

Maintenance Required
Lesson Four - Sin
1 Corinthians 5-6

Intro:

“You Christians are too judgmental.” Have you ever been on the receiving end of that type of comment? It is often accompanied by “The Bible says not to judge others” based on a wrong interpretation of Matthew 7.

It is quite humorous to observe the apparent contradiction as that statement itself is a judgment. If we evaluate human nature and culture, it becomes readily apparent that judgement is a necessity of living life.

“We discourage judgmental statements, but our lives require evaluations all the time.” Is this person safe? Is this the right decision? What is the right thing to do in this situation? All of these require a moral decision making process and standard by which to orient what is good and right.

This fear of being labeled judgmental has unfortunately crept into the fabric of many modern Christians and their churches. One author expressed it this way: “If that is truly the case - if we are living in a day when even Christianity is being repackaged to present a God without wrath bringing people without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross - then what do we as Bible-believing Christians do? What should we do in our own lives and in our churches, and how can we face the challenge of sin unless we can first recognize it and call it sin?”¹

This is a serious matter that we must recognize the importance of as a church. There must be clarity on what sin is while also adopting an attitude of rightful accountability and correction when sin creeps into our lives and the lives of our church.

1 Corinthians chapter 5-6 give us a clear insight into the response that the body must have in calling out sin, promoting the truth to follow in repentance, and provide discipline when it is unheeded.

Chapter 5 pushes us to recognize the need for church discipline in dealing with sin while chapter 6 “explains a bit more of the principle involved in judging those inside the church.”²

¹ Dever, Mark. 12 Challenges Churches Face (9Marks) (p. 50). (Function). Kindle Edition.

² Ibid.

Note: We are discussing sin and judgement within the context of accountability among members of our local assembly. While we should rightly stand for truth and what is right within our secular culture, we are called to preach the Gospel, not stand in self-righteous condemnation.

1. The Call for Church Discipline

Pause here and read chapters 5-6 together as a SmallGroup.

What is the situation that Paul is address that is prompting the need for the church to bring discipline to one of its members?

Vs. 1-2 - In a public known manner, a member of their congregation has begun to take part in a sexual sin that was not even practiced within the pagan culture that surrounded them. A member of their congregation had committed fornication with the wife of his father (likely his stepmother). It is interesting to note that it appears this woman that he has had the sinful relationship was unlikely a believer as only the man is brought before the congregation.

What was the response of the congregation?

It appears that they have not dealt with this situation at all as they have been consumed with their own pride. (Puffed up) We are not given specific insight into the content of the churches boasting. Was it of the prominence of this particular member or his wealthy status? Was it their tolerance towards this brother and his actions?

At best they are ignorant of the sin that is being committed within their midst, at worst they have become complacent about the sin that is taking place in their midst.³

What did Paul command them to do to address this situation?

Paul commands them to excommunicate this man from the congregation when they gathered together. Here we see another subtle nod within Scripture to practice of regular, consist assembly as a congregation that practiced spiritual accountability.

Vs. 3-5 - Paul expresses his judgment and condemnation of this sinful lifestyle and commands the body at Corinth to follow in his example under the authority of Christ as they have failed to do so thus far.

Paul's primary focus is on the church's attitude and their failure to carry out their corporate responsibility as God's holy people.⁴

What was the purpose of this judgment and removal?

Mark Dever highlights 3 reasons for the church to excommunicate this believer. The call for church discipline is for...

Reason 1 - His own good; Reason 2 - For a Pure Church; Reason 3 - For Obedience⁵

- **His Own Good**

The first reason for church discipline was for the good of the one who was living in open, unrepentant sin. While it is perhaps rare that those who are brought under church discipline immediately recognize the action as for their good, it is nonetheless true.

They are to excommunicate this man from the membership of their body. Remember from our teachings on church membership that one component of membership is the church's affirmation of one's status as a regenerate member of the family of God. Therefore, the deliverance to Satan (V. 5) refers to the removal of the church's affirmation.

"he is referring to the public removal of the church's affirmation of his salvation. He is to be handed over publicly to the worldly life that he has chosen and excluded from the believing earthly community."⁶

What is the purpose of this turning over? "that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." It is through this time of chastening from the Spirit and the accountability of their former church, the individual is brought to a place of repentance over their sin and restored back to the body.

Excommunication from the body does not mean that someone is not a follower of God, it simply means that they are not living in a way that reflects that to be true and have not heeded the Word of Scripture or the Spirit and cannot be affirmed as Christ's followers.

⁴ Mark Taylor, 1 Corinthians, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, vol. 28, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 133.

⁵ Dever, Mark. 12 Challenges Churches Face (9Marks) (p. 50). (Function). Kindle Edition.

