

December 13th, 2020

# The Faithful Wounds of Church Discipline

1 Corinthians 5:9-13

## Why should we preach on discipline when the world is on fire?<sup>1</sup>

I know the whispers that may be audible in your hearts this morning, because they are audible in mine: “Why should we take up Sunday morning to preach on this? Aren’t there more vital subjects? Why should we preach on discipline when the world is on fire?” Well, think about *what* was going on in the world when Paul wrote these words about Church discipline. The Church then was in the furnace of persecution—just read **1 Peter**.<sup>2</sup> It was surrounded by heresies on every side—just read **1 John**. There was tyranny in many parts of the government (**Acts 12:1**); a great famine that spread across the world (**Acts 11:28**); and the saints were plagued by crippling poverty (**2 Corinthians 8:3**). And yet Paul believed it was still necessary to admonish the Church to practice discipline nonetheless. Why? Because the Church is *meant* to be a refuge from the wickedness of this world. **1 John 5:19** says “We know that we are from God, [but]<sup>3</sup> the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.” The world is in

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### <sup>1</sup> Church discipline *again*?

I was sitting at the dinner table this last week reading my favorite author Jonathan Edwards on the passage that we just read and Monica asked me what I was reading. I told her, and being married for 21 years, she knew what that meant so she asked: “Are you going to preach on Church discipline *again*?” Now she was only echoing what was in my heart. On the one hand, I didn’t really want to. But I responded by saying “We don’t get to pick the the subject matter of Scripture. We wouldn’t be good pastors if we simply skipped those passages that we don’t prefer.”

<sup>2</sup> “Even in the case of the primitive Church, while yet in the furnace of persecution, it was necessary, by the exercised of judicial authority, to purge out the offense and the offender, that the Christian society might be preserved pure.” James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ: A Treatise on the Nature, Powers, Ordinances, Discipline, and Government of the Christian Church*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2016), pg. 710

<sup>3</sup> original “and”

moral darkness. It needs to see light from another Realm. That's one of the reasons God leaves the Church on earth— **Philippians 2:15**—“that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.” But how can the Church be a light in the world, if it looks exactly like the world?

### **Church discipline creates worshippers**

The Corinthian Church is a picture of a Church without discipline. They became so scandalous in sin that even the pagans were shocked. Why would the world ever turn to a Church that looks like this for hope and truth and salvation? Christ designed the Church so that when unbeliever comes in, he would be convicted not only by the truth *but* by our lives so that the secrets of his heart would be disclosed, and he would fall on his face, worshipping God, declaring that God is really among us (cf. **1 Corinthians 14:24-25**). But that can't happen if the Church looks just like the world. Therefore Church discipline is “one of the most powerful means of conviction and conversion towards those who are [on the outside].”<sup>4</sup> An undisciplined Church says that Jesus doesn't care about holiness; it says that His gospel isn't powerful enough to transform people from darkness to light; it says that He is no different from any other god.

### **Church discipline 'saves' the Church<sup>5</sup>**

Jay Adams once said “Discipline is a primary means...for drawing a line between the Church and the world, one of the chief ways of identifying God's people, and a pivotal element in distinguishing a true Church from a false one.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 2*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. 121

<sup>5</sup> Instrumentally

<sup>6</sup> Jay E. Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline: A Right and Privilege of Every Church Member*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 1974), pg. 10

It is the failure to practice this that leads to liberalism, because when a Church has fallen into moral decay, it no longer has the strength to combat heresy. Discipline is the tool that God uses to form righteousness and peace in us. **Hebrews 12:11** "...it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."<sup>7</sup> It produces joy and happiness. **Psalm 94:12-13** "Blessed is the one you discipline, Lord, the one you teach from your law; you grant them relief from days of trouble, till a pit is dug for the wicked." It is an evidence of the Father's great love towards us. **Hebrews 12:6** "...the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son."<sup>8</sup> It is the tool used in the hand of the Holy Spirit to restore broken marriages, to snatch those who are deceived out of the fire, to break addictions to alcohol, drugs, and pornography, to equip those who live in anxiety or depression, to root out idolatry and secret sins. This is what we all need. This is what the world desperately needs to see today. That is why we can say "Faithful are the wounds of church discipline."

