

Church Discipline



**A Right & Blessing for Every
Faltering Christian**

**A Responsibility & Privilege of Every
Faithful Congregation**

Forum Terrace Church of Christ

Sunday Morning Summer Quarter 2026 - Adult Class

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Introduction

"Why I never heard of the church withdrawing from anybody!" This exclamation can be heard across the nation in the New Testament church by those who have been members for forty years or more. Why? Not because such is not taught in the Bible, but because this has been a neglected subject in many places. Little is taught on it, and less is practiced.

There are many differences and problems related to church discipline because brethren over the years have not been taught. There are extremists. While some cry for love and tolerance, others go on a witch hunt. It is one of the most abused and unused responsibilities in the church today. Much of this is because of ignorance, confusion, false teaching, the emotional difficulty involved, lack of love and concern for erring brethren, etc.

Three strong encouragements are given by Jesus for pursuing church discipline in Matthew 18:18-20: *"Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."* First, we have binding and loosing authority from Heaven. Second, the Father will grant our prayers and efforts. Finally, Christ has promised to be present with us. As we exercise church discipline on earth Heaven itself will back us up.

A benefit of church discipline is to demonstrate before the world that the church Jesus built and bled and died for is holy. When the church is tolerant of sin among its membership, it becomes indistinguishable from the world around it. The congregation and the Lord Jesus Christ end up with a tarnished reputation. We are not to be conformed to this world (Rom. 12:2). *"Unbelievers are drawn more effectively...where there is an unmistakable and translucent distinctiveness in the things that really count: sex, money, possessions, drink and the tongue"* (Prior 28). When the local church holds its members accountable for their conduct, they become an oasis of godliness in a desert of sinfulness. To this end church discipline can help a congregation *"become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world"* (Phil. 2:15).

The objective of this study is to simply learn what church discipline is, how to do it, and how to overcome the various misconceptions surrounding it. To comprehend any doctrine of the Bible one must 1) study all or most of the passages relating to it and 2) study it systematically and thoroughly. To consider any false doctrine one must first study the Bible's teaching on the subject before they can honestly and/or accurately teach against a false doctrine. Therefore, we will first, define church discipline, then study the various texts dealing with this subject, next outline the procedures, identify the subjects, purpose, and manner of church discipline, consider the time involved in this process, how to treat those who have been disciplined, reasons why some neglect it and then study some objections and false doctrines related to this topic; and finally observe a case of the joyful results of the practice of loving, congregational discipline.

Finally, this study is designed to dispel any notion that church discipline is harsh, mean or unloving. Church discipline is a right and a blessing that should be afforded to every faltering member. To withhold it by not withdrawing when needed is unloving and cruel. It is also a God-given responsibility and privilege of every faithful congregation who truly love God, love the Savior, love the Truth and love their brethren. *"Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted"* (Gal. 6:1).

The Necessity and Definition of Church Discipline

The Need for Discipline Within Society

To our society, the term "discipline" is a dirty word, cruel and barbaric. We live in an age that wants no restraints or controls. Lack of discipline pervades society. Disregard for authority is evident on every hand. A lack of respect for law and for those who enforce the law has brought us to a low point on morality and our highest crime rate in this country. A lack of discipline in the home has brought us a wave of juvenile delinquency. Parental authority is not respected. Teachers have become fair game for mental and physical abuse, because students know they will not be adequately punished. Adultery, homosexuality, incest, violence and crime against society and God's law are the norm rather than the exception. Those involved in adulterous marriages, social drinkers, false teachers, immodest dress, gambling, etc fill churches are welcomed into the congregations with open arms. They are not afraid to sin, because do not fear God and have no fear that brethren will discipline them.

In contrast with this, the Bible teaches discipline and respect for authority in all walks of life. One of the greatest needs of our day is discipline. Every organization, no matter the size, has to regulate or control itself.

The Bible teaches us to respect civil government (Rom. 13:1-4.) Society sees the necessity of discipline in that it provides laws, as well as trials and punishments of violators. Christians may have never lived under a more ruthless government than Rome. But first century Christians were taught to honor the king and be model citizens.

God has also demanded that discipline be maintained in the family. *"He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly"* (Proverbs 13:14). *"And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord"* (Eph. 6:4). Much of the juvenile delinquency rampant today is caused by parental delinquency, because no discipline was practiced upon the child in the home. A home cannot exist without authority and discipline.

The Need for Discipline Within the Church

The church is God's family (1 Tim. 3:15), school (1 Tim. 3:16), army (1 Tim. 1:18; 2 Tim. 2:3), kingdom, body, bride, etc. and like all these, it too requires discipline. Discipline begins with the instruction from God's Word. "If words from the pulpit are not enforced by action from the congregation and the elders, members will learn that the church does not really meaning what it says" (Adams 17).

Every member of the church is to submit to the loving discipline of the Father (Heb. 12:5-11). God has always demanded discipline to be maintained among His subjects. Concerning the discipline we receive from God the Hebrew writer states: 1) Don't be indifferent or stoic about it (12:5a). 2) Don't be discouraged about discipline for it is for your good (12:5b). 3) Discipline is an expression of love, 6a. 4) Discipline is proof of sonship (12:6b). 5) Discipline is a family matter (12:7). 6) To be without discipline is to be an illegitimate child (12:8). 7) Discipline brings respect to the one who disciplines (12:9). 8) Discipline is good for one even if it seems to be bad at the moment (12:11).

Discipline begins with the individual. Paul had to buffet his body and keep it under control (1Cor. 9:26,27). He crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts (Gal. 5:24) and trained himself to be godly (1 Tim. 4:8). When one will not maintain personal discipline, he will become the subject of public discipline.

Every member is responsible to elders' discipline (1 The. 5:12,13; 1 Tim. 5:17-19; Heb. 13:17).

Every member is responsible for the discipline to one another (Ac. 11:23; 1 Th. 3:11,12; Heb.

3:12,13; 10:24,25; Eph. 5:19).

Meaning of Discipline

Our English word for "discipline" comes from the Latin *discipulus* meaning "pupil, disciple." Thus, "discipline" originally referred to "teaching." The idea of punishment was only secondary. A disciple is "one who accepts and follows a teacher of a doctrine or learner" (Funk and Wagnall). "Disciple" is *methetes* in the Greek. He is a learner. There is a close connection between Doctrine, Disciple and Discipline. Doctrine is that which is taught. A disciple is the learner or follower of the teacher from whom he is taught the doctrine. Discipline is instructing the disciple in the doctrine. It is a training process with correction by punishment as only one part of it, and then only if it becomes necessary.

Say the word "discipline" today and one can only envision correction and punishment. The primary meaning of discipline is not punishment. Consider the definition of it from four hundred years ago: "The rules and regulations by which a body of men are kept in a state of efficiency and order, and under complete command." (Universal Dict. of the Eng. Language, II, 1627). Modern dictionaries read:

"4) Punishment for the sake of training; correction; chastisement."

"a) training which corrects, molds, strengthens, or perfects. b) Punishment; chastisement. c) control gained by enforcing obedience or order, orderly conduct; as troops noted for their discipline. d) Rule or system of rules affecting conduct or action. e) To train in self-control or obedience to given standards; to punish; hasten."

Note the different words denoting what discipline involves: education, development, instruction, exercise, training, drill, correction, chastisement, punishment, and reformatory or penal action.

The Hebrew words of the Old Testament use it to refer to the disciplinary action of a parent toward his child (Pr. 3:11,12; 13:24; 22:15; 23:13) and the disciplinary action of God toward His people (Dt. 8:5; Job 5:17; Ps. 94:12).

The New Testament uses the words *paideia* and *paideuo*. *Paideia* means "1) the whole training and education of children, Eph. 6:4... 2) Whatever in adults also cultivates the soul, esp. by correcting mistakes and curbing passions; hence a. instruction which aims at the increase of virtue, 2 Tim. 3:16...b. acc. to bibl. assuage chastisement, chastening...Heb. 12:5..."

"Paideuo: 1)...to train children;...to be instructed or taught, to learn:...1 Tim. 1:20; to cause one to learn;...Tit. 2:12. 2) to chastise; a. to chastise or castigate with words, to correct;...2 Tim. 2:25...b. in bibl. and eccl. use employed of God, to chasten by the infliction of evils and calamities...1 Cor. 11:32; 2 Cor. 6:9; Heb. 12:6; Rev. 3:19...c. to chastise with blows, to scourge...Heb. 12:7,10...Lk. 23:26,22." (Thayer).

These Greek words are used eight times in Hebrews 12:5-11. Even when they are used to denote punishment or chastisement the object of its use is still to teach. "*Hymeneus and Alexander who I delivered unto Satan that they might learn not to blaspheme*" (1 Tim. 1:20).

It is clear that in the English, Hebrew, and Greek, the concept of discipline means more than just chastisement. It involves first instruction and then correction.

Two Phases of Church Discipline

Usually people only think of the extreme action of withdrawing association when they talk about church discipline. Yet, the New Testament speaks of two types of discipline: instructive discipline and corrective discipline.

Instructive discipline is preventive in nature. Prevention is always better than cure. "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." "Building boys is better than mending men." "As the twig is bent so grows the tree." "To cut off an offender is good; to cure him is better; but to prevent him from falling is best of all." The more instructive discipline the less need for corrective discipline.

One purpose of instructive discipline is basically to avoid corrective discipline. It is designed so the Christian can learn God's Will in order to apply it to his life and please God. One errs by not knowing

the scriptures (Mt. 22:29). It is the teaching or training which corrects, molds, strengthens, or perfects. This part of discipline is molding one into a new way of life (2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 6:13,22; Gal. 5:22-26).

Instructive discipline is to be conducted in a proper manner. The church is God's teaching institution (1 Tim. 3:15; 1Th. 1:8). The church has been designed *"to edify itself for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ...from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love"* (Eph. 4:12,16). Paul also wrote, *"therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another"* (Rom. 14:19). This is accomplished by the teaching in regular assemblies, plus gospel meetings, and special classes. Thus, church discipline must be viewed as an on going duty of all Christians at all times.

The need for corrective discipline would diminish significantly, if more preventive discipline were practiced. A brother can show signs of spiritual weakening and is allowed to progress to the point of going back into the world without a single effort to stop his spiritual destruction. A little encouragement might have prevented the downward trend and the need for corrective discipline.

Corrective discipline is needed when instructive discipline fails. It results from inadequate instructive discipline or the failure of the Christian to make application of that instruction to his life. Reformatory or punitive in nature. We cannot escape the idea that corrective discipline is punishment. We punish our children when they misbehave to correct them. The government punishes those citizens who are disobedient to the law to correct them. Paul was teaching the Romans how to avoid breaking the law, thus becoming subject to civil punishment. It results in the identification of the sinner and his sin, an severance of social relations, and the recognition of the severance and those who persist in sin.

Congregational corrective discipline starts with the recognition that a brother is out of step with the Word of God. Next, someone or someones care enough to confront the brother. It may be that he only needs to be properly instructed or reminded.

Corrective discipline is a topic for instructive discipline. Members need to be taught how to respond to correcting with the same gentleness and love the expect to receive from brethren trying to correct them. Knowing how to speak the truth in love is essential for correcting any one caught in a fault.

"Without discipline in society, chaos would result. Without discipline families break up. Without discipline the New Testament Church will cease to edify the saints and continue to be the pillar and ground of the truth. Church discipline involves the training of disciples of Christ in the apostles doctrine, sometimes this requires corrective measures to be taken. Simply stated, 'Scriptural church discipline should be defined as the total process through which saints in Christ's body help each other grow toward spiritual maturity 'unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.' (Eph. 4:13)" (Usrey 37).

The End Game: Self-Discipline

While disciplining one of my children. They asked why I was so stubborn" about correcting their behavior all the time. I told them it was not out of stubbornness but a duty God gave father's to love them enough to discipline them. Right now, they needed help with making good choices and behaving themselves. One day I my hope would be they would be able to mature enough to be able to discipline themselves. Then I would be free and independent of disciplining them.

Christians need to develop self-discipline. Paul wrote, *"but I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified"* (1 Cor. 9:27). Solomon wrote, *"he who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city"* (Prov.16:32).

At times some Christians cannot maintain self-control of their behavior and need the external discipline that other members of the congregation can provide We all need protection from our worst enemy - ourselves when we lack self-discipline. Everyone could use an extra pair of eyes to see the spiritual blind spots. After all, none of us are experts on us. Church discipline has been Divinely designed as a means to that end.

Questions:

1. Give your own example of how the world lacks discipline and respect for authority.
2. How does the Hebrews writer (12:5-11) describe God's discipline of His children?
3. What other words are associated or related to the word "discipline"?
4. Is correction and punishment the primary definition of discipline? Explain.
5. What is the main meaning of the Greek term for "discipline"?
6. What are the two phases of church discipline?
7. True False Instructive discipline is punitive in nature.
8. How can instructive discipline help avoid the use of corrective discipline?
9. What sort of things can a local congregation employ to promote instructive discipline?
10. Why should brethren be instructed about corrective discipline?
11. How does church discipline help members with self-discipline?

Application & Discussion:

1. List some Bible examples of those who confronted others concerning sin or false teaching. What lessons can be learned from their example?

2. How might a congregation assess the effectiveness of the instructive discipline of the members?

Homework: Focus on your self-discipline so that you may avoid the need for others to discipline you.

Congregational Discipline in the Old Testament

The Old Testament has several examples of congregational discipline. The punishment meted out was far more severe than church discipline is in the New Testament. Many of those disciplined were put to death. By just looking at a few of these examples one can clearly perceive that discipline by the congregation in Israel was essential for the nation's spiritual survival.

Worshiping the Golden Calf

While Moses was up receiving the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, the Israelites were in the valley below breaking the commandments. Moses was gone too long. The Israelites complained to Aaron. They wanted to go back to Egypt. Aaron took their gold jewelry and made a gold calf saying, *"This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!"* (Exodus 32:4b). The next day *"they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play"* (32:6). God was furious. When Moses came down Mount Sinai and saw the idolatry he broke the Ten Commandment tablets. *"Then he took the calf which they had made, burned it in the fire, and ground it to powder; and he scattered it on the water and made the children of Israel drink it"* (32:20). Of those who refused to repent, Moses and the Levites put to death. *"And about three thousand men of the people fell that day"* (32:28b). God punished the people with plague for their idolatry.

Breaking the Sabbath Law

God commanded the Israelites to keep the Sabbath day holy (Ex. 20:8).. No work was to be done on the seventh day of the week. However, they caught a man was picking up sticks on the Sabbath. *"The Lord said to Moses, 'The man must surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.' So, as the Lord commanded Moses, all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him with stones, and he died"* (Num. 15:35-36).

Offering Unauthorized Incense

Nadab and Abihu, the sons of the High Priest Aaron, served as priest in the Tabernacle. One day they offered incense using strange fire instead of fire from the altar. *"So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord"* (Lev. 10:2). Moses reminded Aaron of what God had warned earlier. *"This is what the Lord spoke, saying: 'By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified.'"* (10:3).

Achan's Sin Caused by Achan

God told the Israelites to march around the walls of Jericho a total of thirteen times. This proved very unlucky for those in the city of Jericho. The city was taken easily when the people shouted the walls fell down flat. The next town with walls and gates was not as formidable. But the city of Ai cost Israel a victory and lives. Joshua was very upset. But God told him, "Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put it among their own stuff" (Josh. 7: 11). The next day they cast lots to find the guilty party. The lot fell upon Achan. Achan confessed, *"When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of*

gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it" (7:21). The punishment by the congregation was swift and fatal. "So all Israel stoned him with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones. Then they raised over him a great heap of stones, still there to this day. So the Lord turned from the fierceness of His anger" (7:25-26).

Ezra's Remedy for Mixed Marriages

In the previous chapter Ezra learned of the Jewish leadership who had violated God's command in Deuteronomy 7:1-5 by marrying pagan women. He demonstrated the proper personal response to this sin. Ezra chapter nine is recorded in the first person whereas chapter ten is written in the third person. This gives the Bible student two perspectives on this issue. Chapter nine tells how Ezra personally handle the bad news. This chapter explains how the Jews were going to deal with this as a corporate entity (Ezra 10:1-44).

Ezra chapter ten demonstrates that Ezra's prayer for a revival is answered. The Jewish people have come to help and be encouraging to Ezra as he takes the lead to deal with this issue. All the people are commanded to attend. Those who chose to forsake this assembly are under great penalty.

Ezra begins by rebuking the sinners and calling upon them to repent. However, the rain is so heavy and the number of the guilty are great enough that it is decided for a committee of leaders to be constituted to convene over this crisis. Notice two prominent leaders decline participation. However this does not stop the proceedings. After three months, over one hundred men are found guilty of abomination of marrying the heathen. Those included in this number are priests, Levites, singers and gatekeepers. Ezra and the commission require the men to repent and put away their foreign wives and children. This would restore obedience of the nation before God and free it from continued contamination by paganism. Dangerous circumstances demand desperate remedies.

The responsibilities, concerning congregational discipline over this malady infecting the nation, is carried out by the leaders, congregation, and sinners as they fulfill their various duties.

The Duties of the Leaders:

- **Pray**

As Ezra was weeping and praying at the Temple "a very large assembly" (10:1) showed up in support at the outer court of the Temple. The issue was now in the open before the entire congregation of Israel. Ezra's reaction to the sin as recorded in chapter nine has had its desired effect upon the people. Prayers over problems produce an infectious response by pricking the conscience of the people. Never undervalue the power of the prayers of one devout saint (James 5:16).

- **Respect and Do God's Will**

The covenant and the putting away of the wives was to be "done according to the law" (10:3b). Ezra took an oath from the leaders that "they would do according to this word" (10:5).

Today, congregational discipline must be by God's Rules in the New Testament (1 Cor. 5:4-5).

- **Take Responsibility**

The leaders and the people told Ezra in verse four to "arise, for this matter is your responsibility." They were willing to take responsibility for this problem. When it comes to church discipline Paul informed the Thessalonians of their need to take responsibility (2 Thess. 3:6).

- **Be of Good Courage**

The great assembly also told Ezra "we also are with you. Be of good courage and do it" (10:4b). It is encouraging to know that when dealing with sin in the congregation that one is not alone and can take courage in that fact. "But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good" (2 Thess. 3:13).

- **Do Not Give in to the Opposition of the Few**

Not everyone was in agreement with the plan to move forward in dealing with the sinners among them. "Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite gave them support" (10:15). Regardless, the majority pressed on with unity from most of the community.

