

Life Together

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

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same
image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.
(2 Corinthians 3:18. ESV)*

Whom You Are To Judge

November 9th, 2014

1 Corinthians 4:18-5:13

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Introduction:

Good morning! Open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 4:18. We'll be reading from verse 18 of chapter 4 through to verse 13 of chapter 5. My plan for this morning is fairly straight forward – we'll read the text and then by God's grace and hopefully in some logical order we will attempt to display the principles for church discipline that we find embedded therein. This is a hard text. Not because it contains words that are difficult to translate – it does not; not because it is cluttered with obscure cultural references – it is not; and not because it deals with things with which we have no experience. It does not. It's a hard text because it seems to mean exactly what it says. It's a hard text because obeying it would be painful and potentially disruptive. Nevertheless it is what's next so let's put on our seat belt on and hear together the Word of the Lord:

¹⁸ Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. ¹⁹ But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. ²⁰ For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. ²¹ What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?

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. ² And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

³ 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 for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

⁶ Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? ⁷ 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.

⁹ I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—¹⁰ not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.¹¹ 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.¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?¹³ God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.” (1 Corinthians 4:18–5:13 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

The passage we have just read is one of the main passages in the New Testament that we would appeal to in order to discern the correct practice and guiding principles for discipline in the church.

The Practice And Principles Of Discipline In The Church

From it, first of all, we notice that:

1. Discipline in the church is analogous to discipline in the home

Before we look at the structure of church discipline we are wise to take note of the spirit of church discipline. Church discipline is done in the spirit of fatherly admonition. In 4:15 Paul referred to himself as their father in the faith and now here in 4:21 he says:

What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a **rod**, or with love in a spirit of gentleness? (1 Corinthians 4:21 ESV)

“What kind of dad will I be when next we are together? Well that depends on you”, Paul says. The word he uses for “rod” in 4:21 is the same word used in the Greek translation of Proverbs 22:15 and 23:13-14:

Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the **rod** of discipline drives it far from him. (Proverbs 22:15 ESV)

¹³ Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a **rod**, he will not die.¹⁴ If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol. (Proverbs 23:13–14 ESV)

Paul is saying that he exercises discipline in the church for the same reason that a father exercises discipline in a home – to save and sanctify the child. That is the spirit that should characterize

discipline in the church. It should not be done to silence the annoying or to exile the irritating. It should be used to save and to grow God's children.

Secondly, we see that:

2. Discipline in the church presupposes a clear distinction between insiders and outsiders

It seems that Paul had already written to them about church discipline but they had misunderstood what he was trying to say. In verse 9 he says:

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people (1 Corinthians 5:9 ESV)

“We already talked about this!” he says, but clearly they didn't understand. It seems that they thought he meant that they were not to associate with any sinners, period, which is obviously unrealistic, so they had simply set this entire teaching aside. They thought Paul had gone too far and so Paul clarifies:

¹⁰ not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. ¹¹ 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. ¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? ¹³ God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.” (1 Corinthians 5:10–13 ESV)

That's about as clear as you can get. Paul is saying that discipline is for people inside the church – not for people outside the church. Quite simply, we treat full blown pagans one way, and full blown Christians another way and p.s. there is no third way. This is why membership matters. You cannot do church discipline in a church where you don't know who you're talking to. You have to know who is in and who is out. You have to insist that people declare.

Now again, going back to our family analogy this makes perfect sense. You don't spank the neighbour's kids. If you do, you go to jail. You are allowed to discipline your own kids – within reason and in an appropriate manner of course – but you are not allowed to discipline the neighbour's kids. Family discipline presupposes that you know who belongs to your family. Same thing in the church. We don't discipline visitors. According to the Bible, and actually according to our by-laws, the church only recognizes two sorts of people in the pews – members

and visitors. We have no theological and no bylaw category for the long term adherent. A long term adherent is just a very persistent visitor. We're glad you are here, but you are not family until you declare.

