



## **REDEMPTIVE COMMUNITY – PART 2**

### **Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13**

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Matthew 18. Round two of church discipline. As we attempt to expose some of the misconceptions, false ideas, that exist in most, if not all, of our minds, I want to take you to round two of the church discipline force on video. Watch this with me.

*[Video Plays]*

We all know that you can take something really good and you can abuse it, you can distort it, misunderstand it even. It's that way with a lot of things. Marriage...a great thing. We all know it can be abused, distorted, and become a bad thing in some instances. Even love itself is a good thing, a great thing, but it can be distorted and abused, and become subtly dangerous. I'm convinced church discipline is in that category. The Scriptures give us a picture of discipline...in church discipline in the context the community of faith, as a great thing.

However, there are all kinds of abuses all throughout church history. Even in churches that want to be faithful to practice some of the things we're looking at, there are tendencies to abuse, to distort along the way, and it's caused some to say, "Well, let's just throw it out the window." We're not just going to throw marriage out the window, and we're not going to throw love out the window. You don't throw something good out the window. You guard it, and you make sure that you honor the whole picture that is good in it. So, that's what we're going for as we look at church discipline. We're looking in Scripture. What does Scripture teach? Then, how can we as a faith family implement that with all the care we can possibly give it for each other's good, for the good of the church, for the glory of God?

That's the whole picture at the very beginning of the church covenant that we have. That is how can we promote one another's good, good of the church, and ultimately, the glory of God. You've got the whole covenant there listed, our church covenant, all the way down to the end. I just wanted to remind you that the context this comes in, but we're looking at the sentence at the very end that's bolded there. "We will humbly and gently confront one another and receive correction from one another in accordance with the New Testament understanding of church discipline and restoration."

What is that New Testament understanding? We started to dive in last week to Matthew 18, and this week we're going to be in Matthew 18 again, and then be in 1 Corinthians 5 some. These are the two really primary texts on church discipline. I want us to look...here's where we're going. We're spending three weeks here, and this is the second of three, so we're in the middle. The goal today is to spend time in Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5 and get biblical foundations. Let's see what Scripture says.

What's going to happen today, though, is these biblical foundations are going to probably provoke a lot of different questions around this room. "Well, how does that look in the

context of church today? How does that look in the context of this church? How does this look at Brook Hills?" We're going to dive into some of that next week. We'll see some practical things, but there's probably going to be a lot of questions left over. However, the goal is let's see what Scripture teaches. Understand what Scripture teaches and then look at how to implement it.

I included in your notes there...I wanted to just kind of review where we've gone real quickly, especially if you weren't here last week. We talked about why we don't talk about church discipline and why many churches have nothing to do with it, ignore it almost. Why not church discipline? Many say, "Well, we're not going to do that because church discipline is legalistic." Obviously, it can become legalistic. We start imposing non-biblical or extra-biblical regulations or rules on one another, or we confront one another in sin in a way that is not gentle and Christ-like and loving with humility. Obviously, church discipline can become legalistic, but Scripturally, church discipline is not legalistic. It is loving.

We know we're going against the grain here. We live in a culture where it's not even popular to discipline children, where we don't even see the love in that. So, when we talk about discipline in the church, this is a challenge. Church discipline is challenging, but it's loving. That's what Scripture teaches.

Some people say, "Well, what about Matthew 7:1? 'Don't judge or you, too, will be judged.'" What we said last week is keep going to Matthew 7:5. What Jesus is teaching in context there in Matthew 7 is that we look at sin in our own lives so that we can see and help a brother who is struggling with sin in his life. That's the whole point. Matthew 7:5 takes us to what Jesus is teaching there. Here in Matthew 18, it's all over the New Testament. We help one another grow in holiness. That's what church discipline is about.

Now, some might say, "Well, people will leave." We talked about how church discipline is not the sharpest church growth tactic. You're not going to see this one on T.V. very often, or in the best seller list in the Christian bookstore: *Your Best Discipline Now*. That doesn't bring in the money, but here's the deal. What we've said is this is God's church to grow, not ours. We are foolish to think that we know the best way to grow the church. When God has given us His Word, we need to align with His Word and trust God to add to our number. That's the picture.

