

Church Discipline

- I. Churches are held accountable before God for whom they retain in their membership. A church must decide whose companionship they prefer: a disorderly member's or the Lord's. **JOS 7:11-13; REV 2:14-15.**
- II. When a church member stands in violation of N.T. commandments which require exclusion from the body, and such transgression is *commonly reported*, only then must a severance result, lest it be "named among" the saints. **1CO 5:1-2; EPH 5:3.**
 - A. commonly: After a fashion or in a way common to all; in common; generally, universally.
 - B. common: Of general, public, or non-private nature.
 - C. general: Including, participated in by, involving, or affecting, all, or nearly all, the parts of a specified whole, or the persons or things to which there is an implied reference.
 1. An offence may be common report because of general awareness of the offender's action. For example: A member openly commits or confesses to an offence during a church assembly. (As such, members would be very foolish to openly blurt out their sin problems, as is the manner of some churches).
 2. An offence which is only known by few may have to be made common report through the prosecution of the offender in the church court.
 3. A proven offence of common report must result in the exclusion of the offender regardless of whether he is penitent or not. In **1CO 5**, the penitence of the offender was not even mentioned, thus it had no bearing on the process.
 - D. If the offence can be dealt with by repentance BEFORE it becomes commonly reported, then it need not be dealt with by exclusion. An attempt should be made to keep an offense private and covered by repentance after the order of **JAM 5:19-20**.
 1. *Reparable* offences that are not of common report may be covered by repentance. These would be offences in which a living person of responsible age (God, victim) could forgive the offence against oneself, or reparation was made to the victim's satisfaction.
 2. *Irreparable* offences like murder may have to be turned over to civil authority for process and also made matters of common report upon which the church must act.
 - E. There are two exceptions to the rule of *common report* offences:
 1. Heresy is allowed two admonitions before exclusion. **TIT 3:10.**
 2. Wrath is allowed to be rectified until sundown. **EPH 4:26.**
 - F. Failure to promptly discipline *proven* offenders frustrates the progress of the church and risks the increase of wickedness. **JER 6:29; 1CO 5:6; 15:33; 2TI 2:16-17; HEB 12:15.**
- III. There are six N.T. lists of offenses that call for church exclusion. **1CO 5:11; 6:9-11; GAL 5:19-21; EPH 5:3-5; ROM 1:29-32; 2TI 3:1-5.**
 - A. The offences of these six lists are all categorized together by the word "such."
 - B. "Such" is a demonstrative word used to indicate *the quality or quantity of a thing by reference to that of another or with respect to the effect that it produces or is capable of producing.*
 - C. Hence, all the offences categorized by the word "such" must be dealt with in the same manner. In **1CO 5:11**, the listed offences are to be dealt with by exclusion.
 1. The offences listed in **1CO 5:11; 6:9-11; GAL 5:19-21; EPH 5:3-5; ROM 1:29-32** are all classed together with *fornication*.
 2. The offences of **1CO 5:11** and **2TI 3:1-5** are all classed with *covetousness*.
 3. According to **1CO 5**, *fornication* and *covetousness* must be dealt with by exclusion.

