

1 Corinthians When Faith & Life Collide

Study 5

The Gospel and Church Discipline

1 Corinthians 5

1 Corinthians 5:1-2

“1 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! 2 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. a) Paul condemns the Corinthian believers for being arrogant. Instead of being arrogant, what should the Corinthian believers be doing?

- They should be mourning with deep anguish of the soul
- They needed true repentance

b) The man who committed such an act of gross immorality should be excommunicated. What is the reasoning behind this?

- The excommunication or the removal of the person is to preserve the nature of the church
- The church’s holiness is reflective of God’s holiness

1 Corinthians 5:3-5

“3 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. 4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 5 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.”

2. Is the delivering of this man to Satan for the “destruction of the flesh” vindictive or redemptive in nature?

1 Corinthians 5:6-8

“6 Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 7 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. 8 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.”

3. a) What does the metaphor of the leaven represent?

- Metaphor for evil small imperceptible until it produces its effects on whole

b) By extension, if there is one person who commits sexual immorality and no action is taken against that person, how would this affect the rest of the church?

4. Some people would argue that we need to show love and not judgement since God is love - so we cannot remove believers who have sinned greatly from the church, we need to be understanding and tolerant. Is this thinking correct or incorrect? Why?

- The death of Christ has made us new

- Yet we must get rid of the old in order to be new, precisely because in Christ we are already new!

5. a) One of the main focuses of the church as mentioned in 1 Cor. 1:2 and 1 Cor. 3:16-17 is holiness. What is the definition of holiness?

- In a class of His own

- Exodus 15:11

- 1 Sam. 2:2

b) What does it mean that God is holy in love, justice, mercy, power, and knowledge?

- He is perfect and in a class of His own in each attribute

c) If we focus only on the love of God, but not the holiness of God, what does that result in?

- It diminishes the magnitude of God's love

d) What does the cross show more - the love of God or the holiness of God? Discuss.

- Both - in equal measure

1 Corinthians 5:9-13

“9 I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. 10 Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 11 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.

12 For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? 13 But those who are outside God judges. Therefore “put away from yourselves the evil person.””

6. In your own words, what is church discipline?

- Church discipline is the process of correcting sin in the life of the congregation and its members
- This can mean correcting sin through a private word of admonition
- And it can mean correcting sin by formally removing an individual from membership

- Church discipline can be done in any number of ways, but the goal is always to correct transgressions of God's law among God's people

7. Is church discipline for everyone who comes to church?

- Church discipline is for professed saints - professing believers
- Not for non-believers
- It is for anyone who is ostensibly a Christian - "anyone who bears the name of brother"

8. Which kinds of sin should a person be excommunicated for?

- Persistent sins which have a consistency
- Has a moral/social significance
- Serious, outward, unrepentant

- When the sin in the congregation is serious and has outward manifestations that will seriously impugn the reputation of the church

9. What are the steps taken for church discipline as found in Matthew 18?

- a. Take it to him personally
- b. Take others along
- c. Take it to the church
- d. Excommunication

10. If any believer has been excommunicated, does that mean he/she must never come back to church? If not, under what conditions?

Takeaway

- A. The Nature of Church Discipline is:**
 - a. Redemptive: A change of behaviour is desired - to grow in holiness**
 - b. Corporate: As a body of Christ**
 - c. Prophetic: Shines God's truth onto error and sin**
 - d. Proleptic: Foretaste of future judgement**
- B. The Reason for Church Discipline is Holiness**
 - a. God's Holiness means His attributes are in a different class altogether**
 - b. God's Holiness should be reflected in the Holiness of the Church**
 - c. God's Holiness magnifies God's love**
- C. Church Discipline is only for professing Christian believers**
 - a. For Serious, Outward, and Unrepentant Sins**

Case Study

Case 1 – Chequered Past

May Leong had joined the 3rd Baptist church for the past 2 years and was progressing well in fellowship and even serving as a Sunday school teacher. She had not joined as a member yet and was in the process of sending in her applications.

Then someone from her home town came to visit the church and recognized her. The person then told some folks in church that May Leong had been an active member of the Methodist church in her home town and in fact was a youth leader. However, she got involved with a young man, also a Christian, and it turned out that she got herself pregnant by him.

It was a bit of a scandal seeing how this was a small town and all but the long and short of it was that May secretly aborted the child much to the dismay of her church friends and pastor. She quietly left the church and was not seen in churches for years.

She has now resurfaced in 3rd Baptist church and the visitor questioned the spiritual standing of the church which will tolerate such an immoral person who was in the position to teach Sunday school.