You see all over the book of Acts, and we looked at Acts 2 and Acts 5. Some say, "Well, we don't know how to practice church discipline." What we're saying is, "Let's learn how then." What is it? We talked about holistic and both these facets of church discipline are huge. First, formative church discipline. We defined that as continual training that we receive from the Word and the body of Christ as our lives are transformed into Christ's likeness. We're in the church and all of us are disciples of Christ. That implies we're under discipline. Even the fact that we're sons and daughters of God. We have a Father. Hebrews 12 teaches our Father disciplines us because He loves us. None of us is the finished product. We're all being transformed more and more and more into the likeness of Christ. That's discipline. It's happening in our lives all the time.

Now, part of that is restorative church discipline: Corrective care taken by the body of Christ in matters of unrepentant sin in a brother or sister's life. This is key. If we are left to ourselves, we will wander into sin. Every single one of us has a sinful nature still in us that wars against the spiritual nature, the nature of Christ in us. It's Galatians 5; it's the war between the flesh and the Spirit. Part of the purpose of the church, of the community faith, is to guard us, to help us spur one another on toward Christ. That's why Christianity cannot be lived in isolation, because we have a tendency to sin.

Now, Christ has forgiven us. He's empowered us over that, and the whole point of the community of faith is to help one another avoid sin. So, what we're saying in restorative church discipline is when we start to wander...which any one of us does. I do, you do, we all have a tendency to that. We want a brother or a sister who is there by our side who will stop us! We don't want a brother or a sister who's going to wait until we have gone this much farther in sin. We want someone to stop us here. This is the picture when it comes to restorative church discipline, which is what Jesus is addressing in Matthew 18.

Now, we talked about how the foundation in this whole picture of discipline is the grace of God. There's a great book by a guy named Jerry Bridges that I would recommend if you want to dive in deeper; it's called *Disciplined By Grace*. The whole point of the book is there's a picture here of grace and discipline that come together in a beautiful relationship.

We saw that grace expressed in the whole context surrounding Matthew 18:15-20. We talked about approaching church discipline. How does Jesus approach church discipline? He tells us we need childlike humility. It takes a great deal of humility to confront one another in a way that honors Christ in their sin, and then it takes a great deal of humility to receive correction from one another. We need childlike humility. We need a deep concern for holiness. We need to be serious about sin.

We have become so casual with sin. We, today, are so flippant with the holiness of God. We need a deep concern for holiness. We need to see sin, not like our culture sees it, but like a holy God sees it. In such a way that we would not be surprised to hear Jesus, "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away." Sin is that serious.

We need a deeper concern for holiness. Along the way, we need a passion for the hurting. Picturing the parable of the lost sheep. The whole point of church discipline is not to kick people out; the whole point of church discipline is to keep people in, to keep people close to Christ. The picture here is a father who runs...a shepherd who runs after a sheep, a Father who runs after us, and uses the church to do that. Along the way, we need forgiving hearts. Obviously, we need to forgive as God has forgiven us.

### **Applying Church Discipline ...**

So, all of that leads up to Matthew 18:15-20: Applying church discipline. So what do you do? Look at Matthew 18:15. Jesus says, "*If your brother...*" Now, follow along here, and you'll see four steps here. Let's see if you can identify them.

*"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector."*

[Then Jesus says,] "*I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."*

### **Step One: Private correction.**

Okay, step one, applying church discipline: Private correction. Step one: Private correction. *"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you."* Now, side note here. Some of you in your Bibles, I'm guessing most of us, where it says in verse 15, that first phrase, *"If your brother sins against you..."*, I want you to look down in your Bibles there, and you probably have a little note, a little footnote, in your Bible that takes you to the bottom, and it says something along the lines of, "Some manuscripts do not have the words 'against you.'" This is what...this is going to be kind of a tangent, but I hope a valuable tangent real quickly.

This is what New Testament scholars would call a variant. What that means is in the earliest manuscripts we have, there are variants. There are slight differences between those earliest manuscripts. In this case, some of those early manuscripts don't have the words "against you." Some of them do. So, if you're translating the Scriptures, then you say, "Well, do you include it or not?" Some people will say, "Well, this is why you can't rely on the Bible, because it's not even true. You don't even know what the original manuscripts are." This is where I want you to encourage you to take heart.

