

# UNITED to guard the fellowship

## 1 Corinthians 5

**MPS: The Church practices discipline in spiritual covenant to guard the unity of Christian fellowship.**

**OBJ: Every person can understand the practice of church discipline by four applications.**

**INTRO** We are in a new series entitled UNITED: Together in the Gospel, a study of 1 Corinthians. IN this series we are laboring for one thing, to live as a people united in the gospel of Jesus Christ. **Unity fuels God's people for kingdom mission in the world.**

### READ 1 Cor 5

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

*<sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, <sup>5</sup>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.*

*<sup>6</sup>Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>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.*

*<sup>9</sup>I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? <sup>13</sup>God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."*

**TRANS** 1 Corinthians 5 highlights another item at the top of the modern church's "IIR" list (issues we Ignore and Reject). 1 Corinthians 5 provides a case study of church discipline. This is not a comprehensive treatment of the topic, but it does provide a right response to open sin in the church body. Matthew 18 instructs that discipline should begin long before what occurs in 1 Corinthians 5 is forced upon the church, so that even when one Christian sees their brother or sister in sin loving discipline is active. **Church discipline begins in personal relationships that are committed to Christian obedience first.**

Church discipline that is faithful to the whole counsel of God involves several stages, all designed to produce faith-driven repentance and reconciliation. But, when faith is rejected and hardness remains, it always culminates before the whole church where authority is seated. Problems never go away when ignored. And sin cannot be forgiven or cleansed when confession and repentance are not practiced. Our challenge today is that the American church rejects authority or any claim of authority that is other than individual. So with that in mind, here we go...

**MPS: The Church practices discipline in spiritual covenant to guard the unity of Christian fellowship.**

**Disclaimer:** IF you believe church discipline is just another opportunity for pastors, or the church, to beat up on people, then I beg you to listen to this message. Listen not out of personal experience or pain from past hurts, but from the Spirit as He illumines the scriptures today. Listen not because what the church has often done is right, but because without corrections we lack a God-ordained practice to strengthen the church's witness and impact in the world. **Church discipline guards against any individual ruling or ruining the church, while all live under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. A return to Biblical leadership in the church depends upon re-instating a biblical church discipline to the congregation.**

**Paul aims directly at a big problem in the Corinthian church.** “Sexual immorality” is a general term that refers to any form of extra-biblical sexual activity outside of marriage between a man and a woman. In the Corinthian church a man was having sex with his father’s wife. We don’t know who the woman was, exactly. It wasn’t the man’s mother or Paul would have stated that fact. Nor does Paul directly address the man. We do know that it was a relationship of incestuous sin. And, we know it was strongly regarded as wrong because Paul states that not even the pagans, non-believers, considered it normal or acceptable. [Regardless, the Corinthian church made allowance for a sinful practice that even the culture considered unacceptable.](#)

**Paul pinpoints the real problem in this situation as the church’s response to the man’s sin.** Paul says, “*And you are arrogant!*” They are puffed up with self-conceit. Their arrogance has rationalized why this man’s sin, that not even pagans accept as normal, has been accepted by the church. It’s problematic for the church when people live in open, unrepentant sin. But a much bigger problem is when Christians accept or tolerate open sin because they’ve arrogantly justified it. Arrogance is always sinful self-serving, whether it accepts sin to justify personal transgressions or to avoid having to deal with sin. [Pride is the mother of all sin, giving birth to, nurturing and coddling every form of wickedness.](#)

**Mourning, not arrogant acceptance, is a Christian’s right response to sin.** Christians respond to sin in accordance to what God’s Word calls it, death. When Christians respond in arrogance, we deny God’s Word and condemn the world to justify separation from “those sinners” while condoning sin within the church. Paul directs the Corinthians to remove this man from the church. [When Christians chose to live in open sin rather than gospel obedience, the church is responsible to relate to them in their sin to demonstrate the truth that accords with their living.](#)

**Paul states that by the Spirit he is present with them in spirit.** Authority in the church doesn’t arrive or leave with an individual. Paul pronounced judgment not by his own authority or definition, but by confessing what God’s Word had already stated in the power of Holy Spirit. [Authority remains in the church when God’s Word is confessed and obeyed through the leading power of God’s Holy Spirit.](#)