Some church members demanded that she be confronted and church discipline to be exercised on her.

1. How would you approach the issue should you be the presiding leader of the 3rd Baptist Church?

Someone close to May will want to bring the matter discretely to her attention in a very loving manner and not judgmental in tone.

2. The matter was brought up to a very embarrassed May Leong and it transpired that she did do all those things and willfully aborted the foetus. She was very troubled and regretful of what she had done. Should church discipline be exercised on her?

Absolutely not because she is regretful and repentant which does not fulfil any criteria for discipline.

3. Someone asked her, that if it should happen again would May keep the baby and not choose abortion again? May could not honestly answer the question and hoped that the situation would never arise again. That someone interpreted that to mean that May is not committed to the sanctity of life and therefore not repentant and hence must be disciplined. What do you think?

May is obviously still confused over the matter and honest in her uncertainty hence this uncertainty should never be misinterpreted as rebellion or lack of repentance.

Case 2 – Heart Issues

Henry Wong was caught telling a lie when he was chatting with a group of friends in the church hall. He told people that he was the financial controller of the multinational company Siemens Malaysia but in fact he was only an accounts clerk.

His workmates attended the same church and were horrified by the false image he had created for himself. One of the church elders confronted him about this and he denied lying about it and insisted he was the financial controller.

He got very upset and stormed out of the hall and for the next few weeks was very subdued in church.

1. Should church discipline be meted out to Henry as it would seem he is not repentant?

Why not? Something like the sin of embellishing stories is rooted in far more significant and unseen sins like idolatry and self-justification. Those are the sins we want to spend personal time discussing with him.

But even if he denies it, we should probably not draw him in front of the church.

Pursuing every tiny sin in a church's life will probably induce paranoia and propel the congregation toward legalism.

There clearly needs to be a place for love to "cover a multitude of sins" in a congregation's life (1 Peter 4:8). Not every sin should be pursued to the utmost. Thankfully, God has not done so with us.

Formal church discipline is required in cases of **outward, serious, and unrepentant sin**. A sin must have an outward manifestation. It must be something that can be seen with the eyes or heard with the ears. Churches should not quickly throw the red flag of ejection every time they suspect greed or pride in someone's heart. It's not that sins of the heart are not serious. It's that the Lord knows we cannot see one another's hearts, and that real heart problems will eventually rise to the surface anyway (1 Sam. 16:7; Matt. 7:17f; Mark 7:21).

2. Look at the situation of Acts 5 when God took the life of Ananias and Sapphira for lying and in 1 Cor. 5 the church is merely to excommunicate the sinner. Isn't the Bible inconsistent in its actions?

Case 3 – Out in the Open

Marlene and Lawrence had been attending the 3rd Baptist church for a year and they are noticed to be a very close couple. Marlene is a Christian but Lawrence is not. Marlene has attended Alpha and is now in Gamma studying God's Word seriously.

Someone pointed out that the couple had been living together for the past 4 years - after all they share the same flat. The fact that they have presented themselves as a couple and live in the same flat would give credible suspicion that they have been living together in a sexual relationship.

Marlene has been trying to get Lawrence to come to Alpha and make a commitment to God but so far he has resisted all her overtures. Someone asked the leaders if it is alright for couples to cohabit together since Marlene and Lawrence are doing this. Since the church has said nothing, then there must be clear endorsement of this.

Hence the person knows of lots of couples like this who would like to join the church in this case.

1. What should the church do in this situation?

This is a case for church discipline as the sexual immorality is public knowledge and if left alone will influence others and reflect on the church.

2. Will this cause Lawrence to be turned off by Christianity for good and stumble him? How would you answer the objection that church discipline will drive people away and that we can't minister to people who leave our church?

Marlene will need to make a stand for Christ and we should give her adequate time for the gospel to impact her life but the gospel will transform her values and ethics and she will want to change and be holy as she sees that this is her true calling in life.

Lawrence will need to see this too because if the situation persists he will be led down an even more dangerous path of disaster that is a Christianity that is to provide comfort and fellowship and is not rooted in the holiness of God. It will render the cross irrelevant.

If Lawrence is upset by the church's stand on holiness and sexual purity at least he would have understood its commitment and what it stands for and not be misled into a powerless church whose ethics does not match its creed.

3. What should the church do if a member who is close to Marlene under discipline refuses to break fellowship?

She or he should be counselled but there is no biblical information that he or she too should be subject to church discipline.

4. How should family members relate to Marlene who is under church discipline?

5. In light of the possibility of a lawsuit, is church discipline advisable in our day? Why/why not?