

**Church Discipline Matters!
So Church Membership Matters!
(1 Corinthians 5:1 May 19, 2019)**

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— 1 Corinthians 5:1 —



In the 16th century, the Reformers set out the principles for determining if a church was a true church.

Sorry to all you *9 Marks* fans – but they determined that there were *three* marks of a true church.

Their thoughts were summarized in the *Belgic Confession* in Article 29 which is titled – *Marks of the True Church*.

If I asked you – what are your top three marks that define a true church? I am not sure what you would say.

Today, in many churches it seems to be:

Good worship, good fellowship and good coffee.

But, I think most on the more conservative end might say:

Biblical gospel, biblical doctrine, biblical practices.

But here is what the Reformers said:

Belgic Confession

Article 29 – Marks of the True Church

The true church can be recognised if it has the following marks: The church engages in the pure preaching of the gospel; it makes use of the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them; it practices church discipline for correcting faults.

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Preaching, sacraments, church discipline.

That is a very interesting list.

I am not sure how many of you would have listed church discipline as one of your three marks that define whether a church is a true church.

In fact today many Christians wince at the thought of church discipline.

It sounds unloving, legalistic and judgmental.

It sounds more Puritan than 21st century.

It conjures up images of you messing up a bit and the Elders taking you to the office to administer the cricket bat of correction.

But, that is no way the description of the practice found in the Bible.

This morning we begin two chapters where Paul's topic is church discipline – and we will see that in Paul's mind – church discipline is not only necessary to the spiritual wellbeing of the church and each one of us – it is actually one of the most loving practices we can do as a church.

Church discipline is essential for your spiritual well-being and life in this world.

A reminder of where we are. We are making our way through 1 Corinthians where Paul is dealing with some men and women who put themselves forward as teachers – pronounced some rather divisive teachings – attached some prominent names to their teaching and as a result the church was left divided and in grave danger.

We have seen that Paul's answer is:

Cross-centred wisdom for flawed saints.

Paul's answer was to preach Christ and the cross.

After the introduction we began looking at Paul's response to the reports which came from Chloe's people.

These reports dealt with two issues:

Divisions and Depravity.

This morning we begin to look at the second issue – *depravity*.

How do you deal with depravity when it gets into the church? Basically Paul says – you deal with it through church discipline.

God calls His people to holiness. Be holy because the Lord is holy.

Yet, the church in Corinth had not just let a little bit of sin in – they had opened the door to some truly sick depravity.

1 Corinthians 5:1 tells us the issue Paul is dealing with:

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and the kind of sexual immorality that is not even tolerated among the Gentiles—a man is sleeping with his father's wife.

We will see that there is immoral depravity of many forms in the church – but Paul singles out this off the charts example to make his point.

A man in the church is sleeping with his father's wife – his step-mother – and the church has not acted.

The world knew this was wrong. Jews know this was wrong – Gentiles know this was wrong.

But, what is totally mind blowing is that there was a faction in the church at Corinth saying – this is fine for Christians to be involved in.

And ... even more distressing to Paul is the fact that the leaders and members of the church had not acted to deal with this depravity.

In fact they were boasting about it!

Verse 2:

And you are arrogant! (the word is puffed up – proud).

Verse 6:

Your boasting is not good.

Instead of being heartbroken that this was occurring in the church – they were arrogant and boasting about it.

How does this happen?

A number of commentators suggest this man was an important person in the church so the church let it slide.

Maybe he was a leader. Perhaps he was wealthy and the church relied on his support. He might be part of an influential family in the church.

So they all just turned a blind eye – immorality – what immorality?

We will put our head in the sand and pretend it is not happening.

Look, tragically churches *have* turned blind eyes to sin – even serious sin because someone is important to the church – or it is too much trouble to deal with it.

But the fact they were boasting and puffed up suggests there is more going on here.

The church is not just ignoring this man or even protecting him – they were revelling in his liberty to act in this way.

How can a church – the people of God – do this?

How does a church actually become more depraved than the world?

It happens when you have a poor theology of the holiness of God and the depravity of man.

And that is why Paul keeps saying preach the cross.

You can only understand the cross when you realise God is entirely holy and we are totally depraved.

But here in Corinth, some in the church had a theology that allowed them to deny that this depravity was even sin.