Ninety-nine percent of variants are practically totally insignificant. There's one letter missing here or there, or maybe word order switched around, not in a way that changes meaning. In that one percent that are maybe a little more significant than that, none of those...none of those affect central doctrines or tenets of Christianity. Even in this picture, this would be one of those one percent where, "If your brother sins 'against you'...". The reality is when you take this whole picture in light of the entire teaching of the New Testament, some would say, "Well, this is only when somebody sins directly against you." However, the reality is, Galatians 6:1 teaches us that when a brother is caught in sin, we should restore him gently. It's not specifically specified there, "Well, if it's against you." So, the picture the New Testament gives us is if you've been directly sinned against or if your brother is caught in sin, this is what you do. Go and show him his fault just between the two of you.

So, here's the principle that we're going to seek to unfold in these first two steps especially: Keep the circle as small as possible as long as possible. Jesus says, "Don't go and talk to somebody else about your brother's sin." Which, let's be honest, is the first thing that we're prone to do, and that we do all the time. Jesus is saying, the Scripture is teaching, that that is sinful. It is sinful.

Ephesians 4:29-32: To speak about a brother or sister in a way that does not build up their needs, their character in Christ, that's the picture in Ephesians 4. We looked at that a couple of weeks ago. Our tendency is to go and, maybe, even to fish around and find out if anybody else knows about this brother's sin. Jesus says don't do it. Go to your brother; go to your sister. Just between the two of you. Resist the temptation to gossip, because then, you need to be confronted now.

This is one of those points where I'm convinced we could do so much at this small simple point to save the reputation of Christ and each other, and to guard against division of the church. If we just did this one little, simple part of church discipline correctly, then it would save what, I'm guessing, scores of people around this room know as heartache in the church. Let's guard this. Let's implement that today.

This doesn't involve some major church organization, church discipline stakeout team. This is just in the context...this whole picture, this first step is in the context of our relationships with one another all the time. We're always doing this. We're always helping one another in individual ways like this, and we're making sure...I've seen it happen. You've seen it happen

over and over and over again. The more people know about a brother or sister who's struggling in this sin the more a case is built, so to speak. The more people know about that the harder it's going to be for that brother to be restored, because of the root of bitterness. It's going to grow in that brother. It's going to be very difficult as opposed to you going to him and saying that this is what...and even being open. "Hey, did I misunderstand this?"

Oftentimes, we've got totally wrong information. We've read a situation wrong. We're talking to all these other people about it, and the brother over here has done nothing wrong. So, for his sake, for your sake not to fall in sin, and for the sake of the glory of Christ, keep it just between the two of you. Go to your brother or sister. Jesus says, "If he listens to you, you've won your brother over."

I'm convinced 95% of church discipline happens right here. It's something we do. Now, nobody likes that kind of conversation. That's why we go to talk to everybody else, because it's easier to talk to other people than to talk with each other about sin and struggles. However, do the hard work from the very beginning and just go to your brother. Love and care for him in humility. Same picture that Matthew 7 teaches. You've looked in your own life. You're going to help your brother with the speck in his eye. Go to him, love him enough to care for him and go to him, and not be talking to everybody else about this. In the process, you'll win your brother over. Regain your brother.

I'm convinced we do step one right here, we've done the majority of church discipline in the church. No team necessary. No official organization. Just live among one another and care for each other enough to help each other avoid sin. Step one: Private correction.

However, what Jesus says in verse 16 is, "If he will not listen..." Now, I want to pause here before we go to step two. If your brother will not listen, will not listen to the Word, will not receive correction, that's when you go to step two. If your brother turns from sin at that point, then the whole church discipline picture here in Matthew 18 is not in play anymore.

Now, there might be...follow along here...there might be situations where maybe a brother or sister had some relationships that need to be restored as he's turning back. There's some things that you're going to help walk with him or her through in the process of restoring and the consequences of those sins. That's a whole other picture. However, what the rest of Matthew 18 is dealing with is unrepentant sin in the church. A brother who will not listen to the Word, a sister who will not listen to correction from the Word in the body of Christ, and continues unrepentant in sin. If they don't listen, then you go to step two.

### **Step Two: Small group clarification.**

Step two: Small group clarification. Small group clarification. By small group, Jesus says one or two others. "*Take one or two others along so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.*" He quotes there from Deuteronomy 19:15. This picture is a pattern from the Old Testament where others are brought in to testify to the truth of something. Again, the picture here is to keep the circle small, to gather together one or two other believers who were gentle and humble, and loving and caring, to go with you. They can, in the process...there's all kinds of things those one or two brothers can help you understand if you're imposing some non-biblical or extra-biblical legalistic regulation on somebody. That's good. That brothers or sisters could say, "You don't need to be confronting this." However, if it needs to be confronted in a brother's or sister's life, now you've got two or three people who are saying, "We love you, and we care for you. We want you to experience abundance in Christ, and so we talk with you about this for that reason." Two or three brothers or sisters doing that.