### *The Big Idea...*

Christ gave us Church discipline in order to reclaim our brothers and to make a clear line between the Church and the world, therefore we must practice it

- ☆ The Authority of Church Discipline
- ☆ The Subjects of Church Discipline
- ☆ The Manner of Church Discipline

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<sup>7</sup> NIV

<sup>8</sup> cf. Revelation 3:19

## I. The Authority of Church Discipline

### Discipline is a tri-fold act of love

Last week we saw the three purposes Paul had in excommunicating<sup>9</sup> this incestuous man from the Church. First so that the offender "...may be saved in the day of the Lord" (v.5); so that the rest of the Church would not be corrupted by his influence (v.6); and so that Christ Jesus would be honored with sincerity and truth (v.8). In summary we saw that Church discipline was an act of love to the offender, to the Church, and to Christ Himself.

### This is happening all the time: formative & corrective discipline

Now this final stage of Church discipline is not the only kind the Church should be engaged in. Jesus lays out the steps leading up to removal in **Matthew 18:15-17**. But even there we are not given the whole picture. There are two basic species of discipline: **1) formative discipline** and **2) corrective discipline**. In **formative discipline**, we are being *formed*. Like a child who moulds a little figure out of play dough, so the Christian is constantly being moulded by the means of grace that God has given us in preaching and prayer, singing and sacraments, fellowship and family worship. **Romans 12:2** "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed *by the renewal of your mind*." Whenever your mind is being renewed, formative discipline is taking place. Which means that this kind of discipline that is literally happening all the time in the Body of Christ. In **corrective discipline**, we are being *corrected*. Now this also happens all the time, doesn't it. We daily, hourly have moments where instead of being transformed by the renewing of our minds, we are being conformed to the world. We need to be corrected. Sometimes this correction lasts 30 seconds—the Holy Spirit convicts you of speaking something unkindly to your spouse or child or fellow Church member and you repent. Or perhaps it can last 3 months or longer when an individual is caught in some serious offense

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<sup>9</sup> I would argue that in a healthy Church, this last stage of Church discipline should be a fairly rare occurrence.

for which they are not willing to repent over. That is the kind of discipline<sup>10</sup> in view here in 1 Corinthians 5.<sup>11</sup>

### By what authority?

The question here is: *by what authority* does the Church have to practice this kind of Church discipline? We rushed past v.4 last time, so let's look at it again. v.4 "When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, [then v.5] you are to deliver this man to Satan." Let's stop. Three important principles of Church discipline here.

### Principle #1: The authority of Church discipline doesn't rest with one man

It's true that Paul—by apostolic authority—is directing the Corinthians what they ought to do.<sup>12</sup> But the authority of Church discipline doesn't rest on one man. That leads to the tyranny of Rome. We see this in **3 John 9-10**. John says "I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes [a pastor there], who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority...and not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church." The Church does need leadership, which is why Christ has given the Church a plurality of elders. And it is the elders that should have the authority of first judging each case. **Hebrews 13:17** "Obey your *leaders* and submit to *them*, for *they* are keeping watch over your souls, as *those* who will have to give an account." That's the **first principle**, the authority of Church discipline as Calvin said "...should [not] be put into the hands of any one man, of excommunicating at his pleasure any that he may choose."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> This is the longest chapter in the Bible on Church discipline.

<sup>11</sup> "For inward impiety, and anything that is secret, does not fall within the judgment of the Church." John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. XX*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks 2009), pg. 193

<sup>12</sup> Though Paul is absent bodily, his apostolic authority is present.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, 183

## **Principle #2: The authority of Church discipline rests on the whole church**

Paul says in v.4 “When *you* are assembled...” The *you* is plural in the Greek, referring to the whole Church. The authority for Church discipline doesn’t stop at the counsel of elders, but it also comes with the consent of the whole congregation.<sup>14</sup> Jesus said in **Matthew 18:17** says “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” Whenever it gets to this stage, it should be so clear to the congregation that she agrees that this is what *ought* to be done and the only thing left to do. If the congregation ever disagrees, the counsel of elders ought to take a hard look at themselves to see if they have erred. That’s the **second principle**, just as Paul blames the whole congregation in Corinth for failing to practice Church discipline, so he charges the whole congregation to take part in it.

