

Compassion & The Unrepentant
Selected Scriptures

Introduction

I appreciated Ed's sermon on the dangers and pervasiveness of idolatry very much. It gave a lot of meat to the warning the apostle John gives at the conclusion of his first epistle, "*Little children, guard yourselves from idols,*" (1 John 5:21). It is easy to fall into the trap of idolatry. Ed began with Paul's warning in Romans 1 about the idolatry of exchanging the glory of the incorruptible God for an image of corruptible man or some creature which is worshiped and served instead of the Creator. Worship of some physical image of false gods is still common today. However, the slide away from God which descends into depravity begins with the idolatry of withholding the honor and thanksgiving due to God to follow man's own futile speculations. Man professes to be wise, but in following his own wisdom, man becomes a fool.

Idolatry, like all sin, is an issue of the heart. It is turning away from what God has revealed about Himself in Creation and His word to follow the futile speculations of human wisdom. Idolaters decide for themselves what is or is not true and the order of priorities which usually gives first place to self and what is related to self. Foolishness masquerading as wisdom leads him to exchange the truth for a lie resulting even more idolatry. False religions worship false gods whether the god is depicted in some image or not. Cults either distort the true God into something false or will give false worship to the true God. Both are forms of idolatry. Examples of the former include Jehovah's Witnesses and Roman Catholicism, and examples of the latter are the Samaritan's of Jesus' time and the rote liturgies and rituals done without meaning in modern churches (Isaiah 29:13).

The combined force of the first commandment, "*Thou shall have no other gods before Me*" (Exodus 20:3) and the Great Commandment, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind*" (Matthew 22:37-38), means that anything you value more than God can be an idol. Idolatry is not just substituting something else for God, it is also withholding what belongs to God because you have made something else more important. It does not have to be related to anything religious. It could be tangible items such as wealth, a house, a car, things you collect, or it could be something you do such as work, a hobby, a sport or entertainment, or it could be a person who is important to you such as a parent, a spouse, a child or a friend. Anything, any activity or anyone that becomes more important to you than God can be an idol. Every sin done willfully is in the end idolatry since it is placing greater value on human wisdom and desire than on God's will, wisdom and commands. Ed gave us a good warning last week that we must be careful to heed.

The cure for any form of idolatry is to return to the truth God has revealed about Himself and align ourselves to follow Him. I have spotlighted those truths over the last few months. God is the Creator and everything that has been created exists for His glory (See: The Purpose of Creation). God created man to carry out the mandate given to him in Genesis 1:28, and within that mandate are specific roles for the man and the woman and the establishment of families. (See: The Purpose of Mankind). Adam's sin brought a curse upon the world, but hope of a future redeemer even within the curses pronounced. God redeemed man from sin by Jesus taking on human flesh, living a sinless life, then dying as the perfect sacrifice in substitute payment for man's sin, then rising from the dead proving all of His claims and promises are true. Man can be forgiven his sins by simple faith in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. God would display His glory in both vessels of wrath which He tolerated and the vessels of mercy in which He would display His grace and righteousness (See: The Purpose of Redemption). Ephesians 1:4 explains that the vessels of mercy were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world that we would be holy and blameless before Him. Or as stated a different way in Romans 8:29, the true

Christian is predestined to become conformed to the image of Christ. The believer will become holy either in cooperation with the Holy Spirit or through God's corrections (See: The Pursuit of Holiness, Part 1 & Part 2). God will accomplish His will in us.

That brings us to this morning's sermon, "*Compassion and the Unrepentant.*" God's compassion includes His discipline of His erring children, and His church is one of the means through which He brings about such discipline. Before I go on, I want to mention two preliminary things about this sermon.

First, those actively involved in this church may recognize the connection this sermon has to the individual that reached the third step of church discipline at end of last October. I will not be mentioning any names since this sermon is broadcast in the public domain, and while the Biblical principles that will be presented are for the public, the shame of the individuals involved is not.