Again, this doesn't necessarily have to involve a church leader or a pastor. In fact, I mean it could, but I think the best context is to involve someone or a couple of people who know that person, who are involved in that person's life, who know what they're walking through and who will walk with them through that struggle. So, here we've got the majority of church discipline in these first two steps. The goal is keep this small in these first two steps.

### **Step Three: Church admonition.**

Then, it widens in step three. Jesus says, *"If he refuses to listen to them..."* In other words, "If he will not receive correction, if he continues unrepentant in sin, then tell it to the church." Step three: Church admonition. Now, the church is involved. "Well, what does that mean?" Well, the word here, "Tell it to the church," is *"ekklesia"*. It's a word we see all over the New Testament for the gathering of believers. The picture is the local church, the assembly, the gathering. That looks different in different contexts, but now the circle has widened to involve the church. "Tell it to the church."

Now, I know that as soon as we see that, we think, "Okay, so you go from three to 4,000. How does that look in the context of The Church at Brook Hills, the church that we're a part of?" Those are some of the things we're going to dive into next week. Let's just see what Jesus is saying here. He says, "Tell it to the church, the gathering of believers, the assembly, the local body. Tell it to the local body." The picture here, I've wondered at this point, "Man, that seems to get large quick. Why? Why would it be necessary? Why would Jesus say, 'Go to the assembly of believers and tell them about this brother or sister and their sin?' Why?"

This is the picture. This is one of those times in the study for me over the last couple of weeks that just came alive in a way I had not realized before in this text what's going on here. I think part of the reason I hadn't realized it is because, even when I've seen churches that practice church discipline, I think this is something that's missed out. Oftentimes, the time when it comes to the whole church, the whole gathering, when a brother or sister sins who is under church discipline is brought before a whole gathering is oftentimes when that brother or sister is being excommunicated or removed from membership in the church, which we're going to talk about in just a second.

However, that's not what Jesus is saying here. It may get to that point, but He says, "Tell it to the church", and listen to the very next phrase. *"If he refuses to listen, even to the church..."* So, the picture is the point of telling it to the church, the whole gathering of believers, is so that now, you have an entire local assembly of believers out of love and grace and mercy and humility, is going after that believer, saying, "We want you to turn to Christ. We want you to trust in Christ." Is loving them enough, caring for them, showing the mercy and grace of God to them, in order to draw them back to Christ.

The picture here...I love the picture here of a God who does not leave us alone to wander off in our sin, but who gets to a point where He says, "I love you so much, I'm going to send my people to show you that love; my people are going to be an expression of that." So, the picture here is the church expressing the grace and love and the mercy of God in order to bring this brother back from his sin. Grace and mercy all over this deal.

### **Step Four: Church excommunication.**

That leads to step four. *"If he refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector."* Step four: Church excommunication. Excommunication, removal from the church. The imagery here is Jesus saying, "Treat him as if he were not a brother in the church. Treat him as if he were outside of the church." He's no longer treated as a member of the body of Christ. Excommunicated; expelled from church, which is the language we'll see in just a second in the New Testament.

I want us to see here in Matthew 18 that this is not an option. This is a command from Jesus. Treat the brother or sister in unrepentant sin as if he were not a member anymore, as if he were not a brother or sister. That's a command from Jesus, which means to not obey this is to sin. Ladies and gentlemen, we are in sin. We are in disobedience as a body if we do not do this.

Now, let's pause here for a second, and let's just be totally honest with each other. This doesn't seem right, does it? This is tough. This is certainly tough to implement, but this is tough to understand. Doesn't this go against the grain of all of our thinking? Isn't the church suppose to be the people and the place where everyone is welcomed? Why would the church say to someone, "You cannot be a member here. You are excluded from membership here." Why would the church say that? Doesn't that seem to go against every picture of the church that we have in our minds? Why would Jesus say this? Why would the New Testament church actually do it?