## **Principle #3: The authority of Church discipline comes from Christ Himself**

Paul says in v.4 that this is to be done “...in *the name* of the Lord Jesus and...with *the power* of our Lord Jesus.” What does it mean to be done in *the name* of the Lord Jesus? Well it doesn’t mean that we *simply* say “we do this in *Jesus’ name*.” It means that Church discipline can only be carried out if it agrees with Jesus’ name—meaning the revelation of Jesus—found in His Word. The Church should *only act* according to what Jesus has said in Scripture. If the Church disciplines outside of that, it’s declaration is wrong, and carries with it no authority. That’s why the Reformers were willing to set aside Rome’s excommunications, because Rome acted outside of Jesus’ name. It’s why the Apostle John was willing to set aside the wrong judgments of Diotrephes in 3 John, because he wasn’t acting in accord with Jesus’ name.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> “The power of Christ resides, not in any individual, but in the assembly of believers.” Thomas Charles Edwards, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Published by Forgotten Books 2012, Originally Published 1885), pg. 125

<sup>15</sup> “Whenever a local church acts in Jesus’ name, that is *according to His Word*, they can be sure they are acting in His power.” John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians*, (Chicago, IL.,: Moody Publishers, 1984), pg. 125-126

Now when Church discipline is done in accord with Jesus' name, it definitely comes as v.4 says "with *the power* of our Lord Jesus." There are three particular places where we find the Lord Jesus Christ definitively granting such power to His Church.

The first place is in **Matthew 16:18-19** "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." These keys were not for Peter as a private person *but* to Peter as representative of the whole Church, in other words, the Church *itself* possesses these keys.

The second place is in **Matthew 18:18** after Jesus tells them to treat the unrepentant sinner as a Gentile and tax collector. He says "Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."<sup>16</sup>

The third place is in **John 20:23** after Jesus rose from the dead, He told His disciples the spiritual power the Church would be given: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." This doesn't mean that the Church literally has the power to forgive guilt like Rome believes, but rather it means that the Church following the lead of her Master in Heaven welcomes back the repentant sinner into the assembly or shuts the unrepentant sinner out of the assembly.

You see all three of these passages are equivalent to each other and help interpret each other. The keys of the kingdom (**Matthew 16:19**) is the power of opening or closing the door of Church membership to those seeking to be included or those deserving to be excluded. The keys are equivalent to the authority of binding or loosing on earth in **Matthew 18:18**, and to the forgiving sin or withholding forgiveness in **John 20:23**. The point is, as James

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<sup>16</sup> NASB

Bannerman points out “Our Lord did...convey to His Church a permanent gift of authority and power in the way of discipline that was long to outlast the ministry of the Apostles.”<sup>17</sup>

### **The Erastian spirit of this age**

This of course is no small thing because it puts the Church in the crosshairs of the spirit of this age. The spirit of this age says that the Church doesn't have any separate or distinct powers of it's own. This is the historical error of what is called Erastianism. Erastus lived in the 16th century, and he taught that the powers of the Church were entirely subordinate to the state. He held that “... office-bearers (pastors etc) were *merely* instructors, or preachers of the Word, without any power or right to rule, except what they derived from the civil magistrate.”<sup>18</sup> He believed that it was a contradiction for a civil society to allow the Church to have it's own independent society with independent powers reside within it. Now Erastus would be correct if the Church and the state were called to exercise the *same type* of power. But the Church and state have different powers. The state has the power of the sword which it exercises in the physical realm while the Church has the keys of the kingdom which she exercises in the spiritual realm. Unfortunately what we see today is that the State is exercising it's sword far beyond it's rightful boundaries.<sup>19</sup> The Church must realize as the Westminster Confession of Faith says in 30.1 “*The Lord Jesus, as King and Head of his church, hath therein appointed a government, in the hand of church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate.*” That's one of the implications of Paul's words in v.4: Church discipline is done in the name and power of the Lord Jesus, not

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<sup>17</sup> Bannerman, pg.708-709

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*, pg. 109

<sup>19</sup> One only has to look at California for a blatant type of Erastianism. There, the state is acting as if the rights of the Church hinge upon their nod. They can give rights to the Church and they can take them away. That's why John MacArthur has taken the stand that he has, because the state has no right to unduly regulate a Church's gathering. Why? Because the Church has it's own independent powers and officers. And they do not depend upon state permission.

according to the dictates of the state. Jesus is the Head of the Church, not the state.

