Section: Doctrine of the Church (Ecclesiology)

Wednesday, February 24, 2021

M. Kirstine

**TEACHING NOTES**

**Q106. What is Christian accountability and discipline?**

It is loving correction to someone who professes to be a Christian when he/she is out of step of core sound doctrine or practicing other sin. If he/she does not repent after biblical efforts are made, then God’s instruction is dis-fellowship until he/she does. All Christians are to joyfully submit to biblically-based accountability.

**Q107. Why do we do Christian accountability and discipline?**

We practice Christian accountability and discipline because of our love for God and our love for one another.

It glorifies God when we trust and obey His commanded will, and it is loving to others to treat them the way God has ordained.

Let’s look at our two questions:

* **Introduction**

Tonight’s lesson will be very biblical, very practical, and various degrees of challenging.

Very biblical - The topic we are studying has to start with and remain governed by God’s word, so we’ll look closely at what *Scripture teaches us* in this lesson.

Very practical – We will see in Scripture very practical requirements that God has commanded for us. This is God’s instruction for us in a realm of life that we WILL face. He has blessed us with instruction as to how to truly love others and honor Him; therefore, this practical teaching is timely and needed.

Various degrees of challenging – And in this, each of us will be challenged. Our flesh wants to *have relationships the way we see fit*. But we must conform to God’s commanded will despite how challenging it is. The reality is *not many people* like confrontation or conflict. We almost always would prefer to just avoid conflict or confrontation. But God’s word tells us it is not loving to avoid *certain things*, and He instructs us how to deal with them.

In this we must set aside our fleshly preferences and receive the instruction of our Lord on these matters. Jesus’ teaching in **Luke 9:23-25** should be considered here. As our Lord Jesus said ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?’

While we will be challenged by our Bible study tonight, *are we* coming to the topic truly willing to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Jesus?

Our topic tonight is by no means a popular one in our “to-each-his-own” culture. In fact, as culture has become more and more indifferent to various sinful practices, many in the church have followed suit. And this is an incredibly sad reality. Scripture calls Christians to "not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (**Romans 12:2**).

But with tonight’s topic, not being conformed to this world hasn’t happened among *many modern churches and many professing believers*. Instead, some Christians have tolerated sin and/*or even encouraged sin* in themselves or in others, for a variety of reasons.

Some of these reasons are less intentional, while others are blatantly ignoring God’s commands.

But, as we’ll see tonight, God’s word is clear about how to handle a professing believer who is *pursing* sin.

* **Two Temptations**

With topics and lessons like this one, people often find themselves in one of two groups, so I want to bring light to this.

* **Hasty**

Some folks will read the commands for accountability in their Bible and/or hear a lesson like this taught and they will overreact. They’ll become over-zealous and seek to put these things into practice in an unbiblical way and with too many people, and they’ll do unnecessary, unloving damage to relationships. In short, they will be hasty in the name of accountability, and that’s a terrible thing. We cannot be hasty in this. If you tend to be that way, or this study leaves you feeling a strong motivation to be hasty, please stop and take the instruction I’ll give in a moment.

On the other hand, the other group will essentially do the opposite.

* **Inaction**

The temptation on this other side would be to read the commands for accountability in their Bible and/or hear a lesson like this taught *and recoil*. In this recoiling, people will not want to obey God’s word on these things. They don’t want to have tough conversations or possibly lose relationships dear to them. They will have several reasons why God’s instructions on this don’t apply to them or their situations. They’ll want to put this all aside and continue **not** doing what we’ll see God command tonight.

Often times, this is founded in a desire to be loving and peaceable. And we want to applaud that desire, but “loving and peaceable” need to be understood as God defines and commands them. We are not smarter than God. Yes, we must be loving and peaceable, and God tells us how we do those things—not the world and not ourselves.

Other times **inaction** in accountability occurs because of fear: not a godly fear, but rather a self-seeking fear. A fear of adding possible tension to relationship, or a fear of not wanting to lose a relationship, or a fear of others that seeks their approval over obeying God.

To some degree, **we have all** fallen into this **inaction** before. But this shouldn’t be the case. We need to trust and obey God’s commanded will. We need to interact with others *the way God has ordained*.

