

1 Corinthians 5

The living gospel part 6: The Gospel and Church Discipline

April 2, 2017 – Spence Shelton

EASTER is like right around the corner now. You've got invites sitting on your seat. I want us to take two approaches:

1: AIR WAR. JUST BLANKET CHARLOTTE with these things. I want you to eat out a lot. And every server: "hey I want to invite you to Easter services at our church if you don't have plans." You have NO IDEA what is going on in someone's heart and mind. Your tiny brief interaction could jumpstart a change in someone's eternity. Every target cashier you encounter. I'm not kidding. We ordered thousands because we should invite like we expect as many non-Christians as Christians on Easter Sunday. You should plan on coming to the 8am unless you are bringing someone. EVERYBODY. EASTER at MERCY is going to be a time where some people are going to get saved and God is going to use you to get them here. That's the air war approach. And inviter cards are great for this.

2: GROUND WAR: That person you want sitting beside you Easter Sunday. That person you've got a relationship with. They know you, you know them. Now is the time. Someone far from God but close to you. You don't really need an inviter card for them. Cause you have their #.

A text is more personal than an inviter card. But an invite while hanging out, even more so. I've got some new friends I'm going to be inviting. Would challenge you to do the same.

** need you to jump in and serve. There is a serve button on the mercycharlotte.com/easter page.

Intro

How many of you ever took a human anatomy class? I took a science class in high school that covered anatomy (everybody wondering where we are going today). In anatomy you spend a lot of time, most of the time, learning how the body works. You learn all the different systems. There was one part that we only spent a very little bit of time on but I found out was really important called the white blood cells. You know what these things are? These are like your body's defense mechanisms. When an outside organism tries to invade the body these blood cells travel through and attack it and destroy it. Not only that, certain ones catalog the invader to remember so it can fight it better in the future. The white blood cells are the navy seals of the body, even though you rarely hear about them. Today we are talking about the white blood cells of the church. It is something you rarely hear about but is crucial to keeping the church body healthy.

The topic we are covering in 1 Corinthians 5 is commonly referred to as Church Discipline. I'm not sure what your experience with this idea is. Maybe you've never heard about it, maybe you have. Church discipline is to the church

what white blood cells are to the human body. **It seeks to restore individuals and the church from the harm that sin tries to cause.** And since we are people who constantly sin, in one sense church discipline is something constantly happening that you were just never knew what to call it. Here's the big idea I want you to leave with today. If you get nothing else, get this:

Church Discipline is God's way to restore you from sin not punish you for sin.

If you leave with nothing else today, that's what I want you to leave with. That will serve you well here at Mercy, it will serve you well should you move away one day. And listen I HOPE if you are not a Christian here today maybe some stereotypes will get broken down a little. All I can ask is that you listen with an open mind for a little while.

So here's what I'm going to do. We are going to walk through the chapter and I'm going to explain some things as we go. Then come back around and craft a clear picture of church discipline is and what characterizes it.

[1] 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.

Ok so here's the scenario that brought the whole church discipline thing up for Paul. Remember, Paul is writing a letter to this church because he's been told some stuff is going down that isn't exactly in line with what God has

called the church to be about. One of those problems: There was a guy having sex with his dad's wife. Now we are hopeful that this means his stepmom because of how Paul said it. But even if that's the case, Leviticus 18.8 specifically forbids God's people from sleeping with their step moms. Look it up.

And you know this was messed up because even the Pagans...in Corinth...were like "that's gross man." And you know you've gone off the deep end when those guys think it's too far. That's like _____ having so much drama in your life that the Kardashians tell you to chill out. The point is, if you call her mom and take her to the prom...that crosses the line.

And most importantly, we aren't talking about a one-time thing. This is present tense. "Has" his father's wife. It is an active ongoing relationship that is clearly out of bounds that we are talking about. Paul says:

[2] And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

Here's Paul's problem. Not only is there no repenting, but there seems to be acceptance of this situation. And Paul says the acceptance of that which God specifically forbids...that is arrogance. Why? Because if they decide to reject God's right & wrongs and establish their own, they have in effect sat down in God's seat. And that is arrogance on the part of the whole church.

