

Accountable in an Unaccountable World

1 Corinthians 5

Our world tells us that personal belief and private behavior is no one else's business. But accountability is a blessing and a protection for followers of Christ. When we choose to walk in unrepentant sin, the most loving thing the church can do is confront and discipline. Discover the process and the blessing of church discipline.

1 Corinthians 5:1-2: Paul rebukes two specific sins

- 1) v1: The man's sin: unrepentant incest
 - immorality = *porneia* = sex w/ someone who's not or should not be your spouse
 - In this case: with his stepmom = incest
 - Even the Gentiles outlawed incest – and that's saying something!
 - He "has his father's wife"
 - Not a one-time stupid decision - he moved in with her!
 - Blatant, willful, unrepentant sexual sin
- 2) v2: The church's sin: silence
 - This is the focus of the chapter, not incest
 - The whole church knew about this man's sin... and did nothing
 - Instead they ignored it, swept it under the rug
 - We don't know why they ignored it, we just know that they did
 - **What should shock us: not the shame of incest, but the silence of the church**

1 Corinthians 5:3-13: Paul's solution to both sins is Church Discipline

- V3: Paul "judged" the incestuous man = **sentenced him to punishment**
- What is the punishment? Includes 2 related things:
 - **1. Removal from the church (v2, v7, v13)**
 - **2. Total isolation (v11). Pray for him, but don't spend time with him**
- That's what Paul means by his enigmatic statement in v5: "deliver such a one to Satan"

Serious unrepentant sin demands serious consequences, and that's what church discipline is: the most serious consequence the church can impose.

Q1: WHEN do we exercise church discipline?

- Not just anytime we see sin! There are two very important restrictions
- **First restriction: It's only for those who claim to be a Christian**
 - o We have no business judging non-Christians. We're called to love & share the Gospel
- **Second restriction: it's only for certain types of sin**
 - o Immorality, covetous swindling, idolatry, reviling, drunkenness, heresy, divisiveness, etc.
 - o A lot of different sins, but here's the key: **None of these qualify for church discipline UNLESS THE PERSON IS UNWILLING TO REPENT**
 - We all sin, sometimes seriously
 - Chapter 5 would've been totally different if the guy had repented

Q2: HOW do we exercise church discipline?

- Church discipline is a 5-step process where each step gets more painful than the last, BUT it can be aborted at any point if the sinner will repent
- **When you see someone walking in unrepentant sin who goes to Grace and claims to be a Christian, here's what you do...**
- **STEP 1: Examine yourself – Gal 6:1**
 - o Are you walking with the Lord? Are you repenting of sin?
 - o Think about your motives – are you seeking the good of your brother?
- **STEP 2: Confront in private – Matt 18:15**
 - o Pray for courage and then go speak privately to the person
 - o Be gracious & humble – be ready to listen – you may not have all the facts
 - o If the person repents, then you've won your brother or sister back from sin
 - Process ends here – move on to restore and rebuild
- **STEP 3: Bring help – Matt 18:16**
 - o "one or two more" who can confirm the facts and increase pressure
 - o This is NOT permission to gossip
 - o If the person repents, it stops here – move to restore and rebuild
- **STEP 4: Take it to a pastor or elder – Matt 18:17a**
 - o Bring it to the leadership of the church and they'll take over
 - o 1 or 2 elders will meet with the person to confirm facts and urge repentance
- **STEP 5: Remove and isolate the unrepentant sinner**
 - o End of Matt 18:17, "...and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector"
 - To Jesus' audience = "have no contact with him"
 - o In our case: elders will inform whole church or some portion of the church
 - o He or she will be removed from membership and asked not to attend GBC
 - o Church members who know the person will be asked to cut off contact

Q3: WHY do we exercise church discipline?

- For the good of the church (v6)
 - o To protect our HOLINESS
 - Leaven = fermented dough; metaphor for how sin spreads in the church
 - The church needs discipline to keep us holy! 1 Tim 5:20 – instills godly fear of sin
 - o To protect our WITNESS
 - We've all seen the damage that hypocrisy does to the witness of a church
- For the good of the sinner (v5b)
 - o "For the destruction of the flesh so that the spirit may be saved..."
 - o "Flesh" = "fleshly lusts"
 - Paul turns him or her over to Satan so that Satan's torment can wake him up and turn him away from sin
 - Satan is often an unwitting ally in God's good plans!
 - When you cut a believer off from other Christians, the hope is that it wakes him or her up to the stupidity of their sin
 - o "Save" = "deliver"
 - Many would say deliverance from hell
 - However this contradicts clear teaching of the Bible
 - Salvation is a free gift from God received by faith alone
 - Better option: repentance **delivers from further sin and discipline**
 - o **The point is that the reason to discipline a sinning believer is LOVE!**
 - We do it for their good – to deliver them from the fleshly lusts that are leading them down dark and destructive paths
 - James 5:19-20 – To love is to confront
 - Prov 27:6 – "Faithful are the wounds of a friend"

Here's what this passage means for you today...

- You must **BE ACCOUNTABLE**
 - o We are accountable to the church body for everything we do
 - o We are accountable to each other and to elders in every single area of life
 - o Accountability is GOOD – it protects us from sin and instills a godly fear in us
 - o So let us **embrace accountability!**
 - Confess our sins to one another
- **Hold ONE ANOTHER ACCOUNTABLE**
 - o We're RESPONSIBLE to confront one another when we see unrepentant sin
 - o DON'T STAY SILENT – makes you as guilty as the guy committing incest