Take a right with me to go to 1 Corinthians 5. 1 Corinthians 5. I want you to see how the New Testament church was obedient in this. They were living in disobedience by not paying attention to this whole picture, and God, through Paul, called them to obedience. 1 Corinthians 5. As you're turning there, quick setup. The city of Corinth was a city of loose living and sexual immorality. I'm convinced, in many ways, very similar to our culture today, where sexual immorality is rampant, hardly even noticed. You don't have to sit through one round of commercials on T.V. or sit through five minutes of a movie today to know that sexual immorality is just accepted as rampant, and it's no big deal. We're desensitized to it. The picture in Corinth is it had infiltrated the church. I'm convinced the picture is the exact same today; exact same today.

So, what happens is Paul writes this letter to the church. Here in 1 Corinthians 5, he addresses the situation, which I wish I could clean this up some, but there's just no way to clean it up. The situation is there is a brother, there's a member in the church, who is sleeping with his stepmother. That's the picture. He is a member of the church, and Paul addresses them. I want you to hear what he says, 1 Corinthians 5:1:

*It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. [Which the language there is a picture of a stepmother.] And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus, and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan so that the sinful nature may be destroyed, and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.*

*Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast – as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.*

*I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people. [Then, Paul says,] Not at all meaning the people of this world who are*

*immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world.*

Paul just gets on this. "Listen, this is talking about the church here. If you were avoiding the sexual immoral in the world, you couldn't go out of your house. You could go somewhere else, maybe, another planet."

*"But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man, do not even eat." Don't even sit at the table with him. "What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. 'Expel the wicked man from among you.'"*

I want you to notice the forceful language Paul uses here. Four times he says what to do. In verse 2, he says, "Put that brother out of your fellowship." Verse 5, "Hand him over to Satan", which we'll talk about in a minute. Verse 7, "Get rid of that brother as a member in the church." Verse 13, "Expel the wicked man from among you." This right here pretty much rules Paul out of being on the front cover of church growth magazines. He's just lost his right to this ever. Not just Paul, but Jesus tells us this in Matthew 18. Paul talks about it here in 1 Corinthians 5. The Word of God is telling us to remove a member from the church, to remove a brother or a sister from the church.

*For the purity of the church.*

Why? This doesn't make sense to us, so why? I think 1 Corinthians 5 gives us the answer in a variety of different ways. You've got this in your notes. First, do this for the purity of the church; for the purity of the church. This, I'm convinced, is the primary issue. As we're going to see in a minute, this is good for the brother or sister who is in immorality, but the primary issue here is the effect on the church. The purity of the church is at the forefront of 1 Corinthians 5 in a variety of different ways.

Look at these truths that rise from 1 Corinthians 5. First, church members are accountable; church members are accountable. I want you to notice that Paul in 1 Corinthians 5 is not confronting the brother who is in sexual immorality. Who is he confronting? He's confronting the church. He's not rebuking the brother who is caught in sexual immorality. He is rebuking the church, and the picture here is the church being told that they are disobeying God for the way they're responding to this brother.

The issue in 1 Corinthians 5 is the church's toleration of sin, and he says to them, "You are accountable church, first, before God." 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, just a couple of chapters before this, talks about how the people of God are the temple of God. Paul is saying, "You're the temple of God, and you're not guarding the holiness of that temple." All throughout the Old Testament, you didn't let idols hang out in the temple. You cleansed the temple. In the same way, now you're the temple. You do not let impurity reign in the temple.

You're accountable before God for that, and not just accountable before God; church members are accountable for each other. This is the point of 1 Corinthians 5. The church, the body of believers, the church is responsible for the sin of its members. Did you catch that? The church, the body of believers, is responsible before God for the sins of its members. We do not think this way. We think about sin individualistically, don't we? We think, "Well, that's that brother's problem; that's that sister's struggle." That's exactly what they were doing in 1 Corinthians 5, and Paul rebuked them for it.

He said, "It's not that brother's business before God. It's your business before God that he is living an unrepentant sin. You're accountable before God and for each other. That's the whole picture, and it makes sense in light of what we've seen all the way up to this point in the last three or four months. As members of the body of Christ, we belong to one another, right? We belong to one another in that way, and that's what this whole yeast and dough is about. One member's sin doesn't just affect them. One member's sin affects the entire body of Christ. We saw this a year ago when we looked at sin in the camp, Achan's sin in Joshua 7. One man's sin affects the entire people of God.