- **Enlist the Assistance of Other Leaders**

The task was big, the sinners many, and the weather was bad. It was not practical for the whole congregation to suffer with weeks or months of dealing with the details and determining the individual cases. Ezra wisely delegated a commission of leaders to help review each case. It was impractical to try to interrogate so many people in one place, especially when the weather was so inclement; and the work couldn't be done in a day. *"The heads of the father's households"* formed the committee.

When Jesus spoke of the procedure of disciplining a sinning saint, He spoke of the need for examination by others before it was brought before the entire church (Matt. 18:15-17).

- **Examine the Case Carefully**

If the committee began its work on the first day of the tenth month and *"by the first day of the first month they finished questioning all the men who had taken pagan wives"* (10:17).

Today, when working with members of the church who have been overtaken in a fault (Gal.6:1) need to be careful to take the necessary time to carefully examine the situation.

Duties of the Congregation

- ▶ **Sorrow**

Having seen the responsibilities of the leaders in this congregational discipline, it is obvious that the whole congregation of Israel was involved in dealing with this national tragedy. It is noted that *"the people wept very bitterly"* (10:1b).

Ezra withdrew into one of the rooms of the Temple to fast and pray for God's guidance. This burden and pain was great. His was a very rigorous fast in that he drank no water.

When *"the people wept very bitterly"* they demonstrated the proper attitude toward sin among them. Paul warned the church as Corinth to change their attitude toward sin in their midst (1 Cor. 5:2).

- ▶ **Have Hope**

The marriage between the Jewish leaders and the foreign women may have caused some to think the dealing with this sin was hopeless. However, Shecaniah said, *"yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this"* (10:2b). Perhaps, one's lack of hope for the sinner is an indication of one's lack of faith in God and His Word.

- ▶ **Commitment to the Truth**

Ezra took definite action, but first he secured the support of the leaders and all the people. *"Let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them"* (10:3). Once again Israel had been unfaithful and had broken the covenant with God. This is a time of renewal to the covenant.

- ▶ **Supporting the Leaders**

Shecaniah was the spokesman for the people. For them he said to Ezra, *"we also are with you. Be of good courage, and do it"* (10:4b). In effect the people were saying "we will support you, so take courage, be brave, you are not alone." Church leaders also need encouragement to do their work (Heb. 13:7,17).

- ▶ **Faithful in Attendance**

In order for the congregation of Israel to deal with this danger, all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered at Jerusalem within three days. The punishment for failure to attend was severe. First, a loss of belongs and second a loss of brotherhood (10:7-8).

In order to deal with discipline, it become necessary for the church to congregate. This is what Paul told the Corinthians to do. *"when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus"* (1Cor. 5:4-5).

- ▶ **Be Serious**

Notice in verse nine the people were *"trembling because of this matter."* This was serious. Even though the average Jew could honestly declare his innocence by saying, "I did not marry a foreign woman."

Today, sin in the congregation is still a serious matter. The soul of the sinner is at stake (1 Cor.

5:5). Discipline can save the congregation from the infectious and spreading nature of sin (1 Cor. 5:6-7).

▶ **Suffering Inconveniences**

In contending with sin many inconveniences can arise. The people complained, *"it is the season for heavy rain, and we are not able to stand outside"* (10:13a). It can also be inconvenient due to the time involved. *"Nor is this the work of one or two days, for there are many of us who have transgressed in this matter"* (10:13b). Perhaps, many congregations forgo disciplining the unrepentant sinner among them due to the difficulties of the time and fear, etc. which arises.

Duties of the Sinners:

◆ **Negative Influence of the Few Sinners**

According to the list of names given in verses 18-44 only about 110-114 men were guilty of taking pagan wives. This would have been no more than about one percent of the Jews in Judah at this time. Ezra could have been accused by some of making a mountain out of a mole hill. One person's sins affects the whole community of faith. Paul said, *"a little leaven leavens the whole lump"* (1 Cor. 5:6).

◆ **No One Is Exempt**

Often when it comes to sin some people, especially leaders, might receive special treatment and be exempt from any disciplinary actions. Yet family name and fame does not provide immunity for those who were related to Joshua, the High Priest from Zerubbabel's day (10:18). Notice there are seventeen priests, ten Levites along with the other eighty-four mentioned in the list.

◆ **Co-operate**

Every individual who was involved in this sin was required to assemble for disciplinary action. *"And let all those in our cities who have taken pagan wives come at appointed times"* (10:14). Every one was to co-operate, especially those who were being examined in regard to their marriages.

◆ **Confess Sins**

In verse eleven the guilty were encouraged to *"make confession to the Lord God of your fathers."* Confession means to "say the same thing." They were accused of breaking God's marriage laws, would they agree this was true? (1 John 1:9).

◆ **Repentance**

Sincere repentance requires heartfelt sorrow before God for our sins. True repentance is seen when one takes the required steps to correct their sins. This is true even when it is difficult. Some of these men had children through these sinful marriages (vv. 3, 44).

◆ **Separate from Sinners**

Marrying the Canaanites permitted the influence of idolatry to destroy their relationship with God. Therefore, they were told to *"separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the pagan wives"* (10:11b). Most likely these women were returned to their father's households. Perhaps, the men would continue to do the right thing and send a form of child support.

When all attempts to correct the sinner in the congregation has failed, there comes a point when they are to be separated from the flock, if not physically, then socially and spiritually (1 Cor. 5:9,11,13).

◆ **Sacrifice for Trespass**

Finally in verse nineteen a sacrifice for the trespass was required, *"And they gave their promise that they would put away their wives; and being guilty, they presented a ram of the flock as their trespass offering."* When they presented a ram: "This shows that they sinned against knowledge; for a sin of ignorance the oblation was not a ram, but a goat." (Trapp)

Today, Christ is our sacrifice for the sin. In the context of church discipline Paul wrote, *"therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us"* (1 Cor. 15:7).

Summary

Congregational discipline worked in dealing with this issue. *"And they gave their promise that they would put away their wives; and being guilty, they presented a ram of the flock as their trespass offering"* (10:44). God's plan will work, if we will only work God's plan.

Questions:

1. What punishments were inflicted upon the Israelites for worshipping the Golden Calf?
2. By whom were these punishments meted out?
3. What happened to the man caught gathering sticks upon the Sabbath Day?
4. Why did God consume the priests, Nadab and Abihu with fire?
5. What happened to Achan for his sin?
6. List the described actions of Ezra before the house of God in verse 1.
7. Who assembled around Ezra and what were their actions?
8. What covenant did Shechaniah suggest should be made? Who did he say should keep it; and by what authority should it be kept?
5. Why should Ezra *"be of good courage and do it?"*
6. What did Ezra do; and what was the response of the people?
7. Why didn't Ezra eat or drink?
8. What was the consequence of not coming to the assembly at Jerusalem in three days?
9. How did they *"increase the trespass of Israel?"*
10. Who was put in charge of this investigation; and who assisted them?

11. Who gave up their foreign wives? Why did they offer a ram for sacrifice?
12. How many of Israel were guilty?
13. Give the total for those that were guilty of having “strange wives?”

Application & Discussion:

1. According to the New Testament when is it permissible by God to put away a spouse? Should a Christian put away a non-believing spouse? Is it wise for a Christian to marry a non-Christian? (See Mt. 5:31,32; Mt.19:3-9; Rom. 7:1-3; I Cor. 7; etc.).
2. Why do you think discipline was so severe in the Old Testament? In contrast to this, do you think the discipline required by the New Testament church is too severe?

Homework: The Old Testament has practical application for us today. *“All these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition... Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall”* (1 Cor. 10:11,12).

Jesus' Teaching on Church Discipline

Matthew 18:10-20

The Parable of the Lost Sheep, 18:10-14

Jesus uses this same parable of the Lost Sheep in Luke 15:3-7. In a different setting, He teaches a somewhat different lesson. He is arguing with the Pharisees about His role in saving the lost sinner and the rejoicing in heaven over their salvation. Here Jesus is speaking of believers who go astray and are sought for in hopes of restoration.

◆ God Values the Little Ones

As if the disciples needed any more of a warning to be careful in their treatment and attitude toward fellow believers who may be weak, Jesus warns *"take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones"* (18:10a). To *"despise"* means to show contempt for or to think little of the little ones or denigrate as worthless or look down one's nose at someone considered beneath you, because they are considered morally, religiously, socially, etc. inferior.

They can do this in many ways. First, by being a stumbling block, failing to seek them when they are lost or being unwilling to forgive them of their trespasses. God's children are not to suffer from child abuse at the hands of their fellow brethren.

◆ God's Angels Serve Little Ones

As a demonstration of God placing great value on the little ones Jesus says *"for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven"* (18:10b). Many have appealed to Matthew 18:10 as a proof text for guardian angels. This single passage has become the foundation for the idea that every little child has been assigned a guardian angel. The real issue that needs to be answered has to do with the current activity of angels. Are angels still active in the affairs of this world today? True, the visible activity of angels has come to an end, because their mediating work is done (Heb. 1:1,2). God's Spirit speaks directly through the Word, not heavenly messengers. Since angels have served mankind throughout the Bible record, there is no reason to believe their service has ended. After all, they rejoice over the one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7) But there is no evidence in Scripture that an angel is assigned to each soul to guide them in life choices.

◆ God Saves the Little Ones

"For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost" (18:11) is the very purpose for God sending His Son. God loves the lost that much. To devalue the sinner is to devalue the gift of God.

◆ God Cares for Each Little One

The phrase *"What do you think?"* introduces something new for a disciple to contemplate. The problem to contemplate is *"if a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray."* Jesus points out that one out of a hundred sheep is important. A good shepherd would notice or know if one was missing (John 10:3;14-15).

◆ God Seeks the Lost Little One

It is the normal course of action for the shepherd to *"leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying"* (18:12). Sheep are known to be feeble-minded in their nature. They have no sense of direction. They wander off. They are absolutely defenseless, have no biologically built-in defenses like teeth or the spray of a skunk. Sheep cannot quickly run away and have no camouflage, etc. They do not have a sense of direction like a dog or cat in finding their way home. They eat and eat till there is no pasture left, just dirt. Then they starve. The shepherd does not condemn the stupid animal

to its fate. He seeks after it.

◆ **God Rejoices Over the Recovered Little Ones**

Notice the conditional *“if he should find it.”* Sheep are not always found or found alive. There are many dangers, harsh elements, and predators. But if the lost is found and restore, *“he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray”* (18:13b). No one is happier in all the universe than God when the lost repent and return.

This does not belittle the value of the ninety-nine sheep who did not go astray. Imagine a parent with ten children and one of them wanders off and is lost. First, the parent would secure the other nine and then run off and search until the lost child was found. The emotional relief would focus on the one child that was in danger and now has been found and restore to the safety of home. No one would for a moment think that the mother or father did not have any joy in the other nine or favored the one that became lost over the others.

◆ **God Will to Save All Little Ones**

Jesus concludes, *“even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish”* (18:14). God cannot force the lost sinner to come home. However, God’s desires all men to be saved (2 Pet. 3:9). The motivation is found in the idea of them perishing and being lost forever in Hell.

If God thinks so highly of the lost believer how much should we do to help restore them?

Dealing with a Brother When He Sins, 18:15-18

► **Step One: Recognize Sin in a Brother**

Jesus moves on from focusing on how to treat and value a lost little one to the procedures to be taken in seek to retrieve a lost brother. *“Moreover if your brother sins against you”* (18:15a). This is any brother who sins, it involves any type of sin, and requires action on the part of any brother who knows of the sin committed. Sin matters. If your brother sins do not overlook and tolerate it. Instead, investigate and encourage repentance. To avoid bitterness swelling up in the heart of the offended, as soon as an offense is recognized it needs to be addressed.

► **Step Two: Go**

“Go” is in the Greek present tense (imperative mood), implying a gentle, patient series of confrontations” (Blomberg 291). Brethren who are spiritual need to go to the sinner in a spirit of meekness and gentleness and seek to restore a brother or sister (Gal. 6:1). Do not go to prove a point or get revenge or through someone out of the church. Go to gain a brother back from sin and into “one another” fellowship.

► **Step Three: Privately Show Sin**

Everyone has the ability and responsibility to go to another. When he goes he must *“tell him his fault between you and him alone”* (18:15b). *“Tell”* is from *elencho* meaning to bringing to light or expose. It is possible that he does not even realize what he has done. It could be a sin of ignorance (Num. 15:22) or a secret fault (Ps. 19:12). It is also possible that there is a complete misunderstanding of the situation or proper application of God’s Word and no sin has been committed. Keep the private matter between the two, private. This step would go a long way to preventing embarrassment by the sinner hindering his repentance.

This step does not involve those who are in public error via teaching false doctrines and practicing immorality. Jesus did not rebuke in private those scribes and Pharisees teaching error. He publically rebuked Peter more than once and also Martha. He rebuked Herod and others publically without them being in His presence. Those who publically criticize those who publically rebuke those who sin in public are being hypocritical. A Christian can be sinned against either directly and indirectly. They can suffer offences in a personal way or in public.

► **Step Four: Gain or Loss**

There are two possible outcomes to steps one through three. First, *“if he hears you, you have gained your brother”* (18:15c). The brother’s physical ability to hear is not in question but his willingness

to listen and properly respond with a penitent heart is the goal. The motive is always to “*save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins*” (see James 5:19-20). The second possibility: “*But if he will not hear*” (18:15d). “*If*” goes back to the possibility that the lost sheep is not recovered. The motivation for addressing sin in another is to save and restore and not to kick someone out of the church. To “*gain*” or win your brother is the term from commerce indicating the idea of profit or loss. If you work hard to save and protect and recover your money, how much more a brother’s soul?

► **Step Five: Witnesses**

If nothing has worked to restore the brother he does not give up but asks for help from others. “*Take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established’*” (18:16). In the Law of Moses two or three witnesses were needed in capital cases to help assure justice (Mum. 35:30). It also seems to involve any accusation of violating the Law (Deut. 1(15; 17:6). This same requirement is called for in different situations in the New Testament (John 8:17-18; 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Tim. 5:19).

These witnesses do not have to be witnesses to the sin. But they are to witness how the brother reacts to being accused of sin. Perhaps they note there is no sin but a misunderstanding or the accusing brother is the real sinner.

► **Step Six: Gain or Loss**

The rule of procedure is still focused on the goal: restore the lost brother. However, he can still refuse to listen to the brother and witnesses.

► **Step Seven: Church Discipline**

When the brother continues in sin, “*tell it to the church*” (18:17b). Although the church will not exist until the day of Pentecost, it has been prepared for since eternity. The whole context of this discourse of Jesus to the disciples was to prepare them for their future which involved the future church. This is done by the first brother and witnesses telling publically what they know to the church. Church here refers to all the local believers who are assembled together and can listen to the grievance. The New Testament uses “*church*” in this manner (1 Cor. 11:18, 14:34,35). Paul suggests this to the church at Corinth in dealing with the sinful brother: “*when you are gathered together*” (1 Cor. 5:4).

► **Step Eight: Gain or Loss**

The purpose of involving the congregation is that the sinner might “*be ashamed*” (2 Th. 3:17) “*that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*” (1 Cor. 5:5). Yet again there is no guarantee this will work. “*But if he refuses even to hear the church*” (18:17). This is not the end of the church’s efforts. They do not give up on their brother. Perhaps one more final step can motivate him to repent.

► **Step Nine: Disassociation**

The final step in this process is: “*let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.*” Today, being socially ostracized is not much of a punishment to those in local churches where members never associate with each other in the first place. For discipline to be more effective congregations need to create a closer sense of community between members.

The Jews would not associate with Gentiles who are more than likely pagan. And certainly not have social dealing with a traitor like the publicans. Jesus is not agreeing with this attitude. After all, He had the publican Matthew among the Twelve and was known as a friend to publicans. He also healed Gentiles and marveled at their faith. Jesus was simply illustrating the type of treatment to be given believers who refused to repent. This does not mean the sinner’s soul is completely excommunicated. Paul commanded, “*do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother*” (2 Thess. 3:15). While Christians keep from associating with the erring brother, they continue to keep calling him back home in repentance.

Authority for Church Discipline, 18:18-20

Jesus draws their attention to something that is also of unusual importance saying, “*Assuredly, I say to you*” (18:18a). He is now going to focus on another related aspect of church discipline. By what authority does a church have a right to discipline a member? The authority is delegated from God in Heaven. There is no authority higher than the local church on earth to serve as an “*ecclesiastical court*”

in dealing with discipline.

Repeating a previous promise given to Peter (16:19), Jesus now applies it to the church: *“whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven”* (18:18b). Here the church has been given the authority to shut the door on the unrepentant brother and to open it again when he comes to repentance.

A second support of the church's right and responsibility to discipline its members is given by Jesus. *“Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven”* (18:19). The term “agree” comes from the Greek *sumphonea* from which we get the English term symphony. This is used to refer to various instruments coming together to create a harmonized sound. The term “anything” is *pragma* in the Greek and “is a term frequently limited to judicial matters. Here Jesus reiterates the actions of Christian discipline, following God's guidelines, have his endorsement.” (Blomberg 281).

The third reassurance to the church's duty to discipline is given in verse twenty: *“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”* The mention of “two” relates to the need for two or three witnesses as required in verse 16. Coffman wrote “in the name of Christ means, by his commandment, by the authority of his will and teaching, in obedience to his specific commandments.” Only God can be present anywhere and everywhere. Jesus is clearly making a claim to be Deity by having divine omnipresence. Christ is present when we worship, however this passage is dealing with the authority behind the practice of church discipline and not worship services. Christ has promised to be with the church when it pursued this process according to the rules God has made already in heaven.

Questions:

1. How much does a shepherd care about one sheep out of a hundred gone missing? How does this relate to God's care for the lost soul?
2. Does the shepherd's rejoicing over the one lost sheep devalue the other ninety-nine? Explain.
3. List the steps in the effort to recover a brother in sin.
4. Why is it so important to keep a private matter between brethren private at first?
5. What is the motive of this reproving?
6. Would one sin against his brother and God's Law if he went to others first? Explain.
7. True False If he repents, he could then tell others.
8. What purpose would taking witnesses serve?

9. How is the church to be involved?
10. What does the final step involve?
11. How did the Jews treat Gentiles and tax-gatherers?
12. True False Churches can employ the process of church discipline described in verses 15 to 17 to a broader range of sins than just disputes between individuals.

Application & Discussion:

1. Give examples of how we can be stumbling blocks to the faith others today.
2. List in our own words the authority God has delegated to the church to take discipline on a impenitent member?

Homework: Seek out a lost “little one” and restore them to the fold.

