

Deliver This Man to Satan

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[0 : 00] 1 Corinthians, and we're in chapter 5. We'll be reading verses 1-13.

! God has some strong words about keeping His church pure.! This is what He says. 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. And you are arrogant. Ought you not rather to mourn?

Let him who has done this be removed from among you. For though absent in the body, I am present in spirit. And as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing.

When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus, and my spirit is present with the power of the Lord Jesus, 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 : 09] Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened.

Unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. 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.

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

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.

For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. Purge the evil from among you.

[2 : 24] Christ our wisdom. We learn of that truth in 1 Corinthians. I'm thankful for that song that we can sing.

As we return to 1 Corinthians tonight, we return to Mark this morning as well. We're now here in 1 Corinthians chapter 5. And we're very much picking up right where Paul had left off in chapter 4.

Remember, Paul had been urging the Corinthians to follow his example, to listen to him. They had been wanting Paul to become like them, puffed up and proud.

And Paul is saying, no, no, you need to become like me. And he's showing himself to be humble and lowly. And then Paul gives this warning in chapter 4, beginning in verse 18, which leads into our passage.

He says, So there is this arrogance in the church.

[3 : 51] It's permeating the whole church. And Paul is prepared to deal with the arrogance. He's ready to come with a rod. And by that, Paul means he's ready to discipline the church, to enact church discipline.

That's what the rod symbolizes. Discipline. We read of the rod often in Proverbs, and it's used there as a means of speaking of how to bring about good for a child.

And remember here, Paul is talking to the Corinthians as what? As their spiritual father. He says in chapter 4, beginning in verse 14, I do not write these things to you to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children.

For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

So we're going to read a couple of Proverbs here. And as we're reading these Proverbs involving the discipline of children, as we do this, we should think also of Paul and of his spiritual children in the Corinthian church.

[5 : 05] So Proverbs 13, 24, Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him. Or Proverbs 29, 15, The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.

So Paul loves the Corinthians too much to just let them continue in their sinful ways. He's prepared to discipline them so that they might turn from their sin and so that they might honor the Lord.

Because we have to remember, the discipline of the godly is always, always, always for our good. And that's exactly what we see here. Paul is ready to come to discipline the church.

So as we come into chapter 5, that's what this chapter is all about. We're looking at the whole chapter tonight, and it's all about church discipline. Now that is becoming increasingly less common in local churches today.

Instead of dealing with sin out of this genuine biblical love that we see here in 1 Corinthians 5, what happens? Sin gets overlooked.

[6 : 21] It gets ignored out of this false, distorted love often called tolerance. So we need these words tonight. As shepherds in this church, Pastor John and I need these words tonight to be reminded of what biblical love looks like in the face of sin in the church.

And let me emphasize that. In the church. That is what Paul is addressing here. He makes that clear in verses 9-13. We are to judge those inside the church.

God will judge those outside the church. And by judge, we're not talking about condemn to hell. We are talking about taking action in response to unrepentant sin.

So we don't have that responsibility to take that action in the world, but we do in the church. And that's what Paul is talking about here in 1 Corinthians 5. So that's going to be our focus as well.

God is going to teach us three things tonight in this passage about church discipline. He teaches us what our attitude toward sin in the church should be.

[7 : 33] He teaches us what our response toward sin in the church should be. And then God teaches us what our rationale should be for that response. Or to put it just more simply, our attitude, our response, and our rationale.

So let's look first at our attitude towards sin. Verse 1 again. 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. And you are arrogant. Ought you not rather to mourn? So far in Paul's letter, he has been talking more so in broad generalities.

This big picture problem of following leaders in the church with this arrogance, this unhealthy, sinful arrogance. Remember, people have been saying, well, I follow Paul, or I follow Apollos.

And we've seen this tendency in the church has been driven by pride. Well, as we get to chapter 5 here, pride is still at the root of the problem.

[8 : 42] But Paul is not speaking in these broad generalities so much now. He's giving this very specific, graphic example of sin that must be addressed.

This sexual immorality in the church. This incest. A man has his father's wife. This is obviously sin. It's an example among many, many specific examples of sexual sin that God forbids in the Mosaic Law.

In the Old Testament. And we're going to see here in chapter 5 that Paul is going to draw several parallels between Israel and the church. Here is one of them.