If you look down to chapter 6 verses 12-13 we get an idea of what was being taught.

It seems that some in the Corinthian church taught this little ditty – **everything is permissible for me**.

I hope your first thought is to scream – how can they teach that? How can a Christian say – **everything is permissible for me – everything!**

As Paul pointed out in chapter 5 verse 1 – even the Gentiles did not say everything is permissible. Even they said some things were not permissible.

But not this faction in the church.

It seems they had taken on board an idea common among some Greeks that what really matters is your spirit – the immaterial part of you.

The body – the flesh part doesn't really count.

So, we can do anything we want with our bodies – and it won't defile our spirit.

For goodness sakes, it's just sex.

They argued – when you get hungry you eat.

When you have desires you satisfy them.

It's just natural. What is the big deal?

They said they had reached the point where they don't get hung up on sex.

Yes, we know there were prohibitions under Jewish law – but we are beyond that. Christ is the end of the Law – just as we don't keep the Sabbath or make sacrifices – so the morality laws no longer apply to us. Christ has moved us to a more spiritual plane.

We have our spiritual practices and our earthly practices and we don't let one interfere with the other.

Bad theology leads to bad practices.

Some in that church had found ways to actually champion depravity.

Paul was appalled. In Ephesians 5:3–4 he said this:

Sexual immorality and any impurity or greed should not even be heard of among you, as is proper for saints. Obscene and foolish talking or crude joking are not suitable, but rather giving thanks.

Christians shouldn't even joke about this let alone participate in it or tolerate it.

But if you take your eyes off the cross – worldly thinking gets in.

Brothers and sisters – if you do not believe it can happen here or in any church – in a short space of time – then you need to look around at churches in our country and at churches in history.

Right now, we have prominent denominations saying – homosexuality is not sin – it is just another expression of love.

Sex before marriage is not sin – try before you buy – helps reduce divorce.

And speaking of divorce – no holds bar there – you want a divorce – you got it.

Then there are some churches on the fringes who boast about their sexual liberty.

And go back through the history of Christianity and you will see churches that were relatively conservative, they took in some bad theology, they started tolerating sin – then they began to champion it and become more perverse than the world.

The Corinthian moral catastrophe keeps happening.

An appeal to our fleshly desires will always find a few willing ears.

Paul was under fire. You have singled out this poor guy. Well if he loves God, if he tells people about Jesus, if he gives to the church, if he is kind to old ladies – what is the big deal if two consenting adults are intimate? It is just sex. It does not affect our spirit. The church should just get out of people's bedrooms.

That is the situation Paul has to deal with and he is absolutely appalled.

But the question is – how do you deal with depravity in the church?

I know this is an off the charts example – but the principle is the same for any kind of sin.

Paul tells them:

Remove from your congregation – remove from your membership – the one who did this.

This loving process of protection for Christians and the church is called **church discipline**.

In chapter 5 and chapter 6, we will see Paul deal with the issue of **holiness**.

The point of these two chapters is this:

For the good of the church, the world and for the
glory of God – pursue holiness



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Here in chapter 5 – Paul’s point is:

Love others enough to discipline severe sin in the church 5:1-13

You have to be deaf to miss the main thrust of Paul’s command.

In chapter 5 alone, this is what Paul says:

Remove from your congregation the one who did this.
Hand that one over to Satan.
Clean out the old leaven.
Do not associate with sexually immoral people.
Remove the evil person from among you.

This is a passage about *church discipline*.

Church discipline was important enough that the Reformers declared it to be one of the three marks of a true church.

Paul talks about it in many of his epistles. John talks about it. Jesus spoke about it.

And yet it is a subject that is often downplayed or overlooked.

Before we get into these two important chapters – I wanted to slow down and spend one sermon just talking about this crucial subject of church discipline.

I don’t enjoy this.

I like talking about love and grace and forgiveness and joy and heaven.

I know church discipline is something no one wants to talk about – but it really is a crucial subject.

One of the main reasons I want to slow down here is that by itself 1 Corinthians 5 can give an unbalanced view of the whole process.

Paul is dealing with extreme depravity – he is dealing with a church that has not followed the biblical process – he is dealing with a church that he has already commanded to deal with immorality – a church that was in danger of moving from Christian to cultic.