Second, this was going to be a sermon that was going to be in reaction to the finalization of an evil - an unbiblical divorce - that was supposed to have taken place this past Thursday. Instead, by God's grace, sickness on the part of a lawyer involved has delayed that, so there remains time to continue the process in step three to confront and pray with the goal that repentance will yet take place. This sermon then will be proactive instead of reactive. It will serve as both a warning and instruction about what happens when the final step of a case of church discipline is reached.

Over the years I have preached several sermons dealing with church discipline, but those have focused on the steps of church discipline and the need to be involved in each others lives so that admonishment occurs quickly to keep sin from taking root. Early intervention to confront sin to bring about repentance can often prevent church discipline from escalating to the final step of disfellowship. Today I will briefly cover the steps of church discipline, but I will also focus on the Biblical practice of church discipline which is outlined in Article V of our church constitution which includes the reasons and causes of it. I will conclude with an emphasis on some pragmatic instruction on what to do when the process does reach disfellowship. Tragically, most churches ignore the Bible's instructions on church discipline and will not practice it. We cannot do that because we are committed to following all God has revealed in His word to the very best of our understanding of it. We can't ignore defiant sin in our midst because God does not ignore it. Neither do we practice shunning that occurs in some churches because that also contrary to Biblical teaching. We keep the Biblical balance.

The Causes For Church Discipline

I begin with a quick review of the Biblical causes for church discipline. The root cause is always sin. Jesus stated in Matthew 18:1, "*If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.*" Paul wrote in Galatians 6:1, "*Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.*" If we love each other as Christ has commanded us, then we will care enough to admonish a brother when something sinful in his life is recognized. That is to be a normal part of the Christian life (Romans 15:14, Colossians 3:16).

Please note that this is done with the humility of self reflection and not condemnation. That was Jesus' point in Matthew 7:1-5 about judging one another. There is no spiritual gift of either church policeman or church prosecutor. We do not investigate each other to see who has broken the law so that we can bring charges and prosecute. We are a family that loves each other so that when a brother or sister stumbles in sin, we get involved to help them get back up to walk in righteousness again. We rebuke and admonish, but we are also to be patient, forbearing, tender-hearted and forgiving of one another. While the starting point of church discipline is noticing a brother in sin, the first action is self examination to make sure the log is out of our own eyes so that we can see clearly to help our brother with the speck in his own. True love and humility, not self-righteousness, is proper Biblical attitude that starts the process.

Any sin is subject to this first step of church discipline and that is a blessing since follows of Christ

desire to avoid sin and deal with it quickly when it occurs. Any sin that escalates beyond a private rebuke does so because of either unrepentance or the public nature of the sin. Paul and John both rebuked certain people by name in their letters because their sins were known publically. Paul specifically states in 1 Timothy 5:20 that an elder that continues in sin is to be rebuked in the presence of all so that the rest will also be fearful. Dealing with a public sin publically also protects the person who has sinned from continuing rumors after they have repented. Any sin has the potential to escalate, but the Scriptures do list certain sins as serious and more subject to escalation to public rebuke. Here are four categories.

1. Doctrinal deviation or heresy. Paul warned in Titus 3:9 to *“avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.”* He gave a similar warning in 1 Timothy 6:3-5, ³ *“If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, ⁴ he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, ⁵ and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.”* Paul warned in Romans 16:17-18, ¹⁷ *“Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.”* ¹⁸ *“For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.”*

The apostles John and Peter give similar warnings. 2 John 10, ¹⁰ *“If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting;”* ¹¹ *“for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.”* 2 Peter 2:1-2, ¹ *“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. ² Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned.”*

As I have pointed out many times from Ephesians 4:11-16, one of the blessings about being part of the church, the body of Christ, is that as we use our various spiritual gifts to minister to one another the whole body is built up and we protect each other from *“every wind of doctrine, the trickery of men, [and their] craftiness in deceitful scheming.”* Proper church discipline corrects theological error and keeps it from spreading.