We have no clue how serious sin is. We have no clue how serious sin is in the community of faith. We are responsible before God for each other. Do you realize...let this soak in...you are responsible for the holiness of the brothers and sisters that are sitting around you at this moment? Brothers and sisters behind you, beside you, and in front of you. You're responsible for their growth in holiness, and if there is a brother or a sister sitting around you, a member of this body sitting around you, that is unrepentant in sin, is continuing on in unrepentant sin, then God holds you responsible. God holds us responsible. I mean "you" in a plural sense. You, people of God. Us. We're responsible for each other's sins.

It's even in this picture of verse 2 when he says, "And you're proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief?" That word there, it's a great word. It's a sorrow over sin. The picture is it's to experience sorrow and grieving over someone else's sin in the same way that we would experience sorrow and grieving over our own sins. It's to grieve over others' sins as if they were your own.

That right there in and of itself, you think about it. Maybe this is why we don't do church discipline, and why we're not grieving over each other's sins. Because there is so little grief in our own hearts for our own sins. Don't miss the connection. If we are casual with sin in our own hearts, then we will be casual of sin in other people's hearts. When we are serious about sin in our own lives, then we will have deep sensitivity to sins in the community of faith. That's the picture here. So, the lack of church discipline in our culture and in the contemporary church today is a reflection on our causal flippant attitude towards sin. We don't think it's a big deal. 1 Corinthians 5 says, "It's a huge deal." One writer said that, "A church that does not mourn over sin, especially sin within its own fellowship, is on the edge of spiritual disaster. When we cease to be shocked by sin, we lose a strong defense against it."

Church members are accountable; church members must be humble; must be humble. What is the sin of the church of Corinth here in 1 Corinthians 5? What's their sin that Paul points out? Look at verse 2. "You are," what? "You're proud; you're proud." What does that mean? Proud? Were they proud of this guy who is committing this sexual immorality? Are they boasting about that? Certainly not necessarily boasting about his exact sin, but follow closely here. Do not miss this.

I want you to see with me what Paul is identifying as pride in 1 Corinthians 5. Don't miss this. Pride, 1 Corinthians 5 as being addressed here: Pride is toleration of unrepentant sinners in the church. "That's pride," Paul says. Pride: Toleration of unrepentant sinners in the church. It's not necessarily that they were boasting about how great this man's sin was, but they were boasting about the fact that they welcomed him, that they were "open-minded" to use our terms today, that anyone, including someone in such heinous sins, could be a member of this church. They were proud of it. "Look at our grace and our freedom! You can do anything you want and be a member of this church." Paul rebukes them for it.

Now, key words there: "Unrepentant sinners in the church." This is not talking about the way we approach those who are unbelievers outside the church in sin. It's not talking about those in the church who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness and growing in holiness and struggling with sin along the way. This is unrepentant sinners in the church. The language here is a man has his father's wife. It's present continual action. He is living in immorality, and you are saying he is welcome here as a member of this body. Paul says, "That's pride. Your boasting is not good."

Now, the alternative is obviously what? The alternative of pride is humility. What's humility in 1 Corinthians 5 then? Humility is exclusion of unrepentant sinners from a church. That's humility. Paul says, "This is what you should do: Turn from your pride and exclude him." "Exclude" is the right word. We saw the forceful language Paul used in verse 9. He says, "Don't even associate with him." Verse 11, he says, "Don't even eat with him." This is not the only place Paul talks like this. This is not just Paul waking up in the morning, having a bad day and writing 1 Corinthians 5.

He says it at other points, too. 2 Thessalonians 3:6. He warns the church to keep away from a brother. 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15, "Take special note not to associate with this particular brother." 2 Timothy 3:5, Titus 3:10, "Have nothing to do with this brother."

I want you to realize something. This is the exact opposite of what we think, isn't it? Like, we think this is totally reversed. We think it is humble to welcome everyone as members of the church. We think it's a sign of humility to say, "It doesn't matter what you continue to do in sin, you can still be a member." We think that's humble. In fact, we think it's prideful to do anything different. We would certainly call any church that's casting out members because they continue unrepentant sin... "Who do they think they are? 'Holier than thou' people? Talk about legalism; that's what that church is all about. They're removing members."

Don't gloss over this. We can't miss this. It's by God's grace we are obedient to Him in Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5. God forbid that we would get to this point with a brother or sister, but if we did, and a brother or sister was removed from this body, mark it down from the start, that will not be perceived as humble. It will be perceived as prideful, arrogant legalism.

