



Growing into Church Discipline Pt 8: Shunning, False Teachers, and Leadership Accountability

The Biblical Heart of Church Discipline

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Holy Text: 2 Corinthians 13:1-10

- Many scholars believe that 2 Corinthians was written about a year after 1 Corinthians, about 57AD or so.
- William MacDonald said,

“If 1 Corinthians is very widely studied and preached from, 2 Corinthians is widely neglected by preachers. Yet this is a very important Epistle. The Epistle is difficult. The meaning of many verses is obscure, to say the least. There are several explanations for this: (1) Paul uses a great deal of satire, but it is sometimes difficult to be sure just when he is doing so. (2) To fully understand some sections, we would have to have further information as to Paul's exact travels, the travels of his companions, and the letters he wrote. (3) The Epistle is intensely personal, and the words are often the language of the heart. These are not always the easiest to understand.

One reason we love 2 Corinthians so greatly is because it is so personal. We seem to get closer to the heart of Paul here than in any of his other writings. We feel something of the tremendous enthusiasm he had for the work of the Lord. We catch a sense of the dignity of life's greatest calling. We read with silent amazement the catalog of sufferings which he endured. We experience the hot flush of indignation with which he answered his unscrupulous critics. In short, Paul seems to let us into every secret of his soul.”

- In our Text, we see some of this “heart and soul language.”
- Indeed, these verses express what we might call, **“The Biblical Heart of Church Discipline.”**

Thoughts on the Verses:

1. In verse one, Paul reminds them that this is his third written communication with them and what that means biblically. It is now a trifold witness, which was significant in God's Law:

Deuteronomy 17:6 (KJV) *At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death.*

Deuteronomy 19:15 (KJV) *One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.*

Matthew 18:15-17 (KJV) *Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. **16** But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. **17** And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.*

2. In verse 2, Paul again admonishes those who are willfully and without repentance sinning in the LORD's church. Indeed, he told them that if he came again, he would "not spare" the sinners. There would be apostolic judgment.
3. Verse 3. Apparently, there were some in Corinth that doubted Paul's authority, possibly influenced by false teachers:

2 Corinthians 11:1-5 (KJV) *Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me. 2 For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. 3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. 4 For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him. 5 For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles.*

2 Corinthians 11:12-15 (KJV) *But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we. 13 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. 14 And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. 15 Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.*

2 Corinthians 12:11-13 (NLT) *You have made me act like a fool. You ought to be writing commendations for me, for I am not at all inferior to these "super apostles," even though I am nothing at all. 12 When I was with you, I certainly gave you proof that I am an apostle. For I patiently did many signs and wonders and miracles among you. 13 The only thing I failed to do, which I do in the other churches, was to become a financial burden to you. Please forgive me for this wrong!*

4. In verse 3, Paul reminded them that through his ministry, Christ was among them in power! Had they forgotten? It is SO easy to forget what God has done in our lives, and SO easy to take good leaders for granted as well.
5. In verse 4, he reminds them of the Gospel, and also that his apostolic "weakness" was in line with Christ's...and through such there is God's power! The false teachers in Corinth criticized Paul's speech and bodily weakness:

2 Corinthians 10:1-10 (KJV) *Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence am base among you, but being absent am bold toward you: 2 But I beseech you, that I may not be bold when I am present with that confidence, wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh. 3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: 4 (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) 5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; 6 And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. 7 Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that, as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's. 8 For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I*

should not be ashamed: 9 That I may not seem as if I would terrify you by letters. 10 For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.

6. Verses 5-6. Paul encourages self-examination. Such a prayerful process should not only confirm their own salvation, but also that Paul and his companions are true.
7. The instruction of verse 7 is difficult. But I like MacDonald's contextual interpretation:

Paul now continues the subject of the discipline of sinning members of the church at Corinth. He states he is praying to God that the Corinthians would do no evil by countenancing sin in their midst, but that they would work ceaselessly toward the discipline and restoration of the sinning members. He does not pray this in order that he himself might appear approved, or might be seen in a better light. He does not want them to do it simply because he could then point to their obedience as an evidence of his authority. That is not the thought at all. He wants them to do it because it is right and honest. And he would rather have them do that, even though it meant that he might seem disqualified.

Here again we have an evidence of the unselfishness of Paul. In his prayer life his thoughts were constantly on what was for the good of others and not for his own recognition. If Paul went to Corinth with a rod, asserted his authority, and succeeded in gaining obedience to his instructions concerning discipline, then he could use this as an argument against the false teachers. He could say this was evidence of his lawful authority. But he would rather that the Corinthians take the necessary action themselves, in his absence, even if that might put him in an unfavorable light as far as the legalists were concerned.

Beloved, church discipline must never be about the leaders “asserting their authority.” Rather, the glory of God and the good of God’s flock must be the main focus and goals!

8. Verse 8. Not just leaders, but all of God’s people must never fight against truth, but must stand for what is true!
9. **Verse 9. If Paul seemed weak and such a view helped them be strong, then so be it! His heart was their protection and maturity in Christ, even if it meant his own loss of standing! Again, this was heart of his discipline!**
10. Verse 10. Paul DID NOT want to use sharpness or severe speech. Again, he wanted them to do what was right without his having to use apostolic discipline. Nevertheless, he reminded Corinth that the LORD Himself had given him such authority, NOT for their destruction, but for their edification (building up)!