2. Immoral conduct is a second area of serious sin. Temptations in this area are real which is why Paul warned Timothy to *“flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart”* (2 Timothy 2:22). In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul publically rebuked a man for blatant sexual immorality that did *“not exist even among the Gentiles.”* He also had to rebuke the Corinthian church for their tolerance of this sin in their midst and he then gave them specific instruction about what they needed to do which we will look at in detail later in this sermon. In 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 Paul had to tell them to stop visiting the temple prostitutes and flee immorality. Immorality would include all the sexual perversions I talked about a few weeks ago on God’s design for Human Sexuality ([Link](#)). Any sexual conduct outside of a man and a woman married to each other is immoral.

3. Sowing discord or causing division is a third area of serious sin. This is not referring to legitimate disagreements. It is referring to deliberate and malicious efforts to create factions over personal differences and minor issues. *“A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers,”* are among the seven abominations to the Lord listed in Proverbs 6:16-19. Going back to Romans 16:17 cited earlier, false teaching causes dissensions and so you must watch and turn away from those that do that. Paul bluntly states in Titus 3:10-11, ¹⁰ *“Reject a factious man after a first and second warning,”* ¹¹ *“knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.”* Divisive and

schismatic are synonyms for factions, and it is often associated with heresy, though Paul rebuked the Corinthians for their quarreling and divisions that developed due to hyper allegiance to their favorite Bible teacher - Paul, Apollos, Cephas. Christ is not divided. Each member within the body of Christ is to work in harmony with all the other members of it for the health and maturity of the whole body and the glory of Christ.

4. Living in a disorderly manner is the fourth serious sin listed in Scripture as a cause for discipline. 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 begins, *“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us.”* He then goes on specifically point out those who were living and an undisciplined life, not willing to work and being busybodies. He concludes in verses 14-15 regarding such people,¹⁴ *“If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame.”*¹⁵ *Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.”* The book of Jude gives similar warning about those who are greedy, proud, unfaithful, ungodly, grumblers, fault-finders, lustful, arrogant, and flatterers.

The Steps of Church Discipline - Matthew 18:15-17

I have gone through the steps of church discipline in detail in previous sermons, so I am going to be brief here. Jesus said in Matthew 18:15–17,¹⁵ *“If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.”*¹⁶ *“But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.”*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.”*

The first step, as already explained, is confronting / admonishing a fellow believer who has fallen into sin with the goal of correction, reconciliation and restoration. Galatians 6:1-4 is for all practical purposes a more detailed instruction in carrying out step one. If the individual does not listen, then -

Step Two. The individual in sin is confronted / admonished again, only this time it is with two or three witnesses present. This helps establish the facts and often clears up misunderstandings which are often the cause for conflict. The goal is still correction, reconciliation and restoration. If a church Elder was not part of this process, it is wise to repeat this with an Elder present since Galatians 6:1 states that it is *“you who are spiritual”* that should be involved in the effort to restore a brother in sin. Find the most godly people you can get for this step. If the individual will still not listen and heed, then -

Step 3, the matter is brought to the church and the congregation is instructed to seek after the individual to bring about repentance and reconciliation. This involves more people in confronting and appealing to the one who is sin, but it also gets those who may not know the individual to be praying for them. The goal remains the same - correction, reconciliation and restoration. Ample time is given for the church to carry out this work, but not so much time that it drags on and on. If the individual will still not repent, then it goes to the step four.

Before I talk about this final step, I want to stress again that the goal to this point has been to bring about reconciliation and restoration of the one in sin to fellowship through conviction of sin leading to repentance. It is not unusual for someone caught in sin to go through steps one and two multiple times as he struggles to overcome the pit of sin into which he has fallen. As long as the individual is actively and sincerely striving to walk with Christ, you continue to work with them. Such an individual would be humble and ask others to help and pray for him which means he might tell the church himself. That may appear to be similar to step three, but it is an appeal for help by someone who is convicted and wants to change instead of something to increase admonishment and rebuke to bring a sinner to conviction so that they will repent and change. You never get to step four unless the person in sin remains hardened in unrepentance. He has determined that he will go his own way instead of God’s way as clearly pointed out to him from the Scriptures.