### **Church discipline carries with it the power to change**

One final implication of **v.4**, is that when Church discipline is done in accord with Jesus' name, it is accompanied with Jesus' power. Please turn with me to 2 Corinthians 2. If you look at **v.5**, your Bible might have the subtitle above it "Forgive the Sinner." Commentators believe this whole section deals with the incestuous man from **1 Corinthians 5**. The power of Jesus through Church discipline brought this man to repentance. Look what it says "Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough [*referring to them delivering the man over to Satan*] so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him."<sup>20</sup> Do you see? This man—by the power of the Lord Jesus name—was brought to repentance and restored to the Church through Church discipline. They were told to forgive him and reaffirm their love for him. Do you see the great motive we have to practice this? The Lord Jesus always accomplishes exactly what He desires through it. If the offender never returns and repents, it demonstrates that he was never part of the true Church. "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us" (**1 John 2:19**). In that case he will not corrupt the Church or damage the witness of the Lord Jesus. But if he does return, then it was through this gift that Christ has given the Church that he has been reclaimed—that he was snatched out of the fire (**Jude 1:23**). Jonathan Edwards says here "If you strictly follow the rules of discipline instituted by Christ, you have reason to hope for his blessing; for he is

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<sup>20</sup> Then look at **v.10** "Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ." Notice the same language from John 20 when Jesus told His disciples about forgiving and withholding forgiveness

[accustomed] to bless his own institutions, and to smile upon the means of grace which he hath appointed.”<sup>21</sup> That’s our **first point**, the authority of Church discipline doesn’t come from anything in this world, but it comes from Christ, and it comes with the power to reclaim sinners.

## II. The Subjects of Church Discipline

### Lost letter?

Here I’m asking the question “*Who* are we to practice this kind of Church discipline on?” Please look with me at **v.9** “I wrote to you *in my letter* not to associate with sexually immoral people.” Two things. First, Paul had written them a previous letter and God according to His good pleasure determined it would not be preserved. Some Christians are troubled at this thought, that the Apostles might have written things that are lost. But this shouldn’t trouble in the slightest. As Charles Hodge has said “The Church has all the inspired writings which God designed for her edification; and we should be therewith content.”<sup>22</sup> Secondly, in this letter he had written ‘not to associate with sexually immoral people. Apparently they misunderstood his meaning. And they had stopped associating with unbelievers instead of the immoral brothers in the Church.

### You don’t have to leave the world

So he clarifies in **v.10** “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.*” It is impossible to not have associations with immoral people because the world is filled with those who are in rebellion to God. **1 John 5:19** “...*the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.*” It is not until the end of this age when King

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<sup>21</sup> Edwards, pg.121

<sup>22</sup> Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2018), pg. 99

Jesus separates His sheep from the goats that we will no longer have any association with the wicked of this world. Paul doesn't forbid our associating with evil men because then we should have to "seek another world to live in."<sup>23</sup>

### **The Church has no authority to discipline the world**

Therefore his meaning is that Church discipline in no way, shape or form extends to unbelievers. The Church has no authority "beyond the circle of it's own members."<sup>24</sup> That why he says in v.12 "For what have I to do with judging *outsiders*?" And then again in v.13 "God judges those *outside*."