However, the picture that 1 Corinthians 5 is teaching me is exactly the opposite, church. It is pride to tolerate sin among each other like it is no big deal. It is pride, and it is sin against God, the toleration of sin is sinful. It is humility to address sin in a brother or sister's life, even to the point of expelling them from the church if necessary. It is pride to sit back and, under a banner of grace and freedom, welcome everyone as members no matter what they do. That is pride, 1 Corinthians 5 says, and it's humility to care about each other and to care about the holiness of God, such that you would confront each other in sin and, if it gets to this case, that you would expel someone from church.

We choose the first option, toleration, because it's a lot easier, isn't it? You talk about hard work. Humility here is the hard work. Think about the pain involved in 1 Corinthians 5. Maybe, not even just the pain, but the risk involved here in a culture of honor and shame in the 1st Century, to shame a brother. Think about it even more. Now, we don't know the details. This is hypothetical speculation, but even if it wasn't the case here, it could certainly be the case in our day. What if it's a brother who is particularly influential? What if it's a brother, this brother is extremely generous? What if this brother has influence, power in the community?

One writer said, "To lose the favor of a key benefactor, for example, would have been unthinkable in Greco-Roman society. It would invite hostility. It would have been more expedient for such a leading figure to be protected from criticism which might lead to his excommunication." There may be, in other words, a situation where someone has chosen to ignore the sinful actions of another rather than lose the favor of so prominent a person.

Think about it. Fledgling church at Corinth in a time of persecution where it was difficult to be the church and be followers of Christ, to have this leader carried away in the immorality in the city, and to expel him from the community and to bring that reproach upon yourself? There's an easier way to do church in Corinth in the same way there's an easier way to do church in Birmingham, but Paul says, "No matter what it costs, you guard the holiness of God's temple. You promote the purity of the church. You're accountable to God for that." This is humility. Humility does not tell God how He should be gracious. Humility obeys God with fear and trembling and gentleness. Humility obeys God no matter what it costs.

Church members who are accountable must be humble, and church membership is essential. We've talked about this before. We'll just hit on it briefly, but the implications here for what means to be a member of the body of Christ are huge. Most people read this story today and think, "Okay, removed from the church. Big deal. What does that really matter?" It shows how far we've come, how much we have minimized what it means to be a member of a local body of Christ, to think that this would be no big deal. It was a huge deal in that day. This was severe.

Don't miss what the Bible's saying here about what it means to be a member, a part of a local body of Christ. The church, that local body defines who is a member. This is not up to the individual here. It's up to the body, because the body of Christ is responsible for defining who are members in the community of faith. That's the picture here. On a deeper level, don't miss what Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5 are both teaching. Isolation from the church reflects separation from Christ. Whether it's this picture, "Hand this man over to Satan", which we'll talk about in just a second, or Matthew 18, "Treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector." To be excommunicated, expelled outside of the body of Christ, was to be recognized as someone who's not even a believer, not a brother or sister.

This is why, again, if we minimize, devalue church membership, what it means to be a member of the body of Christ, and we live Christian lives, and we're just kind of floating all around, not connected to a local body, then, we're going completely against the New Testament. The New Testament has no understanding of a follower of Christ who is not a committed member of a local body of Christ, who's committed to that gathering. We've talked about that before.

*For the salvation of the individual.*

So, the picture here is Paul saying, "Excommunicate someone, first, for the purity of the church. Second, for the salvation of the individual." Salvation in a holistic sense here; for the good of the individual. "*Hand this man over to Satan so that the sinful nature may be destroyed, and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord,*" verse 5.

Now, there are tons of debates on this, and we're not going to have time to dive into all the different interpretations here. The point here...don't miss the purpose, because even different ideas, thoughts on "hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed", what do those things mean? They all lead to his spirit being saved on the day of the Lord. So, the picture is this is for this man's good. The day of the Lord is the day of judgment. So, whatever it means, "hand this man over to Satan so the sinful nature may be destroyed", it is for his good, for his salvation.

Now, we think, "How is that possible? How can you hand a man over to Satan for their good?" This is where...this is like three or four sermons down to thirty or forty seconds. In a nutshell, there's precedent all over Scripture. Satan...Satan the ruler of this world, god of this world...lowercase "g"...god of this world, is still not sovereign. God is sovereign over Satan, and over everything Satan does. We see in Scripture God using Satan to accomplish God's purposes.

