

Clean Out the Old Leaven

1. Principle of Discipline

A. **Preventive discipline** - NT speaks consistently regarding each Christian's individual responsibility to separate himself from sin.

1. James - "*Pure and undefiled religion*" means "*unspotted from the world*" (1:27).
Peter - Urged readers to be "*holy in all ... conduct*" even as God (1 Pet 1:15).
John - Wrote "*that you may not sin*"; the hope of being with/like the Lord impels each Christian to "*purify himself, just as He is pure*" (1 Jn 2:1; 3:3).
Paul - "*Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires*" (Gal 5:24).

2. Preventive discipline begins with the individual who continually nurtures his resolve through study and prayer to keep himself pure.
3. The congregation augments this resolve by pouring a large amount of assets into preventive discipline: teaching/preaching; watchful elders; inspiring worship.

B. **Corrective discipline** - When sin does occur, it is again every Christian's responsibility to make his own correction through confession and repentance.

1. If the sin persists, the sphere of responsibility is again widened to other members of the community to affect change: Gal 6:1; Mt 18:15-16.
2. The urgency evident in 1 Cor 5 is due to the failure of the Corinthians in these areas. The situation was critical because the church had failed to act.

C. When a Christian is unwilling to correct sin, the ultimate response of the church is **expulsion**: Mt 18:17; 1 Cor 5:13. Why?

1. No basis for spiritual fellowship exists. Willful persistence in sin is prima facie evidence that the sinner's relationship with God is null and void.
2. To save the sinner - 1 Cor 5:5b. At this point, the most powerful appeal is to "*deliver such a one to Satan*" to give him a tangible taste of what he is choosing.
3. To preserve the purity of the Lord's church - 1 Cor 3:16-17. The temple is made of *living stones*; when those stones are defiled, so is the temple.
4. For deterrent effect. Such punishment (as called in 2 Cor 2:6) says to others that sinful behavior will not be tolerated. See rebuke of elders - 1 Tim 5:20.

5. To defend the integrity of the church before the unbelieving public. **Illus:** Alabama booster. *"I disassociated myself from the University first."*

C. A congregation which is not vigorously active in **all** phases of discipline leaves its identity in question. Does it love the brethren? Does it understand the true nature of sin? Is it fully obedient to the new testament pattern?

2. Practice of Discipline

A. What makes the *implementation* of the principle so difficult? Why did Corinth tolerate such morally degenerate behavior?

1. They weren't tolerant of *everything*: those in "wrong" party (ch 1); those whom they were suing (ch 6); those who had scruples about meat offered to idols (ch 8); the poor (ch 11); the less-gifted (ch 12). But they would have a natural weakness toward sexual matters due to the Corinth's notorious immorality.
2. But the Corinthians went beyond indifferent toleration to boastfulness (*1 Cor 5:2*). *1 Cor 1:26-31* suggests that the Corinthians craved status and acceptance among their peers who rejected Christianity. Perhaps the Corinthians were trying to **downplay their uniqueness** so as to retain respect and credibility.
3. But they exceeded even the Gentiles' standards of acceptable behavior and thus lost the credibility they sought to preserve. The world despises a hypocrite.

B. What makes discipline difficult in **any** age?

1. All sins are not equally easy to establish: see "fornicator" and "covetous" - *5:11*.
2. Emotions - When sin is not vague object but has name and face of friend, family.
3. By nature confrontational; most of us find such confrontations unpleasant.

C. What about our specific cultural inhibitors of discipline?

1. Society associates sensitivity and compassion with not making value judgments. Intolerance is "mean-spirited." This creates a "chilling effect."
2. Disrespect for authority has created a backlash of hostility toward punishment in any form: parents to prisons to schools.
3. Growing social insulation. Our busy schedules, technology (answering machines, in-home amusements - computers, video games, VCRs, etc.), and expectations of privacy have weakened spiritual ties that are essential to effective discipline.

4. Institutional freedom of association - "I can't be excluded" attitude.
5. Comfortable tolerance of sin. Sin is so pervasive we may view it as inevitable and thus take disciplinary measures only against the most flagrant offenses.

3. Suggestions

- A. Make it clear to new members that their association will place them under the NT teaching on discipline. Those who want to do right will welcome this.
- B. In a congregation without elders, emphasize in business meetings the spiritual health and welfare of the church above temporal matters.
- C. Act sooner. Every parent knows that delay between the infraction and confrontation makes correction harder.
- D. Promote a family atmosphere where meaningful, caring interaction is an ongoing feature within the congregation. We honestly need to assess: "Just what is it that we are withdrawing from this brother."
- E. Have confidence that following God's pattern will accomplish His will. We need to turn a deaf ear to the excuses used by spiritually weak for not exercising discipline.

Conclusion: *Our distinctiveness from denominations rests upon ourself-proclaimed intent to restore pure NT Christianity by conforming to the authoritative pattern of the NT. A **significant** part of that pattern involves discipline of sinful members, ultimately expressed in withdrawing from those who walk disorderly.*

*The great need of our day is **courage**, but courage begins with **conviction**. If we have the proper conviction regarding the purity of the Lord's church, the virulence of sin, and the love of our wayward brethren, then the hard task of discipline will take care of itself.*