### **Assuming Church membership**

As a side note here, Paul is assuming Church membership by making the distinction between insiders and outsiders. Turn over to 14:23-24. Paul here is talking about the superiority of preaching over speaking in tongues, but notice how he makes a distinction between the whole church in v.23 with outsiders or unbelievers in v.24. He says "If, therefore, *the whole church* comes together and all speak in tongues, and *outsiders or unbelievers* enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds? But if all prophesy, and an *unbeliever or outsider* enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all." Now I believe Paul is using *unbeliever* as a synonym with *outsider*.<sup>25</sup> But my point is, that Paul assumes there are *insiders*, that is brothers and sisters who are members of church in Corinth. It was these *insiders* who took part in putting this man out of the assembly. It is *insiders* that Jesus speaks of in **Matthew 18:17** "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to *the church*"—the insider. We aren't supposed to inform the world-wide

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid*, pg. 90

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According to Chrysostom, Paul meant this in v.10: "When I command you to shun fornicators, I do not mean all such; otherwise you would require to go in quest of another world; for we must live among thorns so long as we sojourn on earth. This only do I require, that you do not keep company with fornicators, who wish to be regarded as brethren, lest you should seem by your sufferance to approve of their wickedness." Calvin, pg. 192

<sup>24</sup> Bannerman, pg. 706

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Colossians 4:5 and 1 Thessalonians 4:12

Church when we practice Church discipline or every other Church in Boise. We know that would be inappropriate. We tell it to our local Church—to our members that have confessed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ together. I point this out because I think the reflex for many evangelicals who are suspicious about Church membership is to say “Show me where Church membership is taught in Scripture.” And our answer is that it is simply assumed everywhere in Scripture.<sup>26</sup> The reason why modern Americans are doubtful of it is *not because* the Bible doesn’t teach it, but because we live in a radically individualistic culture which interprets the Bible in an individualistic way. How can you practice Church discipline without Church membership? Is it any surprise that Churches who don’t have Church membership very rarely if ever practice Church discipline? Paul has already acknowledged their be outsiders or unbelievers in the Church. We don’t judge those, God does. Paul “...confined Church discipline to church members.”<sup>27</sup>

### **Anyone who bears the name of brother**

He makes this clear in v.11 “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

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<sup>26</sup> One example is Hebrews 13:17. “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.” Which church leaders do Christians obey? Any that come along? No, they should obey the leaders of the church they belong to, the church they’ve committed to. And which Christians will these leaders someday give account for? Any who come through the church door? No, they’re responsible for the specific members of their church. Formal Church Membership lets believers know who they are committing and submitting to, and it also lets churches and their leaders know who they are responsible for.

<sup>27</sup> Hodge, pg. 91

a one.”<sup>28</sup> Do you see? We are only to excommunicate those *who bear the name of brother* who are guilty of these things. Notice three things here. **First**, the verbs are in the present tense. We don’t remove saints who *used* to do these things otherwise no one would be left in the Church. Rather we are to remove those who are currently guilty of these things. These things have become the new normal that exemplifies their lives. These aren’t secret sins, but they are public, visible and destructive to the Church. Furthermore the guilty person has become obstinate and refuses to repent for these things. We are never to remove believers who truly hate the evil they do (**Romans 7:20**); or those who truly hunger and thirst after righteousness but find themselves empty (**Matthew 5:6**); or those who are broken over their sin (**Psalms 51:17**). The Church is supposed to be a hospital for those who know they are desperately sick (**Luke 5:31**). No excommunication not for brothers and sisters who sin, but its for brother and sisters who stop repenting for their sin.

**Secondly** this list of six sins is only a representative list. Paul is not limiting excommunication only to people who commit these sins. There are other sins—like an unlawful divorce or murder for which a member could be removed for.

Which brings us to the **third** thing. Why does Paul mention these *specific* sins? Why are these sins significant? He mentions the *sexual immoral*—those involved in illicit sexual activity; the *greedy*—those who must have more and are willing to defraud others to get it; *idolaters*—those who are devoted to anything more than God; *revilers*—one who abuses others with contemptuous language; *drunkards*—those addicted to drink; *swindlers*—those who defraud others of