False Teachers/Teaching in the Church

- False teachers’ infiltration of the church was not unique to Corinth. To the Roman church, Paul wrote:

Romans 16:17-18 (KJV) *Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. 18 For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.*

- These verses apply specifically to false teachers, and generally to anyone who presumes to “teach” others counter to apostolic doctrine.
- **The discipline is two fold: 1) Mark those that cause divisions and 2) Avoid them.**
- This implies that believers are themselves doctrinally sound AND are willing to take such stands for truth when called for.
- The apostle John taught something similar, commanding the church not to tolerate false doctrine, or be hospitable or encouraging to those who teach such:

2 John 1:8-11 (KJV) *Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. 9 Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. 10 If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: 11 For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.*

- John even named names:

3 John 1:9-11 (KJV) *I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. 10 Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church. 11 Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.*

- Ephesus, where Timothy ministered when Paul wrote to him, was also warned. Paul warned Timothy against those who would deny conscience (that inner part of us that knows right from wrong according to the Moral Law, Rom 2:15). Paul “names names” too, describing the excommunication of certain men.

1 Timothy 1:18-20 (KJV) *This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; 19 Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: 20 Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.*

- Paul commanded Titus (who ministered to the churches in Crete) to fight against “judiazers” in the church via sharp rebuke.

Titus 1:10-16 (KJV) *For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: 11 Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. 12 One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are alway liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. 13 This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith: 14 Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth. 15 Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled. 16 They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.*

- Much was at stake: whole households!

Titus 3:8-11 (KJV) *This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men. 9 But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain. 10 A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; 11 Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.*

- This passage puts a time limit on grace in discipline, particularly as it relates to sound vs false doctrine. After two admonitions, the Scripture says reject a heretic. In essence, such a one is beyond human help. God must deal with him.

Shunning as a form of Discipline

The New Testament describes different kinds of discipline. Last week, we saw the sad case of excommunication...

1 Corinthians 5:4-5 (KJV) *In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

We also read of “withdrawing,” or “shunning”:

1 Corinthians 5:9-11 (KJV) *I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: 10 Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. 11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.*

This form of discipline was not unique to Corinth:

2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 (KJV) *Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. 7 For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; 8 Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: 9 Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. 10 For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. 11 For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. 12 Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. 13 But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing. 14 And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. 15 Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.*

- The context of these commands concern those who “walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received” from the apostles.
- Certainly, critical doctrines are a part of those traditions, but if we read on it seems to be about integrity of walk and work, about withdrawing from the lazy and the busybody (meddler).
- Not only that, but Paul extends the context in verse 14 to the whole letter!
- From William MacDonald:

But what about a man who refuses to obey the apostle's instructions? The other Christians should discipline him by refusing to have social fellowship with him. The purpose of this discipline is to shame him for his behavior and constrain him to mend his ways.

However, this discipline is not as strong as excommunication. Here the offender is still looked on as a brother. In excommunication, he is counted as “a heathen and a tax-collector” ([Mat 18:17](#)).

The discipline of a believer always has in view his restoration to the Lord and to the people of God. It should not be carried out in a spirit of bitterness or enmity, but rather in Christian courtesy and firmness. He should not be treated as an enemy, but rather as a brother.

Church Leaders can be Disciplined too!

1 Timothy 5:17-20 (KJV) *Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. 18 For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward. 19 Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. 20 Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.*

- In the NT, there is a principle: “To whom much is given, much is required.” (Lk 12:48) This certainly applies to one who would under-shepherd God’s people.
- An elder gets both the benefit of the doubt (unless there are two or three witnesses) AND a quicker public rebuke.
- The Scripture just says, “Them that sin” with no qualifiers. ESV says “those who persist in sin.” NLT says, “*Those who sin should be reprimanded in front of the whole church; this will serve as a strong warning to others.*”
- This makes sense. How can the church accomplish her mission with persistently sinning pastors?

Hebrews 13:17 (KJV) *Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.*

- All attempts at discipline will fail if there is little regard for church leaders.
- Similar to a home, if members of the household will not submit to and obey Dad and Mom, discipline is impossible.
- However, leaders must be careful with their authority and lead with humility:

1 Peter 5:1-3 (KJV) *The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: 2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.*

Closing Thoughts:

Some of these things surely seem harsh to the modern believer. We are used to being “soft on sin” and consider any discipline as “anti-grace” or “unloving.”

However, even a cursory reading of the New Testament indicates the seriousness of sin and false teaching in the life of the believer and in the corporate body. Scripture is inerrant, inspired, infallible, and sufficient. And Scripture clearly teaches that:

1. Christ sees all within His churches.
2. Christ cares about the purity of His church.
3. Christ's sheep should condemn rather than celebrate sin.
4. Christ, through the apostles and their doctrine, calls for, at times, correction, shunning, and excommunication due to false doctrine and unrepentant sin.
5. Christ's goals in discipline are His own glory and His people's redemption and reconciliation.

Amen.