

15 Disciplines of a Loving Church
1 Corinthians 5 – 7 | 07.31.2016 | Body Life @OBC

When Uzzah touched the Ark . . . God struck him dead.

David protested . . . but it led to the purification of Israel's worship.

When Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit . . . God struck them down too.

Fear gripped the church . . . it purified that assembly . . . and led many to faith.

Whenever God's discipline is enacted . . . it is for the good of his people.

The same is true when a church moves to discipline a sinning member.

Only . . . unlike God's discipline, our discipline is provisional . . .

. . . and hopeful that it won't lead to death, but life.

. . . Life for the sinning member . . . and life for the ones they sin against.

Indeed, this morning I am struck by the providence of God.

This message on this date has been on the calendar for months.

Only this week ... did the elders come to a decision to bring this matter before you.

May we marvel at God's timing.

By ordaining the timing of this message, he is showing how he loves this church.
How he loves this couple. And how he wants all of us to grow in his love.

We can have absolute confidence he's working for the good of those who love him

My prayer is that we would learn how to walk in that love!

So this morning . . . we look at 1 Corinthians 5 – 7 . . . to see how it teaches us to think about how God's love initiates and informs in church discipline.

This is not an expositional message, but a proverbial one.

An expositional message makes the shape of a sermon fit the shape of the text

This proverbial message follows Paul's argument and makes points of application.

ITW, we're lifting the cream off the top . . . which comes from the milk of the word.

Over the last 8 weeks,

We've fed on the milk of the word . . . Or, to shift metaphors . . .

We've plowed the soil of 1 Corinthians 5 – 7.

Hopefully . . . a number of seed thoughts have been planted . . . and are growing.

Now, we're going back to see what fruit we can glean. And how to apply **1 Cor 5–7**

And in so doing . . . we are asking a number of questions:

WHAT do Paul's instructions about church discipline mean for us?

HOW should we relate his teaching about church discipline to sexual morality?

Paul says churches have authority to handle their own "cases."

. . . HOW do we do that?

OR How do the church's **authority**, discipline, and love work together?

These are the questions we are asking . . .

And they are not hypothetical . . . They are blood earnest . . .

They involve all of us . . . calling us to grow in wisdom as we see how a loving church pursues discipline

So . . . that's what we'll see 15 disciplines of a Loving Church.

The Loving Church

1. **A Loving Church begins with the gospel, holds fast to the gospel, and leads others to the gospel (6:9 – 11).**

The centerpiece of these three chapters is 1 Corinthians 6:9–11. So we begin, we will touch on them in the middle, and we will end there. These words read:

⁹ Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Christian love can never be perceived or pursued apart from faith in the gospel.

Paul says faith (in the gospel) works itself out in love.

John says that we love because God first loved us and sent his son to die for us.

Therefore, the loving church is a Christ-centered church.

Any church that denies gospel is not being loving.

Any church that advocates social justice without the gospel, is not being loving.

Any church that speaks of grace but no holiness . . . is not being loving.

And so . . .

a loving church begins with the gospel,
holds fast to the gospel, and leads others to the gospel!

That's where we start . . . but we have a long ways to go.

2. **A Loving Church is not surprised by the grossness of sin (5:1)**

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. (5:1)

Sin doesn't get much "grosser" than this . . . but a loving church doesn't react to sin's grossness.

Instead, to the vilest sinner it offers the grace of the gospel.

Scripture teaches us that Christians are capable of the worst sins. What Christians are not capable of is enjoying or enduring sin.

In this way . . . Christians are spiritual cats, not spiritual pigs.

By nature, pigs enjoy the mud. Cats don't. They jump right out. So it is with the Christian.

And loving churches don't focus on the sin . . . but on the Savior who can forgive and cleanse and teach how to walk in holiness.

So . . . Loving Churches are not surprised by sin . . . but they are grieved by it!

3. **A Loving Church mourns over sin (5:2)**

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

Paul rebukes those who are indifferent to sin. He calls us to grieve over sin.

This is the heart of a church that loves God, that loves his holiness, and that loves OA

When you see another member sinning, what do you do?

Do you mind your own business and do nothing? I hope not!

Love bids you to grieve . . . and it bids you to act.

That action begins with prayer, but continues to pursuit . . .

