Review of Church Discipline

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Introduction:

A. We will begin today by looking at the character of true lovers of God and disciples of Jesus Christ, and we will use Psalm 27:4 to define what we mean by these terms. Here is David's life verse for our great goal!

B. This past Wednesday evening we studied the glorious and intimate relationship between God and David, and we can only think ourselves in his company, if we have a great jealousy and desire for the house of the Lord.

C. Phinehas purged Israel and stopped God's judgment (Num 25:1-15), and we must do the same by His rules; and it is valuable to see that Phinehas was very different from the rest of the grieving and praying crowd.

D. Israel lost 36 men in a battle against the little city of Ai before Joshua purged Israel of Achan, and it is important to note that God considered the whole nation guilty until they executed the sinner (Joshua 7:1-26).

E. The house of the Lord of the New Testament is the local church (Eph 2:19-22; I Tim 3:15; I Cor 3:16-17).

F. Love for Jesus Christ and His house is shown by jealousy for its purity and hatred against any and all sins.

G. Jesus Christ is very particular about the character and quality and purity of His churches (Rev 2:2,6,14-15).

H. A mark of the true church that reduces true churches to a very small minority is zealous church discipline.

I. Church discipline is not an option of the New Testament – it is a plain and obvious doctrine and practice.

J. We cannot expect God's blessing on our church without obeying the orders for discipline (Psalm 144:11-15).

I Corinthians 5

5:1 Paul publicly identified a horrible personal and sexual sin occurring in the church.

A. The rumor had correctly spread that Corinth had a serious fornicator in their membership.

B. This sin is obviously known by many, for it is commonly reported, or known by a majority.

C. Paul's use of "common report" indicates that many or most of the church knew about it.

D. This was no longer a private sin known only by a few that could be dealt with privately by spiritual brethren (Galatians 6:1-2; James 5:19-20).

E. The sin was a heinous variation of fornication – a man was sleeping with his father's wife.

F. Fornication in general and this fornication in particular are wrong (Genesis 35:22; 49:4; Leviticus 18:8; 20:11; Deuteronomy 22:30; 27:20).

G. As he wrote the Ephesians, such sins were not to be named even once among saints (Ep 5:3).

H. Though the Gentiles, and Corinthians particularly, were lascivious, this sin exceeded them.

5:2 The church was puffed up in pride rather than mourning its sin and getting rid of it.

A. Rather than grieve in anger for this sin, the Corinthians excused it in self-righteousness.
B. Consider their high opinion of their spiritual gifts, false notion of love, and lax discipline.
C. When a man is being blessed, it is easy for him to think God overlooks sin (Ps 50:21-23).
D. They should have been incensed that one naming the name of Christ was sinning this way.
E. The holy zeal of Phinehas is a character trait missing for the most part today (Num 25:1-15).
F. They should have already sought for his removal from the church, even by divine judgment.
G. Rather than mourning for the terribleness of sin, they were proudly thinking themselves fine.

5:3 Paul had already judged what ought to be done, regardless of his absence from the church.

A. The situation did not need a fact-finding mission or committee meeting – it needed judgment.
B. Paul gave his judgment quickly and authoritatively, as if he had been present at Corinth.
C. There was not laboring with the sinning brother, for the nature of the sin was beyond that.
D. He was guilty of a public and scandalous offence; therefore Paul could judge it easily.
E. There is no question concerning repentance, for this public offence must be judged severely, regardless of what repentance the sinner might say he felt in his heart.

5:4 Church judgment is executed by the whole church in and by the authority of Jesus Christ.

A. All actions private and public should be done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Col 3:17).
B. Paul mentions His glorious name twice to establish the authority by which judgment is done.
C. Contrary to any ministerial abuse of power, Paul directs the whole church to the action.
D. Church judgment is not by the pastor or a committee, but by the whole church in assembly.
E. They were to proceed as if he were there, which he was in spirit (intent and power), not body.

5:5 Church judgment is turning a person out to Satan for the desired salvation of their spirit.