Paul directs the Corinthian church, “*deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.*” This is, without doubt, a very difficult phrase to understand and action to undertake. However, we can say a couple things about it to help us understand. Paul is stating that there should be a noticeable exclusion from the church in the distinct activities of Christian communion, the Lord’s Supper and meals, and community fellowship where Christians gather for explicit gospel ministry. Every person is not to shun and isolate the man in individual encounters outside the church. But neither are they to continue relating to him in denial of his sin as if nothing has happened. Exclusion from Christian ministry returns this man to Satan’s worldly domain, to recognize the vainness and vileness of his practices that oppose Christ. And, entrust his eternal soul only to God. [The aim of all gospel ministry seeks to destroy the flesh and further entrust our lives to God’s Kingdom rule in Jesus Christ.](#) There is a limit in gospel ministry at which the people of God can do no more. At this point, it is sin for us to strive on without ultimate trust in God. [When the church’s gospel labors fail to produce a repentant turn in a brother or sister, the Spirit leads to turn the reality of the offending person’s life over to the eternal purposes of God’s faithful hand.](#)

**Paul explains that discipline provides a demonstration of Christ’s purifying sacrifice.** He uses the illustration of dough and leaven. The whole lump is affected by the smallest amount of leaven. The congregation must act to remove the “leaven” of sin. This action guards the whole congregation in accordance with the work Jesus Christ, the Passover lamb, accomplished on the cross for salvation. In other words, the congregation’s discipline reflects the atoning work of Christ to cleanse from sin. When the church refuses to practice discipline by faith in Jesus’ atoning work, all worship and ministry is infected with the leaven of malice and evil. [Jesus’ atonement applied through discipline brings sincerity and truth to the church’s worship and ministry.](#)

**Finally, Paul clarifies that his instruction should not be mis-applied to pervert the church’s mission.** These instructions do not guide the church in how to relate to all people in the world. Christians don’t judge the world because it already lives under God’s judgment. [Sectarianism that separates Christians from relating to the world is never a faithful expression of gospel mission.](#) Christians judge fellow Christians within the church as an act of faithful confession in

accordance to God's Word. In other words, we call sin what God's Word says it is. Church discipline aims to carry out in practical application what Christ's sacrifice on the cross eternally accomplished for those who believe in His name. When we strive to do more, we disobey God by substituting our own wisdom and efforts. When we do less, we deny the soul's eternal worth and any need to entrust our souls to God's care at all. [Church discipline serves as a congregational confession that the church is limited in what we can know and do to discern the state of a person's eternal salvation.](#)

**APPL** People in the church who remain rebellious and hard in open sin should be removed from the church for the sake of the church because of Jesus' atoning sacrifice. This principle applies personally as well. People and practices that repeatedly influence you to turn / walk away from faithfully obeying Jesus should be ruthlessly purged from your life. This principle should be applied comprehensively to your life, including how you think and what you believe (confessions and convictions), how you relate to and treat others (attitudes and affections), and how you act (actions). And, when people repent in faith we must be ready to welcome them back in, both congregationally and personally. [Faithful church discipline begins in the personal life of every Christian, acknowledging that we cannot grow and mature on our own but by the transforming work of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the power of Holy Spirit through the congregation.](#)

**MPS: The Church practices discipline in spiritual covenant to guard the unity of Christian fellowship.**

**OBJ:** [Four applications](#) help us faithfully align our lives and the church's practices with God's Word.

**First, humble confidence to obey God's Word is the church's / Christian's right response to sin, not arrogant acceptance that ignores and condones it.**

Church discipline labors for redemption and reconciliation with God, ultimately, and His people, practically, through the atoning work of Jesus Christ. It is never a commissioned 'sin hunt' to sniff out every occurrence or to 'kick people out' of the church. [Church discipline simply applies the gospel to one who claims to be a Christian and enjoys all the blessings of Christian communion and fellowship, but lives unrepentant in sin and disobedience to God's Word, thereby denying the power of the gospel.](#)

Compassion toward sin, and toward the one who claims Christ but remains in open sin, is a denial of Christ's cross and an abomination against God. [When the church turns a blind eye to sin, we end up justifying actions that even the unbelieving world doesn't accept.](#)

**APPL BEWARE, Christian!** When you think "little" of sin you show greater compassion for the damnable activity and "actioner" in sin than for the innocent Christ that was crucified on the cross. We are WAY TOO comfortable talking about people in a way that destroys them (gossip, slander, malice, etc), either intentionally or unintentionally, with NO intent to help them or do them good. And WAY TOO SILENT to speak to someone when they are destroying their lives by living in open sin. This is a functional and practical denial of the center of the Christian faith, the cross of Jesus Christ.