God strictly forbids a man from having his father's wife in Leviticus 18, verse 8. Among many examples, a long list of examples of sexual immorality, this is one of them.

Leviticus 18 leaves no loopholes in God's design for sexuality. It is to be for one husband with one wife.

[9 : 47] No one else can enter in or replace either of them in that relationship. And so in Leviticus 18, God calls such things abominations.

He calls them perversions. He says it is depravity. This is not how the people of God are to live. It's all rooted in being what?

Set apart to God. Holy unto God. Distinct from the nations. God is making the people of Israel holy and distinct. Setting them apart for Himself.

Listen to how Leviticus 18 begins. The Lord says, Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the Lord your God. You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt where you lived.

And you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. You shall follow My rules and keep My statutes and walk in them.

[10 : 46] I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My rules. If a person does them, he shall live by them. I am the Lord.

Pretty clear who's giving these instructions here, isn't it? Three times. I am the Lord. I am the Lord. And as is often the case, God's reasoning is that His people are to look different from the surrounding nations.

Don't do as they do. They hate God's laws. They live outside of God's good design. Be nothing like them. So is Paul here?

As Paul is writing to the Corinthians about this sinful relationship that's found in the church, how much more jarring is it when he says, this is not even tolerated among the pagans.

Those people that you're to be distinct from and different from, even they find it abominable and reprehensible. Even they don't tolerate that.

[11 : 49] That's how distorted their attitude is towards this sin. Now, what is their attitude? It's not just a tolerance of sorts, like they're just putting up with the sin, or like they're tiptoeing around it in conversation, or as though they're pretending that it's not happening.

No, Paul says, and you're arrogant. Instead, what should they have been? Grieving it. Mourning it. Paul's saying, shouldn't you be filled with grief instead?

Which implies that this arrogance isn't just a pompousness, that there's a celebration of sorts. Instead of grieving, they're almost reveling in it. They're warmly accepting this sin.

They're putting their stamp of approval on it, and perhaps even honoring these individuals in ways. We really don't have to try very hard to see how sexual immorality is absolutely being received in the same kinds of ways in so-called churches today.

Here is a very clear reminder to us. God's good design for marriage is not to be messed with. God hates sin, including the perversion of sexuality.

[13 : 06] He's grieved by it. And so should we. We should hate it. We should mourn it when we see it and when we find it in the church.

We should by no means accept it. We should not tolerate it when professing Christians live in sin, sexual sin like this, or any sin that is clear to see.

We shouldn't just be okay with it. We certainly shouldn't celebrate it. We should hate it. The sin that is. The person committing that sin, we're going to see a different attitude towards that person soon enough in our passage, but the sin itself, we should hate.

Do you hate sin? Hate is such a hated word in our world today. We are told all the time that we shouldn't hate.

There's this massive ad campaign that is going on right now with all of these commercials involving celebrities, and the campaign is called Stand Up to Hate.

[14 : 17] Now on the surface, that sounds good. Like, I shouldn't, there's lots of things I shouldn't hate. There's lots of ways we see hatred in this world that is wrong, but God in His Word does not call us to just stand up to hate broadly, to oppose the attitude of hate, because God does hate certain things.

He hates the worship of false gods, like setting up pillars to them, or in that way, celebrating them. Deuteronomy 16:22 says, And you shall not set up a pillar which the Lord your God hates.

Or how about Psalm 11:15? The Lord tests the righteous, but His soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. Or we could just go with the list.

The list from Proverbs 6, beginning in verse 16. There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to Him. Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood.

A heart that devises wicked plans. Feet that make haste to run to evil. A false witness who breathes out lies. And one who sows discord among brothers.

[15 : 40] So in a very broad, general way of speaking, we can simply say, God hates sin. So we should stand up, not just to hate in this broad, general way.

What we must stand up to is evil. Yes, we should oppose evil. And nowhere more than in the church, where the people of God should no longer look like the evil that we see all around us in the world.

So yes, we should hate sin. If we find ourselves squirming at the thought of hating anything, perhaps we need to ask ourselves, am I thinking in more worldly ways or thinking according to God's ways?

Are you believing and embracing what God says in His Word? Or are you believing and embracing what the world says? Which, if we think about it, this same world, mind you, hates God and His Word.