A. By congregational action in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, they did the following work.
B. Church members are turned over to Satan from the fellowship and protection of the church.
C. They are turned over to him that by such punishment their sinful flesh might be destroyed.
D. There is protection in the church of Jesus Christ, and exclusion puts one out from this safety.
E. This is not a miraculous sign or wonder of sending devils to possess a man to destroy his life.
F. Consider Job. God had him hedged about from Satan, but then Satan was given the privilege to torment him. Job's life was pretty rough after that, but we may assume he lost any pride!

G. Consider David. God had him hedged about from Satan, but then Satan was given the privilege to move him to number Israel. We may safely assume David walked more humbly.
H. Consider Peter. God had him hedged about from Satan, but then Satan was given the privilege to move him to deny Jesus. We may safely assume Peter was more humble after it.
I. The condition of our spirit in the day of the Lord Jesus should be of great concern to us (1:8; II Cor 5:9-11; Eccl 12:13-14; Phil 1:10; I Thes 3:12-13; I Thes 5:23; II Pet 3:14; I John 2:28).
J. Church judgment does not save souls in any legal way, but it can save men practically and prepare them for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, especially with prayer and admonition.

5:6 The confident and haughty view of the Corinthians was not right due to sin among them.

A. The Corinthians thought very highly of themselves, as the church at Laodicea (Rev 3:17).
B. They had many spiritual gifts, teachers, and new doctrines; they did not worry about sin.
C. But such glorying is not good, for they had sin in their midst that corrupted the whole church.
D. But such glorying is not good, so let us always come confessing and asking, not glorying.
E. Many churches glory about and over sin today by talking about the love and mercy of Jesus.
F. Many churches glory about and over sin today by basking in numerical or financial growth.
G. Men forget the nature of God – infinitely seeing all details – and He is a holy perfectionist.
H. A church cannot come to Him with only one thing wrong, if they know about that one thing.
I. David had one impressive parade to move the ark, but God found fault with his methods.
J. Asa had one impressive revival, and God mercifully overlooked the remaining high places.
K. Paul illustrated sin by the power of leaven, or yeast, to affect or infect the whole lump.
L. Sin is compared to leaven, or yeast, or a canker, in other passages (Gal 5:9; II Tim 2:17).

5:7 Due to the relationship with Jesus Christ, the Passover Lamb, they should remove leaven.

A. Paul continued his metaphor by telling them to get rid of the leaven and be a new lump.
B. The Corinthians were unleavened legally by Christ, but they must be unleavened practically.
C. Jesus Christ fulfills the Passover figure and type, so they should match the unleavened bread.
D. It is our custom to use unleavened bread, for we know that is what our Lord and apostles did.
E. But the concern of a church should not be unleavened bread, but an unleavened congregation.
F. Jesus told his disciples to avoid the leaven of Herod and the Pharisees – hypocrisy (Mk 8:15).

5:8 The communion feast should be kept with unleavened bread and a sinless congregation.

A. A church must be dedicated to keeping itself pure from any leaven of malice or wickedness.
B. A church must be dedicated to keeping itself as a body of members in sincerity and truth.

C. Paul uses “feast” for communion, as it is the N.T. Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
D. The unleavened bread of the Passover is best fulfilled by the sinless lives of the congregation.
E. Sin and sinners, such as the one identified here, should be put out to keep the lump pure.
F. The Lord’s Supper is the focal point of church membership, which ought to be kept pure.
G. Only closed communion can possibly allow the nature of church judgment taught here.

5:9 Paul had taught them by a written epistle earlier to avoid dangerous worldly associations.

A. Christians are not to socialize unnecessarily or dangerously with fornicators (Eph 5:11-12).
B. Fornication was common by inclusion of it in the rules from Jerusalem (Ac 15:20,29; 21:25).
C. Fornication was common by its frequent mention (I Corinthians 6:18; 7:2; 10:8; II Cor 12:21; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5; I Thess 4:3-7; Rev 2:14,20-21).
D. There was a precedent already established for the Corinthians to avoid worldly fornicators.
E. Paul allowed social company or eating with unbelievers (I Cor 10:27), but public fornicators pressed Christian liberty beyond the lawful to that not expedient (I Cor 6:12; 10:23).
F. It is the yoking, fellowship, communion, or agreement with sinners that Paul condemned (II Cor 6:14-17), for such company is contradictory (Amos 3:3) and dangerous (I Cor 15:33).