* **The Solution to the Temptations: Follow Scripture**

Therefore, the answer to both these tendencies (hasty or inaction) is trusting God’s word and seeking godly counsel based on the word of God.

God has ordained that we don’t do life alone, *as we see fit in our own eyes*. Instead, we are desperate for His Scripture, and He has called us to also seek and heed the biblical counsel Christians around us— not simply Christians we go way back with or who often tell us what we what to hear, but Christians who truly know and handle the word of God well—*Christians who have proven a practical wisdom in applying God’s truths and navigating life in this fallen world based on God’s word*.

So, this is one of the most important things you hear tonight: you are not to be alone in all of this.

* **Our Study Scope: Relationships with Those Who Proclaim Faith in Christ**

Now, let me make one more introductory point. It needs to be understood that our scope in this lesson is that of *relationships Christians have with others who proclaim faith in Christ*. Understanding this is very important.

What God requires of us in regard to interactions with *non-believers* is also something we need to know, but that is a topic for another study another time.

So please remember, what we discuss tonight has to do specifically with relationships Christians have with others who proclaim faith in Christ.

* **What is Christian accountability and discipline?**

Let’s jump in now. Let me remind you of what Christian accountability & discipline is:

**Q106. What is Christian accountability and discipline?**

It is loving correction to someone who professes to be a Christian when he/she is out of step of core sound doctrine or practicing other sin. If he/she does not repent after biblical efforts are made, then God’s instruction is dis-fellowship until he/she does. All Christians are to joyfully submit to biblically-based accountability.

That’s what we are going to see in Scripture tonight. Christian accountability, and in some cases dis-fellowship, are the loving commands that God gives to His people to pursue repentance from sin in those who claim to be Christians.

* **Why do we do Christian accountability and discipline?**

Now, before we dive into the details and Scripture on the *what and how*, I want us to have a proper foundation on the “why.”

*Why* do we do Christian accountability and discipline?

As our second answer tonight says:

**Q107. Why do we do Christian accountability and discipline?**

We practice Christian accountability and discipline because of our love for God and our love for one another.

It glorifies God when we trust and obey His commanded will, and it is loving to others to treat them the way God has ordained.

God’s design in all of this is that Christians would seek to honor the purity of the Christ—that *as* His body of believers, we rightly handle those who claim His name but do not walk in a manner worthy of Him.

*This is the loving thing to do*.

Look at a few examples of how God’s word speaks to these interactions between us:

**Proverbs 27:6** Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

**Proverbs 15:32** Whoever ignores instruction despises himself, but he who listens to reproof gains intelligence.

**Ecclesiastes 7:5** It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools.

…Hear God’s word tell us directly that God has given each other as a blessing. Hear God’s word tell us directly that accountability is a blessing.

Look at the clarity given in

**Hebrews 12:11** For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

God’s *design for* accountability and discipline is a blessing.

On the other hand, *what if* we ignore or despise this Christian accountability and discipline? Look at:

**Proverbs 26:12** Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

**Proverbs 5:22-23 22**The iniquities of the wicked ensnare [a person], and he is held fast in the cords of his sin. **23**He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly he is led astray.

Worthy of a longer look, we even have Christ’s warning to professing believers in sin in:

**Revelation 2:4-5** **4**But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. **5**Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

Christian accountability and discipline are often significant means that God uses to grow His saved. If not for loving insight and rebuke from others, many times we would not see or fight sin that we are each guilty of.

Think of how vital accountability and discipline is for the rearing of a child. If you never told your kids what they didn’t know about things that were bad for them or didn’t hold them accountable to truth, how they would turn out?

Like a loving Father, Hebrews 12 says it is *because of love* that God disciplines us. In the same way, it is also *because of love* that we hold each other accountable and practice discipline in the body of Christ.

The MOTIVATION is love for Christ and His body.

The WHY is blessing and proper testimony and God’s glory.

See the mindset and approach to life we are to have in:

**Romans 12:9** Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.

We must understand that accountability and dis-fellowship is loving and gracious to all parties:

First, God uses it as the means to draw back a true believer who is in sin, for glorious reconciliation and sanctification. That’s loving.

