

The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians

Immorality and Discipline in the Church

1 Corinthians 5:1-13

1. The Need for Discipline (v.1)

Every Christian is called to be holy (Matt 5:13-16; 1 Pet. 1:16), and all believers will eventually be holy (Rom. 8:30; 1 John 3:2). Christians are given both the desire and the opportunity to resist the temptation to sin and to live in faithfulness to Christ (Gal. 5:17; 1 Pet. 5:9; cf. 1 Cor. 10:13-14; 1 John 2:1). In addition to the factious divisions (1 Cor. 1:11), Paul had been informed that there was an individual in the church who was engaging in incestuous immorality, and a proper response by the local church, though different than if this were done under the Law in the nation of Israel (Lev. 18:6, 8, 29), is required.

2. The Duty to Discipline (v.2)

Discipline is a vital part of training in godliness (Eph 6:4; cf. Dt. 6:7ff; Heb. 12:7-11). The ministry of a faithful local church will include both teaching what God has commanded (Matt. 28:20; cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17) and correcting believer's sinful actions and beliefs (2 Tim. 4:1-2). A faithful local church has the obligation to discipline those within its midst who do not live in obedience to the Word (Matt. 18:15-20; cf. 1 John 2:3-6; Jude 17-23).

3. The Method of Discipline (vs.3-5a)

The necessary disciplinary action of the local church responding to the ongoing and unrepentant sinful activity of a member of the congregation is expulsion (v.2b). Both the investigation and confrontation stages of church discipline are to be done carefully and judiciously (cf. Matt 18:15-17). The desire of all who are involved at any stage of the disciplinary process is for the repentance and restoration of the sinning brother or sister (cf. Matt. 18:15, 17). If the sinning brother remains obstinate regarding his sinful behavior, he is to be expelled from the community (cf. Matt. 18:17b). The local church is to render this verdict (cf. Matt. 18:17) and from that point on is to interact with him on the basis of evangelizing an unbeliever and not confronting a sinning brother.

4. The Reason for Discipline (v.5b-8)

When a local church engages in careful biblical discipline of its members, up to and including their expulsion from the fellowship, for sins which the individual has committed, it is exhibiting its faithfulness to Christ.

A. Why is the Sinner Disciplined?

I. Initial Encounter

A Christian is able to be confronted by another brother or sister in Christ on account of any sin that is committed (cf. Matt 18:15a; 1 Cor. 5:11; 2 Thess 3:6-13).

II. Final Expulsion

Whether the sin which brought about the initial discipline encounter is as sensational as incest or as mundane as anger, the common sin which results in a person being removed from fellowship is impenitence (cf. Matt. 18:15b).

B. Why Does the Church Discipline?

I. Obedience to God's Command (v.5b; cf. Matt. 18:17; 2 Thess. 3:6,14-15)

The local church is to be diligent in confronting and dealing with the sin within the fellowship as an act of obedience to the Lord.

II. Love for the Sinner (v.5b)

Rebuking a sinning brother is a sign of true care (Prov. 27:6). Striving through adversity to help a sinning brother see his sin and repent before God is a labor of love shown to the sinning brother (cf. 2 Sam. 12:7; Ps. 32:1-6). If the sinning member of the congregation refuses to repent, the loving hope in expelling him from the congregation is that he might be brought to repentance by having to endure the natural consequences of his continued sin.

III. Holiness of the Local Church (vs.6-8)

Leaven is almost always used with reference to sin (cf. Matt. 13:33), but it always is used to illustrate relentless permeation. The only way to prevent leaven from affecting an entire lump of dough is to utterly remove the leaven.

5. The Sphere of Discipline (vs.9-13)