4. Therefore, all the offences classed together with fornication and covetousness must be dealt with by exclusion.
 - D. *Rebellion* is another offence which could result in church exclusion since it is “as the sin of witchcraft” (**1SAM 15:23**) and witchcraft is impermissible by **GAL 5:19-21**.
 - E. By the same reasoning from **1SAM 15:23** and **GAL 5:19-21**, *stubbornness is as idolatry* and since idolatry is impermissible, stubbornness is impermissible.
 1. stubborn: Of persons or animals: Pertinacious or dogged in refusing obedience or compliance; unyielding, inflexible, obstinate: chiefly in bad sense, unreasonably obstinate.
 2. Such might be the charge against someone who, after reproofs, persists in defying requirements for proper conduct (e.g., forsakes assembling, refuses pastoral communications, etc.).
- IV. If a member who has been rebuked *privately* concerning an excludable offence after the manner of **JAM 5:19-20** continues persistently in his error, the matter should be brought forward for prosecution.
- A. **GAL 5:21** says: “...they which DO [are doing] such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”
 - B. In such a case, there must be at least two witnesses to the offence before it can be prosecuted. God's system of justice will not allow a man to be condemned on the strength of only one witness even if he is guilty. **DEU 19:15; 2CO 13:1; 1TI 5:19**.
 - C. Again, patience is paramount. Persistent wrongdoers can't hide their sin forever. **1CO 4:5; 1TI 5:24-25**.
 - D. If you are the only witness to an offence, reprove the offender meekly and pray for his salvation. **GAL 6:1**.
 - E. If you are the only witness to a persistent offender, apprise the pastor. If several individual witnesses do this, a case can be established.
- V. Church discipline should be administered to those who violate apostolic tradition. **2TH 3:6, 14-15 c/w 2TH 2:15**.
- A. Church members who will not work when they should work should be excluded. **1TH 4:11; TIT 3:14; 2TH 3:7-13**.
 - B. Church members who forsake the assembly should be excluded. **HEB 10:25**.
 1. forsake: To deny, renounce, or repudiate allegiance to (God, a lord, etc.).
 2. Absenting oneself from assembling with the brethren does not of itself constitute a forsaking of assembling but it could certainly lead to that.
 - C. Likewise those who refuse to take the Lord's Supper or wash feet would be violating commandments and apostolic order. The foregoing remarks on *stubbornness* would apply.
- VI. Scripture gives the church a procedure for discipline.
- A. The pastor as the overseer is responsible to conduct the church court. **ACT 20:28**.
 1. Church members have a right to seek counsel from the pastor in handling matters of judgment. **PRO 20:18**.
 2. The pastor must be absolutely just, doing all things without partiality. **1TI 5:21; TIT 1:8**.
 3. Note that Paul directed the church as to what action to take in dealing with an offender. **1CO 5:3-5**.
 - B. An accusation calling for an exclusion must be *proved*. **1TH 5:21**.
 1. Corroboration must come from credible witnesses. **PRO 14:5**.

2. An unproven prosecution results in the exclusion of the accuser. **DEU 19:16-20.**
- C. The accused has a right to be heard. **DEU 1:17; JOH 7:51.**
- D. The accuser should face the accused with his accusation.
DEU 19:16-17; ACT 25:16; 24:17-19; JOH 8:10-11.
- E. The church does the actual excluding by a majority vote.
 1. Paul told *the church* to put the offender away. **1CO 5:13.**
 2. The punishment recommended in **1CO 5** was executed “of many,” that is, of the greater part. **2CO 2:6.**
- F. The offender is to be *noted, marked and avoided*. Attention is directed to who he is and what he did. Names should be named. **ROM 16:17; 2TH 3:14; 1TI 1:19-20.**
- G. The rebuke of such an offender should be open and public to instill fear in the rest.
1TI 5:20; HEB 10:31.
- H. Note the various expressions describing church discipline.
 1. The offender is “taken away from among you” (**1CO 5:2**), a parallel to final judgment when the wicked are severed from among the just.
MAT 13:41-42, 49-50.
 2. He is delivered “...unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (**1CO 5:5**). c/w **1TI 1:20**.
 - a. This may involve bodily afflictions. God may well let Satan have his way with him *up to a point*, including physical death for the defiantly unrepentant. Example: a brother is excluded for drunkenness and then persists in excess consumption of alcohol and dies in a car wreck or from bad health.
 - b. Satan receives power at times to try the godly, as Job (**JOB 2:4-7**) and Paul (**2CO 12:7**): how much more the ungodly?!
 - c. The intent is to not necessarily annihilate the disobedient but rather drive him to repentance that works spiritual salvation. **2CO 2:6-7; 7:10.**
 - d. Being *turned over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh* is for the purpose of *destroying fleshly lusts*, which, if saints would be wise, they should be doing of their own accord so as to *avoid* being turned over to Satan (**1CO 11:31**). It is called *mortifying* (depriving of life, putting to death).
ROM 8:13; COL 3:5-6.
 3. He is *purged out*. **1CO 5:6-7.**
 4. The church is not to keep company with him. **1CO 5:9-11; 2TH 3:14-15.**
 - a. company: Companionship, fellowship, society.
 - b. He is no longer considered part of the church fellowship.
 - c. He has no voice in church matters and no place at the fellowship of the Lord's table. **1CO 10:16-21.**
 - d. He is not to be eaten with. **1CO 5:11.**
 - (1) In context, this eating is the *feast of Christ our Passover* or the Lord's Supper. **1CO 5:7-8.**
 - (2) This is the particular company that we are not to keep with excluded members.
 - (3) Church discipline does not rule out necessary family and business connections.
 - (4) Neither does this rule directly apply to the people of this world. It is not a sin to have lunch with an unconverted sinner.
1CO 5:9-10 c/w LUK 15:2.
 5. He is to be *put away* from among the church. **1CO 5:13.**