He says they should be mourning! Paul is concerned with how OK they are with this. If you were to walk in here today and a live alligator were just roaming around the room. You would be alarmed. The fact that you are seeing it means somebody must have missed it. So you walk up to one of our awesome guest services team members and say “excuse me, do you see that alligator creeping towards the 3rd row?” And the team member says...yeah we know about him. “Well do you think its safe to have an alligator freely roaming around?” “Hey man, who am I to judge?” Well now you aren’t sure what to be more alarmed about. That there is a gator or that nobody seems to care!

That’s kind of what Paul is saying. There is dangerous, obvious sin being openly practiced and tolerated and they should be alarmed and you should be mourning what it’s doing to this person and to the church.

Paul says you gotta remove this person from among you. Quick Pause button ok: Paul saying, “remove” here is actually a step in a series of church discipline steps. Right now Paul is talking about the very last step. Like the emergency escape hatch lever a fighter pilot pulls when all the other ways to keep the plane from crashing have failed. I’m going to show you all the other steps before this one during the second half of the sermon. This is not Paul being quick triggered and temperamental. Need you guys to know that **Church Discipline DOES NOT EQUAL “KICK YOU OUT.”**

[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.

So this is going back to last chapter. This whole “my spirit is present” thing means something like “act like I’m there instead of acting like mommy & daddy aren’t home.” I’m far away and still I can see from here...what this guy is doing is out of bounds for God’s people.

Verse 5 (leave this verse up the whole time)

Let’s talk about this for a second cause it is pretty extreme language. I want you to see both parts of the verse ok? Just calm your Heart Rate and lets look at it.

- First part: **deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh (highlight this part)** Paul is acknowledging who this guy’s true master is. Ephesians 2. Once you followed the prince of this realm...Satan. Before you were in Christ you belonged to his realm. And Paul is saying...give this man back to Satan. Which means...put them outside of the fellowship of the church. A big, big step. It means treat them like they are not a Christian. Why must they remove him? 2nd half of the verse
- **so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. Again have whole verse up only this part highlighted**

Paul uses this “so that” phrase again in 1 timothy 1.20 the same way. To restore two guys caught up in blasphemy.

- You gotta catch this because this is where the love of God is. Later in the sermon we are going to talk about all the steps in Church discipline, the FINAL one being the one Paul is talking about here. When all other steps fail, you hand a person over to Satan. It is a last resort to remove them from the church. WHY DO YOU DO IT? Paul is going to give two reasons today. The **first** is here in verse 5:
 - SO THAT HIS SPIRIT MAY BE SAVED!!!
 - Catch that? The heart of Paul’s action here is to see this individual restored to God. The motivation is love. The hope is that when “given over to Satan,” which means removed from the church, they will sober up. Their desire to satisfy the flesh...that desire will hopefully be overmatched by the desire to return to Christ. Many scholars translate “flesh” as “fleshly.” Hopefully their fleshly will re-submit to the Lord and their spirit will be saved.

Here it is: **Church Discipline is God’s way to restore you from sin not punish you for sin.**

See that? God is not some rash bounty hunter out to pay you back for your sin. He’s your dad. He loves you. And he’s willing to go to extreme measures to call you back from your sin. Even to the point where, what he’s saying here...and this blows my mind: God can use Satan to

sanctify you. That’s what he’s saying. Jesus after all rules over Satan. And he can even use Satan, our archenemy, to save and sanctify his people.¹Mind Blown!

I said there is a second reason they have to remove this one who is in open, unrepentant disobedience to God’s commands:

[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.

Paul is equating sin to “leaven.” How many bakers in the house today? Let me explain. Leaven is like “yeast” but not quite the same. In ancient times, instead of yeast, a piece of dough was held over from one weeks baking to the next. By then it was fermenting. And so could cause fermentation in the new lot of dough, causing it to rise in the heat. It was a useful practice but not hygienic. Since dirt and disease would be passed on from week to week.² So once a year the

¹ This idea comes from John Piper’s sermon “[how Satan saves the soul.](#)”

² C.L. Mitton, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (London: Epworth, 1957) 61.

Jews would break the chain and start again with fresh unleavened dough.

