

Church Membership

Week 5

Schedule:

Week 1: What is the church and is it important?

Week 2: What is Church Membership and is it important?

Week 3: What are the Church and its members like?

Week 4: What are the responsibilities and privileges of membership?

Week 5: What do we do if a member does not represent Christ?

Week 6: What will practicing meaningful membership look like?

Introduction:

What would you think of a coach who teaches and instructs but does not correct a player who is doing it wrong? How about a math teacher who teaches but does not correct the student who does his homework wrong? How about a doctor who encourages healthy living but does not cut out cancer or a tumor? In all of these scenarios you would have to say that they are only doing half their job. Correction is helpful and necessary in the process of growth.

Week 5: What do we do if a member does not represent Christ?

Answer: Use corrective church discipline to remove the sin that is among you.

Church discipline is not popular, but it is nonetheless a necessary dimension of a church's faithfulness to God and His people.

God's view of discipline:

God disciplines those he loves.

Hebrews 12:5–11 (ESV) — **5** And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. **6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.**" **7** It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? **8** If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. **9** Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? **10** For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but **he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.** **11** For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

God commands discipline (correction) of sin among the community of believers.

Galatians 6:1 (ESV) — **1** Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, **you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.** Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

2 Corinthians 2:6 (ESV) — **6** For such a one, this **punishment by the majority** is enough,

Ephesians 5:11 (ESV) — **11** Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, **but instead expose them.**

1 Thessalonians 5:14 (ESV) — **14** And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.

2 Thessalonians 3:6–15 (ESV) — **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 tradition that you received from us... **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. **15** Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

1 Timothy 5:19–20 (ESV) — **19** Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. **20 As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all,** so that the rest may stand in fear.

2 Timothy 3:5 (ESV) — **5** having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. **Avoid such people.**

Titus 3:9–11 (ESV) — **9** But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. **10** As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, **have nothing more to do with him,** **11** knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

8 Questions on Church Discipline

1. What is church discipline?

Church discipline is the process of correcting sin in the life of the congregation and its members. This can mean correcting sin through a private word of admonition. It also means correcting sin by formally removing an individual from membership. **The goal of church discipline is always to correct transgressions (sins) of God's law among God's people.**

a. Corrective church discipline is an aspect of Christian discipleship.

- i. Discipline and disciple are etymologically related, both taken from the realm of education, which involves teaching and correction.
- ii. Two types of discipline: formative discipline is teaching through forming, and corrective discipline is teaching through correction.
- iii. Discipline involves growth, so making disciples involves teaching and correction.

b. Corrective church discipline is the formal public act of excluding a professed Christian from church membership and the Lord's Table for open, unrepented of sin.

- i. This is the practice of excommunication, an act whereby a church announces that it can no longer affirm a profession of faith.
- ii. Church discipline is not an act of revenge or retribution; it is a loving act intended to remedy someone's sin, "so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord" (1 Cor. 5:5).
- iii. From the perspective of those who believe in a final judgment, church discipline is the most loving way to warn an unrepentant sinner.

2. When should church discipline be done?

Answer: When an affirmed brother or sister in Christ is caught in sin and will not repent of it.

Sin is: thinking, saying, doing, or wanting what God has instructed us not to.

Why people live in sin:

- Lack of knowledge about their sin.
- Lack of skill to change their sin.
- **Lack of will to fight their sin.**
 - "I don't want to change my sinful behavior"
 - "I don't care if I'm sinning"
 - "I will not repent, ask forgiveness, and forsake my sin"

3. How should church discipline be done?

2 Procedures for Excommunication

a. Excommunicate an unrepentant sinning member swiftly for sin that is bold and shameless before God. (Paul's instruction)

1 Corinthians 5:1-2 (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.**

1 Corinthians 5:4-5 (ESV) — **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.

1 Corinthians 5:12–13 (ESV) — **12** For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? **13** God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”

- Paul is confronting a church for tolerating a man who is sleeping with his stepmother, a man who is presumably unrepentant.
- Paul commands the church to hand him over to Satan for his refusal to repent, declaring him a citizen of the kingdom of the world.
- Paul concludes this account by asserting the responsibility of the church to judge its own (1 Cor. 5).

b. Excommunicate an unrepentant sinning member after a timely process of calling him or her to repent and forsake sin. (Jesus’ Instruction)

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.

4 Steps

- 1. Go individually to the sinning brother. (15)**
- 2. If no repentance, Go as a small group (2 or 3) to the sinning brother. (16)**
- 3. If no repentance, Bring the matter to the church. (17)**
- 4. If no repentance, Excommunicate the unrepentant sinning brother from among the church. (17)**

*** Important:** Jesus is concerned about keeping the knowledge of somebody’s sin to as small of a group as he can. But he is also willing to widen the knowledge of an individual’s sin so that more brothers in Christ will call the sinning brother to repent.

4. Why should church discipline be done?

It should be done for the sake of:

- The unrepentant individual
- The congregation
- The non-Christian neighbor
- The name of Christ

5. Which sins require church discipline?

- a. The sin must have an outward manifestation—a mere suspicion of pride or greed does not lead to formal discipline.
- b. The sin must be unrepented of—if someone is refusing to be obedient to God’s commands, he is prizing his sin more than he prizes Jesus.

6. How quickly should a church act?

- a. Sometimes, church discipline should be a slow process.
 - i. Everyone sins differently and should be approached differently.

1 Thessalonians 5:14 (ESV) — 14 And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.
 - ii. Repentance may be present and should be identified.

Isaiah 42:3 (ESV) — 3 a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.
- b. Sometimes, church discipline must be swift in cases of unabashed sin.

7. How should we interact with someone who has been disciplined?

- Treat them as you would an unbeliever. (Matt. 18:17)
- The Lord’s Supper should not be taken with disciplined members, and the tenor of interactions with them should change.
- Family obligations must still be maintained.
- The hope is that disciplined members continue to attend worship to hear the gospel even when the hand of fellowship is no longer extended.

8. When should a church restore someone from discipline?

- Restoration to fellowship occurs when there is repentance.
- Restoration to fellowship does not accompany a probationary period but restoration to full- fledged fellowship.

- Restoration to fellowship accompanies a church's public announcement of forgiveness and affirmation of love for the repenting individual.
- Restoration to fellowship is an occasion for any church to celebrate.

Specific Case Studies:

- The Unrepentant Adulterer
 - How should we proceed?

- The Unforgiving Individual
 - How should we proceed?

- The Preemptive Resigner
 - How should we proceed?

How does the topic of church discipline relate to our study of church membership?