Thirdly in this passage we notice that:

3. Discipline requires a reliable report of actual sin

Paul mentions that this matter has been reported to him by reliable sources.

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, (1 Corinthians 5:1 ESV)

In chapter 16:17 he tells us who they are:

¹⁷ I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence, ¹⁸ for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. **Give recognition to such people.** (1 Corinthians 16:17–18 ESV)

These are the men who brought the letter and who told Paul what was going on. Paul obviously considered them reliable witnesses. This accords with the standard of evidence presented in the Old Testament and taken for granted in the New Testament. Every charge has to be established on the testimony of 2 or 3 witnesses.

And it has to concern an actual sin. The situation in 1 Corinthians certainly meets that criteria: In Leviticus 18:8 we read:

⁸ You are not to have sex with your father's wife; it will shame your father. (Leviticus 18:8 HCSB)

Deuteronomy 22:22 says:

"If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman. So you shall purge the evil from Israel. (Deuteronomy 22:22 ESV)

Paul quotes the end of that verse in 5:13 making it pretty clear that this verse was in view. The man in 1 Corinthians 5 was having sex with his father's wife – that is with his step mother. In ancient society a man's step mother would be closer to his own age than to the age of his father and it was not uncommon for there to be a certain attraction, but that attraction was never to be

indulged. It was a great insult to the father and it was an especially wretched form of adultery. What we're dealing with here is an actual sin. Its important for us to notice that Paul is not calling for discipline because someone was unpleasant or unwise or irritating. We don't use discipline in such cases, we pray, we teach, we encourage. Discipline is for actual sin. If you don't have a verse then you don't have a case. We don't discipline people for trick or treating. There is no verse for that therefore we have no official position on that. We don't discipline people for playing violent video games. We don't discipline people for the moderate consumption of alcohol. We don't discipline people for smoking cigarettes. We don't discipline people for allowing their daughters to date at 14. All of that stuff may be unwise, but it does not warrant discipline. No verse. No case. But when a man sleeps with another man's wife we deal with it. Verse and case.

Fourthly, we notice that:

4. Discipline deals with fruit in order to get at faith

We are not merely in the "behavior management" business. We are in the faith formation business. We deal with fruit in order to get at faith. Paul operates under the assumption that faith produces fruit; that is to say that what you believe will manifest in your behaviours so he deals with strange behaviours because they indicate false faith. Paul's ultimate concern is not good behavior it is saving faith. Again, parents, you understand this. The ultimate goal of discipline in your home is not peace and quiet it is saving faith and sanctified children. We don't want Johnny just to stop teasing his sister we want him to examine his heart to see why he feels that he must tease his sister and we want him to be concerned about what that says about his soul. So it is in church. People filled with the Holy Spirit don't generally sleep with other people's wives so let's talk about that. Let's talk about what's in your heart that leads you to act in this way. That's the conversation we are ultimately hoping to have.

Fifthly, we see that:

5. Discipline preserves the witness and the worship of the church

We catch that concern for witness in 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. (1 Corinthians 5:1 ESV)

If you are a Bible reader then you know that it is a very bad thing when the church is worse than the world. You read about that this week in your RMM readings. In 2 Kings 21 right before the author tells us that God is going to bring great judgment and destruction upon Judah he tells us why:

But they did not listen, and Manasseh led them astray to do more evil than the nations had done whom the LORD destroyed before the people of Israel. (2 Kings 21:9 ESV)

How many of you know that left to themselves, God's people can become even worse than the world? Thankfully God doesn't leave us to ourselves. He fills us with the Holy Spirit and he places us inside community. Church discipline is a gift from God designed to help God's people maintain their distinctiveness within and before the world. Listen, rotten apples, do spoil the batch. When that happens, according to the Bible, God burns the barrel. Discipline ultimately seeks to preserve the life and witness of the church.

It also seeks to preserve the worship of the church. Paul introduces Passover imagery in verses 6-8. In the Old Testament after the temple had been defiled and the worship of Yahweh abandoned, several reforming leaders initiated rites of purification after which they led the people in a renewed celebration of Passover.

