care, which meant often cutting down trees.

And I remember sometimes we'd have these trees where they were infested with termites. Termites had just eaten out the whole inside of the tree and then we'd have a big storm come through and these big giant trees that seemed healthy from one side would just be completely uprooted and thrown down and busted into hundreds of pieces which we had to clean up.

The same thing can happen to a church like that. Sin has a, it erodes, it corrupts, it breaks down internally and before too long it completely destroys.

So we cannot let that happen within our church. And so Paul says the church was instructed to hand this man over to Satan. And so we ask why?

[ 16 : 53 ] That's harsh, sounds harsh. Why? Well, we know that the Bible identifies Satan as the ruler of this world and then turning a believer over to him then thrusts him back into his kingdom, into the world.

And with that the church sends a message to that believer that they will not tolerate unrepentant sin. And hopefully when they are on the receiving end that believer of their church's response to their sin they'll take it seriously.

If this sin is so egregious they think that my church is willing to remove me from their fellowship then this is something serious that I should take seriously.

You know the interventions that I know there was a TV show for a while where they would have interventions where there would be a drug addict somebody who had a problem with alcohol and he would come into a room and he'd be surrounded he or she surrounded with family members and friends and those family members and friends would basically say to that person you know what you're doing isn't just ruining your life it's ruining all of ours it's ruining our relationship with you it's ruining our life together and so as a church we have to be willing to do the same thing when we see this and we know this is occurring we have to realize that this if we don't talk about it if we don't do something about it has the ability to ruin our witness for the Lord and so we must ask those who go through this process will you have the

Lord or will you have your sin and if they don't choose the Lord then we know what we're called to do third church discipline aims to save it aims to save the rest of verse five Paul explains why why you turn this person over so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord so we must understand that the purpose of church discipline isn't to punish for punishment's sake the hope is that in being turned away from fellowship within the church that they will be convicted by the Holy Spirit of their sin that they will repent and that they will seek to be restored to the fellowship of their church it could be that this professing Christian wasn't truly saved and as they are removed from the church they again are likewise convicted and they are saved truly by the gospel either way discipline aims to restore restore the discipline member back to the fellowship and to restore and maintain the integrity and purity of the church four church discipline aims to protect verse six it aims to protect your boasting is not good do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump so Paul is saying here is that when when public when publicly known sin in the church is not subjected to church discipline it will silently spread its destructive consequences throughout the rest of that church church just like a disease that goes untreated spreads and it kills none of this is fun and none of this is easy think of someone who's been diagnosed with cancer and they're told that it's treatable but you're going to have to go through chemotherapy you're going to have to go through radiation it's going to be painful it's going to make you sick but it can make you better and it can kill the disease within you that if left untreated will ultimately bring about your end and so you know you've probably seen it

[ 21 : 32 ] I'm sure that you have we've seen people in our church go through chemotherapy go through radiation and it's hard to see them go through that isn't it but thankfully in many of those cases we've seen that those treatments though painful eliminated the worst issue which was the cancer so church discipline is not a fun thing it's painful but ultimately it produces good for the church for our witness for our integrity and we pray for that believer whom we've had to go through that with fifth church discipline aims to preserve it aims to preserve look at verse 7 Paul says cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump as you really are unleavened for Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed so here he draws the church's attention to Christ as God's perfect

Passover lamb and the believers having had Christ's blood shed on the cross to cover their sins thus separating them completely from the domain of sin and the penalty of sin and judgment reminding them of Christ's sacrifice for them that has secured them and that is preserving their salvation by the indwelling of his Holy Spirit which he has given to them when they were saved who works within them to continue to keep them separate from sinful attitudes having sinful standards and habits convicting us of our sin leading us to repentance preserving our salvation salvation one of the greatest protections that believers have from sin is simply to focus upon and reflect upon the cross of Jesus Christ on his sacrifice there understanding that it's my sin for which Christ died that keeps things in perspective doesn't it he died for my sin church discipline also preserves our witness to the world by again preserving our distinctiveness to the world we are a people who do not tolerate sin but if we do we will like the Corinthian church normalize sin and if we do that we'll look like the rest of the world we won't look like Christ and if that's the case then who's going to listen to our witness who's going to believe when we say that the gospel is able to transform it's able to take that which is dead and bring it to life our words will be empty in fact if we look like the world our words to them will be unbelievable church discipline also preserves our unity when we gather together for communion we remember christ's sacrifice for us that we've been placed forever within his body the church through salvation that we are forever united to one