That's the whole picture we saw in Job, right? God uses Satan to bring Job, forty chapters later, to say, "I repent in dust and ashes, and I see the glory of God." God used Satan to accomplish that. 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, Paul says, "There was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of," who? "A messenger of Satan given to me. A messenger of Satan to drive me to trust in the strength that God provides." God used Satan to teach Paul to trust in His grace and His sufficiency.

One more example. 1 Timothy 1:20 with Hymenaeus and Alexander. They had been handed over to Satan using the same language. "I have handed them over to Satan so that they would be taught not to blaspheme." God has a purpose in this. There are a lot of questions there. That's for those three or four sermons. There are a lot of questions there that are mindboggling to say the least, but the picture is God is sovereign over Satan.

The first, ultimate picture here is the purity of the church, but this is for the good of an individual, that being cast out of the church, he would see the severity of sin. He would feel the consequences of not being united to the body of Christ.

Just think about it, even that right there. We could stop right there. Even that, being out of the church, would be a picture of the severity of sin, that he would see the consequences of being separated from the body of Christ. 1 Corinthians 5, this whole picture only works if there is a distinction between the church and the world that he's cast out into, right? If there's no distinction between the church and the world, which is where we are today in so many ways, then this picture makes no sense to us because it really looks pretty much the same to be outside in the world and inside in the church. God, help us to change that. God, raise up a church that is distinctively unique, that is distinctively holy, in the same way that Acts 5 says, "Awes the world and draws the world to Christ."

This is the picture here, for the salvation of the individual. I pray that God would make us a community of faith that is in and of itself and who we are, we are a gracious deterrent from sin; gracious deterrent against sin, that the thought of being separated from this body is, in and of itself, a gracious deterrent against sin. "No, I don't want to be separated from the body of Christ."

*For the glory of God.*

For the purity of the church, for the salvation of the individual, and you know this was coming: For the glory of God. Paul starts this whole picture, and he says, "This kind of sexual immorality, it doesn't even occur among the pagans. Not even the world condones what you are now condoning in the church." Can I be honest? This is where this journey begins for me as a pastor in this body. It was not long after I came when the elders and I were contacted by a woman in this community. Her husband had committed adultery against her and was with another woman, living with her, and in the process of divorcing his wife. She contacts, and she says, "My husband has come and has joined your church while he's living with this other woman." She said, "I don't get it. How can a member of your church sleeping around on me, and you will do nothing about that?" That pierced me, and we addressed that individual situation specifically.

However, it was clear. How is that possible? It's possible because we have ignored Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5, and I'm not sure that we were ready at that point to dive right into this, and so this has been a long time coming, but we need to dive into it. We need to implement this for the glory of God not to be compromised in the world. We need to implement this in church. There are questions about how that looks; questions abound. However, let's be firm on this one thing: We do not want to compromise the glory of God in the world around us when they see the church, and we certainly don't want to use justifying explanations that we're proud of in the process.

God is doing so much across this body. One of the things we need to work on, and we are working on, is how to celebrate better all of the victories around this room and this body of believers. There are scores and scores and scores of small groups all across this body that are taking on this city for the glory of Christ. Starting ministries, plugging into ministries, infiltrating communities all across the city with the gospel. There are dozens...dozens of individuals and families in this faith family who, right now, are either praying seriously about or are in the process of giving their lives to go to another nation that does not have access to the gospel. There are stories of community and grace and mercy all across this faith family. God is doing awesome things, and I'm convinced that the Adversary would like nothing more than to undercut that with sin in the camp here or there, and for us to think it's small, and it's not a big deal, and it's not worth addressing.

So, let's say as a people we're going to be obedient here. Show us how, God; we're going to be obedient. We're not going to have time to finish. Of course not, but here's what I want us to do. I want us to pray, and I want us to pray together in response to this Word, in light of Psalm 24. Let me read it to you. This is a psalm that was written when people were journeying...follow this, follow this...when people were journeying to the temple for worship, a place where the glory of God dwelled. This is what they would say.

*"Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol. He will receive blessing from the LORD. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob."* That's what they would say. They would look inside. "Do we have clean hands? Do we have a pure heart before we even go to the temple?"

Now, here's the picture. This is not the Old Testament anymore. We are the temple, and so the question is, "Church, do we have clean hands and a pure heart?"

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