Following the "removal of all defilement from the sanctuary" (2 Chr. 29:5) in order to "re-establish the service of the temple of the LORD" (2 Chr. 29:35), King Hezekiah in 2 Chronicles 30 calls upon the people to celebrate the Passover.¹

This exact pattern was followed by Josiah and by Ezra and now here by Paul. After the temple has been defiled, after the worship has been interrupted by sin and pollution, cleanse the temple, remove the defilement and renew the celebration of the Passover. Paul is speaking in "Old Testament" here, he is saying: "Whether you know or not, your worship has been interrupted. You can't worship Yahweh while tolerating sin. He's not listening to you whether you keep

¹Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 212.

speaking or not. So let's cleanse the temple – you are the temple – let's cleanse the temple and then let's gather round the table. Clean and then commune.” That's the Old Testament pattern and Paul is sticking with it. Church discipline is understood by Paul as analogous to cleansing the temple. It has to be done for worship to continue. Discipline preserves both the witness and the worship of the church.

Sixthly, we see that:

6. Discipline responds to different sins in different ways

This is not the only text in the New Testament that teaches on church discipline. Matthew 18 deals primarily with dispute resolution between members, Galatians 6 deals with more run of the mill pastoral correction for lesser sins and 1 Timothy 5 deals with the public errors of official teachers – you have to know what scenario you are dealing with in order to apply the right principles and best practices. This passage in 1 Corinthians 5 deals with known, public, gross, persistent sin. There is a different process for that. Notice that Paul doesn't follow all the steps outlined in Matthew 18. This is a more drastic scenario and so the process is steeper. Discipline responds to different sins in different ways.

Next we notice that:

7. Discipline requires the consent of the entire community

Look at what Paul says in 5:3:

³I 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 for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. (1 Corinthians 5:3–5 ESV)

Paul has already decided on the sentence – the man is to be excommunicated. The sin is not small, the situation is not in doubt, therefore the judgment is certain and Paul has made it but he requires them to gather together in order to affirm it and execute it. This is the pattern for church discipline in the Bible. Jesus said the same thing in Matthew 18:

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.** (Matthew 18:17 ESV)

All of this is perfectly in line with Old Testament practice. In the Old Testament after the priests and judges had decided a matter – as in Deuteronomy 19 with the case of the malicious witness – the entire community had to gather together in order to affirm and execute the sentence. If the sentence was death then the entire community cast a stone. Now, as we move from Old Testament to New Testament we expect continuity and discontinuity. What's the same is that the sentence made by delegates has to be affirmed by the community as a whole. What's different is that execution has been replaced with excommunication. Excommunication is capital punishment in the New Testament. That sentence has to be affirmed by the whole community.

Our process here at FBC follows that principle. The Board of Elders conducts the inquiry as your delegates and if necessary delivers a verdict. In cases of serious discipline that sentence needs to be affirmed by the entire membership. We would call a meeting and we would communicate the decision and we would ask for your affirmation. Failure to give it would result in the resignation of the entire board. Failure to affirm the decision means that you no longer trust the board of elders to serve as your delegates. You do not trust their judgment. That's a serious thing. Paul knows it's a serious thing – this is a test of their willingness to endorse his authority. He's saying: "The evidence is clear, the sentence is obvious. Next Sunday when you gather, have a meeting and excommunicate the man. You have to affirm this decision in order to remain a church." The people have to affirm the decision of their delegates. If they can't then the delegates can no longer serve as such. Discipline is a sacred and shared trust between leaders and members. It has to be owned by the entire community.