6. He is to be to the church “as an heathen man and a publican” (**MAT 18:17**).
 7. This is done to induce shame in the offender. **2TH 3:14**.
 8. By excluding an offender, the church executes revenge and clears itself. God's wrath is appeased. **2CO 7:11-12; EZE 5:13**.
- I. The excluded member is not to be counted as an enemy but admonished as a brother. **2TH 3:14-15**.
1. admonish: To put (a person) in mind of duties; to counsel against wrong practices; to give authoritative or warning advice; to exhort; to warn.
 2. Mind that the admonishing is set in contrast to counting him as an enemy.
 - a. If you wilfully refrain from admonishing the erring brother because you want to convey that he is not an enemy, you have it backwards! You are in this case his enemy since your reluctance to do right reinforces that person in his error rather than drive him to godly sorrow that works repentance per **2CO 7:10**.
 - b. (**LEV 19:17**) Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.
 3. Let the communication with an excluded brother be authoritative or warning advice to repent.
- J. Though the emphasis in severing company with an offender is with a view to the Lord's table, if the excluded brother acts like a fool or a scorner, it would be wise to avoid them as much as possible. Such a person would hold the discipline of the church in contempt. Note these instructions:
1. (**PRO 9:8**) Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.
 2. (**PRO 15:12**) A scorner loveth not one that reproveth him: neither will he go unto the wise.
 3. (**PRO 14:7**) Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge.
 4. (**PRO 23:9**) Speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise the wisdom of thy words.
 5. (**PRO 22:24-25**) Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: Lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul.
 6. (**PRO 13:20**) He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.
 7. (**ICO 15:33**) Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.
 8. (**GAL 4:17**) They zealously affect you, but not well;...
- VII. If a church refuses to follow Scripture in the discipline of offending members, the believer should separate himself from both. **2TH 3:6; 1TI 6:3-5; 2TI 3:1-5**.
- A. To remain identified with a disobedient group would be putting oneself under the corporate judgment of them all. **GEN 19:15; NUM 16:21**.
 - B. Note how Paul intended to not spare the offenders AND those who tolerated them. **2CO 12:20-13:2**.
 - C. Scripture teaches individual accountability before God. **ROM 14:12**.
 - D. The call to each believer remains, “...Who is on the LORD's side?...” (**EXO 32:26**).
 - E. If a believer must withdraw from a church, he should apprise the church of the reason. **1TH 5:14; EPH 5:11**.
 - F. The faithful will not lose their fellowship with God if they withdraw. **LUK 4:25-26 c/w 2CO 6:17-18; PSA 1:1-3**.