So we should hate, not what is good and what is honorable and what is godly, but we should hate what is evil because it is antithetical to what we love. We love God, and so we must hate what He opposes.

[17 : 03] We should hate sin because God does. We should be repulsed by sin because God is. So it's not just, do you hate sin?

We have to also ask the question immediately after, do you love God with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your mind and with all of your strength?

Do you love God? Because as your love for Him grows, your hatred of sin grows as well. Hatred as we even see remaining sin in ourselves, hatred as we see it in the world around us, we want to see sin put to death.

So let's heed the words of Paul. Let's heed the words of Psalm 97:10. Oh, you who love the Lord, hate evil.

That's the first thing that God teaches us when it comes to church discipline, what our attitude should be towards sin in the church. We should hate it and grieve wherever it is found.

[18 : 11] Now let's consider what our response should be. Because we hate it and because we grieve it, well, what should we do? I'll pick up the reading in the second half of verse 2.

Let him who has done this be removed from among you. 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.

When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, 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.

And then jump down to verse 9. I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people, 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.

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 to even eat with such a one.

[19 : 21] For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. Purge the evil person from among you.

Some might accuse Paul of being over the top here in his response. I mean, this is drastic action. This man who has committed this sin of sexual immorality is to be removed.

And he's making it crystal clear. Four times he says it in different ways to remove this man. Verse 2 we saw. Verse 10, not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother.

Verse 13, purge the evil person from among you. And then perhaps we find the strongest language in verse 5. Deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh.

That almost sounds like the Corinthians are to do some kind of strange magical ritual delivering over to Satan. But again, Paul is just drawing our attention back to the Old Testament and very important distinctions made in the Old Testament.

[20 : 38] All throughout the Old Testament, God comes and he dwells in sacred places. Think the tabernacle. Think the temple.

Here is where God's presence is found. And in these places, sin and Satan are not found. They are not welcome there.

So think in the Old Testament when animals were brought as sin offerings. Some were slaughtered, but others were not. Others were instead cast out into the wilderness after the priest had laid hands on them, putting the sins of the people upon them and sending them away, sending them out into that barren, desolate place.

Places away from God's presence. Places where Satan still held sway. Think of outside the camp. Think of in the wilderness.

Think even the whole nation in general. When punished, what happened? Sent away into exile, out of the promised land. Or just to use the New Testament language, the world.

[21 : 52] This really goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden, that very first sacred place where God came to dwell. When Adam and Eve were sent from the Garden, they were sent away from the blessings associated with God's presence and into that place where Satan held sway from the Garden into the wilderness, into the domain of the devil.

And so it is with this unrepentant sinner. Paul says, deliver him to Satan. Expel him from the place where God's presence now dwells.

Because where does God's presence now dwell? in the church, in his people. He is among the seven lampstands in Revelation.

Send him into the world. Meaning, treat him as you would treat an unbeliever. This is what our response should ultimately be if needed.

If a brother or a sister is living in sin, we go to that brother, we go to that sister, we plead with them to repent. As Galatians 6.1 says, brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.

[23 : 14] So we don't immediately go to remove them, but we also don't ignore the sin. We earnestly call them out of it. We urge them towards repentance.

But if they refuse to repent, after following the principles that Jesus lays out in Matthew 18, first the one brother or sister goes to them, then if they won't repent, two or three, and finally the whole church.

But if there's no change of heart, there's no turning away from sin, then we must do what Paul says, remove them from the fellowship of the church, which I would argue depends on the reality of church membership in the first place.

We cannot be removed from something that we were never a part of. We can't be expelled from something that we were not included and joined into in the first place.

So it is that those who are joined to the church are then removed when needed. Which I think is just another way of saying what Jesus says in Matthew 18, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

[24 : 26] God's word is saying, treat this person as you would treat an unbeliever. Now Paul makes this statement in verse 11.

He says in verse 11, with such a man, do not even eat. Now we might think that means that there is never to be a time to get together with that person.

Don't ever talk to them. We need to cut off all communication, all contact with that person. There absolutely are times that that is necessary, where the sin of another is so harmful to others that that action must be taken.

Maybe there's physical violence involved. Maybe there's manipulation taking place. There are certainly times that communication does need to be cut off.

But I don't think that Paul is saying that's always the action that is to be taken. So when he says not to eat with that person, I think he's speaking of a very particular eating.