Paul is dealing with the stage of the church discipline process that requires the removal of an unrepentant sinner – and there is little context about what would have come before.

Imagine someone from the depths of Africa watching a wedding and asking – what is this? He is told – it is how a man takes a wife.

So he might think all he has to do is look around the congregation – find a girl and tell her – hey you look cute – I want to marry – so why wait – let's get the pastor to do us next.

No! There is so much before this. Should I marry? Am I ready for marriage? What should I look for in a spouse?

Then comes the courting – the awkward first date – getting to know them – feelings developing – the first fight – input from family and friends – asking the hard questions – premarital counselling – deciding to commit – the engagement – surviving engagement – all before the ceremony.

In the same way – church discipline is a **process** – a loving process – that very rarely reaches the stage of remove them from the congregation.

Church discipline is a powerful tool – but it can be a dangerous tool – it has to have stamped all over it – **handle with care!**

To help us this morning, I want to look at these three questions:

What is church discipline?

Who receives church discipline?

Why practice church discipline?



What is church discipline?

Who receives church discipline?

Why practice church discipline?

First:

What is church discipline?

The very word – discipline – can sound harsh. Church discipline sounds punitive more than loving.

Marvin was naughty – so Marvin has to come before the congregation while they discipline the sin out of him.

No!

I wish, the Reformers had chosen a different name – perhaps something like – or **corrective love**.

But we are stuck with the name so let's define it.

What is church discipline?

Church discipline is the biblical process whereby a local fellowship can lovingly shepherd brothers and sisters who are struggling with sin.



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I want you to notice a word here.

This is a **process**. It is not – Fred sins – so the church says – Fred get out.

No there are many steps in the process before that.



Caring Warning Witnessing Reporting (and then only if necessary) Removing

Brothers and sisters, since there is no unforgiveable sin – there is no sin that mandates instant removal.

Even depraved sins – incest, murder, rape – while there are consequences for these sins – legal ones, family ones, societal ones – the gospel declares that God can and will forgive those sins if there is repentance – and so must the church.

Removing someone from fellowship is a last resort for unrepentant sin.

Before that step – repentance stops the process.

I trust you realise that church discipline is common – it happens in this church every week. The *caring* and *warning* in love – it happens all the time.

But, church discipline that reaches the step of removing someone from the fellowship is fortunately *very* rare.

Notice it starts with **caring**.

It starts with you caring enough to get involved.

To see what this means, turn with me over to Galatians 6:1–3:

Brothers and sisters, if someone is overtaken in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual, restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so that you also won't be tempted. Carry one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

If anyone is overtaken – or *caught up* in any wrongdoing – any sin – and it comes to be known by you – then you who are spiritual should restore them.

Who are those who are spiritual? Some see this as a way to get off the hook from this passage.

No! Don't read this as – I am speaking to you who are super-spiritual saints. Don't think this text only applies to Pastors and Elders – so praise the Lord I don't have to do this – I am off the hook.

If you read Galatians 5, spiritual here means you who are saved by the Spirit – those who bear the fruit of the Spirit – so if you are a Christian – that is you.

Sorry but every one of us is well and truly **on** the hook.

Here is the idea.

In Galatians 5 we see that in a gospel community – a church – every one of us has the flesh-Spirit battle going on.

Every one of us has times where the battle is not going so well – and times when it is going better.

When the battle is not going well – when we are tempted away by false teachings or the flesh – God has a plan to help.

That plan begins with – you!

Notice I called this step **caring**. You need to *care* enough to get involved.

Yet, so many Christians don't.

I could not tell you how often something like this happens.

You notice a brother or sister caught up in sin.

Your first thought is – man – I didn't want to know that. I don't want to be involved.

And a little debate starts in your head. It will be a hassle if I say anything. It might affect our friendship. I don't have the time.

You look for ways to just ignore it.

You tell yourself – actually Paul speaks to – you who are spiritual – well my week was not that spiritual – so this isn't for me.

You think – I haven't removed my own log – and now I'm not going to.

I'm off the hook.

Surely God will convict the brother or sister to seek help.

Surely the Elders know – this is their job.

You convince yourself – it is not your responsibility – so you stay silent.

Not an option. Paul says – brother, sister – **you** restore them.