Step four - the individual is to be disfellowshipped from the church and the congregation instructed to treat the individual as a “Gentile and tax-gatherer.” The unrepentant sinner may no longer participate in the fellowship of the Christian community. I will expand this and its far reaching consequences in a moment, but first I need to stress that the reasons for church discipline change at this point.

The Reasons for Discipline

Throughout the first three steps of church discipline, the reasons for it are to teach the individual in sin about God and His commands and bring about conviction of sin leading to repentance, reconciliation and restoration. That is one of the purposes of Scripture according to 2 Timothy 3:16–17, “*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*” The manner in which the teaching would be done would depend to some degree on the attitude of those being taught for Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:14 to “*admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.*” Paul charged Timothy “*to preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction*” as a warning against those that would no longer endure sound doctrine but would instead turn away from the truth to have their ears tickled and to embrace myths (2 Timothy 4:2-4). Paul told Titus to “*reprove [the Cretans] severely so that they may be sound in faith.*”

This points out that teaching includes the correction, rebuke, and admonishment of discipline. It is also part of the process of making disciples of Jesus Christ for though making a disciple begins with going out into the world to preach the gospel and baptizing those that respond in faith to that message, making a disciple of Christ continues for the rest of life in “*teaching them to observe (keep, obey) all that [the Lord] commanded*” (Matthew 28:19-20).

In Matthew 18:15, the correction is done to “*win your brother.*” In Matthew 5:24 the effort is made to “*be reconciled to your brother.*” In Galatians 6:1-2, the motive is to “*restore such a one*” and “*bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.*” In James 5:19-20 correction is made in order to “*turn back*” “*the sinner from the error of his way*” which will “*save his soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.*” In 2 Corinthians 7:8-13, Paul’s admonishments were meant to bring about godly sorrow which produces repentance without regret leading to salvation. And Hebrews 12:5-13 tells us the Lord disciplines those whom He loves with the goal of bringing our good in sharing His holiness and bringing about the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

Once church discipline moves to step three there are additional reasons for it. The first is an expansion on what was being done in private in giving Biblical instruction on God’s will - what is right and wrong before Him - to the whole congregation. Such teaching also serves as a warning to the rest of the congregation about the path of sin which becomes more pointed by the example of the one entrapped in sin being brought before the church. In 2 Thessalonians 3:14 Paul points out that identifying the one in sin is done in part to bring shame on him, but it also serves as a warning to the congregation to be wary of his sinful influence and not associate with him. Paul’s warning in Romans 16:17 is similar.

Once you get to step four, these other reasons become primary with the focus now being on the protection of the flock and promoting a proper fear of God. Whether the person in sin repents or not becomes secondary at best.

One reason people do flagrantly and willfully sin is that they have lost their fear of God. Holiness is considered optional. Church discipline helps to restore that in the congregation and beyond. An extreme example of this is the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. As a consequence of their conspiring together to lie, God struck both of them dead. God did the same thing to Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10 for not treating God as holy. In 1 Corinthians 11:29-30 Paul points out that sin among them in their approach to the Lord’s Supper resulted in some of them becoming sick and others dying. The result of God’s discipline of Ananias and Sapphira is recorded in Acts 5:13-14, ¹³ *But none of the rest dared to*

associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem.¹⁴ And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number.” God is to be treated as holy, and since the fear of Him is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom, it should not be surprising that God uses that fear to draw men to Himself. Human wisdom tries to remove the fear of God thinking that will attract people, but all it really attracts is heresy and false worship.