Next, we notice that:

8. Serious discipline assumes the judgment of the group upon the profession of the individual

That's what excommunication is. It is the entire membership of the church saying to you: "Dear brother, dear sister, we do not believe that you are saved. We cannot credit your profession of faith." That's what it means to treat someone like a tax collector or sinner – it doesn't mean we hate them it means we evangelize them because they are not saved! We are saying to the brother

or sister in question: “These actions that you are persisting in, that you refuse to repent of, they are not the actions of a saved person, filled with the Holy Spirit. You reveal yourself to be outside the Gospel! Repent, be saved, come in.” That’s what it means. If you love people you will find the courage to say that when necessary. It is a fearful thing to fall unprepared into the hands of a holy God. When we excommunicate someone we are not saying: “Go to hell”. We are saying: “Please don’t go to hell. Repent, trust in Jesus and be saved.”

Practically speaking we see that:

9. Discipline terminates in formal disassociation

That’s what we believe Paul meant when he said:

not even to eat with such a one. (1 Corinthians 5:11 ESV)

We’ll talk about this a little more next week but given how he has just spoken in terms of the Jewish Passover by way of analogy his meaning seems clear: you are not to permit persistent sinners, recognized as such by the community to participate in the sacrament of communion. Excommunication means no communion. It doesn’t mean that you can’t attend services. It means that we don’t think you are saved and therefore we cannot serve you communion.

Now, you may laugh at that as being much ado about nothing but if you take the Bible seriously, then it is not nothing. When your church withholds communion from you they are saying that they don’t consider you to be saved.

Now, we are not inclined to believe that the judgment of a group could mean anything real for us before God. But it does. Jesus said in Matthew 18, the parallel passage on church discipline:

Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 18:18 ESV)

The judgment of your church upon the validity of your profession is **TAKEN SERIOUSLY BY THE GOD OF HEAVEN**. Jesus said that. That’s in your Bible.

Lastly, we see that:

10. Discipline hopes for salvation and full assurance of faith

Paul says that in verse 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**. (1 Corinthians 5:5 ESV)

We tell a person that he's not saved in hopes that he will believe that; take that to heart repent of his sin and actually become converted! So, just to be clear we're not saying that a person loses their salvation by committing gross sin; we're saying that if a person persists in gross sin despite the correction of the church such a person gives credible evidence that they were never saved to begin with. We want you to be saved and we want you to know that you are saved. One commentator put it this way:

assurance of salvation depends in part on ethical progress²

We want you to get saved and we want to grow so that you can enjoy full assurance of faith. In the church, as in the home, discipline hopes and prays toward that end.

Conclusion:

That's the text, those are the obvious principles and implications within the text but as a pastor I want to do more than explain texts and apply texts appropriately within the church. I want to challenge you to consider your own heart disposition toward the text. How do you react to this? The Apostle Paul anticipates that what he has said in chapter 5 will not be universally well received. He notes in the text that the Corinthians have the wrong attitude to receive this teaching as for their good. He says in verse 2:

And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? (1 Corinthians 5:2 ESV)

You are arrogant. You think that you don't need the help of the church to walk rightly before

²Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 209.

God. You think that you are not subject to the authoritative teaching of the Apostolic Gospel. You think you are capable of being like God deciding right and wrong for yourself. Arrogant people loathe the doctrine of church discipline. Humble people love it. Humble people just know that they need the help of brothers and sisters to mortify the flesh and to overcome remaining sin in their lives. They need it. They need prayer and rebuke and accountability. They know that they have blind spots. They know that their sin distorts their perception of reality. They don't trust their own judgment and so they welcome the counsel of the group.

How does this sit with you? You know how we generally end our messages. I say: "This is the Word of the Lord" and you say "thanks be to God". That's just an old way of giving you the congregation the opportunity to affirm that what you have heard accords with the teaching of Scripture. It's your chance to say: "We understand that our pastor is not authoritative. But to the extent that his message has faithfully opened God's Word, it is authoritative. It's God's Word to us". It's really just a longer way of saying "amen". Can you say that today and mean it? I want you to think about that. Don't just say stuff because we always say stuff. Think about that. Because, as best as I have understood it, as best as I can present it, this is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God. Let's pray together.

(Make us wise in our embrace of the all the ordinary means, we ask in Jesus' Name. Amen)