Second, in some cases, God uses it to show a deceived person—a falsely testifying person—they are not actually united to Christ, and, if God wills, the Holy Spirit will convict that person and bring about true salvation—true unity to Christ. That is loving.

And, third, God uses it to help protect His people from approving, tolerating, and/or falling into sin. That is loving.

Please church, know God’s word and trust it as *the best way* to live. On this matter, and all other matters.

Please don’t set aside *God’s design* to pick up something else that seems right in your own eyes. We hate one another if we don’t conduct our relationships the way King Jesus has told us to.

We’re not living from love of Jesus if we don’t conduct our relationships the way King Jesus has told us to. Christ said: **John 14:15** “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

We practice Christian accountability and discipline because of our love for God and our love for one another.

It glorifies God when we trust and obey His commanded will, and it is loving to others to treat them the way God has ordained.

Therefore, that is why this is such a big deal. That’s why we are talking about this. That’s why it’s in the catechism.

This matters a great deal to God. And we live *for* God.

* **The Loving Commands of Christian Accountability and Discipline**

With that, now we consider the *what and how* from Scripture.

The Christian accountability pursuit includes loving, gentle dialog with a person practicing sin to call him/her to repent.

While human emotions might make this topic heavy, it’s a simple design from God.

* **Go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone**

In God’s design, first we are to: Lovingly talk to a brother or sister when there is legitimate concern of sin.

Seek unity, sanctification, and God’s glory.

In many cases, the extent of accountability needed is only one conversation. That’s all that it takes. (That’s all it should take if we’re all seeking to live by God’s word: *a brother or sister in Christ approaches another in a loving and honest dialog about a concern or known sin; the offender repents of sin and seeks sanctification because of the dialog*.) **This is great!** Jesus says in **Matthew 18:15**, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.”

That is awesome. “you have gained your brother” Praise God! Christian unity & holiness.

As **Ephesians 4:3** says [Be] eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

It cannot be in self-righteousness. It’s not about *being* right, it’s about *being right with God*. Desire and seek unity *in godliness.*

Jesus’ instruction in Matthew 18:15 is clear, right? Talk to your brother/sister in Christ and seek unity and his/her good in seeking repentance.

This happens. Hopefully you have experience with this happening.

It happens in your leadership here at church, and it happens in the groups and discipleship circles here at Disciples Church. It happens and it’s important. Praise God.

We should celebrate this accountability and the real repentance that God produces in it.

* **If he does not listen, take others along with you**

Now…sadly, sometimes a single interaction, like a one-on-one discussion, doesn’t produce the clarity or repentance it should—there’s hardness of heart, or perhaps a disagreement on the facts.

When that’s the case, (sometimes the loving thing to do is ask the other person to pray about it, seek Scripture on the topic, and tell him/her you’ll follow up in a short time. Then do that, follow-up.

*Or,* rather than seeking a second dialog alone,) bring others to join the accountability efforts as Jesus taught in **Matthew 18:16:** “But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.”

In this small group setting, more Christians can seek truth, testify to any sin, and encourage what God’s word requires.

Follow-up admonishment must always be honest and loving, like the first. Once again, our hope is to gain our brother in unity & truth, in their repentance of sin.

* **If he refuses to listen to the covenant community: dis-fellowship**

But, after going through the biblical steps, what if repentance is still not something the person agrees to? One on one and appropriate interactions with the covenant community don’t yield the repentance that God’s word calls for—The professing Christian is insisting on their own way, own desires, preferences, view, or beliefs.

If he does not repent after proper exhortations have been made, then Christians in relationship with that person are to *cease relational interaction* with him until he repents. This dis-fellowship is what Jesus gets at in the next verse in Matthew 18, verse 17, and it is what Scripture repeats in several other places, such as in 1 Corinthians 5, which we see in detail (along with other passages) in a bit.

Dis-fellowship is certainly **not** a popular thing in our flesh, and because of that, it’s **not** something you’ve likely seen happen much of in the span of your whole lifetime thus far. But it is God’s command.