By analogy, Paul is saying there are disastrous consequences for the whole church if this sin is left undealt with. The consequences will be the entire church being ruined by this leaven.

Instead Paul says [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

Cut out the old leaven. Same as verse 5, remove the unrepentant sinner...why? Because you church, really are "unleavened." That means you really are SINLESS. WHY? How can Paul say that the church is without leaven? Or without sin?

JESUS! It always comes back to Jesus for Paul. Christ was the sacrificial lamb. Little OT connection: for a week after the Passover lamb was sacrificed in Israel your home was supposed to be free from leaven. And Paul is making this a picture of sin in the church. Christ is now our Passover lamb and our Passover celebration (verse 8) lasts not a week but forever! Which means let us never again approve of sin in the church because we are declared forever unleavened. We are to live as unleavened people!

Here's Paul's point in these first 8 verses: **Sin is toxic to the sinner. And the Toleration of Sin is toxic to the entire**

church. That's the second reason this guy has to be put out of the church...his sin is toxic to the church.

In both of these I want you to see something: God is trying to bring back the individual. God is trying to protect the church from alligators. I hope you are starting to see the image of a dad loving his kids.

[9] I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—[10] not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.

"Associate" is the key. Wrong way to translate – never develop friendships with a different moral code than you. Right way – don't allow Christians who are sexually immoral to continue in good standing in the church.

Verse 10 – So big– I'm not saying don't associate with non-Christians who have a different moral code. That'd be silly. Christians I need to talk to you: We cannot expect people who are not Christians to act like Christians. Does that make sense? Sometimes we will, without realizing it, look down on people because they are greedy, sexually promiscuous, because they worship their careers or their sports teams. Listen, if they aren't Christians that should not be surprising or disappointing to you. Instead Paul says:

I don't mean non-Christians. To avoid them you'd have to go into seclusion. And that isn't what God has called you to. God has called you to be the friend to the one who doesn't know Christ. Which means you need to get comfortable living openly as a Christian in a non-Christian culture. Non-Christian are you hearing me? This is big: We don't care how you live, we care what you believe. This is verse 12 - [12] For what have I to do with judging outsiders? [13] God judges those outside.

We don't judge your life. That is between you and God. All we are trying to do here as a church is introduce you to Jesus. And we believe that when you come to a point where you believe what he's done for you, you will want to line-up behind him. And that will be voluntarily. Only idiots would try to change behavior before changing the heart. Actions always follow beliefs. And again, we don't care about your actions. We care about your beliefs.

[11] But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. [12] Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? ... "Purge the evil person from among you."

This associate word is heavy isn't it? Anyone who bears the name brother...that means a professing Christian...if he is in OPEN, UNREPENTANT sin...of any kind. Notice how sexual immorality fades into a list here of any unrepentant sin...When someone is in that place, you may finally come

to a place where you have to break fellowship with them. Why?

Because that's the only way left to show that person the severity of their sin. It isn't to punish them! It's a last resort measure to try and bring them back from the deadly path they are walking down! AND you gotta do it to avoid bringing confusion and destruction into the church by tolerating sin.

Ok let me give you, at this point, a clear working definition of "church discipline" and then some guiding principles that hold it together:

Definition: Church Discipline is the process of restoring a brother or sister to Christ and the Church.

I told you earlier that Paul was talking about the last step in a process. Let me show you the whole process. Jesus lays the whole thing out in just 3 verses in Matthew 18. Matthew 18:15-17

[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."

Look at the steps in the process. Because these steps are the steps we are going to follow here at Mercy. It starts out: when a brother sins against you. So that is the occasion to begin the process. And when that happens, follow these steps:

1. **Go directly to the brother. Alone.** – **verse 15**. This is the number one place the church messes up. You want to talk to everyone else BUT the person at fault. And you say things like “hey man let me get your opinion on this.” And what you are doing is AVOIDING conflict. What Jesus is saying is NO, for the sake of the brother/sister...GO TO HIM or HER! Jesus is calling out our desire to gossip right here. So many conflicts get SO BIG because this isn’t practiced. Instead here is what happens: Somebody sins against you...then you go tell somebody...who comes and tells somebody....who tells me. WAY too many people involved. And now it’s a whole thing that never needed to be. Jesus is telling you to go to the person directly. Trust him on this ok. 98% of church conflict could & should be resolved right here.
2. **If they aren’t repentant, bring one or two others.** Notice how many are now aware of the problem? Two to four TOTAL. The purpose here is to try to eliminate the bias of the person sinned against. If you say man this hurt or this is hurting the way you are treating me...and he/she says NO, this is not sinful and I’m not stopping. No sign of repentance...well then the person sinned against has to do more reflecting. And the way they do that is to humble themselves by bringing one or two others to

examine the situation. And if these 3rd party believers agree that you’ve been sinned against, then they will go with you to hopefully help eliminate bias between you and the other. These are mutually trusted people like a community group leader or mutual friends. They are there to listen to you both and help you both see blind spots.

3. **If that doesn’t work, take it before the church.** This means, in our setting, this little group brings it to the elders. Because the elders represent the church and after the elders assess & pray through it the elders seek to restore this person. If they refuse to repent, the most loving thing for the person and the church is to pull the emergency lever.
4. **Treat them as an unbeliever.** This is the most painful thing I’ve ever done in my years as a pastor. And it is a last ditch effort to wake that person up from the destruction their sin is creating. Does this mean we hate them? NO. It means we treat them as an unbeliever. And one thing crystal clear about Mercy Church is that we love unbelievers. We want you to see Christ and so we love you like Christ loves. But we don’t ascribe faith to you because you haven’t gotten there yet.

Ok now that you know what Church Discipline is; let me show you 5 principles that have to be held in tension for us to make it a healthy part of church life:

1. The Gospel is our model & motivation for church discipline

There is a story in Luke 15 that Jesus tells about the prodigal son. The prodigal son is just that...a son. As a son he has an inheritance waiting for him one day. But the son thinking about himself demands his inheritance from his father while his father is still alive. The people listening to Jesus would have been appalled at that. The father, shockingly, gave the son over to his desires. So the son took that wealth and went and squandered it. Given over to his own desires he eventually found that satisfying those desires left him sitting in pig pens eating scraps with the pigs. There, at the end of himself, the son thinks...I should go back to my father. His servants live better than this. So he begins his journey home. And the story goes:

[20] And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. [21] And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' [22] But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. [23] And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. [24] For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

When Paul talks about giving the person over to their flesh...this is his hope. The gospel says that when we turn back towards God, even in our filth, he opens his arms with compassion. And this is the motivation behind church

discipline. That a sinner would turn and come home to the father and receive the embrace of the father once again

2. Discipline is a blessing to believers who belong

My hope is that you see the great blessing this is to you as a follower of Christ. See God in his wisdom knew you and I, even after we became Christians, would still be sinful people. We'd be "prone to wander." This is the mechanism designed by God to bring you back when you, as you are prone to do, wander away from him! You don't want to end up in the pig pen and the loving warnings of your brothers and sisters in the church is your safety net that keeps you from your natural tendency to go there!

But listen, there is something assumed in this entire idea of church discipline. And that is that there are outsiders and insiders. Most notably at the end of the chapter right? How can Paul judge those "outside?" When it comes to this process it is those *inside* that both Jesus and Paul are talking about. And this right here is probably the number one reason you should be a member of a local church. In our day, membership is your way of *belonging* to the church. To submitting yourself to others and to the authority of the church.

We cringe at the idea of surrendering our autonomy in any way. But if you remain independent of the local church then you are walking on a tight rope without a safety net. And if you reply "I don't need membership to get that. I can just get that from some friends I got to church with." That's kind

of the same line a loser boyfriend says to the girl he's dating. Why would I marry her if I can get all the benefits without the commitment? The bigger question is why would she date someone so clearly only in it for himself? If you think you can get all of this without being a member, 1) wrong. Elders only have responsibility to shepherd those in the body. And 2) doesn't that kind of make you a leech on the church? Getting benefits without investing anything? I know that isn't who you want to be. So stop dating the church and join already! Starting Point on _____.