⁶ Ibid. (pp. 51-52). (Function). Kindle Edition.

The point of church discipline is ultimately repentance and reconciliation. The individual is not banned from services, but will not be regarded as a follower or receive the privileges of membership.⁷

The desire is that this is perhaps a scenario similar to that of the Prodigal Son, and the emptiness of this world and its offerings would drive him back again to the feet of Christ.

When we deal rightly with sin in the body, when we participate in holding others accountable, when we excommunicate people for unrepentant sin, it is always for the good and spiritual benefit of the sinner. When we fulfill the commands of Jesus in Matthew 18, the church is the final authority that passes judgment on the individual because it is loving to not tolerate their sin but to call them to repentance.

- **For a Pure Church**

The second reason given for church discipline is the health of the body. We are called as individuals and the church as a whole to pursue holiness and purity. Unrepentant sin not confronted in the body destroys that purity.

Leaven vs yeast

Paul utilizes the illustration of leaven as he continues on in chapter 5 verse 6. A little sin left uncorrected destroys the entirety of the body just as a little leaven gives rise to the whole loaf. Here again Paul draws our attention to the major problem that the church is facing - not the sin of the man (though that is wrong and needs correcting), but the sin of the congregation in refusing to bring correction.

“The man's sin was a single serious infection, but the church's lack of discipline a complete failure of the immune system. Sin that no-one deals with becomes sin that everyone will have to deal with.”⁸

Paul uses the illustration of the leaven in conjunction with the Passover to remind us that we have been changed by the work of Christ; we have been freed from the bondage and leaven of sin. If Christ has freed us from it and called us to worship Him in holiness, stop letting the old leaven creep back in.

⁷ Dever, Mark. 12 Challenges Churches Face (9Marks) (pp. 51-52). (Function). Kindle Edition.

⁸ Ibid. (p. 53). (Function). Kindle Edition.

When we make church discipline a serious practice of our church, when we make a big deal about unrepentant sin, we are protecting the purity of our church and our worship before God. We are living as a proper example of what it should mean to follow Christ.

Again, the spirit is not of self-righteous superiority but borne out of a humble desire to live in a way that pleases God and points others to Him. A church that does not recognize the severity of sin and its consequences dealing with it rightly will become a church that does not understand the Gospel or proclaim it clearly.

Church discipline pursues a pure church and a pure gospel.

- **For Obedience**

We heed the call of church discipline because it is our responsibility to do so. Period. End of Story. Why ought the people to take on the responsibility to discipline this unrepentant, sinning member - because we have been commanded to do so.

Paul concludes chapter 5 by bluntly communicating this command - "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." Paul is not speaking of someone who is outside the church, but one who claims to a follower, who is a member.

We are not to isolate and remove ourselves from sinner in our world, but we ought to remove ourselves from those who claim to be followers while living according to the flesh.

"We must dissociate from such brothers and sisters because it is our business to judge those inside the church (v. 12). Doing so is our responsibility. God will judge those outside of the church (v. 13), but he has called us to act on his behalf inside the church, expelling the wicked from our midst."⁹

Failure on our part to follow in obedience to this command and the command of Jesus in Matthew 18 makes us complicit in the sin of the brother or sister. If we know a brother or sister is living in sin and fail to carry out the process of confrontation from Matt 18 - go as one, go with two or three others, go before the church - then we share in their culpability.

What does that actually look like on a personal level? How should I treat or respond to one who is brought under church discipline? I ought to treat them

⁹ Dever, Mark. 12 Challenges Churches Face (9Marks) (p. 55). (Function). Kindle Edition.

in a way that upholds the severity of their sin and the seriousness of their eternal standing.

Paul calls the Corinthians to not associate or eat with those who have been removed. In other words, we cease to have a friendly, casual relationship that does not involve faithful calls to repentance. They are not shunned - they are always welcome to come and attend a service. Because of their sin, the relationship changes - we no longer do dinner dates, have game nights, play a round of golf as friends, go on family vacations acting as if nothing ever happened. The relationship is focused on their eternal standing before God.

If we take the steps of church discipline, what are the results of this process?

2. The Results of Church Discipline

A. The unrepentant member is confronted by the Spirit and the Word

B. We preserve the purity of the body

C. We give proper place to reflect on our sinfulness and fall in repentance

D. We celebrate and restore when one comes in repentance

The end result of church discipline is not a removal from the body permanently. It is not for continued gossip and division, but as a means of God's correction and grace in our lives. When someone returns from church discipline in humility and repentance, we are called to accept them back as brothers and sisters.

This provides an incredible declaration of the unity and restoration that happens in the Gospel. People of God are not those who hold onto grudges or resentment, but people who embrace sacrificial love.