Church Discipline: Marking and Avoiding False Teachers

Romans 16:17-20

When you see a sign "BEWARE OF THE DOG" understand the danger. (I saw a door mat once that read, "FORGET THE DOG, BEWARE OF THE KIDS!!!") Paul now beseeches ("to call to one's side") the Christians in Rome. He desires to carefully warn them of troublemakers.

Just who is a troublemaker? After all, Elijah was referred to as "*he that troubleth Israel*" (1 Ki. 18:17). The warning is general and does not suggest any specific error. Perhaps, it is not to those already in the church, but to those outside who will come with new teachings to destroy the congregation's unity. Paul had predicted such persons would arise from among the elders in Ephesus (Ac. 20:29,30).

Paul just finished with greetings to Rome. Even from the churches, showing their unity. Now he points out a group who did not need a sincere greeting. Nor should they bid them God speed (2 John 9,10).

Who Are These Troublemakers?

x Dissenters in the Church

The term "dissensions" means literally, "stand apart from" or "to cut into two parts, cleave asunder, dis sever" (Thayer 158). It is divisiveness and polarization. The creating of parties by drawing a line and have others chose sides. The Greek word is found only in Galatians 5:20 and 1 Corinthians 3:3.

Perhaps, Judaizing teachers would be the best example of the kind of troublemaker who would cause dissensions. They were determined to convince all Gentile Christians that they had to be circumcised and keep the Law, or they could not be saved. "Unless you stand apart from all other Gentiles who would not be circumcised you cannot be a part of us." Today, we have many who wish to separate brethren into various parties, based on their false doctrines.

x Developers of Offenses

They were causing or creating difficulties for the saints in Rome. "Offenses" is from the Greek term *skandalon*. They create a scandal. Designates such a course of life as would lead others into sin. Contention and dissension were not uncommon among the local congregations. We need to watch out for those who cause trouble and bring scandals into the church.

x Disobedient to the Scriptures

This is the criteria to determine false teachers: are they disobedient to Word of God. People criticize people for criticizing false teachers. Yet, it is critical that there is a criterion for recognizing who is the one causing trouble. It is not men like Elijah, but those who do not listen to the Scriptures.

x Devotees of the Belly

We saw in the beginning of this chapter that Pheobe was a servant of the church in Cenchrea. In contrast, these troublemakers are servants of their bellies, not the Lord. They serve their own private interests. They do this to obtain money. Their aim is not to glorify the Lord, but to benefit themselves. Their "*god is their belly*" (Phil. 3:19). In covetousness they with feigned words make merchandise of people (2 Pet. 2:3). Their species is not extinct in modern times. They are multiplying all over the nation, on the internet, on TV and on radio.

X Deceivers of the Simple

In the beginning, the serpent with smooth words, and flattering speech beguiled unsuspecting Eve thoroughly. They still come on the scene as the wise, good guys. It is not true that "good guys always wear white hats, bad guys always wear black hats" The false teacher does not wear a black hat, or have horns, or carry a neon sign proclaiming that "I Am A False Teacher - Follow Me To Eternal Damnation".

Notice that false teachers target the simple. Simple does not mean weak-minded, but rather unsuspecting. "fearing no evil from others, distrusting no one" (Thayer 21). "Unsuspecting" (Ardnt and Gingrich 28). These are without deceptiveness in their lives and are not suspicious of the deceptive designs of others. One can be too trusting. The Christian is to avoid being gullible. (Matthew 10:16; Acts 17:11; 1 Thess. 5:21-22; 1 John 4:1).

Their main mode of operation is with smooth words and flattering speech. Speech that sounds like the truth and words that sound good. Things that people like to hear (2 Timothy 4:3-4). They are con artists who cry out peace even when there is no peace, because that is what everyone wants to hear. They are almost perfect counterfeits to the real thing. That is, if you are not looking closely.

How to Treat These Troublemakers

✂ Mark Them

Definition of *skopeo*, which is translated "*mark*" means: "to take aim at (spy) i.e. (fig.) regard" (Strong). "to look at, observe, contemplate, to mark...to fix one's eyes upon, direct one's attention to, anyone: Rom. 16:17; Phil. 3:17;..." (Thayer 579). "a mark on which to fix the eye, to look at;" "to observe attentively and diligently, as they do who are placed in the watch-tower to observe the motions of their enemies" (Vine). In Phil. 3:17 the term is used positively as a call to follow a good example. The thought is that they are to watch for, and to be alert to, those who would bring about such a condition among them.

The New Testament is resplendent with examples of warnings to keep one's eye on false teachers. Jesus warned the disciples of the leaven of the Pharisees (Mt. 15:14; 23:1-39). He told them to keep a close eye on what these people taught and how they behaved. Peter marked sinners and false teachers (Ac. 2:22; 4:8; 2 Pet. 2:1-22). Paul marked false teachers (Ac. 13:8-11), such as, Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Tim. 2:16-18); Alexander the coppersmith, Demas, and Hymenaeus and Alexander (2 Tim. 4:14,10; 1 Tim. 1:19,20).

Do not shut your eyes to what they are doing, nor make excuses for them.

✂ Avoid Them

The Greek word for "*avoid*" is *ekklino* which means "to deviate, i.e., to shun or to decline" (Strong) or "to turn away from keep aloof from, one's society; to shun one: Ro. xvi.17,.. " (Thayer 196) or "turn aside. Not only keep out of their way, but remove from it if you fall in with them" (Vincent 3:181). Webster defines the English word: "to depart or withdraw from: to keep away from; stay clear of"

Ironically, Paul is commanding them to stand apart from (avoid) those who cause others to stand apart (dissension).

To many this seems to be a bit extreme for our tolerant society. We have become a kinder more tolerant people. However, when we have superior attitudes and practices than our Lord and His chosen apostles we are in danger of calling good evil and evil good.

✂ Trouble Shooting

Knowing that there will be troublemakers and knowing how to deal with them, how should these Roman Christians prevent themselves from being a troublemaker or becoming a victim of one.

✂ Continue to Obey

Since they were obedient as their reputation was well attested to by others, than Paul was confident that they would continue to be so. Obedient servants of God are not likely targets of false teachers.

✂ Apply Moral Wisdom

The Greek term for “wise” is *sophos* meaning wise “skilled, expert” (Thayer 582). We are to be wise in one way and simple in other. It is like the term, “sophomore”, the wise/fool. We are wise before God in His Word, but in regard to the world and its evil we are innocent/ inexperienced. Be wise to try the spirits to prove all things, and then to hold fast that only which is good. Jesus commanded his disciples to “Be ye therefore wise as serpents” and “Be harmless as doves” (Mt. 10:16).

✂ **Remain Innocent of Evil**

As to evil, Paul desires that the Romans be pure and innocent. He wants them to be free from any element or admixture of evil (*kakos*). They are not to explore and experiment with evil, but to remain innocent and inexperienced with evil. Too many Christians are “experts” in worldly things and ways and “inexperienced” in the Word of God. People do not have to indulge in evil things in order to know what is evil. People who are wise unto the good will know evil. Only the person who knows what is good has a clear idea of what is evil (Heb. 5:14).

✂ **The End of All Trouble**

All trouble will eventually come to an end. The God of peace, not the god of trouble will reign victorious. God is the source of, and the one on whom, peace depends. Those who are sowers of dissension are not the servants of the God of peace. They too will be crushed with their master.

When will this great event take place? “*Shortly*”. It was to be accomplished while they lived. *Shortly* does not refer to the second coming of Christ. The destruction of Jerusalem would crush the arguments of the Judaizing teachers. Others see an allusion to Genesis 3:15.

Regardless of what event is referred to, we do know that it will be a complete defeat with abject humiliation for the defeated. When Joshua had conquered the kings of Canaan, he called the captains of Israel to set their feet upon the necks of those kings (Josh. 10:24), so will Christ, our Joshua, enable all his faithful servants and soldiers to set their feet upon Satan's neck. By being obedient to the Word, wise in what is good, and inexperienced in what is evil, Christians of all ages can resist the Devil. As a result the divisions are circumvented, congregations are spared, and Satan's efforts are crushed.

Questions:

1. What does “*dissensions*” mean? Give an example.
2. What were they encouraged to do with those who caused divisions?
3. What is the criteria for determining who is a false teacher?:
4. Who are these false teachers serving?
5. How do they deceive the simple?
6. Why do they target the simple?

7. What does the term "*mark*" mean in the context?
8. Give example of those false teachers who are marked in the New Testament.
9. What two things would help the Roman Christians deal with these deceivers?
10. What does the term "avoid" require one to do in regard to someone marked as a false teacher?
11. How does being wise help in dealing with false teachers?
12. What will result if they follow these instructions?

Application & Discussion:

1. What criteria can a congregation use to help them identify false teachers who are to be marked and avoided by the members of the local church?
2. A congregation has been infiltrated by a false teacher among them. He has been going around telling the "simple" the "New Testament Christians should not be reading the Old Testament." What steps should be taken and by whom?

Homework: Test all teachers with the Word of God to see if they are false teachers (1 John 5:1; Acts 17:11).

Case of Corruption in Congregation at Corinth

I Corinthians 5:1-13

Need for Church Discipline

- **A Common Sin**

Although Paul was surprised or shocked at the nature of the fornication the Corinthians church had among their membership, he knew how common fornication was in the city of Corinth. He begins by saying, *"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you"* (5:1a). As a seaport in ancient Roman Empire Corinth was satiated with sex-oriented behavior. The proverbial term *korinthiazesthai* was used during the days of Corinth referring to someone whose morals were very loose. Literally, it meant "to act or behave like a Corinthian."

The Greek term for *"fornication"* is *porneia* from which the English words pornography, pornographic and porno are derived. Originally, the term meant "resorting to prostitutes." It came to refer to any illegitimate sexual activity. In the New Testament "sometimes *porneia* is differentiated from adultery (*moicheia*) and sometimes it includes it. Here *porneias* is general enough to include the sin of incest. (Willis 132). It could also be extended to homosexual acts Jude 7.

- **Shocking Sin**

Paul was in utter shock at the nature of the sin reported among them: *"and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles"* (5:1b). In the culture of Corinth, fornication in most of its various hues were tolerated or met with an attitude of ambivalence or even expected. However, this form of fornication was of such a kind that the Gentiles found it too atrocious to accept. Those found guilty of this form of fornication were marooned or exiled to a remote island under Roman Law during the time of Augustus. Cicero wrote in the first century, "Oh, incredible wickedness, and, except in this woman's case, unheard of in all experience. (Farrar 165).

- **Nature of the Sin**

Paul may have learned of the exact nature of fornication being proudly tolerated in the Corinthian congregation from either Chloe's household (1:11) or from Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (16:17). One can almost hear Paul's shock as he writes: *"that a man has his father's wife!"* (5:1c).

The language *"father's wife"* is taken directly from the LXX of Lev. 18:7-8. The woman being referenced here is not the man's biological mother but his stepmother. This form of incest is considered by God an *"abomination"* (Lev. 18:7-8, 29; cf. Deut 22:30) and was punishable by death under the Law of Moses. *"The man who lies with his father's wife has uncovered his father's nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them"* (Lev. 20:11). The Israelites were warned as a nation not to tolerate this sin *"lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you"* (Lev. 18:28).

This situation of incest was not the result of a one-night stand, but an ongoing or habitual sexual relationship. The Greek verb "to have" is present tense and used in reference to an continuing sexual affair.

Reactions to the Need for Church Discipline

- **Puffed Up**

Paul was not just shocked at the nature of the sin, but their unusual reaction: *"and you are puffed*

up” (5:2a). A seasoned preacher remarked, “What Christians do seldom shocks me. I’ve seen it all.. What shocks me is how they sometimes react to what they have done” (Pratt 73).

The phrase “*puffed up*” is found previously in 4:6; 4:18-19. They were boastful or proud of the situation. The reason for this pride that blinded them to this serious situation is not given. Perhaps, the man was of high social standing. Others have suggested the Corinthians were flaunting their “freedom” in Christ (1 Cor. 6:12) which was influenced by a misguided concept of love or their background in Greek philosophy. They were arrogant in their tolerance and broad-mindedness over this sin. The phrase is a perfect participle making it an attitude that had roots in the past and is growing into the future. So it may be the pride that Paul had being rebuking them for since the beginning of the letter.

- **Mourn**

Instead of being “puffed up” Paul tells them they “*have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you*” (5:2b). The mourning here is used for those expressing their deep sorrow over the death of a loved one. Instead of having a puffed up party they needed a funeral. Just as the father of the prodigal son did not throw a feast for him but mourned for his son till he came home. Wiersbe wrote, “Church discipline is not a group of ‘pious policemen’ out to catch a criminal. Rather, it is a group of broken hearted brothers and sisters seeking to restore an erring member of the family.”

Authority for Church Discipline

- **Apostolic Authority**

Although the Corinthians are tolerant of the incestuous saint among their membership, Paul has already been proactive. “*For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed*” (5:3). Due to his apostolic authority, Paul does not have to wait for them to act or even be present with them to do his part in resolving this serious problem. Physically absent but spiritually present, the Apostle Paul uses his authority to command them what he and they must do now.

- **Divine Authority**

Paul’s authority is not inherent in himself or his title or position, but “*in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...with the power of our Lord Jesus*” (5:4a). Acting according to Jesus’ name is to do something by the authority that is inherent in it. Acting by His power is doing something with His authority. Paul is saying that both he as an apostle of Christ and Corinth as a church of Christ has the right and ability to carry out church discipline.

- **Congregational Authority**

Authority to act does not come from the church but “*by the authority of our Lord Jesus*” (2 Thess. 3:6). Catholicism talks about the authority or power of the church or the head of the church on earth, the Pope. Jesus is the only Head and He alone delegates authority to local congregations.

Church discipline at this point in the process was to be enacted when they “*are gathered together*” (5:4). Perhaps, any visitors could be dismissed or a closed assembly of just the members are involved. However, there is nothing in the text for one to become dogmatic about this. This assembly would be official action with the approval of the Apostle Paul and authority of Jesus. When the Corinthians were assembled to take disciplinary action Paul would be with them in spirit.

Purpose of Church Discipline

Paul moves now to discuss the motives or purposes behind church discipline. These two reasons are in contrast with one another.

- **Destroy the Flesh**

The first reason for church discipline is to “*deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh*” (5:4a). The term “*destruction*” is used to indicate the death penalty in the Old Testament. For example, Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10:1-2 were publically executed by God with fire for their substituting of strange fire in the burning of incense at the Tabernacle. In the New Testament God caused Ananias and Sapphira to drop dead at Peter’s feet for their lies in Acts 5:1-11. During the time of the

Apostles they possessed the power to punish the wicked. "It was the same power by which Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead, and Elymas the sorcerer struck blind. Apostles alone were entrusted with it" (Coffman). This authority or power to punish with physical maladies or even death has not been granted to the Lord's Church either in a universal or local sense. Perhaps, 1 Timothy 1:20 serves as a parallel to this passage. "*Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme*" (1 Tim. 1:20). Obviously the purpose is not their physical death. Delivering to Satan is here a temporary situation, that is, until their "*learn not to blaspheme*."

- **To Save the Spirit**

The second motive given for church discipline is "*that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*" (5:5b). The goal is clearly expressed in the hope the man's soul be saved. The "flesh" will be destroyed one day but the spirit of man can be saved. The flesh here embodies all the desires that are illegitimately fulfilled.

"*The Day of the Lord*" is a phrase denoting the second coming of Christ (1 Th. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10). If the man is lead to repentance before he faces death and Judgment Day (Heb. 9:27) his soul can be saved in Heaven.

Protection Provided by Church Discipline

- **Corrupting Nature of Leaven**

Paul uses a rhetorical device in the phrase "*Do you not know that*" (5:6b; 3:16; 9:13) to call their attention to a well known fact concerning the influence of leaven upon dough. The proverbial expression well known to all is "*a little leaven leavens the whole lump*" (5:6c). It is like our expression: "One rotten apple can spoil the whole barrel."

Leaven is not the same as yeast. In fact, yeast was more scarce in ancient times. This is zyme which is a piece of fermented dough. A small piece of dough was pulled off and saved. When a new loaf was to be made the start piece of leaven dough was kneaded into a new batch. It was allowed to ferment and permeate the whole lump of dough. The loaf of bread would have been light and puffed up.

Metaphorically, leaven represents the power of influence as it spreads. It could be good influence as in the parable of Jesus where leaven is compared to the growth of the Kingdom (Matt. 13:33). Jesus also spoke of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees as their evil influence spread among the Jews (Matt. 16:11,12). Here in the text, the Corinthians have allowed the evil influence of the wayward member's sin to spread throughout and contaminate the entire congregation with corruption.

- **Cleaning Out the Leaven**

"The longer this process continued, the greater the danger that the dough would become spoiled and poisonous. When the dough became bad, it all needed to be thrown away, and the process begun again" (Pratt 80). "*Therefore purge out the old leaven*" (5:7a). The term "*purge*" means to cleanse thoroughly." During the first Passover the Israelites were told to be prepared to depart Egypt. They did not have time to add leaven to the dough and let it rise. Furthermore, unleavened bread would not spoil as fast on their journey out of Egypt. When keeping the feast of the Unleavened Bread, the Jews were commanded to completely clean or sweep the house to cleanse it of all leaven.

- **Becoming Unleavened**

Paul told Corinth that the old leaven must be purged out so "*that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened*" (5:7b). The process of making leaven must start over with a new batch of unleavened dough. This is essential since they are in reality unleavened or pure. Paul is commanding them to "become what you are. You are pure so start acting like it." They are a sanctified people (1:2; 6:11). They are God's unleavened loaf of bread.

- **Considering the Passover Lamb**

If the church represents a loaf of unleavened bread, "*indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us*" (5:7c). This references back to the Tenth plague when the Passover lamb was slain and its blood was applied to the Israelites door post and lintel. When the destroyer came to the house with the lamb's blood, death would Passover the first born and leave them alive (Ex. 12:23). The motivation for their behavior in being pure is based on Christ's crucifixion.

- **Celebrating the Feast**

Paul arrives at a logical conclusion: *“therefore let us keep the feast”* (5:8). The metaphor now is that Christian life has become like a Passover Feast. Our feast is not to be celebrated once a year on the 14th day of Nisan followed by seven days with the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Ex. 12:1-18). We are to continuously celebrate it throughout our life. This is not a specific reference to the Lord’s Supper. Such does not fit the analogy Paul is making.

First, Paul tells us the wrong way to celebrate the feast of the Christian life: *“not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness”* (5:8b). Malice speaks of an evil habit or attitude of mind. All malice and wickedness must be purged from the thoughts, words, and acts of the people. The festive life of a Christians is not to be spoiled by the old fermented way of thinking and living.