[25 : 37] The fellowshiping with them around the Lord's table. Taking communion with that person who is living in unrepentant sin. He's saying don't eat the Lord's supper with those people.

Don't continue to treat them as members of the church. Don't share that meal with them because that meal is this intimate setting of fellowship, this affectionate act of eating together.

Or just to put it one more way, we aren't to be sharing in the joys of the Christian life with someone who is not living the Christian life. That's how we're to not associate with them.

They are to be removed from the membership. Absolutely. And the privileges that come with membership. Absolutely. But this disassociation doesn't always mean that we cut out all communication because we should be treating them as what?

As unbelievers. And how do we treat unbelievers? We urge them to Christ. We call them to Christ. We share the gospel with them. We don't celebrate their sin, but we also don't give them the silent treatment.

[26 : 53] We call them to trust in Christ and we're bold in that. That's not to say that we're to be purposefully annoying, but if that unbeliever then cuts us off because the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ smells like death to them, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2, well, we really need to be at peace with that.

So we shouldn't go around trying to be combative. We don't want to be quarrelsome as 2 Timothy 2.24 says. We want to be kind and gentle and persistent in lovingly speaking of Christ with unbelievers, including those who once professed faith in Christ and perhaps have now been removed from the membership of the church.

If we do that with all wisdom and those unbelievers stop talking to us, so be it. Now we pray asking that God would take those seeds that were planted and make them to take root and bear fruit.

All of this is to say that there should be a biblical balance here. Continue to treat someone living in sin as though they're a Christian? By no means.

Cut that person off entirely from our lives? Sometimes. But hopefully we don't have to take those measures and we can maintain a relationship because we're calling them to repentance in that.

[28 : 17] And we do that because that's how we treat unbelievers. We don't pretend they are Christians but we do proclaim the truth to them even after they may be removed from our fellowship.

And also one last thing on this point in these verses that we've looked at. The discipline is not ultimately coming from us. It's coming from the Lord.

He is the one who disciplines those he loves as Hebrews 12 says. And Paul is making the same point of the origin being with God. Look at where he says, when you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, they are to remove this person.

So in the name, that's Jesus' authority. In the power, that's what only Jesus possesses. So that removal is happening in his name with his power.

It's not just us doing whatever we want. At the end of the day, this discipline is coming from God and that should keep us humble and not self-righteous in the face of that sin.

[29 : 28] So that's the second thing that God teaches us about church discipline in this passage. Our response must be to treat those living in unrepentant sin as unbelievers.

And now let's consider finally the rationale for all of this. Why is it that we take this action of removal from a membership? Well, we see that in verses six to eight.

Verse six. Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old lump that you may be a new lump as you really are unleavened.

For Christ, our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival not with old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

There is good reason for such a strong response to unrepentant sin. The purity of the church is on the line. And to describe that, Paul uses this illustration.

[30 : 33] This whole illustration in these verses centers on the Passover meal. We heard about the Passover meal in the morning. Let's think about the Passover meal again tonight. As the Israelites were preparing for that tenth plague in which God would bring the angel of death passing through the land and killing all of the firstborn in every home that did not have what?

The blood of that lamb on the doorframe. Those homes he would pass over. But the homes without the blood, the firstborn was to be killed. And God had instructed the Israelites that Pharaoh would then let the people of Israel go after this final plague.

So what were they to do? Eat their final meal in haste. They were to be ready to leave. They were to kill a lamb. And they were to eat it along with unleavened bread.

Now why unleavened bread? Because they didn't have time to let the dough rise. They were to be ready to flee Egypt when Pharaoh finally relented. And so God says, in this manner you shall eat it with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand, and you shall eat in haste.

So Paul here, he has the Passover meal on his mind as he talks about leaven in bread, that fermented dough that you have from a previous batch of bread that is now used in a new batch of bread to make the new batch rise.

[32 : 04] And that's all that I know. Casey has sourdough starter, there we go. That has something in it that just keeps on going. And it doesn't take much.

Just a little leaven leavens the lump, Paul says. So it is with sin. A little sin can spread in the church like leaven.

And even worse than leaven, because I think leaven is good, sin is not. Sin defiles. So think of it like mold spreading in bread.

I get that. I inspect my bread. Look at that bread in the store. It has been found. Mold. Mold spreads in bread. Sin left unchecked spreads like those tentacles of mold in the bread.

