

# GAMMA 2017

## STUDY 5

### 1 Corinthians 5: Church Discipline

#### Question 1

Please summarize the principles of church discipline from the passage

#### 1. 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.

#### 2. Why is church discipline instituted?

- (i) The discipline is always remedial and redemptive it is a way of correction that is designed to bring the person back to Christ although it may seem harsh at first. There is a section of the church that will always insist that we should manifest love only by toleration and putting up with even the most egregious of transgressions but there is a dimension of love that is borne out of justice and the holiness of God. In this case the discipline is so that

*1 Corinthians 5:5 (ESV) 5 you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.*

- (ii) The church discipline is done to prevent the sin from influencing the rest of the body changing the character of the body.

*1 Corinthians 5:6 (ESV) 6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?*

*The little leaven ...the small number involved in this sin...has its influential and malignant nature to affect the whole body ...leavens the whole lump*

- (iii) The church discipline is done to preserve the holiness of the church as a reflection of their new nature.

*1 Corinthians 5:7-8 (ESV) Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. 8 Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

We are asked to exercise church discipline in order that the entire body properly reflect its true nature of a transformed body of people called to be holy as He is holy.

*1 Cor 1:2 To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints.*

Saints are people set apart for God and the setting apart is the action of God hence we must reflect what he has called us to be

*1 Corinthians 3:16-17 (ESV) Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.*

We are collectively the Temple of God the most holy part of the temple the Greek term here is “naos” the holy of holies where only the high priest enters just once a year and even then after a week of ritual cleansing. Anything less than this scrupulous preparation risked immediate death. We too are to strenuously preserve the integrity of our Temple which is His body collectively hence our commitment to the holiness of our body the church reflects our commitment to Him. If church discipline is nonexistence, then the reverence and the holiness of God is not discerned.

### **3. When is church discipline instituted?**

When the sin in the congregation is serious and has outward manifestations that will seriously impugn the reputation of the church. All sin is wrong and need to be dealt with. Some sins are dealt with through a sermon and private conviction of sin, others require our brethren to point out so we can take remedial action. The sins that require public attention like in this case are public ie known to everyone and affect the holiness of the church.

*1 Cor 5:11b .. sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—*

These have serious outward impact upon the life and unity of the church.

These are unrepentant individuals as

*Matthew 18:16-17 (ESV) But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector*

### **4. How is church discipline carried out?**

The person is cast out of fellowship of the community of believers.

*1 Corinthians 5:2 (ESV) 2 And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.*

*1 Corinthians 5:11 (ESV) But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one*

This is done corporately not by any individual leader.

*1 Corinthians 5:3-5 (ESV) For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. 4 When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 you are to deliver this man to Satan*

5. Discuss the concept of accountability in church why it is important and how it can be carried out in the context of a Gamma group?

#### CASE 1

May Leong was had joined the 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 folk 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 have 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.

- a. How would you approach the issue should you be the presiding leader of the 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.

- b. 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 fetus. 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 fulfill any criteria for discipline

- c. **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 will 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**

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 work mates attended the same church and were horrified of 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.

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

But even if he denies it, we should probably not draw him in front of the church. Why not? First, 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. Second, pursuing every tiny sin a church's life will probably induce paranoia and propel the congregation toward legalism. Third, 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).

- b. Look at the situation of Acts 5 when God took the life of Ananias and Saphira 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**

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

Some one pointed out to the leaders that is it alright for couples to cohabitate together since Marlene and Lawrence are doing this and 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.

- a. 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

- b. Will this cause Lawrence to be turned off 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 lead 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.

- c. What should the church do if a member who is close to Marlene under**

discipline refuses to break fellowship?

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

- d. How should family members relate to Marlene who is under church discipline?
- e. In light of the possibility of a lawsuit, is church discipline advisable in our day? Why/why not?