Which leads to the main action step of 1 Corinthians 5 . . . the removal of member.

4. A Loving Church disciplines (5:2, 5, 7, 11, 13)

Verse 2 says, “Let him who has done this be removed from among you.”

Clearly, Paul knows the situation well enough to know that this is an ongoing sin, one the church has refused to address . . .

. . . and so he doesn’t overturn Jesus’ steps in church discipline. Rather, he calls for the church to pursue the final step, which they were reticent to do.

He repeats this command in verse 4 more times:

v. 5 – **deliver this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh** = put him outside of the church, the realm where Satan continues to kill, steal, and destroy

v. 7 – **cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump** = the unrepentant sinner pollutes the church; thus to protect Christ’s church, he must be removed

v. 11 – **“I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality”** or another publicly observable outward sin

v. 13 – Paul applies the OT words of Israel’s covenant community to the church = **“Purge the evil from among you!”**

Friends these commands are severe! But they are not unloving.

They express love for God above all things . . . love for the Word of God . . . love for EKK

At the same time, church discipline loves the sinner running from the will of God.

Yet, before getting to that manifestation of love . . . we need to interject a question?

What right / what authority does the church have to discipline?

The answer comes in Matthew 18 when Jesus says the local church (as small as 2 or 3 people): They have been given the keys of the kingdom –

IOW, as a church gathers in Jesus name, we have his spiritual presence/authority to bind and loose; authority to receive believers into the church (in baptism) and authority to excommunicate members who give evidence that they’re not believers

1 Corinthians 5:4 – 5 confirms this too: READ

Something unique happens when the church gathers. Not only is Jesus present, but his Spirit-filled people have the authority to give and withhold access to the Lord’s Table . . . which is what Paul means in v. 11

So . . . the Loving Church pursues disciplines as is needed . . . has authority to do so
But notice . . . what the church does with its authority . . .

5. A Loving Church seeks salvation in church discipline (5:5)

Sadly, there have been many misrepresentations of church discipline.

One might think of Nathaniel Hawthorne's classic novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, where the church harshly scolds Hester Prynne for having a child out of wedlock.

All the while it was the minister, Arthur Dimsdale, who was the father.

Hawthorne paints the picture of an innocent Prynne & an ugly, mean-spirited church.

But this turns the truth of God's Word on its head.

v. 5 – “**you are to deliver this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.**”

What is more loving than that? It is the cross . . . that defines love – nothing else!

Not an America novel. Not pop music. Not the stories you watch on Netflix.

The story of the Cross is what defines God's love towards the church.

And thus the same God who demonstrated his love by sending his son . . .

. . . is the same God who calls churches to exercise discipline

. . . to remove the unrepentant member from the church.

Does that seem counter-intuitive? Or contradictory? It's not.

In fact . . . if you don't see how the love of God and the law of God fit together . . .

You are sitting in this room today with a case of spiritual HIV.

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) . . . doesn't kill you.

It weakens you. It leads to AIDS . . . which destroys your immune system.

In time . . . it makes you susceptible to all sorts of infectious diseases.

The same is true if your understanding of God's love is one of total affirmation.

Friends: That's not God, that's Santa Claus – and even he has a naughty list.

LOOK The same is true for churches: A body of Christ without discipline is like a human body without white blood cells. It may appear healthy for a while, but soon it will get sick.

And to fight spiritual infection . . . God gives church discipline for the purpose of rescue

When a man or woman is removed from the church, they are handed over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh . . . the salvation of their souls.

Church, this is true love!

6. **A Loving Church draws boundaries to protect the sheep & purge evil (5:12)**

While the world teaches us to say: Love accepts . . . unconditionally.
The Bible teaches that love has conditions.

The gospel doesn't proclaim a message of unconditional love . . . it requires the death of Jesus, repentance and faith to be saved. These are some serious conditions.

So love is CONTRA-conditional, not unconditional. That's an important distinction.

1 Cor 6 says if you abide in sin, you won't enter the kingdom of God. That's conditional.

Yet, IN LOVE the Father sent his son to meet the legal conditions and they sent the Spirit to meet the spiritual and ethical conditions.

That being the case, the church is not devoid of conditions.

Biblically-speaking the church has requirements – namely faith and repentance.

