

Titus 3:10-11; Galatians 6:1-2

Accountability & Discipline: Complications & Restorations

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Sam loved going to the hospital. There was just something about it. The floors were always clean. The care and attention was always lovely. And you could get room service at almost any time. So Sam devised a plan. He would move into the hospital. One day he showed up at the emergency room and said he had a lot of pain in his side. They wheeled him in for an exam and battery of tests, but they couldn't find anything. He kept complaining of so much pain that they decided to keep him over night, at least to watch him.

The next day the doctors and nurses came back, and he complained of pain in his side, but also in his back. They ran more tests, but couldn't find anything. He managed to watch a movie and eat a chicken sandwich between tests. It was a lovely day. Again, they kept him overnight. Day by day Sam complained of pain in this part or that part of the body and so they kept him in the hospital, day after day.

One day a U-Haul showed up at the hospital and movers began to unload his belongings in his room, a big-screen television, his family photos, and a nicer couch for comfort. He made himself quite at home, and all the while, kept saying how much pain he was experiencing. The doctors and nurses grew quite concerned about him, but couldn't quite narrow down what was wrong. And so he stayed, until one day, he grew old, and passed away.

Why do we go to the hospital? To get better. We don't go to the hospital so we can stay there forever, but so that we can grow healthy and strong and continue with our lives. A church is like a hospital. It's a place where we welcome sick people, help them heal, and send them out to look for others. True, we keep welcoming them back for a weekly check-up, but with the goal of creating healthy flourishing human beings.

Today, we're finishing our series on [Church Accountability & Discipline](#). At its core, this series is about helping sick people get healthy again. If you're sick with sin, we're here to help you recover and help others. That's what it means to be brothers and sisters in Christ walking a pilgrim journey together. We pick each other up when we fall. We take each other to the Great Physician, to Christ Jesus, when we're sick.

But what if you're not a part of this church? Or you don't even consider yourself a Christian? Why listen? I'll give you three reasons:

- 1) If you've ever had conflict in your life, or experienced a broken relationship, you need to know when it makes sense to put that relationship back together again. I think this sermon could help.
- 2) We all need a restored relationship with God, whether you're the most religious person in the world, or you don't even own a Bible. I want to tell you about that as part of today's message.
- 3) To be a Christian means to be part of a church community. If you're interested in becoming a Christian, you need to understand the church is more than a social club, it's a hospital, and we want to see sick people made whole again. That's our purpose.

The goal of accountability and discipline is restoration.

The goal of accountability and church discipline is to restore those who have wandered off the path, those who are sick. Remember our foundation verse for this series?

Galatians 6:1-2 (ESV) 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. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

The Greek word for “restore” has a lot of depth to it. One of restore’s meanings is “to knit together.” Think of a fishing net with a rope line that has begun to fray and fall apart. The line’s unraveling weakens the entire net, making it less effective. To restore that net is to take that rope and knit-it back together and weave it into the body of nets (Matt 4:21). The other lines in that net no longer says, “That rope isn’t one of us” or “that line doesn’t really belong here.” No, the restored line is an important part of the whole.

That’s what it means for us to take someone who has fallen into sin and yet repented due to accountability. We restore them. We knit them back into the church body. We weave them throughout our congregation, fitting them back together like they had never frayed or fallen apart due to sin. This doesn’t mean we don’t take extra care with them. We weave them into the ministries and relationships where we believe they can succeed, trying not to put them in places they will fail. We carefully restore them to the church body.

Doesn’t this sound great? When can we get going? When do we know as a church when to restore someone to the church body who has fallen into sin? Whether this is the first time they’re hearing about their sin or they resisted so much we actually went to church discipline, restoration comes from repentance.

Repentance > ??? > Restoration

Repentance leads to restoration. I’m going to tell you about another step before complete restoration, but repentance starts the process. Repentance means rejecting sin. Repentance means turning from sin to God.

Acts 3:19-20a (ESV)

19 Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, 20 that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord...

This is a posture. God, I don’t want to be in sin anymore. I want you to restore me! I need you to refresh me. I don’t want sin. I want you. Repentance is not simply saying, “I’m not going to sin anymore.” Like, if every time you got sick you could say, “I’m not going to be sick anymore” and you were cured, we wouldn’t need doctors. Like, you have a cold, and you simply utter the words, “Cold be gone!” and your sinuses clear up. Wouldn’t that be amazing? Much of the time with sickness, and all of the time with sin, we need a cure.

The cure is the forgiveness of God that comes through Jesus Christ, which we receive by coming to him and asking for forgiveness. Jesus is the Great Physician who will forgive us of all the ways we sin against God, whether it’s something small, or something big, something uncomfortable, or something ugly, God forgives it all when we repent of our sins and put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

Repentance is different than never sinning. I just figured out this week that I’ve never actually read the classic tale, *Pilgrim’s Progress* by John Bunyan (1678). My family used to play it all the time on cassette tapes, but that was just the dramatized version. I loved listening to it, the story of a pilgrim named Christian who was on his journey to the Celestial City. He encountered all sorts of trials and temptations and struggles to stay on the pathway. But each time he wanders off, God graciously pulls him back onto the pathway again, often using other Christians to do so. That’s like what our Christian walk is like. We’re on the way to the Celestial City, but sometimes we walk off the path so God sends fellow pilgrims to pull us back on again. That’s accountability and discipline. Each time pilgrim gets back on the path he is repenting of how he fell into sin and walking down the path again. That’s what repentance is.