The celebration for the Christian is to be *“with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth”* (5:8c). Virtues have replaced vices. *“Sincerity”* is to judge by the light of the sun or in our case the “Son”. The Truth is found in the Word of God (John 17:17) and can set us free (John 8:32).

Subjects of Church Discipline

- **Clarification of Misunderstanding**

Next, Paul wants to clear up a bit of confusion over who is to be the subject of congregational discipline. *“I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world”* (5:9-10a). We no longer have a copy of the previous letter he is referencing. But the point is they misunderstood Paul.

- **Exclusive of Sinners in the World**

Paul lists several sinners commonly found in the Corinthian community. This is the first of the vice lists in the Pauline letters. First, *“sexually immoral people of this world”* (5:10b). So common were the fornicators of Corinth they would not be able to live in the city or even near it. Next, *“with the covetous”* (5:10c). Also could be translated “greed” from the Greek *pleonexia*, which is the desire for more and more and never being satisfied. Covetousness is a form of idolatry (Col. 3:5). Third group are the *“extortioners”* (5:10d). These dishonest thieves swindle, embezzle, and extort money and goods from others. Then he lists *“idolaters”* (5:10e). Literally “one who worships or serves idols.” It is not only condemned throughout the Old but also the New Testament (1 Cor. 6:9; 10:7,14; Gal. 5:20; Rv. 21:8; 22:15; 1 John 5:21).

If Paul is telling them to have no association with the wicked of the world they *“would need to go out of the world”* (5:10f). Yet it has been proven by the annals of history that sequestering oneself in a convent or monastery away from the world will not work in keeping pure. Additionally, all the righteous would have to leave the earth and go to the dark side of the moon to distance themselves from the influence of the world. Besides Christ has commanded us to go into all the world and teach and influence it for good with the Gospel (Matt. 5:13f; Mark 16:15-16).

- **Inclusive of Any Sinner in the Congregation**

And now the correction of the misunderstanding of Paul’s first letter: *“But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater...”* (5:11a). Now his list of vices expand to include *“a reviler”* (5:11b). This is “one who abused others” verbally (Morris 92). He also adds *“drunkard”* (5:11c). Drinking was even more common in the Greek wine culture than it is in our day. Corinthians would have had nothing bad to say about drunkenness.

The list is left incomplete. Paul is not going to attempt to list every type of sinner that may become a subject of church discipline. Instead, he concludes the list of possible sinners with *“such a one”* from the Greek *toloutos*. It is Paul’s way of saying etc., which is short for the Latin phrase *et cetera* meaning “and so forth.”

Action of Church Discipline

Just what actions are the Corinthians to take with those who are subject to church disciplining and will not repent. The final step in the process of church discipline is *“not to keep company with anyone*

named a brother" (5:11a) and "not even to eat with such a person" (5:11b). Keep company is from the Greek *sunanamignumi* which is defined as "to mix up with or to keep intimate, close company with." In other words, members are to withdraw or withhold their association from the disciplined member. They are not even to eat a common meal with a brother. Sharing a meal is an expression of acceptance and gives an appearance of approval of another's actions. Members should do nothing socially with the disciplined man that would give him a feeling that they condone, instead by socially ostracizing him they would make him feel ashamed via the disapproval and rebuke. Christians are not to be isolated from the world but to go out and win them with the Gospel. Faithful members are to isolate themselves from sinful members of the congregation who will not repent so their souls may be saved.

Jurisdiction of Church Discipline

- **God's Sphere of Judgment**

Again, by way of correcting their confusion about their rule in disciplining and judging sinful members, Paul clarifies that God's jurisdiction as Judge is those in the world and thus outside the church. *"For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges"* (5:12, 13a). When it comes to judging or disciplining sinners there are two realms of spheres: those outside the church and those inside the church. God judges those sinners of the world. He has established the civil government to judge and punish evil doers in the world (Rom. 13:1-5). The church has no part in having ecclesiastical courts over those in the world. The final judgment of all men is God's jurisdiction.

- **Church's Sphere of Judgment**

God has assigned the local congregation to judge the behavior of its membership. Paul was not concerned with the judging of the world or those outside, but has made it clear from the beginning of this chapter he has already passed judgment on the incestuous man. He along with Jesus (Matthew 18:15-17) expects members of the congregation to judge its own membership. "The Pauline principle is simple: Free association outside the church, precisely because God, not the church, judges those on the outside; but strict discipline within the church, because in its free association with the world it may not take on the character of the world in which it freely lives" (Fee 227).

Verdict of Church Discipline

Paul's final verdict and punishment: *"Therefore, 'put away from yourselves the evil person'"* (5:13b). The apostle is quoting from Deuteronomy. On several occasions this phrase is used to describe the punishment for the false prophet (13:5); those who serve other gods (17:7); those who steal (24:7); false virgin in a marriage contract (22:21); and a false witness against another (19:19). Literally, it is calling for the death penalty on those found guilty. This is not to say Paul is invoking the death penalty on the incestuous man. The punishment under the New Testament is putting him away by way of disassociation. Therefore, church discipline does not sound nearly as excessive and extreme as discipline by the congregation of Israel under the Law of Moses.

Summary

Church discipline when taken to the point of disassociation of the members of the congregation from the non-repenting brother is hard and uncomfortable and even heartbreaking. Yet it is the right and blessing for every faltering Christian and a responsibility and a privilege of every faithful congregation. God hates sin and loves the sinner. Church discipline is God's means by which the local church can isolate the evil influence of sin while saving the soul of the sinner. What could be more loving than this?

Questions:

1. How unnatural was this man's fornication?

2. What was wrong with his relationship to his father's wife?
3. Why isn't the woman mentioned in this chapter?
4. Why did they tolerate such sin among their membership?
5. What should be their attitude toward this situation?
6. What decision did Paul arrive at?
7. When were they to carry out Paul's decision?
8. What does "*deliver such a one to Satan*" mean?
9. What was the objective of this action?
10. Of what is leaven symbolic?
11. What represents the leaven and what represents the lump in this illustration?
12. What will be the result of cleaning out the old leaven?

13. How is Christ our Passover?
14. What is the feast they are to celebrate? How is it to be celebrated?
15. What had they misunderstood in one of Paul's previous letters?
16. In order not to associate with the fornicators in this world what would they have to do?
17. How were they to treat an immoral brother?
18. Who judges the immoral people of the world?
19. List six phrases in this chapter which denote corrective discipline.

Application & Discussion:

1. Is church discipline limited to just those specifically mentioned here? Explain.
2. Was the church discipline upon the man at Corinth (1 Cor. 5), successful in bringing him to repentance? Once the sinner repents is that the final conclusion of church discipline? Explain.

Homework: Check up on a brother or sister who you know to have some struggles or someone you need to check on this week.

Church Discipline: Withdrawing from the Disorderly

2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

Exhortation to the Brethren

Paul and his companions issue a command. It is not a suggestion. It is an order given by them through the authority which is *"in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."* This command involves the actions of the whole congregation corporately and the compliance of each member individually.

The command given to the faithful saints at Thessalonica is: *"that you withdraw."* The phrase *"withdraw yourselves"* (KJV) means "to remove one's self, withdraw one's self to depart,...to abstain from familiar (social contact) with one"(Thayer 587). It is from the Greek term *stello* and requires one to keep away from someone or something. This term does not mean or included in any way the idea of excommunicating a soul from the brotherhood or expelling them from the church building or even the membership.

Paul uses three phrases to identify who are to be withdrawn from by the church. The subjects of this command to withdraw is *"from every brother."* This clarifies that non-Christians are never to be the subject of church discipline. Furthermore, no partiality toward any brother or sister in Christ is to be permitted. Every impenitent Christian is subject to church discipline. This includes those who are influential, powerful, rich, a relative, preacher, teacher, elder, etc.

The second identification of the subject of withdrawing is one *"who walks disorderly"* (3:6). The term *"walks"* "is a present participle, indicating a continuous manner of conduct. There is a great deal of difference between an occasional lapse in doing our duty to God and in walking that way consistently." The walk of a Christian is in reference to his conduct in life. The word *"disorderly"* means "out of ranks, (often so for soldiers) irregular, inordinate, deviating from the prescribed order or rule" (Thayer 83). Those guilty are disorderly and if they continue in this they are walking disorderly. When one commits abortion he or she is walking disorderly. Also, those who forsake the assembly are walking disorderly for he disobeys several of God's commands (Heb. 10:25; 1 Cor. 11:24; 16:1,2). After all, those who forsake the assembling of the saints would be AWOL (absent without official leave) which is the same as being "out of rank" or "out of order."

The third descriptive phrase used to identify those who should be withdrawn from are those who are not walking *"according to the tradition which he received from us."* In the previous chapter the saints were commanded to *"hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle"* (2:15b). These traditions are from the inspired writings or teachings of men like the apostle Paul. Surely, Paul did not intend to refer only to their example of working for their food. All of the inspired traditions must be followed.

Example of the Evangelists

In this paragraph Paul reminds them again of the example of hard work set by him and his co-workers when they were in Thessalonica. *"For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us"* (3:7a). Again, he commands them to follow that example using the word *"ought"* which is in other places translated "must." Not only must they listen to their preaching and read the epistles, these brethren are obligated to imitate their example. The term for *"follow"* is from the Greek term from which the English "mimic" is derived. Paul requires the saints to mimic his behavior.

Paul describes three aspects of this example. First, *“we were not disorderly among you”* (3:7b). Second, *“nor did we eat anyone’s bread free of charge”* (3:8a). Third, *“but worked with labor and toil night and day”* (3:8c).

Why did Paul, Timothy and Silvanus set this kind of example before the Thessalonians? He gives three reasons. First, *“that we might not be a burden to any of you”* (3:8c). See 1 Thess. 2:9. Next, he explains their reason for not excepting or receiving any money or support from them: *“not because we do not have authority”* (3:9a). They had every right before God to receive support for their laboring in the Gospel. He had received support more than once from the church at Philippi (Phil. 4:16) and while laboring in Corinth (2 Cor. 11:8,9). He taught that a preacher is a laborer who is worthy of his hire (1 Cor. 9:3-14). Finally, Paul explains the reason for their behavior was *“to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us”* (3:9b). Many philosophers and religious hucksters were passing through this great city and living off their listeners and then leaving. Paul wanted to be an example of how they were putting the needs of the people above their own rights and needs. They became an example of those who had a right to be support for their work while some of the brethren were not working but still demanded the right to be supported.

Exhortations to the Busybodies

The next set of exhortations are directed toward those who are not busy at working to provide for themselves, but are busy meddling in the business of others. Why were they doing this? Many claim these first century brethren thought the Day of the Lord was coming at any moment and thus stopped working to wait for His Return. However, according to verse two of the previous chapter some were concerned *“as though the day of Christ had come.”* A belief based on misinformation. Why would any of them stop working and wait for an event that is already past? In fact, there is no evidence to link this problem with the views regarding the end of time. No one really knows why this was an issue among the saints at Thessalonica.

According to verse ten this is a problem which Paul had dealt with when working among them. *“For even when we were with you, we commanded you this”* (3:10a). Whatever the reason for the laziness of these unruly brethren, this is not the first time Paul needed to deal with it.

Paul’s previous commandment to the brethren was *“if anyone will not work, neither shall he eat”* (3:10b). God had commanded all men to work for their own maintenance. This is not overlooking those who cannot work due to extreme age, handicaps, sickness, etc. The command is for those who choose not to work. This exhortation seems harsh to in our time where it is assumed that all men are entitled to three square meals a day whether they work or not. When these disorderly brethren find themselves faced with nothing to do and no one to support them they will be forced to go back to work and busy themselves taking care of their own needs and minding their own business. So, it is wrong and contrary to plain apostolic teaching for any church to feed lazy men who simply refuse to work.

Paul describes three things this particular class of unfaithful brethren are noted for in verse eleven. First, he said, *“we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner”* (3:11a). Some false teachers have tried to limit church discipline in this passage to include only those who are lazy and will not repent. They argue that the Greek word *ataktos* means idleness. However, most lexiconographers define the term to mean “disorderly or unruly. It is “from the very *tasso* which is a military term referring to the act of arranging soldiers in military order in the ranks. When the Greeks wanted to make a word mean the opposite of what it meant originally, they placed the later Alpha as its first letter. Thus, *atakeo* refers to soldiers marching out of order or quitting the ranks, thus being disorderly. The word therefore means ‘deviating from the prescribed order or rule’” (Weust 25,26). After Paul tells the Corinthians church to take disciplinary action on the fornicator, he gives a list of other sins that require discipline. The list closes with the Greek term *toioutos* translated *“such a one.”* The term reveals that the sins listed are not a complete list of the only sins subject to discipline. Instead these are sins representative of any rebellion against God. The phrase *“and such an one”* is like saying “etc.” If those to be disciplined were limited just to those specifically listed it should then be noted the types of sinners who would simply have to be tolerate among the membership of the church: gossipers, liars,

homosexuals, abortionists, murderers, etc.

The second description of these disorderly brethren is they are *“not working at all”* (3:11b). They are doing nothing of value to assist in paying for or working for their food.

Finally, these lazy brethren *“are busybodies”* (3:11c). Paul is making a play on words with *“working”* and *“bushybodies.”* These men are not totally idle. They are not busy at their business or work to provide for themselves, but they are busy in other people’s business or work and expecting others to provide for them.

From the Lord comes two exhortations or commands to these lazy busybodies. First, comes the command *“that they work in quietness”* (3:12b). Second, the Lord wants them to *“eat their own bread”* (3:12c). These commands imply two end results. They will be able to work and provide for themselves instead of mooching off of others and it will keep them too busy to meddle and stir up trouble for others. By following these commands peace will return to the congregation.

Encouragement to the Brethren

Paul switches his focus from exhortations to the unfaithful to bring encouraging instructions to the faithful saints at Thessalonica. First, he encourages them *“not grow weary in doing good”* (3:13). As Paul encouraged the churches in Galatia *“and let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart”* (Gal. 6:9). Perhaps, they may have become tempted to cease their benevolent work among the needy saints. This is not what Paul is working toward. However, Paul might have reference to the command to discipline the disobedient. This can be a difficult and disheartening process to carry out for many brethren.

The next encouragement is with regard to how they are to treat any brother among them who *“does not obey our word in this epistle”* (3:14a). The inspired words of this letter contained several different commands to be obeyed. One of these charges was for them not to be lazy busybodies. However, church discipline would include any brother who disobeyed any of the commands given by the Lord. Walton Weaver explains, “the instruction also applies to other forms of disobedience. The author is under no obligation to name every subject to which this teaching is to be applied. New Testament writers often take up specific subjects that people are facing and make application of a principle that is applicable to that specific subject without meaning that the teaching does not apply to other matters...One can become ‘disorderly’...in other ways than by not working and looking to others to take care of them. When they do, the instructions for discipline as outlined in this paragraph also apply to them” (Weaver 594).

Paul lists four steps they need to take when disciplining a disobedient brother in Christ. First, they are to *“note that person”* (3:14b). The word *“note”* is from the Greek word *semeioo* which means to observe or notice or mark for avoidance. In order for the brethren to individually know who they are not to keep company, the congregation must identify the person subject for social ostracism. Paul publically marked such brethren in some of his letters even identifying them by name: Hymenaeus, Philetus, and Alexander the coppersmith. Exactly how the disobedient are noted, whether by an announcement or in writing, Paul does not specify.

The word *“keep company”* refers to associating with someone. It is from the Greek word *sunanamignumi*. The base *mignumi* means “to mingle” or “to mix.” The prefix *sun* carried the idea of “with” and *anan* means “up.” Thus, the word literally meant “mix up with” or “to be mixed up with” or “to mix together with.” Paul used the same term when discussing discipline by the church at Corinth. (1 Cor. 5:10). When one does not want a dear friend to keep bad company, they say, “I hope they do not get mixed up with the wrong crowd.” Thus, the brethren were not to get mixed up with an impenitent brother by continuing their social ties with him. This charges faithful brethren not to have a social meal with a disciplined brother. In no way does this term imply the church must throw him out of the church building and keep him from worship services. After all, where can he better be admonished to repent? It does not require the church to withhold from him the opportunity eat the Lord’s Supper.

The purpose behind the brethren noting and disassociating the unfaithful impenitent brother is

“that he may be ashamed” (3:14). The term *“ashamed”* in the text means “to turn one upon himself, and so produce a feeling of shame, a wholesome shame which involves a change of conduct” (Vine). When the fornicator at Corinth was disciplined the result produced godly sorrow (2 Cor. 2:6,7). Discipline is to destroy the influence of the flesh (1 Cor. 5:5). Disassociation by the brethren is to teach them the seriousness of sin (1 Tim. 1:1,9,20). Withdrawing of oneself from the sinning brother lets him know that he is in the grasp of Satan (1 Cor. 5:5). The purpose of discipline is to save the soul of a lost brother.

Contrary to the beliefs and actions of some, faithful Christians are not to treat the impenitent as our enemy. Paul said, *“yet do not count him as an enemy”* (3:15a). This does not suggest that we should refuse to speak to the person if one happens to meet him on the street. It does not justify acting in an uncivil manner toward him. It does not mean saints would cease to show any kindness and compassion toward him in that they would refuse to help him with trials and afflictions. Christians should still be interested in, and seek his salvation, just as they would a heathen man. Yet in such a way as to leave no doubt regarding our attitude toward his life. What it does mean is to have so social or religious communion with him until he repents. If brethren tell him every time you see him that he should repent, he will soon repent, or start avoiding the brethren. An erring brother who is in an impenitent state is his own worst enemy. Brethren need to continue to love him for his soul’s sake. After all, the faithful are even commanded to do good to and love their enemies.

Church discipline does not mean brethren should turn up their noses at the erring, *“but admonish him as a brother”* (3:15). Their association with the erring should be for spiritual reasons, not social. They need to continue to seek opportunities to save this brother (Gal. 6:1). Church discipline is positive peer pressure at its best.

Questions:

1. Who is commanded to do the withdrawing? What do they withdraw?
2. By what authority is this command given?
3. From whom are they to withdraw?
4. Why didn't Paul accept pay from the Thessalonians?
5. What command had Paul given them?
6. Specifically speaking, how were some of them walking disorderly?
7. What are these disorderly brethren exhorted to do?
8. Why are the faithful brethren exhorted to *“be not weary in well doing”*?