Those who abide in faith and repentance are received into the church . . . those who do not have faith and repentance are put outside the church.

In love, the church makes it as clear as possible who is a member and who is not. **v. 12**

Those who prove themselves to be unbelievers are removed . . . **v. 13**

So the loving church protects the sheep by removing evil . . .
. . .and it loves the unbeliever by making clear who he or she is.

By extension, this principle explains why church discipline depends on church membership.

The local church doesn't have authority to discipline just anyone . . .

We are only able to discipline members. We only have authority to discipline those who have entrusted themselves to this church.

Therefore, we can't and won't exercise CD unless someone is church member.

For some of you . . .

That might make you want to pull your membership right now . . . but you should ask why

For those who are thinking spiritually . . . you should long to be a church member . . . and you should fear walking this snare-filled world without a church family

Church discipline is a gift of God's love to protect you from making shipwreck of your faith
Don't miss out by neglecting to be a church member.

7. A Loving Church also goes to trial to bring peace to its members (6:1 – 11)

In the first 8 verses of chapter 6 Paul rebukes the Corinthians for taking their grievances to the Corinthian courts of law. Why?

2 reasons:

(1) It denies the power of God to reconcile believers . . .

READ v. 1 – 5

Paul's point is that you who are citizens of God's kingdom, who have the Spirit, and the eternal gospel, ... AND who can ask for heavenly wisdom . . .

You have all you need to adjudicate any "case" in the EKK.

To go to court or seek worldly counsel . . . is to deny the church its God-given role of making peace between sinners.

(2) It denies sinners the chance to hear the gospel.

1 Corinthians 6:9 – 11 comes on the heels of this legal briefing.

Like verse 6 – 8, verse 9 asks another question.

While we often read v. 1 – 8 as detached from vv. 9 – 11.
(And we preached them that way) . . . **they are clearly connected.**

What fighting members of the church need + esp. spouses who continue to fight with each other . . . is not a worldly court . . . but a gospel-filled church.

This is what the church offers that the world cannot – and all who submit themselves to the church are coming for gospel-centered protection

To put it frankly, . . . In cases of church discipline . . . the church goes to trial

And it's goal is not to slam down the gavel, but to pull the deceived sinner from the mire.

As we said . . . we are on a rescue mission.

This, of course, is the Lord's work! But if you have your doctrine right – it's our work too!

Next, the church that loves its members enough to confront their sin with the gospel, must be willing to deal with the trickiest sin problems – namely anything related to sex

Nothing will distort God's holiness and love, like a wrong view of sex.

Because sex is so tied to love . . . it will either solidify what is true about love,

Or . . . as was the case in Corinth . . . and today

Sex will totally redraw the boundaries of true love.

Paul knew the power of sex.

As he distinguishes this sin from others, he says in **v. 18**: *"Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body."*

Therefore, a loving church is not afraid to address matters of sex, rather, . . .

8. A Loving Church Applies the Gospel to Sexual Sin (6:12 – 7:40)

From birth . . . you've been trained . . . that love endorses every form of self-expression.

"Be true to yourself" . . . is the most loving thing you can do.

The words of *Frozen's* "Let It Go" could not better express it!

**It's time to see what I can do
To test the limits and break through
No right, no wrong, no rules for me, I'm free!**

That's not love . . . that's spiritual suicide!

A church that sits idly by as those in its care . . . "Let It Go." Is not a church . . .
. . . It's an assisted living center . . . that gives comfort as people seek death.

NO... a loving church applies the gospel to all matters sexual . . .

Which means it proclaims a message of forgiveness and holiness.

Good news . . . Christ's blood can cleanse any sin.

Better news . . . by God's grace, you don't have to live that way anymore

Best news . . . God has given you all the resources to live as a new creation in Christ . . . this is what **1 Corinthians 6:12 – 7:40** is all about.

So to pick up the pace . . . let me hit some of those points and land on the issue of divorce and church discipline.

9. A Loving Church engages / exposes / confronts culture (6:12)

We cannot hold just one position to culture, but we must not ignore it!

That is to say: we affirm what is good in culture and confront what is not.

In **v. 12 – 13**, Paul takes the slogans of the Corinthians . . . and exposes their error.

His approach is worth our imitation.