Don't wait till it all blows up and then say – yeah – yeah – I should have done something – sorry.

Nor is it OK to just pass the buck.

I don't want to be involved – but I know I can't totally ignore this.

I know, I will write an email – anonymous or not – to a homegroup leader, a pastor, an elder – or just casually drop the bomb in a prayer meeting.

Other people know. The burden is now theirs.

Phew – dodged that one.

No. Paul says – brothers, sisters – this one is yours.

If you know them – or if God revealed this problem to you – God wants **you** to be one of those who care and restore and bear their burden.

God wants you to be His instrument to help them.

Notice how this is to be done.

Restore them with a **gentle spirit**.

Circle with a gentle spirit.

The goal of all church discipline is restoration not removal.

The word restore in Galatians means to restore to usefulness. It is used in the gospels of mending ripped nets. It is used outside the Bible to speak of setting a broken bone.

God put you there to help this precious saint who is struggling with sin to be restored spiritually to the place where they can be useful again – to God, their family, the church.

The goal is to help them remember the glorify of the gospel and call on the resources of the Spirit to crucify the flesh.

But when you approach them – and I cannot stress this enough – do it **with a gentle spirit**.

When someone is struggling – they know it – they hope no one notices it – often they don't want it to come out.

They are ashamed, embarrassed – the last thing they need is someone brutally confronting their sin.

Jack man – struggling with sin are we? Looks to me like your life is well and truly messed up. If I see it – then everyone sees it. Your marriage is a shambles – but praise God – I'm here to help.

You have to do it gently.

Jack – brother – I may be way off base here – if so tell me – but I wonder if there are any areas of your life I can help you with? And man – you know me – I have my own mess to deal with – but if I can help – I'm here – and I'm not going anywhere.

If you don't do it gently – I can assure you this thing will explode.

But the point is you need to care enough to get involved.

Now – if there is sin and your caring approach is not enough to turn them – the next step is **warning**.

For example if the sin is against you – Matthew 18:15 says:

If your brother sins against you, go and rebuke him in private. If he listens to you, you have won your brother.

Again it has to be done lovingly and gently. It has to be done as one sinner warning another sinner out of deep care.

In my experience – most church discipline stops here.

When someone cares enough to come and admonish a brother or sister – they usually pay heed. They seek counsel. They confess their sin.

They deal with the issue and the process stops.

But some ignore that warning. And we move to **witnessing**.

Matthew 18:16:

But if he won't listen, take one or two others with you, so that **by the testimony of two or three witnesses every fact may be established.**

In love, take some other mature Christians – I stress mature Christians – so that they know this is serious and must be dealt with.

The witnesses are present not only to confirm that the sin was committed but, in addition, to confirm that the sinning brother or sister was properly warned and that they have or have not repented.

If that fails – the next step is **reporting**.

Matthew 18:17:

If he doesn't pay attention to them, tell the church.

If this person has not listened to their own conscience – the loving concern of a brother – and the testimony of several brothers – if they are persisting in their sin – then the church needs to get involved.

Almost every church tradition has seen this as meaning tell it to the leaders of the church.

For example in Question 85 – the Heidelberg Catechism says – tell the church means – tell the officers of the church.

Basically, we don't want two or three people becoming convinced someone is in serious sin and their next step is them standing up in a service or a member's meeting saying:

Just letting you know, we have come to believe that Janet has a submission problem – we told her and she ignored us – so chuck her out.

No!

We believe the leaders need to be involved before it is reported to the entire church.

Is the sin serious enough? Are personal conflicts involved? Have they been warned in love? Are they in fact repentant?

Then, if the Elders determine this is a sin serious enough to warrant removal and they refuse to repent – then for the good of the person and the good of the church – with tears, prayers and self-reflection – the next step is **removing**.

Matthew 18:17:

[Then] let him be like a Gentile and a tax collector to you.

You tell the entire church and remove them from the fellowship and treat them as an outsider. They are removed from the privileges of fellowship.

That brings us to our second question:

Who receives church discipline?

The answer to that is:

Members who are involved in unrepentant serious sin.

I know this will get me in trouble – but our understanding of Scripture is that **members** are the ones who are to be disciplined.

