

Church Membership

February 2, 2025

1 Corinthians 5:1–8 (ESV)

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. ² And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

³ For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. ⁴ When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

⁶ Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? ⁷ Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸ Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Introduction

This passage highlights the importance of church membership as a covenantal relationship marked by holiness, mutual accountability, and shared commitment to Christ's body. Paul addresses the Corinthian church, emphasizing that membership requires both individual and collective responsibility to uphold God's standards. The church must take sin seriously, addressing it not with arrogance but with humility and godly grief over disobedience. Removing the unrepentant sinner demonstrates the protective love of the church for its members and serves a redemptive purpose by urging repentance and restoration. In this way, church membership becomes a visible testimony of the transformative power of Christ, our Passover Lamb, and His work to purify His people.

Reflection Question:

1. What responsibilities do you think come with being a member of a church?

1. The Purpose of Church Membership

Key Verse: “Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.” (1 Corinthians 5:7)

Church membership is not merely about social affiliation but about participation in a covenant community:

1. **Shared Identity:** Members share a common faith in Christ and a commitment to live out the Gospel together.
 - How does being part of a church shape your identity as a Christian?
2. **Mutual Accountability:** Membership involves holding one another accountable for living in a way that honors Christ.
 - Why is accountability important for spiritual growth?
3. **Corporate Witness:** The church's collective testimony is impacted by the lives of its members.
 - How does your personal conduct reflect on your church community?

2. The Problem of Unrepentant Sin

Key Verse: "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife." (1 Corinthians 5:1)

Paul confronts the Corinthian church for tolerating open sin:

1. **Sin Corrupts the Body:** Like leaven spreads through dough, sin within the church affects the entire community.
 - What steps can you take to guard against sin in your own life?
2. **The Danger of Indifference:** The Corinthians' pride in their tolerance contrasts with the holiness God calls them to.
 - How can you balance grace and truth when addressing sin in the church?
3. **Christ's Sacrifice:** The church is called to holiness because Christ's sacrifice cleanses us from sin.
 - How does remembering Christ's sacrifice motivate you to pursue holiness?

3. The Practice of Church Discipline Assumes Church Membership

Key Verse: "Let him who has done this be removed from among you." (1 Corinthians 5:2)

Paul outlines the necessity of discipline and membership in protecting the church's gospel witness and restoring the sinner:

1. **Restorative Purpose:** Discipline aims to lead the sinner to repentance and restoration.
 - How is church discipline an act of love?
2. **Protective Purpose:** Discipline guards the church's holiness.
 - Why should we address sin in the church rather than ignoring it?
3. **Corporate Responsibility:** All members share the duty to uphold the church's gospel witness.
 - What role can you play in fostering a culture of accountability?

4. Requirements for Membership

To become a member of the church, an individual must:

- Profess salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8–9).
- Undergo believer's baptism by immersion, symbolizing faith in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3–4).

5. Living as Members of Christ's Body

Being a member of the church means:

- Pursuing holiness individually and corporately (1 Corinthians 5:1–7; Matthew 18:15–20).
- Supporting one another in love and truth (Romans 12:13, 15–16; Hebrews 10:24–25).
- Encouraging one another to grow in faith and good works (Hebrews 10:24–25).
- Guarding one another by holding each other accountable to God's Word (1 Corinthians 5; Matthew 18).
- Obeying and honoring spiritual leaders as they shepherd the flock in accordance with Scripture (Hebrews 13:17).

Reflection Questions:

- How can you actively contribute to the spiritual health of your church?

- What steps can you take to grow in accountability with fellow believers?
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Prayer:

- Thank God for the gift of the church and its role in your life.
 - Ask for wisdom and courage to address sin lovingly and truthfully
 - Pray for your church's purity, unity, and faithfulness.
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Catechism:

The Baptist Catechism, Question #101

What is the duty of such who are rightly baptized?

It is the duty of such who are rightly baptized to give up themselves to some particular and orderly church of Jesus Christ, that they may walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.¹

¹ Acts 2:41–42; 5:13–14; 9:26; 1 Peter 2:5; Luke 1:6

Church Discipline

February 9, 2025

Matthew 18:15–20 (ESV)

¹⁵ “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

Introduction

Jesus outlines a redemptive process for church discipline, emphasizing restoration and reconciliation over condemnation. The steps of private correction, involving witnesses, and eventually informing the church aim to bring the sinner back to fellowship while protecting the purity of the body. Discipline is an act of love, rooted in the authority of Christ and the unity of believers in His name. This passage assures us of Christ's presence in the church's decisions and underscores the weight of collective prayer and agreement in seeking God's will.

Reflection Question:

- Why do you think discipline is essential in the church?

1. The Steps of Church Discipline

Key Verse: “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.” (Matthew 18:15)

Jesus outlines a process for addressing sin:

1. **Private Confrontation:** Address the sin directly and privately to encourage repentance.
 - How can you approach someone about their sin with humility and love?
2. **Small Group Accountability:** If the individual does not listen, involve one or two others as witnesses.

- Why is it important to involve others at this stage?
 - 3. **Church Involvement:** If the person remains unrepentant, bring the matter before the church.
 - How does involving the church demonstrate the seriousness of sin?
 - 4. **Separation:** If there is still no repentance, treat the person as an outsider, while praying for their restoration.
 - How can separation be both just and redemptive?
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2. The Authority of the Church

Key Verse: “Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 18:18)

1. **Binding and Loosing:** The church has authority to affirm or deny someone’s membership based on their response to sin and repentance.
 - How does this authority emphasize the weight of church membership?
 2. **Christ’s Presence:** Jesus promises to be with His church when it gathers in His name.
 - How does Jesus’ presence give confidence in practicing discipline?
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3. The Goal of Church Discipline

Key Verse: “If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.” (Matthew 18:15)

1. **Restoration:** Discipline seeks to restore the sinner to fellowship with God and the church.
 - How can you pray for and support someone going through church discipline?
 2. **Holiness:** Discipline helps the church maintain its calling to reflect Christ’s holiness.
 - How does addressing sin strengthen the church’s witness?
 3. **Unity:** Proper discipline fosters a culture of love, accountability, and truth.
 - How does discipline promote unity within the church?
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4. Why Practice Discipline?

- Good for the believer (1 Corinthians 5:1-5, Galatians 6:1-5; 1 Timothy 1:20)
 - Shows others the danger of sin (1 Timothy 5:20)
 - The Health of the Church (1 Corinthians 5:6-8)
 - Witness of the Church (John 13:34-35; 1 Corinthians 5:1; 1 Peter 2:12)
 - For the Glory of God (Ephesians 5:25-27)
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5. Living Out the Call to Discipline

As members of the church, we are called to:

- Speak truth in love to one another.
 - Submit to the church's authority and leadership in matters of discipline.
 - Strive for restoration and reconciliation.
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Reflection Questions:

- How can you prepare your heart to address sin with humility and grace?
 - What steps can you take to encourage a culture of accountability in your church?
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Prayer:

- Thank God for His grace and forgiveness in your life.
 - Ask for courage and wisdom to address sin in a way that honors Him.
 - Pray for unity, restoration, and faithfulness in your church community.
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Historical Document:

The *Cambridge Platform of Church Discipline*, ratified in Massachusetts between 1646 and 1648, served as a foundational ecclesiastical constitution for local churches. Concerning the matter of discipline, the document declares,

The censures of the church are appointed by Christ for the preventing, removing, and healing of offenses in the church; for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren; for the deterring others from the like offences; for purging out the leaven which may infect the whole lump; for vindicating the honor of Christ, and of his Church, and the whole profession of the gospel; and for preventing the wrath of God.