



Caring Enough to Discipline -- 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

Chapter five introduces the new subject of how the church responds to a Christian brother who is caught up sexual immorality. These topics are relevant because we live in an age where most sexual relationships are viewed as acceptable in the world and by even many in the church. The idea of church discipline to deal with unrepentant sin is biblical and necessary, but generally neglected. While the idea of discipline is unpleasant it is sometimes essential to for the purity of the church and the restoration of the Christian who is caught up in sin.

The specific problem in the Corinthian church is clearly stated in 1 Cor. 5:1, ***“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife.”*** The word translated as “reported” carries the idea of an accurate and well known account. The word translated “sexual immorality” is the Greek word “*porneia*” which covers all types of sexual sin. What was going on in Corinth was considered so perverse that even the non-Christian world around them did not tolerate this type of conduct.

The woman in 1 Cor. 5 was almost certainly the stepmother of the man in verse 1 since she is not called his mother. The relationship of the man and his stepmother would have been considered incest and was illegal in the Roman world and condemned under Jewish law (Leviticus 18:6-18; Deuteronomy 22:30) carrying with it the penalty of death. The sinning man was member of the church and it is quite possible his father was a Christian and still living (2 Cor. 7:12). We can conclude that his stepmother was not a Christian since she is not mentioned in the disciplinary action. The word ***“has”*** in verse one is important because it indicates the sin had been going on for some time and it was still happening.

Perversely the church was pleased with their tolerance. Paul rebukes them in verse 2 as ***“arrogant.”*** They had been proud of their wisdom which was worldly and now they are proud of their tolerance which also shows their worldliness.

I. Discipline is Needed to Protect the Church

The reason the church needs to react quickly and strongly to sexual immorality is because the church is at risk. If sin is allowed to continue unchallenged in the church it will affect the entire body of Christ. Paul puts it this way in verse 6, ***“Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?”***

1. How does leaven work and how does this illustrate the potential danger of sexual immorality in the church?

2. How can we be sure that the church in Corinth was aware of the sin in their midst?



The teaching is clear: “The church must deal with sin or the entire church can be harmed. The nature of sin is to grow, infest, spread, and corrupt. Sin needs to be removed from the church so that the entire church is not brought to ruin.



In verses 7 and 8, the yeast is sin and this sin has the potential to work through and destroy the entire church. As with yeast, a small amount has a far reaching influence. In Christ, Christians have been forgiven and cleansed of the sin that marked their old lives. Christ died to pay for sin so that Christians become a new batch without yeast. The festival Paul mentions in verse 8 is the Christian life which is to be lived without sin (yeast.)

3. What do verses 2 and 6 tell us about how the church was reacting to the sin in their midst?

Paul was shocked about how the Corinthians tolerated the terrible sin of sexual immorality in the church. Not only did they allow the sin, but they were proud of their acceptance. This sin was so terrible that even the pagans did not condone this type of behaviour (vs. 1).

4. In what ways do churches tolerate sin today?

5. What are some of the ways in which the church can be affected by sin amongst the members?

6. How is the response of the church different to the sin of a Christian and a non-Christian? (vss. 9-11) What, if anything, does this say anything about the involvement of churches in social and political causes?

II. Discipline is Needed to Protect the Sinning Christian

In verse 5, Paul instructs the Corinthian Christians to “*deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.*” The phrase “*deliver this man to Satan*” simply means to turn him back over to the world where Satan exerts his authority. This man was to be put out of the church. As harsh as this might seem, the purpose of this discipline was to bring him back to God, not push him further away. This was meant “*for the destruction of the flesh*” or to help the man rid himself of the sin which entrapped him.

The very act of putting the man out of the church should bring the sinning brother to his senses. He should mourn his lack of fellowship and desire to be restored through repentance. The great desire for man is that the man would be saved.

7. What was the situation of Hymenaeus and Alexander in 1 Timothy 1:18-20 and what was Paul’s response to them?

8. Read Matthew 18:15-17 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15. What do these verses add to an understanding of church discipline.

Disciplinary action is not easy in the family or in the church. In the church, the desire is never to harm anyone, but to save them from certain destruction. The alternative to discipline is to allow a person to continue in sin and to be forever lost. Churches have allowed their desire to avoid confrontation and discomfort to permit some who might have been restored to remain lost. This is one of the most unloving acts we might imagine.

Many Bible students believe the man mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 is the same man we read about in 1 Corinthians 5. Please read those verses and answer the following question:

9. What response was the church to have to a brother who repented?

III. Some Essential Elements in Church Discipline

There are a number of important teachings surrounding church discipline in 1 Cor. 5.

- A. (vs. 2) The church must be united in the disciplinary action.
- B. (vs. 2) Christians should mourn sin in the church. Great shame should be associated with this type of sin. It hurt the church as a whole, their standing in the wider community, and threatened the very salvation of the people involved.
- C. (vss. 2, 5, 13) The church should have put this man out of their fellowship. A man who sins so wilfully, publicly, and unrepentantly must be removed from the fellowship of the congregation. The goal is to see the man repent and to be restored to fellowship. The Corinthian church is instructed to *“deliver this man to Satan.”*
- D. (vss. 3-5) Full apostolic authority stands behind church discipline. Paul says in vs. 5 that he has passed judgment on the matter and instructs the church to act. This action is also taken in the power of Jesus Christ (vs. 5)
- E. (vss. 4-5) Church discipline should take place in the assembly. This allows the entire church to know and understand why discipline is taking place and shows their unity in condemnation of the sin.
- F. (vss. 9-11) Serious wilful sin requires disfellowship.

10. What would the outcome of church discipline if the entire church is not unified in the discipline?

11. How do we identify which sins are so severe that they require disfellowship? (vs. 11)

12. How would you answer someone who says that we have no right to judge another? (vss. 12-13)

13. Why are churches often wary of practicing church discipline?