Throughout its history, the church has consistently understood the Scriptures to teach a strong link between *church membership* and *church discipline*.

Paul assumes the church knows full well who are part of the fellowship.

1 Corinthians 5:12 is about as clear as you can get:

For what business is it of mine to judge outsiders? Don't you judge those who are inside?

Paul says – as leaders and members – our responsibility is toward the insiders – the members.

The church had a clear boundary between those who are insiders and those who are outsiders. This boundary separates those in the church from those in the world.

Paul is absolutely clear – if someone claims to be a Christian but is in flagrant, unrepentant sin – they must be removed from being an insider.

But that means the church has to know who the insiders – the members – are.

For 2,000 years this very biblical line – insiders and outsiders – has had a number of names – fellowship – association – community – but the most common term has been membership.

The Reformers were incredibly strong on this. Let me read *Article 28* of the *Belgic Confession* which is titled – **Everyone’s Duty To Join The Church**.

In some ways that title says it all. **Everyone’s Duty To Join The Church**.

If any of you ever think we are too strong on membership – listen to the Reformers.

We believe, since this holy assembly and congregation is the assembly of the redeemed and there is no salvation outside of it, that no one ought to withdraw from it, content to be by himself, no matter what his state or quality may be. But all and everyone are obliged to join it and unite with it, maintaining the unity of the Church. They must submit themselves to its instruction and discipline, bend their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ, and serve the edification of the brothers and sisters, according to the talents which God has given them as members of the same body.

To observe this more effectively, it is the duty of all believers, according to the Word of God, to separate from those who do not belong to the Church and to join this assembly wherever God has established it. They should do so even though the rulers and edicts of princes were against it, and death or physical punishment might follow.

All therefore who draw away from the Church or fail to join it act contrary to the ordinance of God.

Those are strong words. Nothing should stop you joining a church. Even if rulers and princes oppose it – even if punishment or death awaits – join the church.

Nothing should stop you!

The Reformers called church membership a duty – an obligation – an ordinance – and a matter of disobedience if a Christian does not become a member.

And if that is not enough – Read Scripture.

The Bible is clear that each local church knew who were the outsiders and who were the insiders – the members of that church.

Many point out that the Bible does not give a detailed procedure for membership.

That is true for so many things. Appointing Elders, Baptism, the Lord’s Table – so many things – we have a command to follow and principles to apply – but not an exact roadmap. That is left to the leadership of each church.

However, based on the Scriptures, most churches use three criteria for membership:

1. An affirmation of a credible confession of faith and baptism. Are they a Christian? Can they give an account for the hope in them?
2. An affirmation that this is the local body they want to join themselves with. Do they understand the teaching and practices of this church? Do they understand their responsibilities to the local body? Will they minister the one-anothers to the other members here? Will they use their talents and resources to help this church spread the kingdom? Will they be accountable to the members and leaders? Will they commit themselves to this local church as their spiritual home?
3. Then in response the church affirms that they have examined their faith and accept the responsibility to love, shepherd, protect, disciple and if necessary discipline them?

Let me share my heart here – and I pray this comes across right.

I firmly believe membership is good for you and good for the church.

It develops a commitment, an accountability and a fellowship that enables you to become invested – to become the man or woman God desires – and to serve God fully.

Can you be a Christian and not a member – of course.

Can you be a fully functioning Christian without being a member – I am absolutely convinced you can't.

I know some of you choose not to become members – and because this passage speaks so clearly about insiders and outsiders and the link to discipline – I want to talk about this for a moment.

I am not talking about those who would like to be members but are working through issues like baptism – that is something different.

I am talking about those with these issues. I begin with the easier ones first:

- Some believe that membership is assumed just because they start attending the church.

If you are regularly in the pews – you consider yourself a member.

Our understanding is that the church and its leaders are given the responsibility to examine all prospective members regarding their salvation and commitment.

The Bible including in this very passage – 1 Corinthians 5 verse 11 – speaks of professing believers – so-called believers. The church is to examine their faith – are they an insider?

The church has to affirm you before we accept you.

Whatever you might want to call this examination of someone's faith and life – we call it membership.

- For others the issue is simply that they just do not want to be accountable. They want the privileges of fellowship – but do not want accountability in their lives. They certainly do not want church discipline if they sin.