- VIII. Upon sufficient punishment, an excluded brother who is penitent may be restored to fellowship. **2CO 2:4-11.**
- A. Premature restoration of someone who is not demonstrably penitent opens doors for worse trouble. **2SAM 14-15.**
 - B. At Corinth, the offender was obviously sorrowful inasmuch as he was in jeopardy of being "...swallowed up with overmuch sorrow" (**2CO 2:6**).
 - C. The punishment, which was exclusion from church fellowship and blessing, was sufficient to "such a man," (v. 6), "such a one" (v. 7), that is, to a penitent, sorrowful man.
 - D. Paul mentions his first epistle in which he had ordered the exclusion of the fornicator. **v. 4 c/w 1CO 5.**
 - E. The Corinthians had promptly executed this discipline and Paul's praise for them indicates that they had done so promptly after receiving the letter. **2CO 7:8-12.**
 - F. The first epistle had been received by the Corinthians a year before the second epistle. **2CO 8:10; 9:1-5 c/w 1CO 16:1-3.**
 - 1. The Corinthians were notified before in Paul's first epistle to make a collection to minister to the saints.
 - 2. This notification resulted in their beginning to be forward *a year before* in ministering to the saints.
 - 3. Hence, the first epistle was written a year before the second.
 - G. Therefore, this *penitent* offender had been excluded for a year.
 - 1. The act of the church in severing him from its membership is one aspect of punishment: a *legal dissociation* from a known sinner.
 - 2. Until he sorrowfully repents, the excluded member is getting only what he desires: life *with* a sin but *without* fellowship and church identity on God's terms.
 - 3. The *sufficient punishment to such a man (2CO 2:6-7)* was to a *sorrowful, penitent man*. It is a punishment upon one who does NOT have what he desires: a life of fellowship with God and saints in the church on God's terms. The church withholds from him what he desires until he *proves himself genuinely repentant*.
 - I. From these facts, it can be reasonably concluded that one year's sorrowful wait is sufficient for *such a man* (a humbled, sorrowful, penitent), and that the Corinthian fornicator had been promptly smitten with sorrow for his sin upon the church's action against him.
 - J. The church is commanded to behave "contrariwise" to "such a man."
 - 1. Since the punishment was exclusion, to behave contrariwise would involve restoration to membership in the church.
 - 2. The church is to corporately forgive, comfort and confirm their love to such a man. Rejoicing would not be out of the question. **LUK 15:22-25.**
 - 3. This is restoring the brother as commanded in **GAL 6:1.**
 - 4. restore: To give back, to make return or restitution of (anything previously taken away or lost).
 - K. The church's system of justice exceeds normal civil process.
 - 1. An offender against the civil code may be imprisoned for a specific time and then released to resume his life in the society which banished him. His sorrow for his actions is not a factor in his restoration if he has "done his time."
 - 2. The church, though, is only obliged to receive an offender back into its society if he has proven repentance. He remains banished until then.
 - 3. Neither the church nor the civil power has power over one after he dies. That power is God's alone. **LUK 12:4-5 c/w REV 1:18.**

- IX. How should the church treat an excluded member who is proven to be sorrowfully penitent?
- A. Until his restoration, he is still “without” the body and therefore barred from church decisions and ordinances.
 - B. However, he is no longer walking disorderly, per **2TH 3:6**.
 - C. He is not causing offenses and divisions contrary to the doctrine, per **ROM 16:17-18**.
 - D. He is rather trying to walk orderly by obeying the doctrine, though “banished.”
 - E. Unlike the disorderly or divisive person who remains hardened in sin, we may have more dealing with a penitent to encourage his restoration to the church upon sufficient punishment. **GAL 6:1-2 c/w 2CO 2:6-8**.
 - 1. restore: To give back, to make return or restitution of (anything previously taken away or lost).
 - 2. The man is eligible for eventual restoration to membership, which was taken away when he was excluded.
 - 3. However, he is still (“...if a man BE...”) *overtaken in the fault*.
 - a. He is still bearing the consequences.
 - b. Such would be the case of an excluded brother who is penitent yet still on probation.
 - 4. He is bearing a burden that we should help him to bear, per **GAL 6:2**.
 - 5. When one is exercised by a chastening, we should encourage him thus letting him be healed. **HEB 12:11-13**.
- X. We must not expect absolutely perfect justice in the church.
- A. The church is made up of imperfect people who do not have infinite knowledge of all things.
 - B. The limitations of human jurisprudence must be reckoned with or the legal system will collapse.
 - C. In the church there may be *tumults*, which are “commotions of a multitude, usually with confused speech or uproar; public disturbance; disorderly or riotous proceedings.” **2CO 12:20**.
 - D. It may get messy in the middle of it all. **ISA 9:5**.
 - E. There may be *disputations and dissensions*. **ACT 15:2, 7**.
 - F. There may be *perplexity*, which is “the inability to determine what to think, or how to act, owing to the involved, intricate, or complicated condition of circumstances, or of the matters to be dealt with, generally also involving mental perturbation and anxiety.” **2CO 4:8; 2TI 2:3**.
 - G. God looks at the heart even though the outward performance may be lacking. **1KI 15:11-14; 2CH 30:17-20; REV 2:23**.
 - H. Perfect justice will be executed by the perfect Judge on the day of judgment. **ACT 17:31**.