It infects those that it comes into contact with. And so if we value the purity of the church and then we can't just give sin a pass.

[33 : 03] We must deal with it appropriately. So it may seem harsh. It may seem harsh to remove someone from membership. Though I'm going to argue in a few minutes even that is for their good.

But we can't miss this other reality at play. It is for the good of the whole church. That others might not be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

So our aim is to maintain the purity of the church. And we have to remember Paul is telling us the church has been purified. The leaven has been removed.

Paul says there you really are unleavened. Or instead of leaven we could say you really are not moldy. The mold has been removed.

The church has been made pure. So maintain the purity of the church. It's already pure. How so? What we see in verse 7. Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed.

[34 : 06] His blood was shed for the forgiveness of our sins. His blood is painted on the door frames of our hearts. His blood was shed for our cleansing that we might be pure.

And it was such a costly sacrifice. So we should make every effort to maintain the purity of the church. Remembering even as we take the Lord's Supper His blood shed for us.

That's what we do every time we take the Lord's Supper. As a gathered body of believers we are celebrating the festival of the Lord's Supper. And in that celebrating Paul is saying maintain the purity of the church.

church. It's why the privilege of the Lord's Supper is removed from someone living in unrepentant sin. That sin being celebrated and at the same time it's bringing dishonor to Christ.

That can't happen. Treating the sacrifice of Christ with contempt. So we see there's these very practical consequences that Paul is bringing to light.

[35 : 14] The very purity of the church is at stake. And why is the purity of the church so important? Because we're the bride of Christ.

Blessed are those whose robes have been washed as we've seen in Revelation. Our robes washed. We're dressed in fine linen. We're awaiting the return of the bridegroom from heaven.

We want to look beautiful for him. We want to be beautiful for our husband who is coming. Our perfect husband rejoicing when he arrives.

So sin must be treated with all seriousness because the very honor of Christ and the dignity of his bride is at stake and because his precious blood was spilt for our purity.

Well, we've covered quite a bit of ground tonight. All of chapter 5. And if we pan out a bit, I think we'll see there really is this logical progression to Paul's thought in this passage.

[36 : 21] If we value the purity of the church, we're going to respond strongly to unrepentant sin. And if we respond strongly to unrepentant sin, it's because we hate sin and we recognize just how dangerous sin really is.

that's Paul's logic. So this is not a cheerful passage. It's sobering. It's addressing the sad reality of sin in the church.

It's heavy. But that doesn't mean that we're to be without hope. It may be heavy, but there is hope. We purposefully skipped a little phrase in the passage that we need to return to now.

Verse 5. Deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. And then we read this. So that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

So there it is. That is communicating the hoped-for outcome in all of this. We can't guarantee the outcome of church discipline. We have a responsibility.

[37 : 29] We've considered our attitude and our response and our rationale. That's all on us. But the outcome, that's not on us.

We can't see that the outcome is met. But what we hope for, what we pray for, is this. That the person expelled from the church, the person removed from membership and treated as an unbeliever, our prayer is that they would come to their senses.

That by God's grace they would think straight again. That their flesh, their sin, would be put to death. That they would turn in true repentance and be restored.

We hate sin, but how we have this hope for the sinner. That his spirit would be saved on the day of the Lord. So 1 Corinthians 5 is not talking about some kind of permanent ban.

If there is repentance, then joyful forgiveness and restoration is to follow. Don't just take my word for it. We actually see this exact situation not in 1 Corinthians but in 2 Corinthians.

[38 : 41] 2 Corinthians chapter 2. It doesn't say, but perhaps even the situation in 1 Corinthians is now being talked about in 2 Corinthians. 2 Corinthians chapter 2.

Listen to what Paul says beginning in verse 5. Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure, not to put it too severely, to all of you.

For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough. So you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.

So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. This is why I wrote that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive.

Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, so that we would not be outwitted by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his designs.

[39 : 41] So that extreme of removal from the church, it's only in effect until there's repentance. And then we're glad to see the sinner forgiven and restored and brought back into fellowship.

That's what we want to see. That's what we want to happen. And only God can work that repentance in a person's heart. So we pray that he would do what only he can.

That he would use the pain of the rod to bring about the ultimate good of that person living in and loving their sin, which is the salvation of his soul on the day of the Lord.