A loving church is neither afraid of culture nor ignorant of it,

Rather we must speak with a prophetic voice to the culture . . . and to one another as we live and move and have our being in this world.

And of course this means dealing with sexual sin . . .

10. A Loving Church condemns *porneia* and calls for holiness (6:12 – 21)

This is the whole point of vv. 12 – 21.

He calls us to flee from sexual immorality (v. 18) and glorify God with your body (v. 20).

This is not unloving, but sacrificially loving.

To speak against the cultural norm (with re: to sex) always invites hostility.

Now . . . this doesn't mean Xians are called to be the morals police in your office.

No . . . the context of this teaching is the local church.

To one another, as God's called out ones, we call for holiness.

To the world, we proclaim Jesus Christ and the message of forgiveness.

The world's problem is not sexual sin. It is unbelief.

Our message to the world is "Jesus saves."

To one another: "Jesus sanctifies" . . . so walk in his holiness.

With that in mind . . . consider Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 7

11. A Loving Church affirms the goodness of sex (7:1 – 5)

Our message is not . . . sex is bad but permissible in marriage.

No . . . sex is good . . . so good it should only be pursued in the permanent, protected boundaries of marriage.

Nakedness is good in the Garden of Eden . . . not so much outside.

12. A Loving Church affirms the goodness of singleness (7:6 – 9)

We don't elevate marriage over singleness as a better calling.

Rather, we affirm both. We celebrate when a man and woman marry.

We praise God for the singles he brings to our church and we see to include them in the life our church and look to find ways for them to use their gifts.

13. A Loving Church affirms the goodness of marriage (7:10 – 15)

Therefore, we celebrate the blessed union of a man and a woman.

And we grieve anything that threatens / destroys that union.

We cannot be indifferent on this matter and be loving.

To love is to rejoice in the truth and to celebrate the good, true, beautiful.

Again . . . this puts us at odds with the culture.

We cannot love God's design for marriage . . . and endorse SSM

But more to the point of 1 Corinthians 7 . . . is a problem that began in our country long before SSM . . . and that is divorce.

A loving church affirms the goodness of marriage . . . with its promise of covenant faithfulness until death.

For the last 50 years, divorce has devastated our country.

And honestly, it has devastated churches.

Therefore, a loving church must affirm the evil of divorce. And when such marital strife occurs, it must use all of its resources—including CD—to reconcile breaking marriages.

14. **A Loving Church disciplines those who SEEK divorce.**

A Loving Church disciplines those who are SUFFERING divorce.

Now . . . this is not to say that church discipline must wait for divorce.

There are plenty of reasons why a church might pursue church discipline with a spouse before a divorce is sought or granted.

But, we are saying that if a member of the church seeks a divorce, the church must move through the stages of church discipline.

To fail to do that . . . is a failure of love!

In short . . . This intersection of divorce, discipline, and the church unites all that we have seen in 1 Corinthians 5 – 7.

It derives from the belief that divorce isn't permissible **for 2 Xians**

This is what Paul teaches in 7:10 – 11

However, he also says in a mixed marriage . . . that divorce is permissible

Now in a black and white world, everyone would know if their marriage was mixed.

But with a world filled with gray, not everything is so easy to see.

Sometimes a mixed marriage is created by conversion . . .

Sometimes, a wife believes her husband is a Xian . . . only to discover (with all kinds of sadness) . . . the falsehood of that belief.

Again . . . This revelation doesn't mean the marriage is doomed or headed to divorce.

If the unbeliever will live with the believer, than the believer should remain.

However, Sometimes this revelation of un-regeneration comes in the throes of divorce.

In such a case, what is the believing spouse to do?

Personally, she is to lean on the Lord and not her own understanding/
Practically, this looks like coming to the church for help.

Remember . . .

The LC has the right and ability to make a decision about someone's salvation.

This is what it means to have the keys of the kingdom.

This is what Jesus meant in **John 20:23**: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

This certainly does not give the church the right to forgive sins ultimately.

But we do have the right and spiritual ability to pronounce forgiveness, whenever we hear the testimony of a believer and see his James 2 faith.

This is what we do every time we baptize someone.

We baptize believers.

And . . . How do we know they are a believer ?? . . .

We listen to their faith and we look for their repentance and love.

If repentance and love are present, we gladly baptize.