**Church discipline guards the congregation to remain faithful to God's Word.** Discipline as a "guard" is put in place before an attack arises. When discipline is put in place and practiced, every Christian is encouraged to live in humble obedience to God's Word by faith through the power of Holy Spirit. And, they know they have the encouragement and accountability of the whole congregation to help them. [Christians live with humble confidence in God's Word by the power of Holy Spirit to act by faith when life moves beyond our control or ability.](#)

[First, humble confidence to obey God's Word is the church's / Christian's right response to sin, not arrogant acceptance that ignores and condones it.](#)

**Second, the assembled body of Christ holds authority and responsibility to labor for the redemption of the sinner by disciplining sin.**

**The assembled church body holds Biblical, Spirit-led authority.** This means she holds a responsibility to each person to act faithfully for the whole. Paul takes action, since the Corinthian church would not. But his action could not be individual. He was required to lead the congregation through a process that was the right response to such a sin, even though they had failed to do this, or 'feel this', on their own. [The congregation cannot, and must not, relinquish to pastors what God's Word places firmly within her realm.](#)

**Church discipline ALWAYS aims to guard the purity and unity of the church by focusing on redemption, not expulsion.** But that doesn't mean expulsion never happens. The Church cannot tolerate turning a blind eye to sin among us. Jesus died to conquer sin. When Christians live like there's nothing we can do about sin, we bear a false testimony about what Jesus' death means.

Discipline that culminates in removing a person from the congregation provides a public acknowledgement that "we can do nothing more for you and your sin, but we can show you where sin leads and trust that Jesus can save you." God, in a similar way, does this with people in Rom 1 in order to point them to the gospel. "*Deliver to Satan for destruction of the flesh*" does not mean God loses control or Jesus cannot save. It does mean that we, the church, relinquish any control that we might think we have in acknowledging that only Jesus saves. [Churches that refuse to practice discipline preach a false gospel by portraying a useless, fake crucifixion and proclaiming a false testimony of God in the world that says, "God overreacted to sin when He killed Jesus."](#) Why would the world want anything to do with God if sin isn't bad enough to deal with and love isn't strong enough to act, no matter the cost!

Second, the assembled body of Christ holds authority and responsibility to labor for the redemption of the sinner by disciplining sin.

**Third, the church practices discipline 'to make visible the reality' of what Jesus accomplished on the cross.**

Expelling a person from the congregation is the church body stating, "we don't forgive or cleanse from sin, but Christ already has. We urge you to trust Him and turn back to us." When the church ignores or condones sin, arrogance produces fear, anxiety and unbelief, that results in malice, envy and evil, and all in denial of Christ's cross. [When the church trusts in Jesus, they obey His Word to act upon what He has already accomplished on the cross in sincerity and truth.](#)

**Once a person is removed from the church body, they are not shunned and damned to eternal shame.** They are treated as an unbeliever ruled by Satan, and no longer granted the same privileges of fellowship and communion they knew as a faithful member in covenant with the Church body. [Actions from individual Christians within the church should align with the action of the church body in how they relate to an expelled believer. Otherwise, their actions bear a false testimony.](#)

**A little leaven leavens the whole lump.** No matter how small your sin, it's affecting your whole. A little bit of tolerance infects the whole for sin's full damnation. [Discipline, both in personal and congregational life, leads us to purge from any and all sin as Holy Spirit convicts so we can become more like Jesus.](#)

Third, the church practices discipline 'to make visible the reality' of what Jesus accomplished on the cross.

**Fourth, church discipline demonstrates faith in Christ's cross to rightly relate to all by obedience to God's Word.**

The church doesn't judge the world because unbelievers already live under God's judgment. THIS is why Christians proclaim the gospel in word and deed. [Christians judge sin IN the church as an act of love to guard one another from sin's damnation.](#)

**Two wrong extremes are often applied in Biblical judgment.** First, Christians sometimes judge the world to justify separating from them. Second, Christians sometimes allow open sin in the church so we don't have to alienate a person or cause discomfort for ourselves. No one gets removed in an effort to protect the church's "perceived perfection". But

removing people through discipline when necessary is an act to regard Christ's sacrifice and righteousness in the church. "Judging sin in the church" and "removing a person in sin" means trusting God's Word to align the present reality of life with the eternal reality of His truth.