another as the family of god but the underlying principle in every act of discipline must be love the underlying principle in all of it must be love love for the individual who we are going to confront love for the church and its purity love for the world love for our lord hebrews 12 6 says 12 5 and 6 and have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons my son do not regard lightly the discipline of the lord nor be wary when approved by him for the lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives jack had baseball practice the other day and we've got about i think five coaches all dads with sons on the team and he noticed uh in the car on our way out he said you know um i noticed that the dads are harder on their sons than anybody else i was like yeah and there's a reason for that you know talking about the fact that you're our responsibility you're a reflection of us and discipline is not always a fun thing can be a painful thing but a father or mother who loves their child will discipline them for their protection because they love them because they truly care about them and it's no different for us with our heavenly father if we avoid church discipline we are saying in a way that we know better than than god does that's how god says to do it but we know a better way we know what's better for our church than than god is what that says if we avoid church discipline godly discipline achieves godly results hebrews 12 10 through 11 continuing on with that chapter in passage for they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them but he disciplines us for

our good that we may share his holiness for the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant amen but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it and so we must ask ourselves do we think that we can build grow and multiply our church by our own power do we think that we can do it better than god can do it if we fall into the temptation of thinking that church discipline does more harm than good then it won't be long before we aren't able to do much good for our lord second question when should a church practice discipline hopefully we understand the purpose now we look at when should a church practice discipline and the easy answer to this question is when somebody sins but there's a problem with that isn't it isn't there because we sin all the time though we're saved though we should be seeking to put sin to death in our lives that sin nature still remains so the bible talks about sanctification talks about how in the moment when you were saved you were completely and totally sanctified christ took your sin you received his righteousness forever god the father looks at you as he sees his righteous son as having no sin remaining but sanctification is also a process it's total in the moment of salvation but we're continuing to become more like christ in our christian lives and it will eventually be completed in glorification when we are made fully like him i grew up in a denomination that believed that you could achieve sinless perfection in this life that you could truly be sanctified in in this life that you would not sin any more in your life and and uh i'll tell you what i noticed that thought uh turn into was moralism moralism there's a bunch of us in in college because uh the denomination is um nazarene i don't care if you know i grew up in the nazarene church uh they they taught that we could be sanctified and so you know what that did to a bunch of college kids put us on the lookout for sin and acting as if we had none ourselves looking down on others you're not one of us you're not good enough you sin we don't but you know what else that led to then deception because those people who thought they were without sin they were deceived and you could see it in their pride and you could see it in their judgmental attitudes you could see it in how they treated sinners as being in a position beneath them and you know what else that created within me thinking that you could be perfectly sinless in this life despair because i sin every day and i remember being in college and thinking

i'm falling way short lord and the expectation is that i'm going to go an entire day without a sinful thought without speaking a sinful word not just not doing bad things but doing all the good things that i'm supposed to be doing i can't do it i thank god that he showed me in his word that it's not up to me to do it christ has done it for me i am saved by grace through faith in jesus christ who has covered me with his righteousness i'm declared righteous not because of who i am but because of who christ is the church is made up of imperfect people who have been saved by a perfect savior and may we not forget that the church is made up of imperfect people saved by a perfect savior we could never do enough to save ourselves we could never do enough to keep ourselves saved this doesn't give us license to sin nor should it give us encouragement to stop resisting sin if you've truly been saved you grow to hate sin and the sin that you hate most is your own is your own because you know that it was your sin for which christ died so when a brother or sister stumbles we shouldn't you know have a couple guys walking around the church with a sack of rocks slung over their back just waiting for okay you know have you heard anybody say anything bad who was late for church

today we're ready and put their sacks down and pull out the rocks and just start pelting one another because if we did that this building would be covered in blood and there'd be nobody left eventually church discipline as was the case in first corinthians is conducted when the pattern of behavior of a professing believer is such that we can no longer affirm their profession of faith they call themselves a christian but their profession of faith is no longer believable because of the nature of their sin and their persistence in it because they're being so much unlike christ now we can't know a person's heart only god knows that however we are called by god to consider the fruits of a person's life and to make a judgment first corinthians 5 12 as paul continues on asking some rhetorical questions for what have i to do with the judging outsiders is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge saying yes you are matthew 7 16 through 20 jesus says you will recognize them by their fruits are grapes gathered from thorn bushes or figs from thistles so every healthy tree bears good fruit but the diseased tree bears bad fruit a healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire thus you will be able to judge them thus you will be able to recognize them by their fruits now the sin must be a serious sin so serious that we question this person's salvation and we question why they refuse to repent

[ 35 : 47 ] of this sin and so as we go to that person in love as we go seeking to restore them we go presenting scripture to them showing them from god's word where they've seriously erred and if they refuse to repent of it that person gives indication that they love their sin more than they love the lord and if that is the case then they must be led out of our fellowship in the hope that they will be convicted of their sin and repent and come back third question how should a church conduct church discipline how should a church conduct church discipline so we know the sacks of stones is out we're not going in that direction well how should we do this well Jesus has told us very clearly in Matthew 18 he has provided the outline for our church for the church as it disciplines its own look there with me