The God who is perfect, who hates sin, who should **not** be dishonored, has put in place this system—these steps. Who are we to question God?

*Christians need to honor God in this*.

-Here, your elders are committed to it—you’ve heard and seen these things from us.

-Your membership covenant agrees to it.

-The church’s, statement of beliefs (publicly published and locally agreed to) clearly declares it.

While, in the past or at other congregations, you may not have experienced all of this being lived out according to God’s word…for us, it was a part of our historic reformation to aligned with God and His word *more fully*.

And, the fruit of that obedience has been real and sweet. Like I mentioned, believers in this church benefit from the blessing of God’s design of Christian accountability and discipline. We are all better for it.

Now, with the weight of this, at this point, it’s good to realize that God requiring accountability and dis-fellowship is not a new thing, nor an uncommon thing.

God has had the principle of accountability and dis-fellowship in both the covenant communities He set apart.

In the Old Testament, we see the principle as an important part of His commands on that typological covenant community. And we see the principle for us, His antitype covenant community in the New Testament, as well.

What we’re getting at here is God has consistently required that the righteousness of people He set apart from the rest of the world be sought through accountability and discipline by the others in fellowship with them, under the authority of and based on *His word*.

* **Accountability and Dis-fellowship in the Old Testament**

So, let’s briefly consider the Old Covenant to see this.

In the economy of the Old Covenant, God gave commands of how the covenant people were to have accountability. And He made clear that grievous sin was not to be tolerated. He said clearly to “purge the evil” from among them.

That meant to no longer have relationship with those committing grievous sins. Sin such asbeing a false prophet, sin of idolatry or false worship, not obeying the priest in matters requiring their judgement, being a false witness who has accused his brother falsely, being a stubborn and rebellious child—not honoring parents, having premarital sex, committing adultery, and human trafficking.

This sample list gives us a taste of the reality of accountability and dis-fellowship God commanded to His Old Covenant people.

They were not to “avoid conflict” or “agree to disagree” or let “to each his own.” God gave commands to them *to act in accountability*.

God put in place the requirement for peers to hold each other accountable. *Within the covenant community, those in proximity or with relationship with someone in sin were the main ones to be involved in the carrying out of these things*.

Now, for certain sins, like the list we looked at, God ordained dis-fellowship *by way of death* in the Old Covenant.

Dis-fellowship by putting the offender to death. *That shows how serious God takes sin, does it not*? It shows how He expected His covenant people to be living in holiness.

Based on Scripture, standard process was that *the one offended or the ones who witnessed the sin* would initiate the dis-fellowship and then the rest of the covenant community in relationship with them would join. Look at **Deuteronomy 13:9**, “Your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people” and **Deuteronomy 17:7,** “The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. ”

Take note of that phrase there in D17: “you shall purge the evil from your midst.” That is a common way that God communicated the requirement for dis-fellowship. Remember that for later.

I’ve given you a sample list in your notes of some of the verses that God commands *dis-fellowship by death* in the four books of Law in your Old Testament:



* **Christian Accountability and Dis-fellowship in the New Testament**

Now, you may be thinking…

*But we live in the New Covenant. Does the Old Covenant really have anything to offer this discussion to us in the New Covenant?*

When rightly understood, the Old Covenant Scripture will always help us; 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says this is the case about all Scripture.

For example, the reality of General Equity is very important.

Do you remember that term, “General Equity?” We learned about it in our Biblical Law lesson previously.

General Equity requires us to know the principles to honor in Old Testament law/commands that are **not** binding *in the exact same way* now. The Apostle Paul makes this connection on this topic for us in 1 Corinthians 5.

We’ll see from that passage (and our look at other passages) that all Christians are called to biblically participate in accountability and dis-fellowship. Christians have clear instruction from God not to ignore sin in ourselves or in others who profess to be Christians. Repentance from falsehood and other ungodliness is to be sought.