Once you reach step four in Church Discipline, the warning to keep the church from sin becomes a major component. Paul did not always know the name of person in sin that was causing the problems, but he rebuked them and those listening to or following them anyway. Galatians 5:7–10 is an example.⁷ *“You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?⁸ This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you.⁹ A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.¹⁰ I have confidence in you in the Lord that you will adopt no other view; but the one who is disturbing you will bear his judgment, whoever he is.”* The same is true in 1 Corinthians 5 regarding the man that had his father’s wife. Paul rebuked the Corinthians in verse 2, 6 & 7 for tolerating it - *“You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst”. . .⁶ “Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?⁷ Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump . . .”*

At other times, Paul did know the names of those in sin and he specifically pointed them out. 2 Timothy 2:14–18 is an example of this. Paul instructs Timothy about what he should and should not do in ministry and then states,¹⁶ *“But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness,¹⁷ and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus,¹⁸ men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some.”*

Once you reach step four, removal of the one in sin is not optional. Here are several direct passages on this issue. Matthew 18:17, *“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.”* 1 Corinthians 5:13, *“But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.”* I already mentioned 2 Thessalonians 3:6 & 14 about keeping away from those that lead an unruly life and to take special note of such a person and not to associate with them. Titus 3:10–11 is also direct,¹⁰ *“Reject a factious man after a first and second warning,¹¹ knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.”*

Any church that will not follow these many commands concerning how to deal with those within it that are unrepentant in their flagrant, willful sin are themselves disobedient to the Lord and they will bear the consequences. Consider the warnings the Lord gave to the churches in Asia recorded in Revelation 2 & 3 about the sin that was within them. They did not heed the warnings which eventually led to apostasy and their demise. Countless churches are on that same path today because they fear man more than God. Their marketing strategies can build religious institutions that tickle the ears of the people telling them what they want to hear, but they cannot build a church, because Jesus Christ is the one that does that. We can only assist Him by following His instructions for it.

The Consequences of Church Discipline

What is to happen if step four of church discipline is reached and the person is disfellowshipped? As already pointed out, those in sin are in great danger since they are walking away from Christ instead of toward Him and they will suffer the consequences of their sin. Those that are Christians who are stuck in sin will be subject to God’s chastening as described in Hebrews 12 as a mentioned earlier. The first consequence will be the loss of fellowship with God quickly followed by the misery of no longer having the fruit of the Spirit as the Spirit is grieved and then quenched. As someone well put it, there is nothing more miserable than a Christian in sin. Psalm 32 is an example of such misery. The chastening continues as the natural consequences for such sin are experienced. Estrangement from other believers is part of

that because the one in sin is walking the opposite direction as those seeking to follow Christ. Disfellowship from the church is a consequence of that. As already pointed out from the examples in Acts 5 and 1 Corinthians 11, God's chastening can become much more severe to include sickness and even death. But such chastening should be a comfort since it demonstrates the person belongs to God.

It is far worse for those that God does not discipline because it means they are illegitimate and not children of God. Such people will experience both the particular consequences of their specific sins as well as the general consequences of being under God's wrath as described in Romans 1:18-32. Their final end will be the second death when they are judged by according to their evil deeds and cast out of God's presence and His glory into the punishment of eternal destruction in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11-15).

How should those in the church react to those who are disfellowshipped? The first reaction is grief and sorrow over the one in sin even as Paul expressed in Philippians 3:17 in his weeping over those that walked away from the cross of Christ and set their minds on earthly things. Part of this would be the continued longing for the repentance of the one in sin. You become like the father of the prodigal described in Luke 15 who keeps looking for his son to repent and return. Remember, that those who walk away from Christ are not our enemies even if they behave that way toward us. As Paul plainly states it in Ephesians 6:12, "*our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.*" Those in sin, including apostates, are dupes of Satan, and our great desire is to see them repent and "*come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will*" (2 Timothy 2:26).