Matthew 18 15 through 20 if your brother sins against you go and tell him his fault between you and him one on one if he listens to you you have gained your brother but if he does not listen take one or two others along with you that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses if he refuses to listen to them tell it to the church and if he refuses to listen even to the church let him be to you as a gentile and a tax collector truly I say to you whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven again I say to you if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask it will be done for them by my father in heaven for where two or three are gathered in my name there I am amongst them we have this authority from him but we've got to make sure that we are doing this his way motivated from a pure and loving heart for his church now here we see that Jesus also does not establish a time frame for these steps to take place sometimes the process needs to move slowly sometimes it needs to move more quickly as it was the case in first Corinthians chapter 5 but again the goal in all of it is restoration and that may be achieved quickly or it may take some time depending on the nature and the impact of the sin but again the goal is repentance restoration

I've been a pastor for nine years and as I thought about this this past week I think about in 98% that may be a little high but in about 98% of the instances where where I was a part of conducting church discipline that person repented and most of them did so at step one where you went to them one on one out of love out of concern out of care with the Bible sitting down talking to them and it was resolved I can only think of a couple of instances where all the steps had to be carried out in some of those cases the person chose to leave the church before those steps could be carried out and those stories are just too personal to share and it's painful it's painful to recall it's not a fun thing but it's what

God wants us to do it's what God calls us to do and in all of it what we must keep in mind is that the goal is restoration not humiliation we're not trying to humiliate that person but we love them and we mourn and it breaks our heart when we see them carrying on in unrepentant sin we grieve we don't celebrate and say oh we got rid of them yes woohoo it's not going to be so awkward with that person anymore no our heart should break and we should pray that that person would come back but when a member goes through discipline and repents as we hope that is the case what should we do when that happens how should we treat them well we reaffirm them we rejoice that they have returned think about what Jesus did with

Peter Peter had denied him three times and after his resurrection Jesus confronts Peter out of love to seek restoration and he tells Peter you will feed my sheep you will tend my lambs I have a purpose and a place for you and so we must do the same when that person comes back we don't whisper behind their back like hey yeah they're teaching Sunday school but let me tell you about what happened five years ago when we had to kick their butt out of church right we're not going to do that that doesn't help if they're truly repentant they've truly been forgiven by God then why shouldn't we and we should want that not throwing past sins in their face thank God that he doesn't do that to us and again in all of this the goal is to guard the reputation of Christ when someone's words behaviors or attitudes mischaracterize

[ 42 : 19 ] Christ we have a responsibility to step in and in doing so we show our love for the Lord we show our love for his church we show our love for the nations which we are commanded to go and share the gospel with the Bible instructs the church to discipline its members but when they persist in unrepentant sin for the sake of their restoration in the church's purity we do what we've been called to do three questions of application that we will talk about tonight at 630 we'll meet and hear if you're not able to be a part of that I encourage you to tuck these away in your Bible and come back to them later today or later this week first question what are the consequences when a church avoids church discipline I want you to think about that what are the consequences if we fail to do what the Lord has called us to do what are the consequences of that going to be what are the consequences when a church avoids church discipline number two what are the consequences when a church abuses church discipline and this happens too some churches get too excited about it. And instead of mourning, they almost look to do it. And it can be abused, and there are consequences for that. We'll talk about that tonight as well.

We've got to be on our guard against doing that. And then third, what positive outcomes result from a church that practices church discipline biblically? What positive outcomes result from a church that practices church discipline biblically? And in all these things, brothers and sisters, look first to yourself. Don't hear a sermon like this and be like, I can't wait.

I got somebody I can't wait to go talk to this week. You look here first, and you deal with yourself first. You make sure that you have a good conscience before God and men, before you carry out His work in a way that will purify His church, but if not done correctly, can severely hurt someone for years and years and years. Let's pray.

Lord, we are so thankful for Your Word and for its instruction. And God, we know that You don't give us an easy button on a lot of these things to just press and poof, it disappears.

God, You never took an easy way out. You went to the cross. That was what was required to be able to save us from our sins. And Lord, You've told us the same, that those who follow You must likewise pick up their cross, dying daily, pursuing You. But that in so doing, Lord, there is life.

[ 45 : 14 ] There is joy. There is peace that this world isn't capable of providing for us. And we know, Lord, that in being a part of Your church, there is joy. There is excitement to be a part of such a loving body. But we know, Lord, that at times, because of our sin nature, situations and issues arise that we just can't turn a blind eye to. So God, give us the strength. Give us the courage.

But Lord, more importantly, we pray that You would motivate us by a love for You and for Your church and for that brother or sister. So that if we go and carry out this plan of discipline which You've given for us, that we would do so in a way that we pray, Lord, would seek that person's restoration.

That our testimony to the nations, to our community, wouldn't be tarnished because we don't practice what we preach. Lord, help us to be a people who bear Your image, who speak Your truth in love.

We pray that You would use us, Lord God, to accomplish Your will and Your purposes. And that You would be praised for it. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.