

Although the details of the historic situation are uncertain, it is clear that Paul had exhorted the church to cast out an unrepentant sinner. His subsequent repentance demanded now his restoration to fellowship. Believers should deal with the problem of sin in their midst in the way God commands in His Word, being neither more harsh nor more lenient than instructed, but truly loving. This proper practice of church discipline is essential for the spiritual health of a local church. Four reasons for this can be found in the current text.

**1. Sin afflicts especially the local church in which it occurs (2:5).**

- a. Paul considered himself significantly less grieved than the Corinthians although either the case of incest in 1 Corinthians 5 or the alleged rejection of his authority in a painful visit would have been grievous. (“Grieve” is probably more here than a feeling of sorrow but giving offense and inflicting grievous pain.) The sinful actions of this one man had a profound effect on the whole church at Corinth, much more than it had on Paul who was physically distant and not a part of the local church. Sin, “yeast” which works like yeast through the whole patch of dough (1 Corinthians 5:6-7), affects the entire church, creating insensitivity to the evilness of sin, setting a wrong example, lowering resistance to sin, breaking fellowship with God, and tarnishing our testimony.
- b. For this reason it is proper for the church together to take action against one who continues in sin without repentance, though only after the preliminary efforts which Jesus teaches in Matthew 18. Sin in the believer is never merely an individual matter. It afflicts especially the local church in which it occurs and therefore the proper practice of church discipline is essential for the spiritual health of that local church.

**2. Repentance and ultimately restoration to fellowship in the church is the express purpose for the offender in disciplining him or her (2:6-8).**

- a. The word translated “punishment”, which occurs only here in the NT, is probably more the idea of rebuke. Church discipline is not punishment in a penal sense, but reproof which is remedial. Punishment exacts payment for a wrong which was done. But for the believer in Christ all punishment for sin has already been paid. Correction and discipline are not punishment but forms of rebuke and training to do what is right. When an offender accepts the rebuke and repents, the church is then called upon to forgive and restore that person to fellowship within the body.
- b. Failing to understand that discipline is not punishment but rebuke leads to wrong behavior. Failing to consider all sin as equal acts of rebellion against God, leads some to see church discipline as inappropriate for alleged “lesser sins” or too little church discipline as insufficient for alleged “greater” sins. Discipline as a rebuke is intended to bring an offender to their senses, affecting repentance and allowing restoration. True believers are needed as functioning members of the body. Proper restoration is needed for both the former offender and the whole body is the church is to be spiritually healthy.

**3. The character of our own hearts is revealed by our willingness to properly practice church discipline, including both the confrontation of the sinner and the forgiveness granted the repentant offender (2:9).**

- a. Paul initially commanded the discipline of the sinner to see if the Corinthians “would stand the test and be obedient in everything”, that is that they could know their “proven worth” (Philippians 2:22). A willingness to obey and to discipline an unrepentant sinner reveals the character of the heart, that we have the same attitude toward sin that God has, that we trust God’s ways to be the best ways, and that we are committed to follow Christ regardless of prevailing opinion.
- b. It is equally true that our willingness to forgive and restore the repentant offender also reveals the character of our hearts. Not to forgive and restore the repentant offender would dishonor our Lord Jesus Christ and devalue His death on the cross. It would be acting as if His death were not sufficient to pay the penalty for all of our sins or would seem to minimize the offensiveness of our own sins and implying that the death of Christ were not necessary for those sins. (Cf. Matthew 18:23-35.) If we want spiritual health, then we will honor our Lord and properly value His death for us.

**4. Satan can use any deviation from proper church discipline as a way of attack (2:10-11).**

- a. As discussed above tolerating sin allows it to spread. That serves Satan’s purposes. The case of unchecked anger (Ephesians 4:26-27) is an explicit example of this.
- b. Failing to forgive and restore a repentant offender can also give Satan opportunity in our lives. If the Corinthians had observed repentance in the offender and were hence prepared to forgive, then Paul would also, sensing that obligation as if in the presence of Christ Himself. God forgives us because of Christ’s death on the cross, which obligates us as well to forgive other believers (Ephesians 4:32). Failing to forgive opens us to attack from Satan.

We are surrounded by efforts being made to prevent people from catching the flu. But believers should be even more concerned about maintaining spiritual health. That requires properly practiced church discipline. We must deal with sin which is worse than any virus or bacteria. Unchecked sin afflicts the entire local body of Christ and failing to restore the repentant opens the body to Satanic attack. Let us encourage one another to remove sin from our lives and freely forgive one another as is appropriate for those who have been forgiven.