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<sup>28</sup> “The Corinthian church had members who practiced all of those sins. An immoral member is the primary subject of 1 Corinthians 5. That some were covetous is implied in 10:24; and some were involved in idolatry (10:21-11). Apparently many of them were revilers, or slanderers, running down members of other parties (3:3-4) and likely to despise Timothy when he came to minister to them (16:11). They had drunkards (11:21) and they had swindlers (6:8). The whole epistle reminds us of the sinning capability of believers.” MacArthur, pg. 132

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The Amplified Bible renders v.11 “But actually, I have written to you not to associate with any so-called [Christian] brother if he is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater [devoted to anything that takes the place of God], or is a reviler [who insults or slanders or otherwise verbally abuses others], or is a drunkard or a swindler—you must not so much as [e]eat with such a person.”

goods or rights by deceit or force. Why does Paul mention these specifically? One clue is found at the end of **v.13**, when he says “Purge the evil person from among you.” Notice the quotations. This phrase comes from Deuteronomy—six places in Deuteronomy that serve as the penalty for all of these sins that Paul mentions.<sup>29</sup> In other words, these sins represent violating the covenant. That’s why under the OT, these sins required expulsion either by death or a removal from the community. They were breaches of the covenant and therefore threatened the whole covenant community. As D.A. Carson points out Paul is using “Israel as an analogy for the Church. If God’s people in Israel expelled certain sinners, then God’s people in Christ should do not less.”<sup>30</sup>

### **The power of preemptive community**<sup>31</sup>

We’ll look at the specifics of what it means to purge the evil person in our last point. But how do we practically apply this truths? If we are to excommunicate open covenant breakers, is there something we can do before it gets to that point? Yes. Remember sin begins small but then leavens the whole person. What does sin need to grow? It needs the dark. It needs privacy. Dear congregation there is sin crushing power found *merely* in sharing our lives with one another. When we share our lives together, we can be there for each other when we are tempted to engage in sin. When Esther was tempted to the sin of cowardice leaving her people to be slaughtered, Mordecai her uncle gently rebuked her and it shook the fear out of her (**Esther 4:14**). When David was going to kill Nabal, it was Abigail who stood in the gap and helped David fight adjacent his anger (**1 Samuel 25:24**). Have you ever thought about that? That you exist to prevent others from sinning and breaking covenant? But if you

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<sup>29</sup> Deuteronomy 13:5; 17:7; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21; 24:7

<sup>30</sup> *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, Ed. G. K. Beale & D. A. Carson, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Baker Academic, 2007), pg. 710

<sup>31</sup> I would have liked to add some elenctic theology here but space prevented me. See chapter three “The Work of Reconciliation Should be Valued over Making Judgments” in Michael Kruger’s *The Ten Commandment of Progressive Christianity*, (Minneapolis, MI.,: Cruciform Press, 2019)

have no lively connection with others, how will you help them fight? The Church has a corporate responsibility to be each other's keeper. We should never think "Oh that is the elder's job, let them take care of it." No, the Lord calls each to help others fight against sin. That's what we pledge together in our covenant, that we would "renounce all worldliness and to fight together against our own self-deception and the deception of the world and the devil." We do this with each other so hopefully we can prevent our brothers and sisters from becoming open covenant breakers. That's our **second point**: The subjects of Church discipline are not *mere* sinners, but unrepentant covenant breakers.

### III. The Manner of Church Discipline

#### As a Gentile and tax collector

In this last section, we're asking: "*How* are we to practice this kind of Church discipline?" v.11 tells us "not to *associate* with" the person. "'To associate with' means to enjoy close social [communion]." <sup>32</sup> v.13 tells us to "purge the evil person from among you" which means to expel them, or remove them. These commands are the equivalent of what Jesus said In **Matthew 18:17** "...let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector." To the Jews a Gentile was somebody outside of the covenant, but tax collector was someone who has betrayed the covenant. The Jews would not have considered either to be part of God's people. That's the idea here, the Church can no longer affirm the excommunicated person to be a Christian. That doesn't ultimately mean that they are not Christians, we don't know, however we can't treat them as one.