But, you don't get to say which privileges and responsibilities of fellowship you want. More than that – we believe the Bible is clear – accountability is something true Christians actually desire.

I don't think we have many if any of those here. Here are the ones I hear more often:

- Some don't believe membership is biblical. They admit that Scripture uses terms like fellowship, insiders, association, join to, body of believers.

But because Scripture does not detail a specific process for membership – they assume that there is no membership. Membership is just a man-made thing – so I don't have to be a member.

- For others the issue is a related one – you see membership not as a duty but merely as an option.

I can join if I want – I can leave it if I want.

It is neither biblical or unbiblical.

I hear variations of this so often – I will get baptised, I will give, I will serve, I will become a member – when I am ready – when I am convinced I should.

It is almost as if – until I am having my quiet time and God speaks from a passage – you should join the church! – I won't join.

I urge you – those here who don't see it as biblical or see it merely as an option – the leaders here don't understand this as merely an option.

We stand with the Reformers and the vast majority of church history who said it is the biblical duty of every Christian to join a local church.

If that is not your conviction I would ask you to do some study. Jonathan Leeman wrote a very short book entitled *Church Membership*. Read it.

I will lend you a copy if you can't get one.

You pray and read the word and see if you are still convinced in your mind that Scripture does not say – it is a duty to join a church.

See if you are still convinced that the vast majority of church traditions are so wrong – it is worth standing against the leadership on this.

We have no motivation for this other than we believe it is for your good and the good of the church.

So, I appeal to you – if you are one who has made this your church home – but are not feeling any impetus to become a member – understand that it puts the leaders in a difficult position.

Our biblical conviction is that we are to shepherd the insiders – the members.

But we regularly ask – is this one our sheep.

So I ask you – in your head – do you consider yourself one of our sheep? Do you consider yourself an insider?

If the answer in your head is yes – then just become a member.

If we don't know whether you are one of our sheep – we struggle to know – do we provide you with help – counselling – finances?

If you sin – what do we do?

Seriously – what do we do?

We can't properly practice church discipline – because we can't remove someone who has never been inside the church.

Basically, our problem as Elders is that at heart we are nice guys.

That means we don't come to non-members – to regular attenders – and say time is up – join or move on.

Maybe we should – but we don't.

And it sure causes us trouble.

We struggle with – do we seek your input on major decisions?

What do we share with non-members?

What role can non-members have in the church?

Even small things like – do we give non-members a copy of the member's directory has taken up much of an Elder's meeting?

But crucially – what are we to do if we see you struggling with sin? Do we have any biblical or for that matter legal authority over non-members?

And what do we do if you fall into unrepentant sin?

In practice – what happens is this – we come to you anyway – and if you choose not to repent – we are told – well I’m not a member – you have no authority – bye.

We believe that is tragic for you, for the church and for the testimony of Christ.

We agree with Paul – we need to know who we are responsible for – we need to know who is inside the church – and that process is membership.

If you have been toying with membership – please prayerfully read this chapter – study this issue – before you conclude it is not that important – that is merely an option for you – that you can be just as good a Christian as an attendee as a member.

I hope that isn’t badgering. I was told not to badger.

I hope you hear that I genuinely believe it is for your good.

So it is members we discipline – and note – we do it for **unrepentant serious sin**.

We don’t remove members if you get a speeding ticket and then say – well not sorry at all – it should be an 80 zone anyway.

It is not – adios member. This pulpit and those pews would be empty.

No, we are talking serious unrepentant sin – sin that they love more than Christ.

I will talk more about this next week.

Finally:

Why practice church discipline?

It is biblical, it is loving and it glorifies God.

No Elder I know likes the latter stages of church discipline. We weep over it.

But we believe – **It is biblical, it is loving and it glorifies God.**

It is **biblical**.

Jesus commands it, the Apostles command it.

And it is **loving**.

It is loving toward the person struggling with sin. James 5:19–20 says this:

My brothers and sisters, if any among you strays from the truth, and someone turns him back, let that person know that whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

The Bible teaches that the pleasures of sin are fleeting and are soon followed by pain, consequences and ruined lives.

It is not loving to ignore sin. It is loving to call on them to turn away from sin.

And more than that sin can destroy them eternally.