5:10 Paul’s rule of company with worldly fornicators was not absolute, or they could not live.

A. If his warning were taken too seriously, they would have to leave the world to avoid contact.
B. Yet we know that friendship with the world is a very dangerous thing (I Cor 15:33; Jas 4:4).
C. Solomon warned about the danger of ungodly friendships (Pr 1:10,15; 4:14-15; 22:24-25).
D. We must rub elbows and do business with the world, but we do not need to fraternize.
E. We do not look for isolated property on an island somewhere to escape the world altogether.

5:11 Church members should not socialize with brothers excluded for large sins against God.

A. By this epistle and at this time and to address this and similar situations, Paul draws a stricter rule against fellowship and socializing with brethren who engage in these sins.
B. The saints were allowed to eat with unbelievers, if it was expedient and safe to do so (10:27).
C. Paul draws a stricter rule for the treatment of excluded brethren than for worldly sinners.
D. We understand “keeping company” and “not to eat” to describe friendly socializing here.
    1. Keeping company is having companions of that sort, or friendly relations (Ps 119:63).
    2. Paul is using a parallelism, which compares keeping company with worldly sinners (5:9).
    3. It is hard to imagine he wrote earlier to warn against the Lord’s Supper with the world!
    4. Keeping company is used to describe social fellowship (Acts 10:28 cp Galatians 2:12).
    5. In the other church judgment text, it has no context of the Lord’s Supper (II Thess 3:14).

6. If we limit the issue to the Lord's Table only, why the strong warning of II Thess 3:15.
7. The apostle elsewhere indicates avoidance and withdrawal (Rom 16:17-18; II Thess 3:6).
8. Jesus taught a man rejecting church judgment should be treated harshly (Matt 18:15-17).
9. The treatment of a fornicator did not include comfort, love, or forgiveness (II Cor 2:6-8).
10. The treatment was such that it was about to bury him in overmuch sorrow (II Cor 2:6-8).
11. We understand Paul to have cut him off from the Lord's Table as sinful leaven (5:6-8).
12. The eating here is just what you think it is – eating! Something they did with unbelievers.
13. But they were not to eat with excluded brethren, who were turned out for excludable sins.
14. The limit on this avoidance, withdrawal, or shunning is plainly stated (II Thess 3:15).
15. Continuing social fellowship did not make enough difference and punishment for sinners.

E. The demonstrative word "such" in contexts like this link many sins together by association.
   1. In this passage we have the general rule for all other public sins comparable to the fornication specific to this case at Corinth. This is how we argue out from a general rule.
   2. By combining lists with the identifier "such," we may tally a list of over forty comparable sins to guide our judgment (Rom 1:28-32; I Cor 6:9-11; Gal 5:19-21; Eph 5:3-7).
   3. By combining these lists, which God considers comparable sins, our self-righteous rankings are exposed as deceitful and ungodly in the sight of a holy God.

F. Then we can add all the offences by apostolic authority (II Thess 2:15 cp Heb 10:25; etc.).

5:12 Church judgment extends only to those within the church, not those outside the church.

A. Paul, though an apostle of Jesus Christ, did not have jurisdiction over sinners in the world.

B. He appealed to the Corinthians that it was their right and duty to judge their membership.

C. Paul's use of "also" is simply referring to the classes of sinners – those within and without.

D. Joining a church gives it the right to judge and exclude you, if you sin excludable offences.

E. There is a very real difference between those within and without a local church – church membership is a very distinct relationship based on mutual commitment and discipline.

F. Visitors from Philippi were strangers to the commitment and communion at Corinth, and the church at Corinth had no way of knowing their condition or judging them.

G. Communion is open, close, or closed. We keep communion closed to our membership only.

5:13 God judges those outside the church, and the church should judge those within the church.

A. We do not have to worry about those outside the church, for the Lord will judge every one.

B. Contrast this with the Old Testament, where the mandate was to destroy all the Canaanites.

C. However, let no man think that a church without knowledge of his sins or practicing lax church judgment can protect him. See God's judgment in the church (11:29-32; Acts 5:1-11).