"I'm a Christian but I don't follow any of God's commands." – NOPE. You are not a believer. ONLY WAY WE CAN KNOW YOU ARE A BELIEVER – JOIN THE CHURCH. "I love Jesus not the Church." If you are not a member of Mercy Church, you aren't held to this.

3. Sinners are gonna sin

This is the "lets be honest" moment. We are all going to sin. You know what? I have sinned against people in our church. WHAT!? Of course I have! I don't try to, but I'm a sinner. And I have. I have been on both ends of "step 1" in the discipline process several times and our church is only 18 months old. I mean, me and John Hellams have had that conversation multiple times. Because we've worked closely together for 2 years. When two sinners are that close that often, they are gonna sin! And you know what, by sucking it up and going through step 1 we've become so much closer. And I know myself and my tendencies to sin so much better.

As a church we need to mourn sin, but we don't need to be surprised by it ok? In fact I want to challenge you on something. If you haven't had the Step 1 conversation "hey this hurt." Or, and this is the better way: when you realize you sinned you go ahead and go first "hey man I sinned against you and I'm sorry." If you haven't ever had that conversation one of two things is true: 1) you've never sinned against anyone or 2) your friendships in the church aren't as close as they need to be yet. I want to challenge you to get there. I know it takes time so I'm not saying this afternoon go sin against a bunch of people or something. I'm saying you need to invite some people in to really speak honestly into your life. Give them a hunting license. It is for your good!

4. Sin, when you don't deal with it, is deadly

This one was pretty clear from the text but you gotta let it sink in for another second or two. Hebrews 3 says it this way:

[12] Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. [13] But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Sin is deadly to the individual because when you don't deal with it, it deceives you into thinking everything is ok. But what it is actually doing is hardening your heart so you

cannot hear the Holy Spirit calling you away from it. I see this happen with guys and porn. Sexual immorality. Since they look at it in private, no one knows. And since no one knows, its not hurting anyone. And so the first few times they feel bad. But after a while they look at porn and don't feel one ounce of remorse at all. Now, is porn any less a sin the 1000th time than it was the first? No. What has changed is their hearts are hardened. Guys need guys or girls need girls to say HEY...THIS IS KILLING YOU! AND YOU CAN'T SEE IT. SO IM GOING TO BREAK YOUR COMPUTER NOW. And I swear that is exactly what some of you need. You don't need a filter you can work around, you need a friend who loves you enough to take a hammer to it. Sorry, getting ahead of myself. That's next week. God gives you fellow members of the church family to kind of represent the Holy Spirit in your life and keep you from hardening your heart.

Sin is also deadly to the church. And God loves his church too much to let your sin fester in the church. He cares about his holiness and when someone is in open unrepentant sin, that is a direct contradiction to his holiness. And so either the church will celebrate sin, or it will celebrate God. It cannot do both. To protect the church, the sinner must, if he or she doesn't repent, be treated like an unbeliever. Since that's how they are choosing to live.

5. True Love doesn't tolerate sin, True Love restores the sinner.

This is probably the most offensive thing I'll say today. We live in the age of tolerance and Christians get the worst rap

for being intolerant. Number one reason someone won't come to an evangelical church: viewed as intolerant. Listen: towards non-Christians that's not supposed to be true. Who are we to judge? Again we desire to introduce you to Jesus. That's our priority. But for those who profess to be Christians: you have placed yourself under the authority of Jesus Christ. To be a Christian is to confess Jesus as the Lord of your life. And it would not be "loving" for you to sit idly by while a brother or sister drifts into open unrepentant sin. That'd be like watching someone eat soup that you know has been poisoned. And you just sit there as your family member just takes bite after bite because...that was their meal choice and you should be tolerant of it. It's not your meal after all. Not hurting you. NO! You'd yell at them..DONT EAT THE SOUP! IT'S POISONED! Same thing is true. True love doesn't tolerate sin, it restores the sinner. True love redirects your vision back towards the one who died for you. Towards the love that can never fail you.

Church Discipline is God's way to restore you from sin not punish you for sin.

Where do you go from here? Maybe you need to repent to someone. Maybe you see you need to join the church! Maybe you need to talk to someone who hurt you. Maybe you need to come to Christ!

COMMUNION