Allowing someone with sin to keep thinking they are saved is not that loving if on the last day they hear – who are you? – depart from Me I never knew you!

We need to understand that Paul says that the final step of church discipline is **not** removing someone from fellowship.



No – the final step is **restoring**.

1 Corinthians 5:5:

Hand that one over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, **so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.**

Church discipline reminds the person in sin that there is a greater judgment than removal from fellowship.

After they are removed we keep loving, keep praying, keep calling on them to repent.

The goal is for a sinner to repent and turn from sin and be restored. That is true love.

As well as being loving for the one in sin – it is also loving to the church.

Next week we will see that if you don't deal with sin – a little leaven leavens the whole loaf.

Unchecked sin will spread through the church and destroy it.

Church discipline warns the other sheep of the consequences of sin. It helps deter sin in other members.

A church that does not deal with sin is an unhealthy church.

Finally – church discipline glorifies God and reinforces the gospel.

What testimony does a depraved church have?

God is holy. He demands a holy people.

1 Peter 1:15–16:

Be holy, because I am holy.

When Adam and Eve sinned – they were cast out of the Garden and a flaming Cherub blocked their return.

When a member of Israel sinned they were removed – often by death.

When a professing Christian sins and refuses to repent – they are to be removed.

If we do not – we deny the gospel. Ignoring sin cries – holiness is unimportant.

It destroys the name of Christ in the world. Every time sin is exposed in the church – the world mutters – knew it – hypocrites – their gospel isn't true.

And the name and reputation of Jesus Christ is tarnished.

Church discipline tells the world – we do treat sin seriously – we do believe our gospel – we do desire to be a holy people.

There you have it – a primer on church discipline – it needed several sermons – but we just have one.

Not something I like talking about I can assure you.

I like talking about grace and forgiveness and heaven.

But it is loving and necessary. It is loving to you and loving to the church.

If you are here this morning and not a Christian – this may sound weird. But I hope you realise our goal is to treat sin seriously.

We don't want you to think we are a bunch of hypocrites – we want you to hear that we are sinners like you – but we know sin is an enemy – and Jesus is the only way to deal with it.

Jesus is the One who makes us holy. But until that final day – one of the ways we become more holy is we bear each other's burdens in love – we lovingly correct – and we do this to the glory of our holy God.

Church Discipline Matters! So Church Membership Matters! (1 Corinthians 5:1 May 19, 2019)

Main Point: Love others enough to discipline severe sin in the church

General Questions:

1. If you were to name the top three marks that distinguish a true church – what would they be? What do you think of the Reformers in the Belgic Confession saying they are: *Preaching, sacraments, church discipline*?

Any thoughts on 9 Marks list?

Mark One: Expository Preaching

Mark Two: Biblical Theology

Mark Three: The Gospel

Mark Four: A Biblical Understanding of Conversion

Mark Five: A Biblical Understanding of Evangelism

Mark Six: A Biblical Understanding of Church Membership

Mark Seven: Biblical Church Discipline

Mark Eight: A Concern for Discipleship and Growth

Mark Nine: Biblical Church Leadership

2. How does sin get into the church?
3. Why do churches often fail to deal with sin?
4. How does a church actually end up boasting about sin?
5. What does the term 'church discipline' mean to you? How would you define church discipline?
6. What are the steps of church discipline?
7. In what ways is it loving?
8. What is the goal of church discipline?
9. What are the dangers of church discipline? How can you do it wrong?
10. What types of sin require church discipline?
11. Why is a church that doesn't do it an unhealthy church?
12. In what ways does it glorify God and give testimony to the world?

13. Do you see a link between church membership and church discipline? If so what is it?
14. Do you agree with the Reformers that it is our duty to become members and nothing not even the threat of death should stop us?
15. Why do some not become members? How would you answer them?
16. What problems do Elders face concerning regular attenders who are not members?

Application Questions:

1. What might stop you from caring enough to bear the burdens of a brother or sister?
2. How have you felt when someone has approached you about sin in your life?
3. Would you attend a church that did not practice church discipline? Why or why not?
4. Is church discipline something you would do? Would you welcome it done to you?
5. How would you encourage the Elders to deal with someone who chooses not to become a member?
6. How should the Elders deal with a non-member who sins? What if they leave the church?