D. The Lord Jesus Christ has limited our sphere of authority to a single local congregation.
E. With this arrangement, and our duty for the purity of the church, sinners must be put outside.
F. When a church puts a sinning member away from themselves, he is then in God's hands.
G. God told Israel to stand back and let judgment fall on the sinners (Numbers 16:21,24,26,45).
H. Paul's summary judgment is very simple – get the wicked fornicator out of your church now!
I. Satan is the god of this world (II Cor 4:4) and moving only by God's permission (Job 1:12; 2:6), so we find judgment includes delivering such sinners to Satan as described above (5:5).
J. It is in the world of hopeless satanic delusion that God's true children may be granted repentance to acknowledging the truth and deliverance from their captor (II Tim 2:25-26).
K. This verse neatly concludes Paul's concise and thorough explanation of judging a fornicator.
L. We can read the blessed recovery of this fornicator in Paul's next epistle (II Cor 2:6-8).

Second Thessalonians 3:6-15

3:6 Holding apostolic tradition is of extreme importance and is enforced by church discipline.

A. Disorder in a life or church is not following God's due order of things (I Chron 15:13).
B. The only times "disorderly" appears in the Bible are all within this chapter (6,7,11).
C. Here is a commandment. It is not a good idea, a zealous prerogative, or an opinion.
D. One of the chief marks of a New Testament church of Jesus Christ is church discipline, which is quickly evident reading the history of the Novationists, Cathari (Puritans), etc.
E. Rome and her daughters, including even infected Baptists, despise and ignore this law; except, of course, when it applies to Bible believers desiring to follow sound doctrine.
F. In these perilous days of powerless religion, church discipline is ignored (II Tim 3:1-5).
G. This commandment is in the name – by the royal authority and order – of Jesus Christ.
H. Opinions of this rule being harsh are twisted – there is a place called hell for sinners!
I. See the lengthy and detailed sermon outline "Church Discipline" dated March 11, 2001.
J. Remember the importance of "due order" in the life of Cain, Moses, Korah, Nadab, Eli, Saul, David, Uzziah, and others. God does not play games with His commandments.
K. Observe that the apostolic tradition here is the same as the traditions of earlier (2:15).
L. Withdrawing is church discipline, exclusion from the Lord's Table and social company.
M. God's order for things is serious, and it extends to what we might consider to be minor.
N. Our treatment of God's laws either contends with the wicked or praises them (Pr 28:4).
O. Compromise here marks us as heretics, sinners, and not the peculiar, holy saints of God.
P. If the Bible is true, then we want to do all we can for the destruction of the sinful flesh.
Q. More specifics of this discipline will be identified before we close the chapter (14-15).
R. This act of corporate judgment follows the private efforts of Gal 6:1-2 and Jas 5:19-20.

S. The “therefore” of 2:15 puts this tradition in a context of Rome’s spiritual adultery.
T. Church discipline is limited by our text to apostolic tradition by the words “of us.”
U. We complain about our nation’s lax penal system, but here we can practice godliness.
V. Men will fuss for favorite doctrines and against hated heresies, but they often balk here.
W. We have had sermons regarding “Forgotten Sins” to learn what offends our holy God.
X. Corporate action is intended by “ye” (plural) and “yourselves” (plural) executing judgment against the singular “every brother” and “he.”
Y. Every brother that walks disorderly – even if family, friend, or offence you do not hate.

3:7 Paul and fellows had given them an orderly example of apostolic tradition about work.

A. The principal matter of disorderly conduct in Thessalonica was professional negligence.
B. But the apostle and the other teachers had given them a sterling example of hard work.
C. The matter worthy of church judgment here is that of professional slothfulness (3:11).
D. The ministry is bound to exemplify orderly conduct in their lives (I Tim 4:12; I Pet 5:3).

3:8 These ministers had carefully conducted themselves to correct these slothful brethren.

A. Paul and companions did not eat any man’s bread for nothing – they earned it by labor.
B. They worked night and day – preaching and laboring – to avoid any financial needs.
C. There were not a financial burden to anyone in Thessalonica, but earned their keep.
D. Paul had the power to collect from them, but the example was more important to him.
E. There is no pattern here for ministers or churches to follow in robbing their ministers.
F. Paul had reminded them of this exemplary conduct in the first epistle (I Thess 2:9).