9. What two things were they to do with the disobedient? Why?
10. T F Paul's command: "*if anyone will not work, neither shall he eat*" applies to every saint without exception or consideration of their circumstances.
11. T F Church discipline is only to be used on those who are lazy busybodies.
12. The phrase "*not keep company*" means:
a. Do not be mixed up together in social event with the disciplined.
b. Never attend services with the disciplined.
c. Never speak to the disciplined.
d. All the above
13. The command by Paul for them to "*withdraw yourselves*" is given to...
a. the wicked alien sinners outside the body of Christ
b. the faithful Christians
c. the sinning saints who refuses to come to repentance
d. all the above
14. List the three phrases Paul uses to identify who are to be withdrawn from by the church.
15. How should they treat a brother who has been disciplined?

Application & Discussion:

1. What are the various positive results of a congregation taking discipline on a saint who refuses to repent?
2. What are the consequences of not withdrawing from the disorderly?

Homework: Start socializing now with all the saints in your congregation. This will make it harder for them to fall away. And if they do, it will give you something to withdraw from them.

Procedure of Church Discipline

An elder once said, "We all know that we ought to improve church discipline, but nobody seems to know where to begin and how to do it." Through lack of knowledge many souls who might have been restored through church discipline have been lost. Consider the familiar maxim: "They who remain ignorant of history are doomed to repeat the mistakes of previous generation." Thus, consider how many more may be lost as a result.

Church Discipline Is a Process

The plan of salvation is a process. It has a set of procedures or steps which must be taken in the proper order, so that the process may be completed and salvation can be procured. We do not treat the process on salvation like denominationalists who take John 3:16 or Acts 16:31 as the entire plan of salvation to the exclusion of all other Bible teaching of the subject (see John 3:35; Acts 16:34). By so doing they propagate the false doctrine of "faith only" and reject what the Bible and the context has to say about baptism.

We must not treat the process of church discipline as others treat the plan of salvation. Just as no one passage tells us the complete plan of salvation (hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized): no one passage tells the entire process of church discipline. Just as the Phillipian Jailor is told to believe and Saul of Tarsus is told to be baptized does not mean they are different plans of salvation. Just because the Corinthians are told to remove the wicked man and the individual is told to go privately to his brother does not mean they are two different processes. By studying all the cases of conversion and related passages we come to a clearer understanding of the plan of salvation. By studying all the cases of church discipline and related passages we can come to a clearer understanding of the correct procedure use to restore an erring brother and save his soul.

Steps in the Process of Church Discipline

#1 Public and Private Instruction and Exhortation

God commanded the church to assemble for worship (Heb. 10:25). Instructive discipline is to be used in these public assemblies (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 14:26; 1 Sam. 2:2).

Not only did Paul teach publicly, but also "*from house to house*" (Acts 20:20). We are commanded to meet this obligation to our brethren if the process is to be completed (Acts 18:26; 1 Th. 5:14). It is unwise to punish one for breaking the law if we have been neglectful in teaching them the Will of God.

#2 Private Rebuke and Admonishment

Rebuke private sin privately (Matt. 18:15). "*Go to him*" requires action on our part. The Lord deals with the responsibility of the trespasser in another passage (Mt. 5:23,24). Private matters must be taken care of privately. Jesus did not say, "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go tell his fault to others" or "broadcast it on the 10 o'clock news" or "write him up on your blog".

We need to admonish those brethren caught in sin. Paul even rebuked Peter (Gal. 2:11-15). Silence is not golden as we owe it to our brother to save his soul from hell (Js. 5:19,20). We need to admonish those found in sin (Gal. 6:1). It does no good to tell everyone else of an individual's sin, and leave him in the dark.

#3 Confirmation of Sin

The certainty of the guilt of innocence of the accused must be ascertained (Num. 35:12,30; Dt.

13:14; 17:2-6; 1 Tim. 5:19). The apostle Paul required evidence (2 Cor. 13:1,2). Accusations against an elder required two of three witnesses (1 Tim. 5:19).

This should be done on an individual bases when we meet to admonish them privately. Sometimes a sin is so public that it is already openly confirmed (Gal. 2:11-14). Nevertheless, this step must be taken before the local church can be involved collectively (Mt. 18:16).

The purpose of witnesses is two fold. First, it is to confirm what took place when the sinner was confronted with his sin. A brother who refuses to repent will not hesitate to lie about specific details to justify his actions. Second, it is to give more force in restoring a brother.

The certainty of the guilt or innocence of the accused must be ascertained. Enough evidence must be heard before judging with righteous judgment can take place (Jn. 7:51). If people deny having done the wrong, and we have no clear and certain proof or when the certainty of guilt cannot be proven beyond reasonable doubt, we cannot continue with corrective discipline. Some men's sins follow (after this life) and will be revealed at the Day of Judgment (! Tim. 5:24).

In the Old Testament, we read that if charges are made against the inhabitants of a city, such as serving other gods, etc., then they were to be smitten with the edge of the sword (Dt. 13:14). They were not to execute a man until he is judged and this required testimony of two or more witnesses (Num. 35:12,30). It should never be administered on the basis of hearsay evidence, but conclusive proof is to be gained (Dt. 17:2-7). Steps:

- ✓ It be told thee.
- ✓ Thou hast heard it.
- ✓ And inquired diligently
- ✓ it be true.
- ✓ The thing certain
- ✓ at the mouth of two or three witnesses.

They couldn't say, "I want to tell this but want no responsibility for what follows - Leave my name out of it." The testimony of such a person counts for nothing (Dt. 17:2-7). They were to go to priests and judges at Jerusalem for any case too hard to decide (17:8-12). Today, however, we have no "court" higher than local church.

It is possible that the accused may even be innocent, as Jesus was innocent. Even two or three witnesses may be wrong in some cases, hence, each individual church member should reserve the right to form his own judgment, giving the accused the benefit of any reasonable doubt of his guilt until the evidence has been established and the witnesses credible.

#4 Public Admonishment

The church must listen and speak. *"And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church"* (Mt. 18:17). The purpose for this command is manifold: frustrations of caring Christians can now be overcome because there can be positive response from all the body. It becomes a function of the body life (1 Cor. 12:25,26). The sinful brother might be recalled because of the very diversity of individual members who try to correct him. The disorderly will be warned and vividly impressed about his wrong (1 Th. 5:14; Tit. 3:10,11). *"Rebuke"* is from the Greek *epitimao* meaning "to set a weight upon, to tax upon,". Hence, the object in rebuking a sinner is to make him feel the weight of guilt and the impending penalty for sin. There must be sincere, diligent effort to restore the disorderly (Gal. 6:1,2). *"Restore"* is from *katartizo* meaning "to men, to furnish completely, is translated 'restore' in Gal. 6:1, Metaphorically, of the restoration, by those who are spiritual, of one overtaken in a trespass, such a one being as a dislocated member the of spiritual body. The tense is the continuous present, suggesting the necessity for patience and perseverance in the process" (W.E. Vine, p. 290).

#5 Public Announcement

■ Involves Collective Action

Some think it is an "official" action of the church that does not involve the membership. Others

say it is an individual matter only, to be done only when and as each person sees fit. They believe it does not involve the church at all. Yet, Paul clearly told the church at Corinth: "*When ye are assembled together*" (1 Cor. 5:4,5). The procedure often used is: The congregation is informed of the efforts that have been put forth and next, the congregation is then given the name or names of those toward whom such efforts have been put forth. A public statement should be made, or read, that all may know and have part in the action. Each one is then urged to do what he or she can to restore the erring brother to faithfulness. If at the end of a reasonable period of time (ten day to two weeks) restoration has not been made, the next step is taken.

Punitive discipline by just one or two individuals is not acceptable. It is the duty of the whole church to support the action (1 Cor. 5:9-11; 2 Th. 3:14). Those of the congregation who uphold the one disciplined should also be disciplined as disobedient to God and thus walking disorderly. No church nor Christian elsewhere has a scriptural right to extend association to the one disciplined as long as he refuses to repent. However, it is the obligation of each congregation to check and make its own autonomous decision.

■ **Involves Public Identification of Sin and Sinner**

We are to mark and note the sinner (Rom. 16:17; 2 Th. 3:14). The words "*mark*" and "*avoid*" are the same as "*take note*" and "*do not associate*". "Lit. Set a mark on" (Vincent, 4:71). "to mark, note, distinguish by marking" (Thayer, p. 474). "Mark" means "to look at, observe, contemplate, to mark...to fix one's eyes upon, direct one's attention to, anyone: Rom. 16:17; Phil. 3:17..." (Thayer. 579). These involve public recognition of sinner's fellowship with Satan and his severance of fellowship with God (1 Cor. 5:5; Eph. 5:11; 1 Tim. 1:19,20). Marking them by name: Paul did this with Demas, Hymenaeus, Philetus, and Alexander the coppersmith.

#6 **Social Ostracism**

■ **An Individual Responsibility**

The phrase "*withdraw yourselves*" in 2 Thess. 3:6 means "to remove one's self, withdraw one's self to depart,...to abstain from familiar (social contact) with one" (Thayer, p. 587). Withdrawal is both an individual and a congregational matter. We withdraw ourselves (individuals). Yet, this results only when one refuses to hear the church (the congregation). The withdrawal announcement is to take place when we are "*gathered together*" (1 Cor. 5:4). It is just an announcement and not the withdrawal itself. The withdrawing is to take place in the life of each Christian after the announcement has been made. The scriptures do necessarily infer that some kind of an announcement is to be made.

■ **Difference Between Association and Fellowship**

Fellowship is spiritual partnership and participation. It should be understood that no brother nor congregation determines our Father's fellowship for Him. When a congregation undertakes to discipline an erring, untrue brother or sister, following God's instructions in the processes, they (the congregation) are obeying God's Will regarding their fellowship with God. When He determines to remove the candlestick, either of an individual or a congregation, we cannot decide or know (Rev. 2:4,5). How merciful and longsuffering He will be with an individual or a congregation none of us can determine. Congregational discipline deals with our relationships within the local church, not a brother's fellowship with God and more than his relationship with his employer, or with his fellowship within his personal human family.

The word "association" comes from the Greek word *sunanamignumi*. The base "mignunmi" means "to mingle" or "to mix". The prefix "sun" carried the idea of "with" and "ana" means "up". Thus, lit. it means "mix up with" or "to be mixed up with" or "to mix together with". Associating with one another is a command (Acts 2:44,45; 4:32; 14:21,22; 28:15; Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:1,2). When a brother refuses to repent all social contact must be withheld. Nine phrases are used to emphasize the point that the sinful, impenitent brother was to be expelled from their recognition of fellowship and association. They are:

- ▶ "*be removed*" (1 Cor. 5:2)

- ▶ *“deliver to Satan”* (5)
- ▶ *“purge out”* (7)
- ▶ *“remove the wicked man”* (13)
- ▶ *“keep aloof from”* (2 Th. 3:6),
- ▶ *“take special note of that man, and do not associate with him...”* (14)
- ▶ *“mark”* and *“avoid”* (Rom. 16:17)
- ▶ treat him as a *“heathen and a publican”* (Mt. 18:17).
- ▶ *“reject”* (Tit. 3:10).

The terms *“avoid”* in Rom. 16:17 and *“withdraw”* in 2 Th. 3:6 and *“reject”* in Tit. 3:10 are equivalent commands. The word *“avoid”* means “to turn away from keep aloof from, one’s society;...” (Thayer). The word *“reject”* means “to shun, avoid:...Tit. 3:10” (Thayer, p. 482). Withdraw *“...that you keep aloof from...”* (2 Th. 3:5, NASV). *“Avoid”* means “to depart or withdraw from: to keep away from; stay clear of” (Webster). *“Ekklineo, to turn away from, to turn aside, lit., to bend out of (ek, out, kno, to bend)...of turning away from those who cause offenses and occasions of stumbling...”* (Vine, p. 91).

Conclusion

The Lord’s plan will work if we will only work His plan. God gave us the plan of discipline we need to work it. Remember, nothing is settled with the Lord until it is settled right. Overlooking sin in the church will not save unfaithful brethren; it will only condemn us.

Each of our Lord’s formal disciplinary steps infers compassionate concern for the accused individual. Each step infers respect for confidentiality and for accuracy of information in dealing with the accused. Each step infers a desire to clear the accused of guilt without telling it to the church.

Questions:

1. Compare the plan of salvation with church discipline.

2. True False By studying all the cases of church discipline and related passages we can come to a clearer understanding of the correct procedure use to restore an erring brother and save his soul.

3. Why is the first step in church discipline so important?

4. What is the purpose of taking witnesses?

5. When does the congregation get involved?

6. What is the first thing the congregation to do?

7. What if the sinner refuses to listen to the congregation?
8. How does the church identify the sinner and his sin?
9. What is the difference between fellowship and association?
10. What are the various things the congregation is to do in regard to the impenitent member?

Application & Discussion:

1. Why is it so hard to go to a brother who has sinner?
2. What should be done if one of the members refuses to withdraw himself from one in error or to honor the decision of the congregation?

Homework: Memorize the steps to be taken in church discipline.

Purpose of Church Discipline

A congregation may practice discipline exactly according to the process outlined by the scriptures, and still not be displeasing to God. Proper procedure is one thing, but the correct motive behind the disciplinary action is just as important. A failure to understand the real purpose involved in corrective discipline is the real reason why so many members of the church raise objections.

Wrong Motives for Church Discipline

The true purpose of church discipline has been abused from the second century onward. When problems arose leaders went to church councils to solve it. Then came the concept of excommunication. "When the papacy was at its height, excommunication was a weapon so formidable that even powerful kings quailed at the thought that it might be directed against them" ("Discipline: Ecclesiastical," Universal Dictionary of the English Language, Vol. 2, p. 1627). Excommunicated Christians who showed signs of contrition formed a class of "penitents." They had a special seat in meetings for worship. The granting of indulgences, in which case, "the prescribed penance would be commuted to a money fine." Later, the inquisition was a system whereby church authorities could spy upon, and with the aid of civil authorities arrest, try, and pass sentence to punish heretics. In America came the Salem witchcraft trials of 1692, when nineteen victims were condemned and executed by church authority. These were more motivated by pride and authority than a sense of love and concern for sinners.

Today, discipline's purpose continues to be distorted by some congregations. 1) Church discipline has been used as a political move. We could call this the "Diotrophes' syndrome" (3 Jn. 9). Discipline is used as a power play between cliques trying to win control over a congregation. Discipline was never meant to "throw somebody out of the church". It may surprise some that the disfellowshipped brother is yet to be counted as a brother (2 Th. 3:15). 2) Retaliation has been its motivation. It is the old "eye for an eye and tooth for tooth" concept. Vengeance belongs to God (Rom. 12:19). 3) Church discipline has been used cover up our own weaknesses through hypocrisy (Mt. 7:1-5). 4) Some think the idea of to "kick someone" out of the church, such as, someone who is not well liked or is not socially acceptable, etc. One should not entertain the idea that discipline has to do with nothing but getting rid of unwanted members. 5) Some think discipline involves a "witch-hunt" mentality. Looking under every bed and in every closet, just trying to catch someone making a mistake. 6) Discipline does not mean the church is primarily interested in making someone suffer. A pharmacist gives us medicine that is bitter to the taste, but it is good for us. Sometimes one's leg must be removed, not to make him suffer, but to save the remainder of his body. God chastises His children, not to make the sinner suffer, but that they may be exercised thereby (Heb. 12:5-11). Withdrawal is not a pronouncing or condemning a person to hell. It is hoped that the withdrawal will save the individual from suffering in eternal punishment by bringing him to a realization of his sinful condition, and thus turning him back to God.

To Save the Sinner

The highest motive in regards to the sinner is to save him from his sin. *"Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus"* (1 Cor. 5:5; see Js. 5:19,20). As evangelism is to save the alien sinner, corrective discipline is to save the erring brother. Jesus said, *"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother"* (Mt. 18:15). Save him when Christ comes. He is delivered unto Satan's domain to find his companionship among the lost, he is brought to his

senses and made to realize how badly he needs the Lord and His people. It is like what happened with the prodigal son in Luke 15. When he was broke and alone, feeding swine and longing to eat their food, he came to his senses. He repented and returned to his father's house. The discipline might be painful to his pride now, but it can break his heart into repentance in time (2 Cor. 2:6-8). It is basically the same reason why we discipline our children. The discipline of the Father produces life, by bringing us into subjection unto the Father of spirits (Heb. 12:9). It is for our profit, that we might be partakers of God's holiness (Heb. 12:10). It yields the fruit of righteousness in peace unto those who endure it (Heb. 12:11).

The effect of discipline is to give the sinner a sense of shame over his sinful state. *"And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed"* (2 Th. 3:14). "Ashamed, i.e., to turn one upon himself, and so produce a feeling of shame a wholesome shame which involves a change of conduct" (Vine). As a child is ashamed when punished for wrong doing, so we hope a child of God feels the shame.

Discipline is to destroy the influence of the flesh (Col. 3:5,6). According to Paul church discipline is to *"deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus"* (1 Cor. 5:5). It produces a destruction of fleshly lust, working to the ultimate salvation of the soul. It's immediate purpose: *"destruction of the flesh."* It's ultimate purpose: *"saving of the spirit in the day of the Lord Jesus."*

Discipline is to teach them the seriousness of sin. *"This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme"* (1 Tim. 1:18-20). It enforces lessons that can be derived in no other way. It is to help him truly realize the enormity of his sin. The sinner must learn that one cannot be saved while violating the moral principles of the Gospel. One cannot go to heaven, if he wrongs a brother and refuses to correct it. One cannot go to heaven, if he refuses to live as the Lord requires. One cannot go to heaven, if he does not abide in the doctrine of Christ.

Discipline lets the erring member know that he is in the grasp of Satan (1 Cor. 5:5). He is not in the kingdom of light, but the kingdom of darkness. It provides the means by which one can recover himself from the snare of the devil (2 Tim. 2:25,26).

Those who struggle receiving discipline from the congregation *"have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: 'My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him'"* (Heb. 12:5).

To Protect the Church

Discipline is to purge the church of its complacency toward sin. *"Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth"* (1 Cor. 5:6-8). There is a broad tolerance for sin in the world. There is a too much tolerance for sin in many churches. In many congregations there is little moral difference between the church and the world. Sometimes the sin tolerated in the church shocks the world. Paul told the church at Corinth: *"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife!"* (1 Cor. 5:1). If the church does not exercise more discipline in the future than in the past, the area of separation between the church and the world will be so narrow that it will be difficult to see. Many like Corinth of old, have *"become arrogant"* or proud of their permissiveness (Rev. 2:20). The world doesn't need the example of Christianized version of the world. It needs to see the sin is a serious problem and in the church is must be cut out and killed off like cancer. This complacent attitude toward sin is enough to allow the whole lump to become leavened. They are Christians now, thus they should hate sin. Christ warned churches about tolerating, or tampering with sin (Ephesus, Rev. 2:2,6; Thyatira, 2:20-25;

Perganum, 2:14,15). Remember, the church wears Christ's name, so bring it no shame.