One of the most direct passages in Scripture about Christian accountability is 1 Corinthians chapter 5. Let’s walk through it as the jumping off point for a New Covenant understanding. The Apostle Paul writes:

**1 Corinthians 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. **2**And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

PAUSE – Ok, this begins right into it. Paul is acknowledging that grievous, unrepentant sin is present amongst the church (the covenant community) of Corinth. The grievous sin, in this case, is a man having inappropriate relations with his step-mother.

And notice as well that the believers there are overlooking it—remember that for later.

What does Paul command them to do at the end of verse 2? “Let him who has done this be removed from among you.” See that? Very clear. Dis-fellowship is commanded for this man who is in **unrepentant sin**.

If this were still the Old Covenant, the command would be to put him to death, but being in the New Covenant now, God through Paul commands *relational dis-fellowship*—not death. Ok, let’s move on…

**3**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. **4**When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, **5**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.

Ok, so let’s point out some things in this portion.

-Paul makes a righteous judgment on the man (he calls the man’s sin *sin*).

-Paul then commands the believers in this community to dis-fellowship with that man. Paul says, “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.” We need to understand this; this is so important.

Paul is saying that since this man is not repenting of this sin, he is to be given over to it. He is to be no longer fellowshipped with; instead, he is to be given over to his sinful pursuits *in isolation*.

**An unrepentant person claiming Christ cannot have both God’s community and unrepentant sin.**

But why does Paul command this? What’s the hope in it? It’s based on love for the man. Paul says that it may be that this man will be brought to repentance through this accountability and dis-fellowship. “…So that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” *Don’t miss this*; this process is based on love and hope.

*It’s loving* to not simply tolerate or passively speak against unrepentant sin in someone claiming Christ.

*It’s loving* to obey God about accountability and dis-fellowship.

*It’s hopeful* to do these things God’s way *so that if God wills*, His sovereign power might bring the person to repentance and restoration because of it. That’s so key; we hope you *understand and value* that.

Note here as well that we see an added layer of grace in the New Covenant in that many of the sins that required *discipline unto death* no longer do. For most sins\*\*, there is now opportunity to continue *to live and to repent* to remain in the covenant community (\*\*all sin expect murder—I won’t get into it in this lesson, but know that *murder still requires the death penalty* per Noahic Covenant and creation ordinance realties). However, the death penalty is not the church’s assignment to execute. No time available in this lesson to get into this.\*\*). In the New Covenant we warn them, plead with them, preach the gospel to them, and (if they do not repent) we use a New Covenant means of dis-fellowship, thereby giving opportunity for life and repentance that didn’t exist in the Old Covenant.

Paul continues, and seeks to stir up conviction and build out the body’s understanding: Verse 6…

**6**Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? **7**Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. **8**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.

**9**I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— **10**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. **11**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.

**12**For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? **13**God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”

In the remaining section there of 1 Cor 5 next notice that…

- Paul uses symbolic language about leaven. “a little leaven leavens the whole lump”…Sin will spread; sin begets more sin. The point of this is to see what we’ve seen tonight already. God’s people are to seek and be holy and righteous, and **not** permit or tolerate unrighteousness in the body. He commands “sincerity and truth.”

Then Paul makes some more very important teaching points and gives important commands.

-Paul says that he already told them not to fellowship with the unrepentant, but he makes a very important clarity. He’s saying this applies to people professing to be Christians: “Anyone who bears the name of brother.”

-He says these principles and commands do not apply to the world—unrepentant sinners not claiming Christ—for then we would **not** have any relationships with the unbelievers of the world, and this would be impossible (we’d have to “go out of the world.”)

So, it’s not calling for the cutting off relations with self-proclaimed **non-**believers.

A primary reason for this is the gospel will not be shared if we don’t wisely engage non-believers; the remaining elect would not be reached with the gospel. God hasn’t removed us from this world; rather, we are to live in it for His purposes.

Then we see…

-Paul again talks about judging, commanding proper judging, and we’ll cover this more later in our lesson.

-And finally, Paul uses the key General Equity statement: “Purge the evil person from among you.” (Remember this common refrain inwhich God communicated the requirement for dis-fellowship.)

In this, Paul (who is inspired by God) is taking a command from the Old Covenant and showing there is a related command in the New Covenant.