The second reaction is a proper fear of God and taking to heart the warning that you do not follow such an example yourself, but instead to become more diligent in your walk with Christ that you may avoid the same traps of sin. That is part of the reason Jesus commands us to get the log out of our own eye before we can help someone with a speck in their own (Matthew 7:5), and Paul tells those who are spiritual that are going to try to help restore a brother caught in sin to "*look to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.*"

Third, which is concurrent with the first two reactions, is the clear recognition of the reality that the individual in sin has stubbornly remained unrepentant despite the efforts of all involved to teach, correct, admonish and reprove his sin so that he may repent. The truth becomes painfully obvious that the one in sin is walking a different path than you resulting in no longer being able to walk together. Whether the individual actually is or is not a Christian is completely in God's hands, but the sinful fruit they are bearing blatantly declares they do not want to follow Christ. Their profession of faith must be considered to be false. There is no longer a basis for fellowship with them, which is why this fourth step is referred to as disfellowship.

Please understand that this is what Jesus is talking about when He states the person in sin is to be treated like a "*Gentile and a tax collector.*" Gentiles were outsiders to the Jews, and a Gentile would have to become a God-fearer and a proselyte in order to have fellowship with a godly Jew. Tax collectors were in a worse position because they were often Jews who worked for the very nation that was oppressing them and so they were considered traitors and worse than a Gentile. Once you reach step four of church discipline, the individual in unrepentant sin can no longer be considered a fellow believer. That person is outside the body of Christ. He or she is no longer part of the fellowship of the church.

Fourth, along with having a proper fear of God, it also needs to be clearly understood that the person in sin is dangerous. As I pointed out earlier, that is why there are so many instructions to *not receive, not associate, avoid, keep away from, turn away from, reject, and remove* such an unrepentant person. Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 5 on how they were to deal with the unrepentant immoral man among them is particularly poignant in our society since it has become like the Corinthians in treating tolerance of sin like it was a moral virtue. Paul rebukes them stating in verses 6-13, ⁶ *Your boasting is not good. Do you*

not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?⁷ Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.⁸ Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.⁹ I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people;¹⁰ I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world.¹¹ But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one.¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church?¹³ But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.”

I hope you get the point here. A professing Christian that remains in unrepentant sin is dangerous. A little leaven affects the whole lump. Such a person is walking away from Christ, and if you attempt to walk with them, you will also be walking away from Christ. There is no fellowship between light and darkness (2 Corinthians 6:14-15). Paul warns not to even eat with such a person.

Fifth, recognize that church discipline is also for the benefit of the one being disciplined. While it is meant to distinguish the true from the false, it is also part of the chastening process that God will use to turn a child of His back to Himself. That is why Paul also stated in 1 Corinthians 5:5 concerning the immoral man that he “*delivered such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of Christ Jesus.*” From what Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 2 & 7, it appears that this man did repent with godly sorrow and Paul encourages them to restore him. In an earlier sermon on this topic I told you about Diane’s best friend who finally repented a couple of years after being disfellowshipped by two churches and was restored. A woman who was disfellowshipped by this church wrote to me some years later that though she was upset at us at the time, she later recognized we did what was right and she repented resulting in her eventually becoming a pastor’s wife. Oh what joy there is when a sinner repents!

It all boils down to this. Our God is a God of forgiveness and restoration, but do not get in the way of His reproofs thinking that somehow your way is better than His. We do all we can to strive to bring a brother or sister in sin to repentance. Those that know the person will rebuke and admonish by speaking the truth in love to point to God’s will and way. Those who do not are diligent to pray for his or her repentance. Once it reaches step four and disfellowship takes place, we continue to long for such repentance. If you happen to meet the person after disfellowship, call them to repentance. Do not continue your relationship with the person like there is nothing very seriously wrong. Never do anything to aid and abet his or her sin. Never try to make the consequences of sin on the sinner easier until they repent. If you do so, you are getting in the way of God’s reproofs and enabling the person to be more hardened in their sin.

Fix your eyes on our Lord Jesus Christ and follow Him. Rejoice with those who are walking God’s narrow way that leads to life. Help the weak and the lame and those who have stumbled as you walk the path of life. Grieve over those that have turned away and left the path. Call out to them to repent and return. Throw a rope to those who have gone over the cliff so that you can help pull them back up. But never leave the path yourself or encourage those who have or soon you will find that you are walking with them and not Christ.