Secondly, church discipline preserves the purity of the Church. It protect it from the contagious, progressive, and contaminating effects of sin. Sin's contaminating effect is compared to leaven (1 Cor. 5:5,6) and gangrene (2 Tim. 2:17,18). Our cooks know how to use leaven. In making sour dough pancakes the cook saves a "starter" from the dough each time. This is the to be put in the new dough over night to leaven it. Just as a small part of a cake of yeast will leaven a huge mixing bowl full of dough, so "a little leaven" tolerated in the church will do the massive damage. We cannot permit the leaven of the world into the church. There is no room nor reason for a starter from the old batch. We should emulate the Israelites who searched the darkest places of their homes to be sure all leaven was removed (Ex. 12:15,20; 13:7) for the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It is like a rotten apple in a barrel or cancer in the body or like weeds in the garden. A little sin allowed to remain in the body will destroy the whole body (Rev. 2:5; 18:4).

Sinners will corrupt others if not promptly removed. Solomon wisely warned, *"because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil"* (Eccl. 8:11). As the lepers were to be removed from communities (Numbers 5:1-4). In the laws of the land when one is permitted to get away with criminal activity, others try to get away with it as well. Sin attracts sin and the unrighteous are not satisfied until they have partners in their unrighteousness. If one can abuse a brother and not be disciplined, then.... one can refuse to live as the Lord requires, then.... another can teach false doctrine, then... Remember, it only takes a few cold sinners to quench the fire of any congregation.

The church is to be made of the purified or sanctified. Of those who have had their souls purified in obeying the truth (1 Pet. 1:22; Rom. 6:17,18). Their garments have been washed in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:14). They must keep themselves pure (1 Tim. 5:22; 1 Pet. 1:13-16). Christ desires to present His bride without *"spot or wrinkle, or any such thing"* (Eph. 5:25-27). God's intentions are to keep us pure, (1Tim. 5:22; 4:12; 2 Cor. 6:17,18). Sinners constitute spots or blemishes in the purified body (2 Pet. 2:13). The greatest enemy that the church has is internal corruption (Tit. 1:16; Jd. 16; 1 Tim. 6:5).

Discipline is needed to preserve the influence of the church. It is the defense of the good name of the church. Every effort must be made to show the world that the church of Christ will not tolerate moral evil within its ranks. The church is to be the *"pillar and ground of the truth"*, thus it can never display partiality for sinners, no leniency for transgressors. All churches have either a good or bad influence before the world (2 Cor. 3:2; Phil. 2:14,15). Corinth had a bad one (1 Cor. 5:1). When sinfulness is tolerated by the church it nullifies our claim of being a New Testament church. The action of 2 Thessalonians 3:6 suggests that we are trying to obey, protect, and defend all that God revealed through the apostles.

A church that does not discipline will lose the respect of decent people in the community and of those Christians who desire to follow Christ sincerely. The world will have a lot more respect for the church if it is trying to keep itself clean than it will have for a church which tries to hide its sins. Thinking men and women do not want to belong to a hypocritical institution. They do not want membership in an organization that preaches one thing and practices another.

When a man of the world can truthfully say that he lives a better, cleaner life than the average church member, or when he can truthfully say there are too many hypocrites in the church, we may know that the church is not exercising discipline as it should.

Having been ordained to save the world, it is often hard put to save itself. We are the "sinner's Bible; we are the scoffer's creed." We cannot bring the world to Christ by compromising with evil. An unconverted church cannot convert the world to Christ. Who will appreciate the need to be affiliated with a church that condones the same sins it is trying to convert them from.

Discipline will not destroy the influence of the church. When Ananias and Sapphira were punished and it caused respect by the world (Ac. 5:11). It might bring a stimulating and amazing awakening message to an unbelieving world.

To Respect the Will of God

Proper discipline will: maintain Christ's honor, (Js. 3:16-18. Proper discipline will help maintain Christ's authority. He has all authority (Mt. 28:18). The church is subject to Him (Eph. 1:22). We must discipline with his authority (1 Cor. 5:4). We must discipline to who that we are subject to Christ's authority (2 Cor. 2:9; Rev. 2:5). We are commanded to "*do all to the glory of God*" (1 Cor. 10:31) and to cause men, by thus living, "*to glorify God*" (1 Pet. 2:12). Church discipline is not an option, it is a commandment.

To Strengthen Faithful Christians

Discipline produces godly fear among the members (1 Tim. 5:19,20; Acts 5:1-11). It demonstrates to others that sin is not permitted. Paul commanded, "*those who are outside God judges. Therefore 'put away from yourselves the evil person'*" (1 Cor. 5:13). If all members were informed as to what they may expect when sin is allowed to rule their lives, very little corrective discipline would ever be needed. Every effort should be made to develop every member of the church into the highest possible usefulness in the service of the Lord. The church is a store house of untold power, much of its power is allowed to lie dormant.

When members are called upon to discipline a fellow member, it puts their obedience to God's Will to the test. Concerning the penitent member Paul noted in 2 Corinthians 2:8-9: "*Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him. For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things.*"

Remember, the purpose of church discipline is to protect the congregation, strengthen the saints, obey the authority of God, save the sinner, and warn the world of the seriousness of sin.

Questions:

1. True False A congregation may practice discipline exactly according to the process outlined by the scriptures, and still not be displeasing to God.
2. What additions and changes did the Catholic Church make to church discipline?
3. What are the various improper motives or reasons behind the practice of church discipline today?
4. According to Hebrews 12:9-11 what are some of the benefits of God's discipline upon His children?
5. True False A Christian caught in sin and in need of discipline should never be made to feel ashamed.
6. How does church discipline teach the world, the sinning brother and the congregation the seriousness of sin?

7. How does church discipline help the world see or understand the difference between the church and the world?
8. How does church discipline preserve the purity of the church?
9. How does tolerating undisciplined sin hurt the influence of the church in the community?
10. How did the community in Jerusalem respond when God discipline Ananias And Sapphira in Acts 5:11?
11. How does the practicing of Church discipline glorify God?
12. How does church discipline strengthen faithful Christians?

Application & Discussion:

1. A brother in Christ admits he was in the wrong in refusing to repent of his sin. But he is still too angry to return to the flock. He feels very strongly that the congregation withdraw themselves from him with impure motives. How would you deal with this situation?
- +
2. Make a list of questions to ask yourself as an individual and congregation to exam motives behind disciplining a sinner among the church.

Homework: When dealing with the brother caught in a trespass remember to not only follow Biblical procedures but to also make church your motives are scriptural.

Timing & Treatment of the One Disciplined

Timing Church Discipline

Timing is crucial in many areas of life. A farmer's use of pesticides and herbicides are crucial to a fruitful harvest. If he sprays too soon, every plant, good or bad could be destroyed. If he puts it off too long, the outcome of these chemicals may be made ineffective. Successful farmers are those who know when the time is right to spray the crop. The Wise Man of Ecclesiastes knew that timing is important in man's life on earth (3:1),

If discipline is premature that soul might be cast into the world. If procrastinated the effect of discipline may be greatly negated. Furthermore, the contaminating effects of his sinful life may have spread to others.

♦ The Steps in Any Process must Be Taken at the Right Time

In the plan of salvation, one must take the procedure at the right time in order to be saved. Certain prerequisites must be met: 1) Must have been taught publicly and privately. 2) We cannot precede until guilt has been fully established (Mt. 18:16). 3) Not until every earnest effort to restore has failed both private and public admonishment and rebuke (Mt. 18:15,16; Tit. 3:10; I Th. 5:14). 4) Not until the church is assembled (I Cor. 5:4; Mt. 18:17; 2 Cor. 2:6) and the impenitent brother marked or identified before the congregation. 5) Only then can we withdraw ourselves.

♦ Time Varies from Sinner to Sinner

The time to begin corrective discipline is when one sins. Yet each case deals with an individual and individuals are all unique and therefore all must be considered according to the attitude, spiritual growth, etc. Some need more teaching. Some things are not as public. Sometimes the congregation is ignorant of unfamiliar with corrective discipline. Different cases require different treatment. Patience is in order, even required.

Other factors may influence the time of the process. If there is a grave threat to the congregation due to a divisive man or faction within the congregation, the leadership may need to ramp things up to save the church from fracturing. Paul told Titus, *"Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition"* (Tit. 3:10). How much negative influence is the sinful example and behavior having on the members, especially those who are young or weak in the faith needs to be considered. Furthermore the influence of the church with the lost in the community may be in peril.

♦ How Long till Public Censure?

As soon as it takes to meet the prerequisites list above. We do not wait years to punish our children.

There are two dangers in procrastinating: 1) Being too "quick on the (with)draw". There is no need for punitive discipline if the erring person willing to repent when we seek to restore him. Procrastinating, hoping for a change of mind which may never come. What parents would wait several months before correcting a child for a wrong deed? (Ec. 8:11).

Withdrawal is a last resort if all other efforts have failed. When he has no shame, no repentance, no confession or no correction, it is time for social ostracism. There is a limit to the time and energy which even the most faithful can expend, lest they *"cast their pearls before swine"* (Mt. 7:6).

Treatment of One Disciplined

After the congregation has followed the proper process in disciplining the impenitent saint, it is

essential that the whole congregation know how to treat the one who has been disciplined. An attitude of indifference or "good riddance" is not acceptable.

■ **Do Not Socialize with Them**

We must quit keeping social company with the one who has been the object of church discipline and will not repent. No more hunting, fishing, golf, sewing, shopping, picnics, games, etc. until there is true repentance. Some think so long as they do not eat with an unrepentant member that they can still keep company in all other ways. But we are to treat him as a heathen and a publican. Jesus said of the sinner, "*and if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector*" (Mt. 18:17). The way in which the Jews regarded Gentiles and publicans is illustrated in Luke 5:30; Acts 10:38; 11:2,3.

"What did I do to draw nearer to that brother or sister before the situation arose calling on me to withdraw? It involves getting to know one another, knowing one another's strengths and weaknesses. How can I "*rejoice with them that do rejoice*" or "*weep with them that weep*," when I have made no effort to know them? What if an erring Christian was never made to feel a part of the family of God? Or, having once felt a part of the family, fell away with little or no contact from other Christians. How effective would our withdrawing be on that person? It would not be very effective. It is unrealistic to think one can walk into another Christian's home for the first time and simply tell them to straighten up, and think you have done all that you can. It requires a sense of "family" that will only come from spending time together. It requires drawing near before one has to withdraw. It is sad to say, in some cases, the closeness between brethren is absent, indeed this absence may contribute to the problems in the first place.

■ **Do Not Eat a Social Meal with Them**

"But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person" (1 Cor. 5:11).

To eat with a man was to acknowledge him as a worthy equal. The Jews rebuked Peter, because he ate with Gentiles, that is, those of Cornelius' household (Acts 11:3), thereby recognizing them as equals. The saints are to have no interchange of hospitality with the sinner which would imply brotherly recognition. Whatever implies endorsement must be avoided. It means to give no encouragement in anyway to the evil one is doing. John wrote, "*whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds*" (2 Jn. 9-11). To extend association to those from whom the church has withdrawn is to be partakers of their evil deeds, (2 Jn. 11).

This of course, does not refer to incidental eating, such as, in a restaurant, at school or work, at the different table, etc.

Some have suggested that this means we are not to eat the Lord's Supper with the one disciplined. The Bible does not teach closed communion. Each man is to examine himself regarding the Supper (1 Cor. 11:27-29). 1 Corinthians 5:9-11 is not referring to the Lord's Supper. Whatever Paul forbids our doing with a brother that is a sinner, he allows or permits us doing with a man of the world. The phrase "*no not to eat*" is in apposition to "*not to keep company*" found in the same verse. It follows that the eating forbidden is eating engaged in with the world, hence, a common meal. If reference is to the Lord's Supper, then men and women who belong to the world are assumed to eat the Lord's Supper.

■ **Make Sinner Ashamed**

The purpose behind the brethren noting and disassociating the unfaithful impenitent brother is "*that he may be ashamed*" (3:14). The term "*ashamed*" in the text means "to turn one upon himself, and so produce a feeling of shame, a wholesome shame which involves a change of conduct" (Vine). When the fornicator at Corinth was disciplined the result produced godly sorrow (2 Cor. 2:6,7). Discipline is to destroy the influence of the flesh (1 Cor. 5:5). Disassociation by the brethren is to teach them the seriousness of sin (1 Tim. 1:1,9,20). Withdrawing of oneself from the sinning brother lets him know that he is in the grasp of Satan (1 Cor. 5:5).

■ **Not as an Enemy**

Paul said the disciplined member is not to be regarded as an enemy. *"Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother"* (2 Th. 3:15). Church discipline of a member does not mean that we should refuse to speak to the person if we meet him on the street. It does not justify our acting in an uncivil manner toward him. It does not mean we would cease to show any kindness and compassion toward him or that we would refuse help to him in trials and afflictions. We will still be interested in seeking his salvation, just as we would a heathen man, yet in such a way as to leave no doubt regarding our attitude toward his life. It means no social communion or association with him until he repents. If you tell him every time you see him that he should repent, he will soon repent or start avoiding you. An erring brother who in an unrepentant state is his own worst enemy. What he needs in the faithful brethren is a truth friend who will rebuke him.

Christians should still be interested in, and seek his salvation, just as they would a heathen man. Yet in such a way as to leave no doubt regarding our attitude toward his life. What it does mean is to have so social or religious communion with him until he repents. If brethren tell him every time you see him that he should repent, he will soon repent, or start avoiding the brethren. An erring brother who is in an impenitent state is his own worst enemy. Brethren need to continue to love him for his soul's sake. After all, the faithful are even commanded to do good to and love their enemies (Matt. 5:44,45).

■ **Admonish Him as a Brother**

Instead of treating the sinful brother like an enemy, spiritual brethren should *"admonish him as a brother"* (2 Th. 3:15). This does not mean we should turn up our noses at the erring. God forbid! Our contact with the erring should be for spiritual reasons, not social. Faithful saints need to continue to seek opportunities to save this brother (Gal. 6:1). Church discipline is positive peer pressure at its best. Whatever is said to the disciplined brother needs to remind him of his current status before God and the congregation and encourage him to come to repentance.

■ **Do Not to Throw out of the Church**

The apostle John was going to rebuke Diotrephes for tossing some of the saints out of the services (3 John 9,10). God does the adding of the saved to the church (Ac. 2:47) and He does the subtracting (Jn. 15:2). *"To remove the wicked man from among you"* is not referring to his physical presence in the church building but to our social agenda or calendar.

■ **Have No Fellowship**

"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them" (Eph. 5:11). This would be a proper response to those of the world and those brethren who have gone back into the world.

Fellowship is the result of our mutual relation with God. We have horizontal fellowship with one another only because we first have vertical fellowship with God. When one sins and does not repent before God his fellowship with God is broken (1 John 1:9). This comes before congregational discipline. When the church disciplines the impenitent brother the church is recognizing the loss of fellowship with God and thus the loss of spiritual fellowship with one another.

We are bound together in the local assembly in order that we might draw strength from one another by mutual edification. This fellowship is dependant on our being like-minded (Phil. 2:2). It is impaired when any fellow fails to maintain his like-mindedness with other fellows. Other-mindedness instead of like-mindedness.

The principle taught here would apply to all who have been disciplined for not abiding in the teaching of Christ. They are not to be encouraged, aided or endorsed. This has no reference to people with whom we may have differences on matters of judgment or opinion.

We are not forbidden to have religious and social communion with him or to do anything that would sanction, encourage, or lend support to his sinful life.

Questions:

1. What is the timing of church discipline so important?

2. What prerequisite steps must be met before the individuals in the congregation can withdraw themselves from the wayward brother?
3. Why does the timing of church discipline vary from case to case?
4. What does it mean to treat the unfaithful brother "*as a heathen and a publican*"?
5. What are some things members should not do with a brother who has been disciplined?
6. What might the members of the congregation do to make the punishment of social ostracizing more effective when church discipline is used on a member?
7. Why refuse to have a common meal with a disciplined member?
8. Does this mean we are not to eat the Lord's Supper with a disciplined member? Explain.
9. Over what is the impenitent brother to feel shame?
10. How are Christians to treat their enemies?
11. What things might a faithful brother do in admonishing a disciplined member?
12. Does church discipline involve removing a member from the church building or assemblies? Explain.
13. True False The sinful brother's fellowship with God is removed when by church discipline (disfellowshipping).

Application & Discussion:

1. Suppose, you tell the church and they do nothing about it, or even take the side of the offender?

2. Is there any authority to read a letter before the church? What about a letter?

3. Does allowing a disciplined individual to continue attending church services eviscerate the act of discipline?

Homework: Start preparing yourself now to properly treat and deal with a member of the congregation who may be disciplined in the future.

Subjects of Church Discipline

One the most common areas of disagreement in regard to church discipline is just who should be subject to discipline. Some limited it to just the sins which are specifically mentioned in scriptures. Others exclude family members. Then there is the question of those who quit their membership in the middle of the process. Just who is subject to church discipline.

Those Specifically Mentioned

Jesus included those who refuse to correct personal offenses against brethren should be disciplined by the church (Matt. 18:15-17). Paul includes both those who cause division (Rom. 16:17 and those who are factious (Tit. 3:10). False teachers would cause both division and factions (2 John 9-11). False teachers have always tried to lead God's people astray (2 Pet. 2:1). Paul warned the Ephesian elders about them (Ac. 20:28-30). We are not to tolerate them in the church (Rev. 2:20). We are to deliver them to Satan (1 Tim. 1:20). Withdraw from those destitute of truth (1 Tim. 6:3-6). Those who pervert the Gospel, let them be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9). We cannot walk hand in hand with those who would hinder the truth. They will cause the shipwreck of our faith (2 Tim. 2:17,18).

