

CHURCH DISCIPLINE: THE MOST NEGLECTED TRUTH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

STUDENT GUIDE

DAILY BIBLE READING

DAY 1	I CORINTHIANS 5: 1-2
DAY 2	I CORINTHIANS 5: 3-5
DAY 3	I CORINTHIANS 5: 6-13
DAY 4	I CORINTHIANS 5: 1-13
DAY 5	I CORINTHIANS 5: 1-13
DAY 6	I CORINTHIANS 5: 1-13
DAY 7	I CORINTHIANS 5: 1-13

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor who defied Hitler and was subsequently executed, wrote in his most popular book, **The Cost of Discipleship**, these stirring words, “Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.” Bonhoeffer captured the spirit of what many think the church is about — a fellowship where accountability too often appears absent. Paul’s words to Corinth in chapter 5 tell a different story, however. He demanded accountability for immoral behavior.*

OUTLINE

- 1. The Report of Sin in the Church (vv.1-2)** — Up until now, Paul has dealt almost exclusively with division in the church at Corinth. It is no surprise that he now turns to defilement in the church. A divisive culture is the perfect breeding ground for decadent behavior. A church that cannot get its belief right inevitably fails to get its behavior right.

Paul planted the church in Corinth to change the city. Sadly, the city was changing the church. More of the city was in the church than the church in the city. Paul begins perhaps the most unpleasant section he ever penned to the church which he loved, “It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father’s wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you” (1 Cor. 5:1-2). For Paul, the church must learn the significance concerning the standard of life Jesus expects from His believing people.

“It is reported commonly” - The reality was, what Paul was hearing was not only true, the verse tense indicates that what Paul heard was continually being told. In the face of this continued moral scandal stood the Corinthian leaders doing absolutely nothing! In addition, not only was the church silent about sin, they were silent about such degenerate behavior, that even lost people knew it to be wrong! As unbelievable as it may sound, the Corinthians were tolerating incest.

Public tolerance shows neither our sensitivity to sin nor our love to the church body. Allowing sin a free pass earns no respect from Biblical truth. And, as Paul showed, tolerating fornication doesn’t even win approval from unsaved pagans.

Question: *We clearly note Paul's abhorrence for tolerating the horrid unholiness of incest in the church's fellowship. However, is discipline exercised for gross sin not also applicable to "lesser" sins? In other words, is there a distinction the church should observe concerning which sins may or may not be tolerated?*

- 2. The Removal of Sin in the Church (vv.3-5)** — The term "gathered together" does not necessarily mean the church gathered together for worship. In fact, the gathering Paul had in mind was probably a special meeting, what we might today call a "special called business meeting." In other words, the meeting possesses a special purpose — to deal with the issue.

We must keep in mind the protocol Paul is revealing concerning church discipline. If the sin were a private sin — that is, a sin known only to a few — then there would be no need to deal with it publicly. A small group could easily and effectively take proper care of the problem. (cp. Matt. 18:15-17). However, because the sin was not only public, but publicly ignored by the church, public confession and public correction were necessary. If a believer will not face his or her sin, the church must face it for them. Thus, a gathering in the proper spirit for the specific purpose stood at the forefront of the disciplinary process.

The church must ever remember that church discipline is not to punish one for sin but to purge one from sin. Discipline is not a day of reckoning but a day of redemption. Exclusion from body life is to force a sinner to face reality, not ban sinners from reconciliation.

Question: *If the church is to turn erring brothers and sisters over to Satan for the "destruction of the flesh" where does forgiveness fit into such a procedure? Explain.*

- 3. The Remedy for Sin in the Church (vv.6-13)** — Once the reality of sin is faced, Paul counsels to remove the source of the sin — the leaven which affects the entire lump. As hard as it may sound, God's Word commands the church to practice church discipline.

A.) *He reveals hatefulness in relation to sin.* He says we must "purge out" the old and only then the feast may be kept. Preceding Passover, the Jewish wife would scour her home with candle and broom, seeking for any speck of leaven and safely remove it before Passover began.

B.) *Paul revealed the helpfulness in relation to the world.* We cannot be isolated from the world. But neither can we be inclusive of the world.

C.) *Paul reveals the holiness in relation to the church.* Since we cannot be inclusive of the world, we cannot be inclusive of church members who cater to the world. We cannot tolerate the world's behavior inside the church of Jesus Christ.

Wrap Up: Many churches have attempted to improve on God's remedy for dealing with sin in the church. Corinth's strategy was to remain silent. Of course, as we saw, silence is not a proper strategy at all. Silence was and still is a moral embarrassment to the church Jesus builds. Others compromise on what they feel are small, insignificant areas, but inevitably end up compromising Gospel integrity. We must face it: no strategy for church discipline exceeds the One Who designed and built the church. If we do church discipline, we must report the sin, remove the source of sin, and follow the remedy the Lord provides.