#### How do we treat them?

So then how are we to treat them? How do we act around them? Well **first** of all, we still treat them with compassion. This hollywoodized Nathaniel

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<sup>32</sup> Roy E. Ciampa & Brian S. Rosner, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The First Letter to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), pg. 216

Hawthorne Scarlet Letter type of excommunication where you treat the person like a dog is never how we are to treat those who have been expelled.<sup>33</sup> **Romans 9:2** says that Paul had “great sorrow and unceasing anguish” for his kinsman who were outside of Christ.<sup>34</sup> **Matthew 5:44** “Love your enemies and pray” for them. **Colossians 4:5-6** “Walk in wisdom toward outsiders...Let your speech always be gracious.” **Luke 6:28** “Bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” Furthermore, imagine a scenario where one spouse is excommunicated from the Church and the other is not. How should the Christian spouse treat the other? Or how should the children treat their excommunicated parent. All the duties that God has given to wives and husbands and children remain. Again Edwards says “Excommunication does not release children from the obligation of duty to their parents, nor parents from parental affection and care toward their children. Nor are husbands and wives released from the duties proper to their relation.”<sup>35</sup>

But we don't treat them as though they are part of Christ's little lambs. **Titus 3:10** “As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, *have nothing more to do with him.*” **2 Thessalonians 3:6** “Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you *keep away from any brother* who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the

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<sup>33</sup> Excommunication does not mean “do not communicate with the offender,” it means “do not commune with the offender.”

<sup>34</sup> Stephen the first martyr of the Church had great compassion on those outside the covenant so much so that as he was being stoned by them he cried out “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (**Acts 7:60**).

<sup>35</sup> Edwards, pg. 120. Edwards concludes with “And so of all other less relations, whether natural, domestic, or civil.” This flatly contradicts Roman Catholicism's version of excommunication (at least the more ancient type) that held excommunicated forfeited their civil rights and such, see Bannerman pg. 714-715. Cf. Proverbs 25:21; Romans 12:20-21. Again Edwards says: “...There are some things by which the members of the church are obliged to show kindness to them; and these things are chiefly, to pray for them, and to admonish them.- And the common duties and offices of humanity ought to be performed towards them; such as relieving them when they are sick, or under any other distress; allowing them those benefits of human society, and that help, which are needful for the support and defense of their lives and property.-The duties of natural and civil relations are still to be performed towards them.” pg. 119-120

tradition that you received from us.” **Romans 16:17** “I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.”

This doesn’t mean that we are to treat them like an enemy. **2 Thessalonians 3:14** says “Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.” It’s true that we can’t affirm the offender as a Christian, but we are *not* to count them as an enemy to avoid *but* as an estranged brother we are trying to win back. Edwards says here that we “...are to have a greater concern for their welfare... take more pains...to reclaim and save them, than...towards those who have been always heathens.”<sup>36</sup>

### **Don’t eat with them**

Yet they are *not* to receive the type of brotherly love and union that we share with other Christians. Paul tells us in **v.11** that we are “not to even eat with such a one.” What does that mean? Certainly excommunicated person have lost the privilege of eating at the Lord’s Supper.<sup>37</sup> But I don’t think that’s what’s in view. “In first century Judaism eating together was of paramount significance.”<sup>38</sup> The big fight in the book of Galatians began because Peter wrongly separated himself from the Gentile Christians refusing to eat with them (**Galatians 2:12**). As Brian Rosner points out “eating together conveys a message...who eats with whom is a powerful way of defining a social group and differentiating it from other groups.”<sup>39</sup> It’s not the act of eating—strictly

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<sup>36</sup> Edwards, pg. 119

<sup>37</sup> cf WCF 30.4

<sup>38</sup> Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 218

<sup>39</sup> *ibid*

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This is why Paul forbid the Corinthians from eating at the pagan sacrifices in 10:1-22. See also how Jesus was sharply criticized for eating with sinners (Luke 5:30; 7:34).

speaking—that is forbidden,<sup>40</sup> it’s identifying them as part of your group.<sup>41</sup> An excommunicated person is to be excluded from the tender communion and loving fellowship of Christians.<sup>42</sup> They are to be ashamed of themselves. That’s what Christ is aiming at: their shame. **2 Thessalonians 3:14** “If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, *that he may be ashamed*.”