In 1 Corinthians chapter five Paul list not only a fornication but also several other sins (1 Cor. 5:11). The term for "*fornication*" is *porneia* which does not mean immoralities in general, but includes all sexual immorality. "Prostitution, unchastity, fornication of every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse" (Arndt and Gingrich, p. 699). Fornication would include adultery, homosexuality, prostitution, immodesty, use of pornographic literature, incest, etc. Next, he mentions drunkards, that is, those habitually intoxicated. The covetous are those with a lustful desire for material things. "Literally it signifies one who wishes to have more of a thing than he ought to have; one who is greedy of money, or of sensual pleasure. One inordinately desirous of something belonging to another" (MacKnight). Coveting is condemned throughout the Bible (Lk. 12:15; Eph. 5:3; Heb. 13:5; Rom. 1:29; and 2 Tim. 3:1-4). Discipline applies also to idolaters, that is, worshipers of anything other than God. "The word idolaters is derived from *eidolon* (idol) and 'latris' (servant, slave) and has as its meaning a worshiped or servant of false gods. ...Originally *eidolon* signified a phantom or shadow, something unreal as opposed to that which was genuine. The Septuagint adopted *eidolon* as its translation for false gods in contrast with the true God. In the next stage of development, the words was applied to anything that was a representation of a false god" (Lightfoot). Revilers are users of abusive language, harsh bitter speech. Also they are called railers or slanderers. At times the railer may use abusive language against individuals at other times his "railing accusations" may be against the entire congregation. It results from refusing to "*consent to wholesome words*" (1 Tim. 6:4). Extortioners are those guilty of plundering, robbery, dishonest gain, to obtain something forcibly from someone unwilling. Busybodies (2 Th. 3:11) are those who wander about from house to house speaking things which they ought not to speak, 1 Tim. 5:11-13. Those "who have no business, but are busy with everybody's business" (McGarvey). God classifies busybodies with murderers (1 Pet. 4:15,16). Paul mentions those who are lazy (2 Th. 3:11). They won't even support their own families (1 Tim. 5:8). The sluggard always has an excuse (Pr. 20:4) but God hates laziness (Pr. 6:6-9). They are in a pitiful condition (Pr. 24:30-34). In 1 Timothy 1:19,20 Paul mentions those who blaspheme. Paul mentions those elders who continue in sin (1 Tim. 5:17-20; Ac. 20:29,30). What sin? Any sin he refuses to repent of.

Those Generically Included

There are some serious problems if we try to limit those who are to be disciplined to just those

specifically mentioned above. Not only wouldn't there be authority for disciplining those who forsake the assembling of the saints, but there would be no authority to withdraw from those who commit abortion, fornicators, murderers, gamblers, drug addicts, social drinkers, etc.

Paul commanded the church at Thessalonica to withdraw from *"from every brother walks disorderly"* (1 Th. 3:6). No partiality toward any brother is to be permitted. Every brother includes those who are influential, powerful, rich, a relative, preacher, teacher, elder, etc. (1 Tim. 5:17-20).

The term *"walks"* is a present participle, indicating a continuous manner of conduct. There is a great deal of difference between an occasional lapse in doing our duty to God and in walking that way consistently."

"Disorderly" means "out of ranks, (often so of soldiers) irregular, inordinate, deviating from the prescribed order or rule" (Thayer, 83). "Lack of order...neglect of order or system; irregularity..." (Webster). "Walk: figuratively signifying the whole round of the activities of the individual life whether of the unregenerate, Eph. 4:17. or to the believer, 1 Cor. 7:17; Col. 2:6...negatively, ...not disorderly, 2 Th. 3:6" (Vine 1207). They are walking disorderly by not following God's Will (2 Th. 3:6,14). *"Not after the tradition"* and *"obey not our word by this epistle"*. Thus, those who disobey God's will in anything they do or don't do and continue in it, refusing to repent (turn their walk around).

Specific illustrations of *"disorderly"* are given as *"idle"* and *"busybodies"*. The word *"neither"* places side by side things that are equal. Disorderliness and idleness are thus equally related to God's Law as violations of it, but the two are not identical. *"Disorderly"* is a broader term than *"idle,"* and includes any form of disobedience.

The works of the flesh are things that will keep one out of heaven. Thus, those guilty are disorderly and if they continue in those they are walking disorderly. When one commits abortion he is walking disorderly. Also, those who forsake the assembly are walking disorderly for he disobeys Hebrews 10:25; 1 Corinthians 11:24; 16:1,2.

After Paul tells the Corinthian church to take disciplinary action on the fornicator he gives a list of other sins that require discipline. The list closes with *toiotoutos* - *"such a one"* (1 Cor. 5:11). Which reveals that these are not the only sins which can break the association of brethren; these are sins representative of any rebellion against God.

Corrective discipline involves all brethren who commit sin and any sin. There are no small or insignificant sins. Any sin that we commit is a transgression of the law (1 Jn. 3:4) and will separate us from God (Is. 59:1,2). If one has the right to commit one "small" sin, all have the same right. Sets up a distinction between "withdrawing" and "non-withdrawing" sins - between sins that are equally bad. This can't be unless there are some sins which will not damn the soul (Js. 2:10). Every known sin for which a man will not repent is to be subject to withdrawal.

Cross-Congregational Discipline

What should a congregation do when a Christian comes from another congregation expressing their desire to place membership when they have been disciplined by another local Church? If the church is a denomination there is not need to consider the authority of that church. After all, there were no denominations in the first century. Denominationalism is unscriptural. Yet, it is a different matter if the local congregation which initiated the discipline is a New Testament church. A local church can only discipline their own members (1 Cor. 5:1-2; 1 Pet. 5:1-3; 1 Th. 3:6,11). All congregations are independent and autonomous bodies of believers, self-governing under our Father's Will in the New Testament.

This does not mean that another congregation's withdrawals should be ignored. . A disciplined brother should be encouraged to go return if possible and make things right with his previous church family.

Church autonomy does not mean they could communicate about members. Letters of introduction appear to have been used inter-congregationally. Before receiving a Christian into membership a church could contact the disciplining congregation's leadership. A letter might read, "Dear Brethren, So-and-So has expressed a desire to place there membership with our local group. We understand they have been disciplined by your congregation. Has he corrected issue?" If not, the

impenitent Christian should be sent back to make thing right at his former congregation before accepting him as a new member.

One church is not bound by the Word of God to automatically accept discipline of another. They can do their own investigation into the matter. If the former discipline has been found legitimate it should be respected.

Churches who have disciplined members who are known to be church hoppers and shoppers to find a place to go, should warn other nearby local congregations. Some are divisive persons who can spread their leaven of sin to other congregations. If a congregation welcomes a Jonah running away from the Will of God they can expect nothing to storms.

Disciplined Family Member

Years ago my father called me about one of my sisters who had started living with a man before marriage. She was a member of the local church where the rest of the family attended. He wanted my thoughts about her and church discipline and what the families obligations would be in this situation. Well, he decided to initiate church discipline and she was withdrawn from. During this time he informed her that she was still his daughter and he would be there to help her. But they would not socialize with her like the rest of the congregation: *“not even to eat with such a one”* (1 Cor. 5:11). Two Sundays later she came and repented before the congregation and was restored.

Keep in mind, the command of church discipline does not cancel out or abrogate other commands of God. A father and mother are still responsible for their sons and daughters (Eph. 6:4; 1 Tim. 5:8). This is especially true if they are still living at home and being supported. A husband and wife still have their marital duties to one another (1 Cor. 7:14-15). They are not so separate or stop any of their permanent divinely commanded relationship (Eph. 5:25f, 1 Peter 3:1-7). However, they should be careful not to encourage or condone sin by a family member in any way.

The Preemptive Resigner

The congregation has admonished a sinful member to repent before they initiate the next step in church discipline: social ostracism or withdrawing of themselves from the sinner if they refuse to come to repentance. Instead of repenting the member hopes to beat the church to the withdraw by announcing there are no longer a member, they are withdrawing their membership. It is like saying to the boss you just fired you, “you can’t fire me! I quit!” So what is a congregation to do with a preemptive resigner?

First, they need to understand what the local church is and the nature of membership in the church. Church membership is voluntary. Yet every Christian should be a member of a local congregation. When they join a local church they are not entering into a social club membership like a gym or country club. They are becoming members of spiritual family. Church membership involves submission to the authority and leadership of the local congregation. They are placing themselves under the oversight of the overseers. They are accountable for living like Christ and keeping God’s commandments. They have entered into a covenant or contract with a body of believers who must fulfill many mutual obligations toward one another.

The church is a “body” with various parts or members. The hand cannot up and say “I resign”. It is like an army. A soldier of Christ cannot just resign and go AWOL without expecting repercussions. The church is the bride of Christ. The members of it cannot just walk out on this covenant relationship. The church is a flock. Sheep cannot just run off and quit the flock and the local shepherds just be expected to sit there and twiddle their thumbs. A church is a family of brothers and sisters with God as their father. A son cannot just runaway from the family. “Just as a person cannot ‘member’ himself, he cannot ‘unmember’ himself...the end of this covenant-like relationship requires the consent of both parties. ...It would be equivalent to letting an arrested criminal resign his citizenship in order to avoid prosecution and conviction.” (Leeman 117). “People join churches by the consent of the church, and they resign by the consent of the church. That is to say, a person cannot walk up to a church and say, “I’m a member now.” (Leeman 116). Preemptive resignations don’t work.

Questions:

1. Should a local church discipline false teachers? Explain.
2. What sins are included in the term "*fornication*"?
3. What sins would "*extortion*" include?
4. True False Church discipline is for any sin a member refuse to repent of?
5. List some common sins though not specifically mentioned would be subject to church discipline.
6. What does the term "*disorderly*" mean?
7. Is Paul's list of sins mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5 complete or inclusive of other sins not specifically listed? Explain.
8. How should a congregation handle a situation where someone who has been disciplined by another congregation expresses a desire to join your local church?
9. How should or should not a wife react to her husband being disciplined by their local congregation?
10. What should a congregation do if a sinful member tries to escape discipline by withdrawing their membership?

Application & Discussion:

1. At what point is it necessary to discipline an elder? Who should lead the process? (1 Tim. 5:19-22).

2. Should we eat Thanksgiving dinner with a family member who has been disciplined? Explain.

Homework: Make sure you understand the nature of membership in your local congregation and understand what obligations you have to the church and its leadership as well as what duties you should expect them to have toward you.

Neglecting Church Discipline

Church discipline has been a neglected subject in many congregations in modern times. It is one of the most abused and unused duties given to the church. Much of this is because of ignorance, confusion, false teaching, the emotional difficulty involved, lack of love and concern for erring brethren, etc.

Ignorance

In Isaiah's day, ignorance was the root-sin that separated Israel from God (1:3). Seven hundred years later, Jesus saw the same tragic ignorance in Israel and cited Isaiah to describe it. Jesus said, *"And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them'"* (Mt. 13:14-15). Though we may not always understand God's motive (Dt. 29:29), it is still necessary to obey. One elder explained the neglect of discipline resulted from not knowing what to do, how to do it, and where to start. Ignorance can be removed by simply studying God's Word (2 Tim. 2:15). God will not overlook our failure to discipline because of ignorance (Acts 17:30,31).

Lack of Faith

Many brethren neglect church discipline, because they believe it will not work. Because their faith is weak and their spiritual barometer is low, they do not even give it a chance. One might as well say baptism will not do any good. Discipline does work. According to 2 Corinthians 2:6, the fornicator at Corinth repented with great sorrow as a result of the punishment inflicted by the many. We need it to save the church (1 Cor. 5:7). Discipline is for the good of all concerned. To say otherwise is to impeach God's wisdom. If we have the impression that it won't work, then our faith is not as strong as it should be, and we need to do more study on the subject (Rom. 10:17).

Some Don't Want to Cause Trouble

Discipline was never meant to cause trouble in a church. Paul speaks of peace right after dealing with corrective discipline. *"Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all"* (2 Th. 3:16). *"Peace"* that compromises God's Will will cause trouble for eternity. It is sin that causes trouble, discipline stops its effect from spreading and causing more trouble. When discipline is not practiced, even the sincere get discouraged.

Past Neglect

Because it has been neglected so long, some do not know where to start or cannot find enough faithful ones to start it. This does not excuse present or future neglect. Sin begets sin. Denominations do not teach or have some ever practiced the Lord's Supper upon the first day of every week. Would they be wrong in beginning to do so? There comes a time to set in order the things that are lacking (Tit. 1:5).

A congregation that has neglected their duty to discipline in the past can repent, be forgiven and start doing God's Will. Continued neglect only puts the souls of sinners and the sound of the members and leadership of the congregation in jeopardy. A church with a reputation for not disciplining erring brethren will become a haven for hypocritical Christians.

Pride

Part of Corinth's failure to discipline the member in sin was their pride. *"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you"* (1 Cor. 5:1-2).

As with the church in Corinth, too many congregations are puffed up over their status that they cannot see the filth and corruption within (Rev. 2:17). Some are proud, thinking that they are doing right, but are doing it all wrong.

Fear

Perhaps one of the greatest fears of people today is the possibility of a disciplined member bringing a lawsuit against the church. Back in the mid-1980s a Church of Christ in Oklahoma was sued over the congregational discipline of a member who had an affair with the local town mayor. This had a negative ripple effect among the brethren. Many elders refused to discipline members out of fear.

There are many fears related to taking discipline upon a member. There is fear: 1) of what the guilty party will do; 2) of what the guilty party's family and friends will do; 3) of sin and guilt in our own lives; 4) of hurting someone's feelings or 5) of tearing up the church and driving people away. Discipline will not run them off. They have already run off from God. We need to remember that we are not trying to please men (Gal. 1:10; 4:6). Discipline was designed to shame him, not hurt him; to make him a child of the light, not an enemy; to save, not destroy.

We should fear God more than men. We ought to obey God rather than men (Ac. 4:20; 5:29). What should a congregation do if it found itself in the middle of such a lawsuit? Follow the example of the apostles when they were drug before human courts for practicing the Truth.

Still others fear what the community or neighbor or family members or friends will think about their church when discipline is practiced. Christians need to concern themselves more with the Word of God than worrying about the world. Those who live godly will sooner or later offend the world, but let us never offend our God. Even if the whole world turns against the local church, it would not give only saint to disobey God.

Poor Leadership

Elders or those who are spiritual within a congregation are to take a leading role (not a sole role) in this matter of corrective discipline (Gal. 6:1; Heb. 13:7,17). Because of incompetent leaders or because of leadership which winks at sin (Ac. 17:30,31) or because they don't have the rest of the congregation to back them, many congregations lack the leadership to initiate discipline.

Far too often, the local shepherds are asleep of the status of the sheep. They had no real membership list to work off of. They also fail to instruct new members what is involved in being a member of the local church. Perhaps, the first mistake the leadership makes is failure to see to it that the congregation to taught about church discipline.

"When it comes to the church disciplining a member, we often hear the excuse that they will not co-operate with the process. They do attend meetings, answer their door or phone, they avoid the elders and others. However, this does not exempt the leaders of the church from trying to save a soul."

Discipline Is Often Abused

Should we reject marriage, because it is often abused. The taxation of the American people is also often abused. The money taken from us by the government is, on occasions, wasted and misappropriated. Hence, some feel taxes are altogether wrong. Nothing has been more abused than baptism. So should we quit practicing scriptural baptism? Man often believes that anything which is abused is wrong within itself and with the recognition of these abuses man is given to going to the other extreme. Usually, they can cite you instances in which withdrawal only caused division within the local church. They talk about how silly it is for a local church to withdraw from a member when all the member was to do is identify with another nearby church. At other times, congregations are too quick on the

"withdraw" and then there are those which procrastinate for years before finally getting around to discipline. In far too many congregations, the members fail to draw near to the individual before there comes a need for discipline. Thus, they never associate and rarely fellowship with the brother outside the church building. In the end, they wind up withdrawing from a stranger, not a brother. Just because discipline is sometimes abused and, therefore, ineffective, does not mean it is altogether wrong and undesirable.

Questions:

1. What is the best way to remove ignorance concerning how and when to implement church discipline?
2. How do we know that church discipline will work?
3. True False When an erring brother is not restored it is proof that church discipline has not accomplished any off its Divinely design goals.
4. Which causes more trouble: using church discipline to correct an erring brother or failing to use church discipline and allow sin to go uncorrected? Explain.
5. What should a congregation do if it realizes they have neglected their duty to discipline erring members in the past?
6. How does pride keep some congregations from practicing church discipline?
7. What are the various fears that might hinder a congregation from practicing church discipline?
8. Who should take the lead in church discipline? If the leaders will not discipline the erring members what should the church do?

9. What could the leadership of the church do if the members will not support their efforts to discipline?
10. How should the leaders of the congregation deal with an erring brother who will not cooperate with the process?
11. Just because church discipline has been abused in some congregations in the past does that mean it should not be practiced today? Explain.
12. What are common mistakes leaders of the church make in regard to church discipline?

Application & Discussion:

1. What about a congregation that has members who should have been disciplined five to ten years ago but the church neglected to do so. Should they proceed with discipline upon them now?
2. How should a congregation respond if threatened with a lawsuit over church discipline?

Homework: Support the leaders and the congregation in its efforts to restore the erring via church discipline.

Objections to Church Discipline

It would seem that with the plain teaching about the subject of discipline in the New Testament, there could be no objections offered by anyone who confessed to belief in the teaching of Jesus and His Apostles. Every good work or endeavor meets criticisms and objections. Are the objections valid or are they raised for some other reason?

"It Is Judging"

"Judge not that you be not judged" is probably the most often quoted and most misunderstood passage in the Bible. Jesus did not condemn the Pharisees for trying to get the mote from another's eye. They were condemned for not getting the beam out of their own eye, first. It is talking about hypocritical judgments (Matt. 7:1-5).

Types of judgment commanded: 1) The mote hunters in Matthew 7:1-5 were commanded to judge another's eye after removing the beam from their own eye. 2) Judging and pointing out religious error must be practiced to please God (Mt. 15:9-13). 3) "Fruit-inspection" or judging a man by his fruit is certainly approved by our Lord in the same context that says "judge not." (Mt. 7:15-20). 4) We are commanded to "*judge righteous judgment*" (Jn. 7:24). This forbids harsh, unkind, hypocritical judgment. To judge righteous judgment is simply to apply God's judgment standards instead of our own standards, always with the best interests of the judged person at heart. 5) We are commanded to judge those in the local congregation (1 Cor. 5:3,12). 6) God gave standards for judging the qualifications of church deacons and elders (Acts 6:3; 1 Th. 3:1-12). 7) Judgments of civil rulers are a part of God's plan (Rom. 13:4). 8) We are told to judge in the cases of dispute which arise among brethren (1 Cor. 6:5).

There are certain types of judging which is condemned: Harsh, critical, condemning judgments, based upon guess, surmise, and speculation are forbidden. Judging by one guilty of the same practice. Judging the right or wrong of what others are doing by our own likes and dislikes, (Rom. 14). Judging the motives being the deeds (1 Cor. 2:11).

The command to "*judge not*" is limited, modified and explained by other scriptures, and we thus conclude that it means we are to "judge not with unrighteous judgment."