**Church discipline sometimes culminates in "removal" because the essence of sin is separation from God.** And on earth, separation from God's people due to habitual, unrepentant sin demands removal from community with His people through discipline to recognize sin's isolation and to long for fellowship of the saints as a blessing of relationship with God. OR, it recognizes one as an un-believer and in need of salvation. Otherwise, how condemning to minister "in the name of Jesus" in such a way that compounds upon all who participate the very condemnation He died to remove. **A church that refuses to practice discipline can only cultivate a congregation of people that coddle unconfessed sin in life.**

Disregarding Biblical teaching about church discipline rejects Jesus' sacrifice on the cross as the 'Lamb of God', just like some disregarded God's direction to paint their door post with the lamb's sacrificial blood in Egypt. Death is always the result of disobedience to God's Word.

Fourth, church discipline demonstrates faith in Jesus' cross to rightly relate to all by obedience to God's Word.

**APPL** IF God disciplined Christ for our sin, and He did (Rom 3:25; Heb 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:1), and IF God disciplines the children that he loves, and He does (Heb 12:6, 10), then the church must know that discipline is a Biblical, God-ordained practice, never optional, for the health, well-being and salvation of the church.

**Church discipline is hard, which is why the practice is mostly lost today.** That's also why God never put the responsibility for it in the hands of one person, or even a small number of people. Pastors hold a specific responsibility to lead the church through discipline, just as every covenant member also holds responsibility to participate. When we live without faith, we deny our responsibility. When we deny our responsibility, we reject God's authority. **The authority for church discipline that removes a person rests in the gathered assembly of the whole local church.**

**TRANS** So, how should I, a Christian desiring to honor God, respond to today's message?

**First, dare to envision something with me.** Dare to envision a people so committed to spiritual growth and maturity, a Biblical transformation in Christ-likeness, that you willingly submitted yourself to engage with them, inviting them into your life, to have a knowledge of your life, to speak into your life in such a way that it actually made a difference in the way you lived.

WHAT IF...among the local church there was a smaller group who knew you more intimately than the rest, that spent more time with you beyond only the congregational gatherings, that listened to more of your desires, struggles, frustrations and joys, that prayed with you, laughed or cried with you, and that walked with you together in life?

WHAT IF...you embraced this smaller group of people, not because they were perfect or better than you, but because you trusted that Jesus was working through them IN and FOR you. And, because you trusted that Jesus was working THROUGH you in and for each of them. You trusted Jesus that they were a voice of godly, biblical wisdom and counsel for your life, as well as gospel reminders and encouragement for you.

WHAT IF...you had a Christian that you knew as a brother or sister, that regularly encouraged you to walk by faith in righteousness and obedience to God's Word. And, you knew and trusted that they would come to you, even pursue you, if you strayed into sin? You may think, "I won't do that." But we all know our hearts are prone to wander.

WHAT IF...today, you committed to BE more of the kind of Christian that you know you need in your life, for someone else in the church.

"WHAT IF...?" scenarios that we dare envision can only become reality as we each commit to invest more deeply in one

another because of the one who dared to die for each of us. This is what Jesus calls us to and leads us in. **One reason people don't trust their pastors or other Christians as the church today is because they have too little of themselves invested in the church to be able to trust them. Christian, you can't be loosely connected to the church and be deeply committed to other people or your own Christian growth and maturity.**

Until you humble yourself in faith to trust and follow Jesus in this way, in ever-increasing & investing relationships for spiritual transformation, among the local church body, the local church will always be a limited source of spiritual well-being for you and a growing source of frustration for you.

**Second, if you are serious about becoming like Jesus, then you must get serious about obeying the way Jesus said we become like Him.**

**APPL** Covenant Membership is a Biblical expression of the church. You can study LifePoint's covenant membership by attending NAVigation Series this month. You can study LifePoint's covenant membership by attending NAVigation Series this month.

**APPL** Third, every Christian should ask of themselves these questions.

- ? **Am I in covenant membership, submitted to the church and following the pastors at LPC?**
  - The person who rejects covenant membership denies local church authority, personal accountability and responsibility for other Christians.
  - There is no Biblical reflection, let alone any explicit teaching of light, that allows a Christian to live in isolation from the local church.
- ? **Is there any area of my life that I know is not submitted to Jesus?**
- ? **Is there any area of life where I am living in open sin, though I may be hiding it from many / most people in my life / church?**
  - It is possible to live in open sin and stay hidden. But know this, that sin will find you out.