3:9 Though having authority to collect from them, Paul chose to give them a holy example.

A. As an apostle of Christ, Paul had authority to collect wages from them (I Cor 9:3-7).
B. Even the Law of Moses taught the same by protecting working oxen (I Cor 9:8-14).
C. Jesus taught God’s rule that the laborer is worthy of his reward (Luke 10:7; I Tim 5:18).
D. It is perfectly sensible that men working carnally trade for spiritual things (Gal 6:6).
E. But wise and caring Paul would never let a lesson be lost when needed (I Cor 9:12-17).

3:10 Paul had laid down the law when with them that slothful men should be starved.

A. If you think this is too harsh, then you have a mind twisted by humanistic socialists.
B. Slothful believers are a shame to Christ’s religion. They should be the hardest workers.
C. If a man will not work, then the just punishment is to let him feel the pains of starvation.

D. If a man will not work, the fastest way to teach him is to let him starve (Prov 16:26).
E. Many parents violate this rule every year of life with children: they can learn chores.
F. Sluggards, those who did not work earlier, should beg and starve in harvest (Pr 20:4).
G. Christians are only bound to share for real, meaningful, serious, and legitimate needs.
H. Giving or supporting the slothful, foolish, or negligent is to subsidize sin and folly.
I. Financial foolishness is deserving of equal judgment by the mind of God (Prov 18:9).

3:11 Paul had been told that there were slothful brethren in this church who would not work.

A. It is not whispering, slandering, or backbiting to tell authorities about sin (I Cor 1:11).
B. Would you call the police to report a murder? Do your children tell you about theft?
C. This obvious exception does not modify at all the condemnation of ungodly tattling.
D. The disorderly conduct of this place is being a busybody rather than working hard.
E. There were men lying out of work and going house to house with nosey conversation.
F. Remember, Paul had addressed this sin authoritatively when he was with them (3:10).
G. He also attacked this error with a gentle approach in the first epistle (I Thess 4:11-12).

3:12 God commands His saints to work quietly and diligently and to eat their own bread.

A. Paul commands and exhorts those whom he has described to get to work quietly.
B. He again invokes the high authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, Whom He represented.
C. He had already taught this precept and principle in the first epistle (I Thess 4:11-12).
D. A great work ethic is not the idea of men or the trait of a race, but the law of God!
E. Saints should eat their own bread; only acts of God should bring bread from others.
F. Quietness is contrary to busybodies by keeping a private, personal, sober profession.
G. Diligence in business is a rule of apostolic order and tradition (Rom 12:11; Eph 4:28).

3:13 Faithful saints should not be discouraged or weary in well doing: they are serving Christ.

A. When the disobedient are rebuked, the obedient may need praise for their faithfulness.
B. Observe the distinction between sinners and the faithful saints Paul makes in verse 11.
C. Though he corrected them for this one area of sin, he encouraged them in other areas.

3:14 Shunning of sinners at the Lord's Table and at social tables is both Scriptural and wise.

A. Paul restates the command of 3:6 in light of Christ's coming and professional diligence.
B. Noting a man is public marking, when sinners are put from the Lord's Table (Ro 16:17).
C. "Any man," "that man," "him," and "he" indicate church action against the individual.

D. He is put from the Lord's Table, and he is avoided at most social tables (I Cor 5:1-11).
E. The purpose is shame, and church discipline has not occurred without creating shame.
F. He is treated as an outsider (Matt 18:15-17); we avoid them (Rom 16:17); we do not keep company with them (I Cor 5:9-11; II Thess 3:14); we do not eat with them (I Cor 5:9-11); we are to withdraw from them (II Thess 3:6); the treatment should shame them (II Thess 3:15); and it must be perceived as and actually be a punishment (II Cor 2:6); and forgiveness, comfort, or love are not given as a church until recovery (II Cor 2:7-8).
G. If a person is repentant, this treatment could swallow a person up with grief (II Cor 2:7).
H. Of course, scornful sinners will be angry, resentful, critical, accusative, offended, etc.
I. It is punishment, and it should not be modified to make it something else (II Cor 2:6).
J. We ignore what they think of our actions the same as wailing children (Proverbs 19:18).
K. See the lengthy and detailed sermon outline "Church Discipline" dated March 11, 2001.
L. The saints that make up a church practice church discipline to enforce holiness for God.
M. This is one of the most contested and questioned aspects of church life due to members with weakness toward family, friends, and feelings, which the Saviour warned against.
N. Here is where decent Christians can choke and forget God's holiness, Christ's zeal, capital punishment under the Old Testament, the purpose of hell, the severity of God's punishments, the importance of details, the Flood, the corrective salt of saints in a society, and other excluded parties unrelated to them.