If the efforts to practice church discipline on an erring brother is met with Jesus said, "Judge not" or "You're being judgmental", informed them that both Jesus and the apostle Paul meant for the faithful members of the congregation to exercise judgment concerning the unfaithful member.

"It Shows That We Don't Love Them"

Parents ruin their children by claiming they love them too much to discipline them. "*He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly*" (Prov. 13:24). Do we hate a child when we correct him for dangerously crossing the street. Correcting one in error shows great love (Pr. 27:5,6; 28:23; Eccl. 7:5). It may hurt their feelings, but feelings may be temporarily hurt and the soul be saved. If we love the Lord and our brethren, we will fulfill both the pleasant and unpleasant duties given to us.

It is love for the sinner, that he may be saved by it. It is love for other brethren, that they will be purified and protected by it. Some show more love for a dog than for the Lord's Church. They will remove the thorn from the dog's foot, but leave thorns in the body of Christ. It is love for God, because He commanded it (1 Jn. 5:3). If church discipline seems cruel read (Dt. 21:18-21). Under that physical law, God ordered the death of the sinner. Why? "...So shalt thou put away evil from among you; and all Israel

shall hear and fear" (Dt. 21:21). When Israel ceased to slay sinners, according to God's law, God slew Israel. In order to purge idolatry from among his people Israel, God decreed the death of the idolater (Dt. 13:11). No sin is ever settled by being white-washed. Discipline is God's surgical scalpel for the removal of cancer from the Body (2 Tim. 2:17,18). A rotten tomato in the basket or a decaying potato in a barrel all affect those about them until the rotten ones are removed.

"No One Is Sinless"

Although it is true that *"all have sinned and come short of the glory of God"* (Rom. 3:23), this does not excuse the local church of disciplining sinners. They argue, "let the one without sin cast the first stone" or "people who live in glass houses do not throw stones." This implies that we are all so imperfect that we cannot engage in any part of church discipline without being a hypocrite. There is a big difference between one who will acknowledge his fault and earnestly strive to overcome it, and one who sins, but refuses all efforts to bring him to repentance. It is true that we all sin (1 Jn. 1:6-10), but we do not all *"walk disorderly."* Just because all Christians make mis-steps in sin, does not mean they are walking disorderly. Just as there is a difference between taking a walk and taking a step there is a big difference between one who commits a sin than one who walks in sin. Withdrawal is not for imperfection in growth, not for those striving diligently, but for the stubborn refusal to repent.

"It Will Harden Their Heart"

When Jesus preached, His teaching turned many away (Jn. 6:66). Teaching baptism for remission of sins may harden some. Remember, discipline at Corinth was effective in returning the fornicator to God (2 Cor. 2:6ff). Pharaoh hardened his heart time and time again and plague after plague. Does this mean Moses should have not commanded him the words of the Lord: "Let My people go!"

"It Kicks People out of the Church"

The Lord adds to the church (Ac. 2:42). The Lord blots the names out of the book of life (Rev. 3:5). No man has the right to cast anyone out of the Lord's church (3 Jn. 9). When a child is disciplined they are not kicked out of the family. We do not kick them out of the assembly or the Local Church for they are still to be treated as a brother (2 Th. 3:15).

Our primary concern should be quality, not quantity. On the other hand, it may be the very thing, that will shake up and wake up those who are drifting rapidly over the falls to destruction. Some must be *"snatched from the fire"* (Jude 23). Though discipline may temporarily cause a drop in the local church's membership in time it will increase with stronger members (Ac. 5:11).

"The Parable of the Tares Forbids Discipline"

Some argue: "The parable of the tares opposes church discipline by teaching us to let the saint and the sinner grow together in the church, lest while we gather up the tares, we root up also the wheat with them."

Two laws of the logic of interpretation are 1) no man can put an interpretation on a parable, or figurative speech of any kind, which conflicts with a plain command. No scripture must be interpreted in such a manner as to contradict any other scripture, and where such contradiction appears it is the fault of the interpreter, and not the scriptures. 2) Where two passages teach upon the same topic, one of them obscure and the other obvious in meaning, the obscure must always be interpreted in the light of the obvious, and never the reverse.

This parable does not refer to church discipline. Jesus said, *"the field is the world."* In human society, in the world, the wicked and the righteous do dwell together (1 Cor. 5:9-11), but wicked Christians and the Faithful ones do not. Remember the field was not the church, but the world.

This parable was given to show men like James and John that the disciples of the lowly Nazarene, could not weed out the wicked from the earth (Lk. 9:51-56). God rebukes impatient servants who would

destroy sinners before the end (Mt. 13:28-30). The fire of the impatient disciples in Luke 9:51-56 would have destroyed people like the woman at the well in John 4. Not even the angels could accurately distinguish the wheat from the tares until God reveals it in the end. The harvest separation is at the end of the world. The separation in Matthew 13 is God's work to destroy sinners, but discipline is God's work to save sinners.

"Can't Withdraw Without Elders"

It is assumed by some that without elders a church cannot practice discipline. There are no indications that Corinth had elders (1 Cor. 3:2,3). A local congregation is spiritually organized without elders if no one is qualified (Acts 14:21-23). Corrective discipline is not an action of elders, but of the whole congregation (1 Cor. 5:4; 2 Th. 3:6; Rom. 16:17). The teaching on withdrawal is directed to all Christians, not just to elders.

"You Cannot Withdraw from the Withdrawn"

One of the most popular arguments against church discipline goes like this: "The church cannot withdraw fellowship from the member who has already withdrawn himself from the church by ceasing to assemble for public worship services."

This argument is based on a couple of assumptions. First, it assumes that "withdrawing" is equivalent to "ceasing to attend". The definition of "*withdraw*" from the Greek term *stello* means "keep away, stand aloof from someone...avoid." (Arndt and Gingrich) and "to remove one's self, withdraw one's self, to depart...to abstain from familiar (social contact) with one" (Thayer 587). What is to be withdrawn? Paul says it is "*yourselves*" (2 Th. 3:6); "*you keep aloof from*" (2 Th. 3:6, NASV). The object to be withdrawn is "yourselves", not the sinner. What of yourselves is to be withdrawn? It is our association. Paul said, "*have no company with*" (1 Cor. 5:9); "*not to associate with*" or "*not to keep company*" (1 Cor. 5:11); "*no, not to eat with*" (1 Cor. 5:11); "*Do not associate with him*" (2 Th. 3:14). The consequence of equating "withdraw" with "ceasing to attend". The wrong one is doing the withdrawing: the erring member, and not the faithful members. The wrong thing is being withdrawn: the erring brother's attendance; not association. If the object of the withdrawing is to get a sinner to cease attending then the object is to kick him out of the worship services and other assemblies of the congregation and keep him out (see 3:John). However, if withdrawing means the erring brother is to cease or to get out of the services, then if he does show up at services the members withdraw themselves by leaving the assembly. Is this what Paul is requiring? Therefore, it is a misnomer and abuse of God's Word to say that the erring brother can withdraw himself from the faithful members by ceasing to attend.

Second, it assumes the unfaithful brother can just quit the church. It is objected that an employer would have no power to fire an employee who had already resigned his job or position. One's relationship with God and his brethren in the local church is not an employer/employee relationship. Since military terms are used to describe our relationship to God the parallel of soldiers would be more accurate (2 Tim. 2:3,4; Eph. 6:10-18; Phil. 2:25; 2 Th. 3:6-15). An AWOL (absent without official leave) soldier knows he is not free from disciplinary action, even court-martial by his unit, simply because he "withdrew" himself first by going AWOL. Similar arguments could be made for a child about to be disciplined and saying they have quit the family. Or a citizen about to be put on trial trying to withdraw their citizenship to avoid punishment.

Finally, it assumes that the congregation's and church leadership's obligations toward the wayward member end when he ceases to attend. Image and shepherd telling owner of a flock: "Well, here are the ninety-nine. The one little lamb did not show up but ran off. I guess we are just going to have to respect its wishes and count it lost."

This argument results in several consequences for the church and the erring member. First it perverts the goal of corrective discipline, that is, the sinner ceasing to attend services. Additionally, it practically eliminates withdrawal as a procedure in corrective discipline. It creates a convenient loophole for impenitent members. It promotes free-lance membership. This view of discipline shows a lack of love

for lost souls. It force brethren to associate with all manner of unfaithful brethren. It promotes negligence by the shepherds. Finally, it minimizes the seriousness of forsaking the assembly (Heb. 10:24-25). The Hebrew writers condemns forsaking the assembling of the saints and then speaks of severe judgment for those who violate God's commandments (see 10:29-31).

Questions:

1. What was Jesus concerning when He said "*Judge not*" in Matthew 7:1-5?
2. Show from the scriptures that Christians are to judge others.
3. Why types of judging are condemned?
4. Are discipline and love mutually exclusive? Explain.
5. How does the practicing of church discipline show love?
7. Do the members of the congregation have to be sinlessly perfect before they can practice church discipline? Explain.
8. Is church discipline to be implemented upon every member every time they commit any type of sin? Explain.
9. What will happen to the hearts of sinful brother who are not disciplined and allowed to continue in sin?
10. True False Church discipline removes the erring brother from the kingdom of God and his name from the book of life.
11. How can a congregation implement church discipline without an eldership?

12. Matching: The Parable of the Tares

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| _____ Man sowed seed (24). | a. The devil. |
| _____ Field (24). | b. Angels. |
| _____ Good seed (24). | c. End of World. |
| _____ Tares (25). | d. Hell (fire, wail and gnash). |
| _____ Enemy (25). | e. Son of Man. |
| _____ Harvest (30). | f. Righteous Saved. |
| _____ Burn Tares (30). | g. The world. |
| _____ Wheat in barn (30). | h. Children of Satan. |
| _____ Reapers, Servants (27,30). | i. Children of God |

13. What is to be withdrawn in church discipline?

14. Who is to do the withdrawing?

15. What are the consequences of the argument “you cannot withdraw from the withdrawn?”

Application & Discussion:

1. List the ways you can show love in church discipline.

2. List the various sins committed by the member for forsakes the assembling of the saints.

Homework: Prepare yourself to answer these objections to church discipline.

The Joyful Results of Church Discipline

2 Corinthians 2:5-11

The sinner discussed in 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 has been unanimously accepted for nearly two thousand years of scholarship to be the same faltering member who was having a sexual relationship with his stepmother in 1 Corinthians 5:1. The man had repented, the incident was closed, and it was time to move on. He did not die as claimed by the early Christian writer, Tertullian. He has come to repentance and demonstrates godly sorrow. The majority at the Corinthian congregation had been successful in their disciplinary action. Now they have obligations toward this penitent brother. Paul instructs them on how to respond and the reasons behind their reactions.

Reasons to Restore Repentant Brother

☐ To Heal Wounds

The first reason given by Paul may be a bit difficult to understand in many of the translations. The Holman Christian Standard Bible reads, *"If anyone has caused pain, he has caused pain not so much to me but to some degree—not to exaggerate—to all of you."* The brother in 1 Corinthians who they should have mourned over has caused pain and grief to Paul and all the brethren at Corinth. Pain and suffering at the hands of others can often result in bitterness. Out of wounded pride some of the saints may be longing for a pound of flesh. Joseph suffered greatly at the hands of his jealousy brothers, Potiphar's wife and an ex-prisoner. But he found a way to overcome and forgive. It is time to let these wounds heal.

☐ Punishment by Majority Was Effective

Paul gives his next reason in verse six: *"This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man"*. The term for *"punishment"* is from *epitimia* an official act of discipline by the group. The Corinthian congregation has penalized this man and it has done the job of bringing him to repentance.

☐ To Be Forgiving

Instead of nursing their wounded egos they need *"to forgive."* No matter what the sin or pain it is time for the past debt of sin to be dismissed. Both Jesus and Stephen prayed that their murderers might receive pardon. This forgiveness was not without condition of obedience to the Gospel for which Jesus died and Stephen preached.

Keep in mind that forgive and forget is not taught in the Bible. It is based on what the Lord said in Jeremiah 31:34: *"For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."* The idea is that God would not hold the debt of sin against one's soul. An omniscient God cannot forget in the sense of complete removal of events from His memory. We may always remember the sin of this man caught up in an incestuous relationship with his father's wife. But he has been forgiven by Paul, Corinthians, and God. However, the sins of others may fade from our mind in time.

☐ To Show Comfort

Next, Paul commands the brethren to comfort the man. *"Comfort"* comes from *parakaleo* which means to call or come alongside for the purpose of rendering aid or assistance thus strengthening and encouraging another. The penitent saint could use assistance in forgiving himself, overcoming the temptation to give up his faith, helping him reconcile with others and even provide physical and financial assistance.

☐ To Ease Grief

If the Corinthians fail to forgive and comfort the man, he may *“be swallowed up with too much sorrow”* (2:7b). “Swallowed up ...is variously translated ‘swallow up’ (as death through the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:44), “drown” (as happened to the Egyptians, Heb. 11:29), and “devour” (as a lion destroys its prey, 1 Pet. 5:8). The preposition intensified the verb, with the resultant meaning of ‘swallow up completely’” (Curry 101). The early Christian writer, John Chrysostom, warned “he will either come to hang himself, or fall into greater crimes afterward.” The time for the many to punish and grieve over his sin must end or else he will be totally overwhelmed or consumed by his sorrow. By forgiving and comforting the man the saints at Corinth can ease his grief and restore his joy. David prayed after his sin with Bathsheba. *“Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me by Your generous Spirit. ...Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, The God of my salvation, And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness”* (Psalm 51:12,14).

□ **To Reaffirm Love**

“Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him” (2:8). The term *“reaffirm”* is from the Greek *kuroo*. It is a legal term indicating a formal declaration of reinstating to a position of restored fellowship. A formal, public declaration welcoming the sinner back into the family with love. Just as the father of the prodigal son gave him a robe, a ring, sandals, and a party to welcome him home and back into the family with all the rights and privileges of sonship. In contrast the elder son did not feel obliged to show love but only complained and refused to come to the party. Just as Paul does here with the Corinthians, the father had to implore or entreat the elder brother to reaffirm his love to the prodigal.

When it comes to the faltering sinner in the church, one must discipline out of love just as Jesus did the church at Laodicia. *“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent”* (Rev. 3:19a). This requires the love described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13, *“Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up”* (13:4). Reaffirmation and forgiveness fulfills the royal law of love (James 2:8).

Loving discipline requires a public announcement to the congregation about how to treat the sinner who is to be withdrawn from. Likewise, reaffirming the congregation’s love would necessitate a public announcement. The elders could address the congregation. First, they could remind them who they had disciplined and why. Next, inform them of his repentance. Third, instruct them on how to treat the brother as he has returned to the flock in full-fellowship and association. Finally, lead the congregation in prayer of thanksgiving for the success of God’s will through church discipline, ask for wise guidance as they reaffirm their love toward him.

□ **To Test Congregational Obedience**

Paul explains one of the reasons for his letter, *“For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things”* (2:9). Taking church discipline and after his repentance forgiving, comforting and reaffirming their love is proof that they have been obedient to the apostolic commands. They have passed the tests of obeying God. If a congregation can submit to the Divine Will in church discipline, perhaps it can be obedient to every other commandment of God.

Discipline is far too often neglected in congregations across the globe. It is easier to sweep sin and sinner under the church rug in a cover-up instead of a clean up. This is especially true when there are those in the congregation who are fearful and demand “peace at any price,” instead of courageously following Biblical precepts.

□ **To Follow Apostolic Example**

Paul makes a plea for them to follow his example as an apostle who has already forgiven the man just as he has already judged the man in 1 Corinthians 5:2. *“Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ”* (2:10). The early church remained steadfast in the Apostle’s doctrine (teaching) in Acts 2:42.

□ **Lest Satan Gain Advantage**

One final reason for their forgiveness and acceptance of the penitent man: *“lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices”* (2:11). They had *“delivered”* the man to Satan to save his soul from sin. Discipline was effective. Now they need to receive him back into their

fellowship and association. Satan wants the sinner back. Failure to forgive and reaffirm their love could hand the man right back into the hands of the Devil. Satan would love to take advantage of the situation by outwitting the Corinthians congregations with his schemes and methods of deception. He hates church discipline because it thwarts his plans to destroy the local church.

Accessing True Repentance

When should a congregation receive the disciplined member back into full fellowship and social association? There are several things a congregation should watch out for in their efforts to restore the fallen. First, to say "I'm sorry" may not represent true repentance. Paul would later in this second letter to the Corinthians warn about the difference between worldly sorrow and godly sorrow. *"For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death"* (2 Cor. 7:10). Second, just because the sinner starts attending again, does not prove repentance. He must confess publically his fault and ask for prayers (James 5:16). Anyone can park their seat in a pew without changing their heart. Next, a congregation does not have the right to put the brother on probation for a period of time to see if he can bring forth fruits of repentance. Paul made no such provision. No one can read another man's mind (1 Cor. 2:11). Furthermore, God is the Husbandman who prunes away the fruitless branches (John 15:2). True repentance before Christ brings true forgiveness from Christ (1 John. 1:9). Additionally, remember that sound evaluation of the proof of repentance demands the congregation counterbalancing compassion with cautiousness. Sometimes the repentance is perfectly evident, for example, a wife returns home to her husband. Many times we should just grant forgiveness and reaffirm our love even if it is the 490th time (Matt. 18:22). Jesus commanded, *"And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him"* (Luke 17:4).

Summary

The Corinthian saint who was in a marriage to his stepmother has been raised from spiritual and metaphorical death through the process of church discipline. The congregation has found victory out of defeat and have gone from mourning and grief to forgiveness and reaffirming their love. For their brother "was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:24). Church discipline will work if congregations will only work God's Will.

Questions:

1. What was the objective of Paul's previous letter?
2. To whom is Paul referring in verse 6?
3. Who all would have been wounded or grieved by the faltering brother's sin?
4. How effective was church discipline?
5. What does forgiveness from a saint to a sinner (brother) involve?

6. List ways they could give this brother comfort or assistance?
7. What might happen if the Corinthian congregation fails to forgive and comfort him?
8. What might reaffirming their love to the brother entail?
9. What example has the apostle Paul set from the church at Corinth?
10. How might Satan take advantage of the situation at Corinth?
11. How had Paul put them to the test?
12. What are some proofs of genuine repentance?

Application & Discussion:

1. If one who has "quit the church" and just starts attending again, does this show evidence that he has repented and can be used in the services? Explain.
2. How could or should a congregation deal with a member who has an addiction and falters time and time again? Does his lapse back into his addiction prove he has never and may never genuinely repented? Explain.

Homework: Be prepared to receive any prodigal back into the local family of believers upon their confession of sin and genuine repentance with forgiveness, assistance and reaffirmation of our love for them.

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