This is critical; don’t miss this. By doing this, Paul is not saying to purge the evil in the exact same way, rather, he is saying

God’s hatred for sin still stands,

God’s expectation for holiness in His people still stands,

God’s expectation of His people holding those who claim or desire to be His people accountable still stands,

and God’s way of using those in proximity to a sinning person for accountably *still stands*.

This is very important to see. God has not removed the requirement for accountability and dis-fellowship in the New Covenant. He has changed the way dis-fellowship *happens*, but He has not changed the core principle within it.

Hopefully you see how relevant and instructive 1 Corinthians 5 is. In the New Covenant, the command of dis-fellowship means we are not to have relational interaction with the unrepentant professing Christian, to any degree. They are to be isolated from God’s church—God’s people.

In line with that, once dis-fellowship is in place, if and when there is a focused opportunity to bring the unrepentant person Scripture and a call to repentance again, this opportunity should be taken. But the contact should be strictly for the purpose of admonishment and restoration. ((Use wisdom in that. EX: THEY WRITE YOU A LETTER vs YOU SEE THEM IN A BUSY GROCERY STORE AISLE))

These things might seem tough, but let us remember:

It glorifies God when we trust and obey His commanded will, and it is loving to others to treat them the way God has ordained. *The primary purpose of this level of accountability is the spiritual restoration of unrepentant professing believers unto the honoring of God’s name and the strengthening of the body of Christ.*

When a sinning believer is rebuked and he turns from his sin, *he is won back to relational interaction and normal Christian fellowship with the body of Christ.* This is huge.

Unity in truth and life together with the body is one of the greatest joys of our salvation. This is the joyful reality of what a person gains when adopted into the body of Christ. So, to have that taken away in dis-fellowship is a big deal to a true believer. And God, in His providence, uses that removal of fellowship to really cost and weigh on the sinning person. In the end, if a person receiving accountability truly loves God and His people, he will not be able to stay away forever in selfishness—in sin. The true Christian will repent.

Accountability is a blessing from God.

In addition to accountability being to benefit the person in sin by seeking their repentance, God has other wise reasons for these commands. *Other purposes of accountability and dis-fellowship include*

deterring others claiming Christ from sin,

protecting the people of God from false teaching,

and maintaining the testimony of holiness in the people of God to the rest of the world (see Deuteronomy 13:11, Deuteronomy 19:20, Deuteronomy 21:21, 1 Peter 2:12, Titus 2:7-8, Matthew 5:16).

GOD is wise. In love, He has designed this system for us.

Let me say at this point, we’ve taken a good chunk of time there to consider the *dis-fellowship portion* of accountability, but it should be said that that is not nearly as common as the accountability being sufficient in the steps *prior to* that. By God’s grace, it seems like a minority of situations get to dis-fellowship. The majority of accountability matters are properly addressed and responded to prior to dis-fellowship being needed. We’re not entitled to that less difficult process, but it seems it’s more common when Christians practice these things.

It’s important to take the time to see the dis-fellowship reality in depth and from both Testaments because only then do we more fully see God’s design, God’s emphasis, God’s hatred for sin in His covenant people, and God’s purposes.

By now, you should be able to see our catechism answer clearly in Scripture: Christian accountability and discipline is loving correction to someone who professes to be a Christian when he/she is out of step of core sound doctrine or practicing other sin. If he/she does not repent after biblical efforts are made, then God’s instruction is dis-fellowship until he/she does.

* **Additional New Testament New Covenant Passages**

Now, 1 Corinthians 5 is not the only New Testament—New Covenant—passage on accountability and discipline; quickly look at some others:

**Galatians 6:1** Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

**Hebrews 3:13** But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

**Titus 3:8-11** **~~8~~**~~The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.~~ **~~9~~**~~But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.~~ **10**As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, **11**knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

**2 Thessalonians 3:14-15** **14**If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. **15**Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

These next four verse apply to anyone who is spreading false doctrine, especially those who are claiming to be Christian…

**Romans 16:17-18** **17**I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. **18**For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.

**Galatians 1:8-9** **8**But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. **9**As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

**2 John 9-11** **9**Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. **10**If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, **11**for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.