3:15 The limitations and nature of this shunning are defined by God Himself, not your heart.

A. We have not created a personal enemy – so no personal revenge, despite, or cruelty is allowed; though godly actions may be perceived and falsely accused as such by them.
    1. If you didn't like the person, then you need to carefully examine your heart.
    2. If the person wronged you personally, then you need to examine your heart.
    3. If you can pray for a person, it is a good sign; if you cannot, examine and repent.
    4. What the excluded person thinks of our treatment doesn't mean the least thing.
    5. And we don't modify our treatment for any reason outside the Word of God.
B. Absolute shunning for most cases is not right, for it does not match the Scriptures.
    1. That would be treating them as an enemy, which we must not do (Matt 5:43-48).
    2. That would not be providing the brotherly care of admonition (Heb 3:12-13).
    3. For we do not absolutely shun heathen men and publicans (Matthew 18:17).
    4. And we will be companying with them in assemblies, if they are still attending.
    5. We must include brotherly admonition – implying care – for his restoration.
    6. Admonition is not forgiveness or comfort; it is reminding a person of duties.
    7. It could be right in the case of a scornful rebel where total shunning is possible.
C. Our goal is the salvation of excluded sinners, but we never modify God's ordained means for their

salvation by “better ideas,” “a gentler approach,” or “the love of Jesus.”

1. There are no human modifications kinder or gentler than these holy commands.
2. Such foolish talk is the humanistic lie that loving parents do not spank children.
3. God declares that withholding chastening is to hate your children (Prov 13:24).
4. The fear of God is not taught by kindness; it is taught by terror (II Cor 5:11).
5. The end does not justify the means, no matter how many false successes you erroneously think you have seen. Beware of the prosperity of fools (Prov 1:32).

D. There are three factors that affect the treatment we give those excluded from our church.
   1. Family or other necessary relationships must or can be maintained righteously, as long as efforts are still made to shame the offender and admonish them.
   2. Depending on their repentance, our admonition will obviously vary accordingly: stubborn rebellion will bring warning rebukes and contrition gentle reminders.
   3. Scorners are devilish fools whom God hates and commands us to avoid, so these wicked persons do not deserve the admonitions of wise men (Prov 9:7-8).

E. God requires a base minimum – shunning punishment that results in shame. This starts with the Lord’s Table but includes social tables of keeping brotherly company.

F. God has set a limit or ceiling – hateful cruelty, as the flesh would treat an enemy, is sin.

G. Where we fall between these limitations set forth by God may vary in a church.
   1. A father may exercise parental authority to punish a rebellious child far beyond what the church does in church judgment, and he has the just right to do so.
   2. A child or wife under the authority of a father or husband may only have opportunity to passively make admonitions as opportunities occur.
   3. If a man has the zeal of Phinehas or Jehu, he will not pander to sentiment at all.
   4. Every man should remember Eli and Galatians 6:5. He will bear his own burden.

Conclusion:

A. For every man and woman with the heart of Phinehas and David, matters of church discipline are not difficult.

B. Therefore, each man and woman with a heart for the house of the Lord, show your zeal in this godly exercise.

C. Let us give a sacrifice pleasing to the Lord by executing judgment against those who despise His worship.

D. The issue is simple; our motives are pure; the goal is God’s glory and saving sinners. Lord, bless our aim!

For Further Study:

A. Sermon Outline: “Church Discipline,” covers the subject in very careful detail with case studies and illustrations (see also).

B. Sermon Outline: “God Hates Compromise,” is a good reminder of the blessed God’s intolerance for stubborn sinners.