



Ecclesiology: The Study of the Church

Lesson 22: Church Discipline: Repentance and Restoration

INTRODUCTION

1. What are some sins that would urge you to lovingly confront another believer? Why? _____

MAIN IDEA

With respect to the disciplined individual, the goal of church discipline is to help the individual repent of sin and be restored to fellowship in the church.

DIGGING IN

The past few studies have focused on how we are to address sin within the church, including excluding someone from the church if they persist in serious, unrepentant sin. In this study we're going to consider the goal of these actions, namely that the individual would repent and be restored to the church.

2 Corinthians 2:5–11

Note: While many interpreters have identified the individual in this passage with the man Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 5, it seems best to see these passages as referring to different people. There are several reasons for this, but one of the strongest is that it is extremely unlikely that Paul would have downplayed the sin the way he does in this passage (“Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything...”) if he were referring to the man who had his father’s wife.

Instead, from what we learn in the rest of the letter, it seems that this incident had to do with someone stirring up opposition to Paul among the Corinthians. That explains why he graciously downplays the seriousness of the sin in question.

1. What action has the Corinthian church already taken (v. 6)? _____

2. In light of verse 7 and the teaching we’ve examined in the past few studies, what form do you think this “punishment” took? _____

3. What does Paul tell the Corinthian church to do now (vv. 7–8)? _____

4. What are the reasons Paul tells them to do this (vv. 6–7)? What does Paul not want to happen? _____

5. What does it mean that the church is to reaffirm their love for this man? _____

6. Based on this passage, under what circumstances should a church accept someone who’s been excluded back into their fellowship? When should a church not accept someone back? _____

That a church should accept back an individual if they repent of their sin—and only if they repent—naturally leads us to ask, “What does true repentance look like?” We learn something about this in 2 Corinthians 7, in which Paul draws attention to how the Corinthians themselves repented over their former toleration of this man who opposed Paul:

2 Corinthians 7:5–13

Apparently, Paul wrote another letter to the Corinthians that hasn’t been preserved. It seems that in this letter, Paul strongly rebuked the church for embracing someone who opposed him and sought to undercut his ministry, and he instructed the church to exclude him from their midst. This explains why Paul was waiting anxiously to hear how the Corinthian church received his letter (7:5–7) and why Paul can say that their response to his letter revealed their earnestness for him (7:13).

7. Did Paul regret that he wrote to the Corinthians? Why or why not (v. 8)? _____

8. Does Paul regret that he wrote to the Corinthians after hearing the outcome? Why or why not (vv. 8–9)? _____

9. What can pastors and other church leaders learn from Paul’s attitude and actions toward the Corinthians? _____

10. What does worldly grief produce? What does godly grief produce (vv. 10–11)? _____

11. Imagine that a person has committed a serious sin and it's come to light. This sin is so serious that the church has excluded the person from their membership. It's now a couple months later, and the person feels terrible about it all. How do you think the church could assess whether the person has genuinely repented or is merely experiencing worldly grief? What are some factors that should go into making this judgment?¹ _____

¹ Bobby Jamieson, *Guarding One Another: Church Discipline*, ed. Mark Dever, 9Marks Healthy Church Study Guides (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 37–40.