And finally, we see again Jesus’ teaching on accountability for the ekklesia—that is Christians…

**Matthew 18:15-17** **15**“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. **16**But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. **17**If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church (ekklēsia –that means believers). And if he refuses to listen even to the church (ekklēsias—believers), let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

See how clear this is for the New Covenant. It’s woven in the whole New Testament. This isn’t a take it or leave it thing. This isn’t just for some Christians. It’s for all of us to know and seek God’s revealed will in.

* **Patience with those struggling but *not* rejecting accountability**

Now, in the accountability and dis-fellowship conversation, we need to clearly state another important reality so that this is not done hastily or otherwise in the wrong fashion.

This is that Christians are called to patience with those *who are less mature in the faith*. We need to understand that there is a bearing with the less mature that occurs ***when*** *they are actively receiving your biblically sound influence, counsel, teaching, and admonishment*.

This is accountability in action, as well.

When the relationship bears the real fruit of the less mature moving in a godly direction **and not rejecting** you or your efforts to look to Scripture with them to bring about repentance, doctrine, and/or godliness, we maintain patience with them. We do not dis-fellowship with those struggling **but *truly* heeding** correction and growing.

**Ephesians 4:1-3 1** I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, **2**with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, **3**eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

**1 Thessalonians 5:14** And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.

**Romans 15:1** We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

**Colossians 3:16** Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

The verses are not a canceling out or contradiction of what we have seen thus far, rather *they instruct us* in a certain layer of active accountability.

What remains is, when those claiming to be Christians that God has relationally put into our lives are unwilling to hear and heed admonishment, unwilling to seek God’s will and truth in Scripture, and/or unwilling to repent of other sin—this is them rejecting accountability—and God commands Christians to inform them of their error and cut off relational interaction with them if they do not repent.

***Patience*** *with those not rejecting counsel and rebuke………and* ***discipline*** *for those who are continuing in sin and rejecting counsel and rebuke.*

* **Further Personal and Practical Application**

Let’s turn now to further consider application…

* **Seek counsel**

We want to urge you to seek counsel in these matters. There is a communal aspect to these things, as well as the always important wisdom in not being on an island in how you’re seeing things and doing things.

For example, there are different levels and depths of relationships in each of our lives. Seek counsel in how God’s commands apply to that and to sift through specifics. Factors of each situation and relationship need to be **carefully** considered. Again, let’s not be hasty.((For example, don’t seek out a total stranger you see on Facebook and spend time and emotion trying to engage them in difficult depths of accountability.))

Do you have a real relationship with a person in question or are they seeking relationship with you? Are they inside or outside of your church, your family, your friends?

* **Judge with right judgment**

Next, in this topic, it’s common for people to think:*shouldn’t we leave the judging up to God?*

Scripture certainly restricts us from certain kinds of judging. For example, in the case of Romans 14, when we study the immediate context, we see that what is in focus here is “opinion” type matters, *Christian liberty* type matters. The examples Paul uses are that of food choices and of regrading one day to be above another day. These Christian liberty matters are not things to quarrel over or judge each other over.

However, what we must understand is that we don’t get to think of core doctrine matters or violations of God’s law simply as Christian liberty matters *in order to prohibit righteous judging*. God’s word gives us guidance in this that we will explore in the next question.

We must also understand Romans 14 in light of the rest of Scripture. In doing this, we see this same Apostle Paul model and command believers to indeed judge one another (1 Cor 5, etc.), and we see that this squares up with Jesus’s teaching about righteous judging in comparison to sinful judging. Therefore, the Romans 14 helps inform us of sinful and unnecessary types of judging.

*And, about Jesus’ direct teaching on judging…*

Jesus’ command not to judge others might be the most widely quoted of His words, even though it is almost always quoted in complete disregard of its context and without considering all of what Jesus, in the flesh, said on the topic, or what the rest of His word says on the topic.

What Jesus taught during His incarnate ministry and what the rest of His word teaches is that we must discern right from wrong, righteousness from sin, morality from immorality.

Jesus commands in **John 7:24** to "judge with right judgment".