That's what we long for. That's what we pray for. That outcome we cannot control, but we thank God that he does. As Brother Jim always says, nothing is too hard for him.

Nothing. We've said a lot about church discipline and church discipline to the point of removing a person from the church. So real briefly, let's circle back to something said earlier.

[40 : 45] I said that all of this talk of removing someone from the church depends upon the reality of church membership in the first place. We can't be removed from something that we were never a part of.

So I think there's this argument here for why it's biblical to have membership in the local church. Now maybe as you were hearing all of that, maybe this thought crossed your mind, or if it didn't, it's crossing your mind right now as I say it.

Why would I want to join something that could eventually kick me out? Good question. Did I just give the worst pitch ever for joining a local church? I mean, why go to all that trouble if down the road, I fall into sin and the church just removes me from its membership?

Might as well be pragmatic and avoid the hassle in the first place. If we're thinking that way, we're missing the bigger picture. We should want God to lovingly discipline us when we go astray.

I don't want to be left alone. And church membership is one of the best means to avoid being left alone. In becoming members of a local church, what are we doing?

[41 : 54] We're committing ourselves one to another. This particular body of believers, we're saying, I'll come after you in earnest love. And you're saying, you'll come after me in earnest love.

We should want God to lovingly discipline us. And he brings that loving discipline through church membership. So for as counterintuitive as it sounds, we really should think discipline is a privilege of being in the local church.

It is. I think a parable that Jesus told us helps us to see this. He told this parable in Matthew 18. The same Matthew 18 where Jesus teaches us of church discipline, well in this parable, it's immediately preceding Jesus' teaching on church discipline.

This is like the lead-in to that teaching. And this is how the parable goes. Verse 12. If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray?

And if he finds it truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

[43 : 18] That is a beautiful picture of how we as the church should respond when a member goes astray. Yes, it may reach the point of removal from membership, but regardless of the degree of discipline, the goal never changes.

We want to see that straying sheep found we are seeking after them. Even in removing them from membership, we are seeking after them as we would seek after an unbeliever.

I want that from the church. I need that. None of us should be looking to fall into sin. We should be striving for holiness. But I'm thankful that I have brothers and sisters who love me too much to ignore my sin, who love me too much to celebrate my sin, but will come after me and seek me when I go astray.

That's what we commit to in church membership. Aren't you thankful for that? And aren't you even more thankful that you belong not just to a church, but you belong to the God of the church, who loves you too much to ignore your sin, who loves you too much to celebrate your sin, and will go after you when you go astray.

Because he's your good shepherd who will never leave or lose one of his sheep that truly belongs to him. So we need passages like this to remind us of the importance of church discipline.

[44 : 47] We aren't hoping for the need for church discipline to arise anymore more than we're hoping for sin to arise, but when sin does, we need to be ready to respond as God teaches in his word.

So yes, we need passages like this to teach us and to remind us of the importance of church discipline. It's not this cruel ancient practice that needs to be abandoned.

Sadly, in many churches, that is how church discipline is viewed. It's easier to overlook sin than to deal with it. It's easier to be accepting of all things than to be confrontational about anything.

But if we have the right attitude towards sin in the church, and a right response to it, and a right rationale for that response, then we won't balk at the idea of or the need for church discipline.

We'll actually rejoice and see what a good gift from God it truly is, because God is committed to his church, because God is committed to the honor of his name, and we should be too.

[45 : 59] Let's pray together. Father, Heavenly Father, what a privilege it is that we are your sheep, all of those who are in Christ.

We are yours. We belong to you. We pray, Father, that you would remind us that you keep us, that you will never leave us nor forsake us, that you will go after us.

And so, Father, we rejoice that we have such a God as you, that you've given us such a church that we can love each other in these ways. So, Father, we pray that you would keep us from temptation.

We pray that we would strive after holiness without which no one sees the Lord. And, Father, we pray that you would take those straying sheep in your church universal, that you would bring them back to yourself, unrepentant sinners going their own way.

We pray that they would come back to you. We pray for those who do not know you, who are far from you, living in their sin, loving their sin, knowing nothing of Christ, desiring nothing of him.

[47 : 01] We pray, Father, that you would work in their hearts and bring them to faith and repentance, that they would find you and know you to be the good shepherd that you are. We pray all of these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.