But if one seeking baptism continues to sleep with his girlfriend or rebel against his parents . . . we will not baptize . . . just because someone seeks it.

The same is true with church discipline . . .

We don't go looking to discipline . . . but when a pattern of sin is manifested . . .
. . . it's not hard to see.

If it's hard to see . . . it's not a sin that would lead to church discipline.

But when it is apparent, then we as the church must act.

And anecdotally, the kind of sins that are most commonly brought to the church, are the sins spoken of in 1 Corinthians 5, 6, 7—sins related to sex, marriage, and divorce.

So back to the question . . .

Who decides who is a Christian?

Ultimately in heaven . . . it is God.

But on earth and for our decision-making . . . it is the church.

The spouse does not have the authority to make that judgment.

He or she may have the best understanding. . . but the keys of the kingdom are not given to individuals. They are given to the church as a whole.

1 Cor 5:3 – “When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

There is something special that happens when God’s people gather in Christ’s name.

The members of our church could take a trip to watch the Nationals play b-ball. But that is not the “church” assembled in the name of Jesus Christ.

No . . . it is when Christians gather in the name of Jesus to worship him, to hear his Word, take the Lord’s Supper, . . . that we are exercising our royal rights.

And thus it is to the church . . . that members should run when faced with all kinds of strife . . .

Again to repeat myself . . . what does the spouse do who is suffering a divorce?

Personally, she must lean on the Lord and not her own understanding.

Practically, she should find help from the church God has given her.

This is why the church . . . founded on the Word of God . . . must be involved in any divorce.

It’s not out of a desire to meddle or control everyone in the church. . .

It’s out of love.

God has given the church to the one whose marriage is fracturing . . .

. . . and the church – especially the elders and the godly women who help us counsel –

. . . is the place where you can find wisdom, counsel, prayer, and help in an hour of need

To get into the nitty-gritty: When someone in the church seeks a divorce . . .

The church must stand to declare the truth of God's word about divorce.

[1] Our greatest commitment is not to any individual . . . but to God himself.

. . . Which means we don't take sides, even as we help discern who is seeking divorce and who is suffering divorce.

[2] At the same time, we must consider the purity of the church . . .

. . . And the effect of dealing lightly with sin.

1 Corinthians 5:6 – 8 speaks of sin . . . as leaven that infects the whole church.

In this way . . . to love the church . . . we must be willing to protect the church from unrepentant sinners who seek to abide in the church.

This doesn't mean such a sinner can't come to hear the gospel.

It does mean we make a clear statement: They cannot take of the Lord's Supper.

[3] Finally, to love the individuals in a divorce, we must perform our 1 Corinthians 6:1–8 duty.

Just as a case is brought before a court and advocates trained in law argue the case, . . .

. . . so a "case" is brought to the church, where the elders trained in the gospel and helped by helped by godly women . . .

. . . are able to provide wisdom and counsel.

In this context . . . the steps of Matthew 18 are followed.

And most often . . . a divorce is coupled with church discipline.

I am cautious in this setting to pronounce absolutes . . . because every case is different.

And yet . . . every case is constrained by the word of God.

. . . every case requires unique wisdom that comes as God's people pray, study Scripture, and let the Word of God have its way.

Indeed, this is why we bring the case before you this morning.

We are seeking your prayers . . . your petitions . . . your labors to reach out to Juan.

Our goal is not to punish . . . but to see reconciliation, restoration, and repair.

But such return . . . begins with repentance . . . and so we pray and plead for that!

I also want to add . . . I am praying that you would make a promise to . . .

The promise is with yourself before God

It's fine if you share with others . . . even your spouse

But that you would promise the Lord, . . . that if you come to a place where sin is waiting at the door looking to destroy you . . .

You would not see the church as the LAST place to go . . . but the FIRST!

God creates the church with the gospel of grace.

In turn the church becomes a means of grace to empower believers to walk in holiness.

There's not one of us today . . . who is so pure we couldn't be led astray by the deceitful of sin.

Therefore, commit to yourself and to God . . .

. . . to be someone who will falls toward the church, should you stumble in your walk

We are an imperfect people, but by God's grace . . .

. . . this church and every church you ever join . . .

. . . will be churches that will love you with

. . .gospel truth,

. . . gospel fellowship

. . . gospel-centered church discipline.