We must make judgments and we must avoid sinful judging, such as self-righteous judging, hypocritical judging, and superficial/untrue judging.

One way we do this practically is to be sure Christian accountability and dis-fellowship is a two-way street. Accountability is **not** about being more concerned about others’ sin than ourselves. We must be honest about our own sin and actively be practicing repentance in our own lives at all times; a person should evaluate his own life **before** looking at the lives of others.

Additionally, we must always receive accountability from others and gladly acknowledge it as an act of love towards us.

God’s word calls us to invite, welcome, and desire the admonition and insight of others.

**Proverbs 8:33** Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it.

**Proverbs 18:2** A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.

*We must* be people who accept the biblical counsel and rebuke from brothers and sisters in Christ. We do **not** want to be the ones of which God says in **Isaiah 5:21** “Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes.”

So, we are called to judge, with a right heart for the right reasons. And, in humility, truly value the judgments of other brothers and sisters in Christ knowing that God works sanctification in it.

* **What kind of matters would call for accountability?**

Next, What kind of matters would call for accountability?

This is an important question. As we just said, some matters (liberty matters) are not to be questioned in one another.

But the type of things that we should hold people accountable to, even unto dis-fellowship if repentance isn’t practiced, are things beyond Christian liberty-type matters. Some things that fall under this treatment are explicit in Scripture, while other things are arrived at by biblical wisdom and good and necessary consequence.

We have examples in some of the more explicit passages where we see dis-fellowship commanded is over someone unrepentantly persisting in twisting of the gospel (Galatians 1:8-9), not acknowledging or teaching sound doctrine as a whole (Romans 16:17-18; 2 John 9-11; Titus 3:10-11); disobeying the commands found in the Bible (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15); and sexual immorality, greed, idolatry, slander, drunkenness, and theft (1 Corinthians 5:11). While these various passages explicitly mention certain things, Christian discipline would also apply to things not mentioned in these passages, such as things that fall into one of these categories or are related to these categories. We must acknowledge once again that biblical truth and wisdom, not man’s feelings or preferences, must aid in discerning what topics not explicitly mentioned require discipline.

That said, there is a disturbing trend in our day that is attempting to make many clear biblical issues into fuzzy or “gray” areas in order to avoid accountability and dis-fellowship. These efforts have dishonored God.

We will not attempt to address every conceivable issue in this overview, but we feel confident in saying that the ones seen in the text and sins related to those are a good starting point for better accountability. Christians must come into obedience with God’s word on this topic. Far too many professing believers are not obeying or seeking to obey accountability the way God’s word sets forth.

*What about you, personally*? Are you *truly* willing to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus in these things? That’s the call on each of us.

 Young adult, if you find out your father or mother, who claims Christ, has determined they want to reject the gender that God has unchangeably made them, are you ready to hold them accountable, even if it means dis-fellowship?

Or, to keep the relationship or avoid hard conversations, are you going to set aside God’s clear word in order to ignore that topic or even actively affirm them in their sin?

Parents, if your son or daughter who claims Christ, comes to you and declares they are resolved in homosexual desires they have, are you ready to hold them accountable, even if it means dis-fellowship?

Or, to keep the relationship or avoid hard conversations, are you going to set aside God’s clear word in order to ignore that topic or even actively affirm them in their sin?

We could go on and on with all kinds of possible close-to-home examples.

While these matters have and will exist for the length of this fallen creation, as society swings back to more openly approving of wickedness, the fact is, more and more professing believers are setting aside God’s clear word to seek what they desire. When these things knock on your door—when they happen in your fondest of relationships—

*who* are you going to be faithful to…God or an idol?

Jesus said, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. … For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?’

* **Closing Encouragement**

As we warp up, hopefully you have a focused sense for what is a stake in all of this:

Honoring the glory of God

The true testimony of His gospel

Our own sanctification

The spiritual health of our brothers and sisters in Christ

True unity & peace

The testimony of the church and the authenticity of our witness

Godly love fights for righteousness and true unity instead of ignoring sin. Remember: **Romans 12:9**, **“**Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.”

And, we finish with a final exhortation from King Jesus:

**Revelation 3:19** Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.

Let’s pray.