### **That their souls may be saved<sup>43</sup>**

Let’s consider three signs of excommunication as we conclude:

#### **1. Excommunication is a sign of what every sinner deserves**

It is a demonstration of what every sinner deserves. Think about what you have heard. Excommunication is public shame. It is being cut off from the covenant community. It’s being handed over to Satan to have your flesh destroyed. Truly excommunication is a sign of the final judgment for the

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<sup>40</sup> Hodge says here “It is not the act of eating with such person that is forbidden. Our Lord ate with publicans and sinners, but he did not thereby recognize them as his followers. So we may eat with such person as are here described, provided we do not thereby recognized their Christian character.” Hodge, pg. 91. Edwards took the opposite view: “It is not meant that we should treat an excommunicated brother as Christians ought to treat heathens and publicans.; for they might eat with them, as Christ himself did; and the apostle gives leave to eat with such, 1 Cor. 10:27. and in the context gives leave to keep company with such.—Christ’s meaning must be, that we should treat an excommunicated person as the Jews were wont to treat the heathens and publicans; and as the disciples had been always taught among the Jews, and brought up, and used to treat them. They would by no means eat with publicans and sinners; they would not eat with the Gentiles, or with the Samaritans.” Edwards, pg. 119

<sup>41</sup> I think this is what John means in 2 John 1:9-11 “Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.”

<sup>42</sup> Should the excommunicated offender be allowed to attend Church (although not partake in it’s other privileges)? I don’t sense a consensus on this from commentators. It seems to me that if a Church’s membership is strong and emphasized then an excommunicated person could still attend Church and feel excluded and ashamed for their sin.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Bannerman pg. 716 for some excellent general principles to consider on handling different types of cases.

wicked. In the next age, the ungodly, those who have never repented of their sins and put their hope in the Lord Jesus Christ will stand before the great white throne. And they will be judged before the whole universe. And when their names are not found in the Book of Life, it will be to their eternal and everlasting shame. They will forever and irrevocably be cut off from God. They will never receive any kindness from Him again, only wrath. **Revelation 20:10** says they will be cast into the lake of fire with the devil “...and they will be tormented day and night forever.” Excommunication foreshadows what every single sinner deserves, to be put to shame, to be cut off, to be destroyed.

## 2. Excommunication is a sign of God’s kind heart

The Lord Jesus Christ has instituted excommunication because He has a kind heart. He instituted excommunication *precisely* because He wants to reclaim wandering souls to Himself. That’s His revealed will in v.5, He appoints us to this task so that “his spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord.” That’s why He has given the Church all these careful instructions. Each one is carefully designed to show the offender His desire to bring him back into the fold. How generous of God to give us a covenant family, that can help us find our way back to Christ when we have lost our way! Perhaps you are here this morning and you know you don’t belong to the covenant family of Christ because you have never received Him, you’ve never trusted in His name. Dear friend, if Christ removes his own people for their sin and casts them out of His Church, what will He do to you? The Scripture says “For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?”<sup>44</sup> Your only hope is to repent of your sins—turn away from trying to run your life your own way—following the lustful desires of your heart, and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith. You can be welcomed into His forever covenant by trusting in him. “Everyone who believes in him will [never] be put to shame” (**Romans 10:17**).

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<sup>44</sup> 1 Peter 4:17

### 3. Excommunication is a sign of the gospel

Dear congregation, v.13 says “Purge the evil person from among you.” That is you and me. The life you have lived has been full of evil—not only your public sins but your private sins as well. If God were to treat you as our sins deserve, you would be the evil person that God would forever purge from His presence. But your faithful Savior Jesus Christ, stood in your stead and was purged for your sake. He was removed from God’s presence *for you*. He cried out “Father why have you forsaken me?” *for you*. He was handed over to Satan for the destruction of His flesh *for you*. He endured the cross, despising the public shame *for you*. And He died and was buried and rose from the dead *for you*. All so that you would never be cut off from. Christ was cut off, so you could be brought near. Dear congregation, as unpleasant as all this talk of excommunication might be, consider that Christ Jesus experienced this in full, all for you, all because He loves you. Christ was excommunicated from God so that you would never have to be.