Pilgrim does start his journey with an act of repentance when he comes to the foot of the cross, and there the sin and guilt he was carrying, pictured as a great burden on his back, looses, rolls down the hill, and falls into

a sepulcher. His sins dies in Jesus' tomb. If you haven't had that first moment of forgiveness and grace, come to the sepulcher. Come to Jesus at the foot of the cross, where he gave his life for your sin, and lay your sin down. Then begin your journey of repentance and faith, looking to Jesus as we head to the Celestial city.

Core to being a Christian is being repentant of your sin. The whole reason we do accountability, and sometimes discipline, is when we see a lack of repentance. But, correction doesn't stop with repentance because we live in a community. When we sin in community, our sins are against not only God, but each other. We need to repair the harm we cause others.

Repentance > Confession > Restoration

Repentance leads to confession, which leads to restoration. It's important to confess our sins to those we hurt with our sins. In our culture we're so individualistic. We don't see ourselves as part of a people. Maybe you see yourself as an American or a Boy Scout or Girl Scout or part of your favorite club. But the church is something far more important. The church is the body of Christ. It's Christ's body that we need to treat it with special care. That's why when we repent of our sin, we need to confess our sin to those we've hurt, which might be a few key relationships in the church, or even the whole church body.

When this happens, those of us hurt by the sin don't say, "Yeah! That's right! You better confess!" Rather, we rejoice! It's a party! The lost sheep has come home! The Bible says that angels rejoice when sinners repent (Luke 15:10)! How much more should we! We eat cake for baptisms. Let's eat cake for restorations! Repentance leads to confession, which leads to restoration.

That's it, right? Easy as one, two, three, correct? I used to clean fish-tanks once a week during seminary. I used to clean one long glass tank that was very scratched up. It was at a doctor's office and one week I heard, "Code blue!" I knew something was happening because doctors and nurses went running to the downstairs atrium. A code blue typically means some sort of medical emergency where someone's life is in danger, such as "cardiac arrest" or a "severe drop in blood pressure." Sometimes, in the church, we have medical emergencies. We have code blues. We have complications that require medical intervention outside the normal steps of church accountability and discipline. I want to briefly touch on three complications.

Three Complications:

Complication #1. Divisiveness/False Teaching

The sin of divisiveness or false teaching is like a fast-growing malignant tumor that we need to swiftly address. We find this sense of urgency in several of Paul's writings:

Titus 3:10-11 (NIV)

10 Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. 11 You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned.

The Greek word for "divisive" is the word "hairesis." Our modern word for "heretic" — someone who preaches false teaching, derives from this Greek word. However, in this verse, hairesis means someone who is causing division. This is someone who is fostering distrust and disunity, perhaps by their teachings, but also by their behavior and actions (2 Thess 3:6).

Maybe they're spreading a rumor in the church body about another family or couple, causing hurt and mistrust. Maybe they believe in Jesus, but not God the Father, and are recruiting others to what they believe. There are a whole slew of ways we can be divisive or teach the wrong things. It's the Elders' job to watch out for this kind of behavior (Acts 20:29-31). We correct them once, then twice, then have nothing to do with

them. Unlike the sin we discussed in Matthew 18, the reason a divisive person would not be allowed to continue at church is because of the risk of causing more disunity or further spreading false teachings.

Have you ever heard someone say, “I’m so glad they caught it in time.” When they say this, they’re typically talking about some form of sickness or cancer that is fast-spreading but they treated it early enough to save the patient. That’s like what this sin is. We don’t mess around with divisiveness or false teaching. We still hope and pray for restoration, but we recognize we have to protect the whole church first.

Complication #2. Egregious Sin

Egregious means “outstanding, bad, shocking.” This is the kind of sin that is both unusual and blatant. It is usually illegal and unethical. It’s not typically a one-time occurrence, but shows a longstanding pattern of un-repentance. Paul addresses one of these situations directly within the church at Corinth.

1 Corinthians 5:1-2 (ESV)

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.

So here’s a pretty bad situation. A man within the church body is engaged in egregious, outstanding, bad, shocking sin. In verse 2 it says the Corinthian church was “arrogant.” They were proud of the sin! Paul is saying, “Guys, this is super bad! Not even your non-Christian neighbors the Romans allow this sort of thing.” This individual and the whole church is confusing the culture with what it means to know Christ Jesus. Paul tells them to get rid of him. There’s no warning, no conversation, immediate expulsion. We still hope and pray for restoration, but recognize something needs to be done immediately.

This is like emergency surgery. No one wants to do it, but some sins are just that bad. Illegal sins. Double-life sins. Sins that show a long pattern of un-repentance. They deserve immediate church discipline. If the sin is illegal, please report it to the police along with the elders, and follow all our other policies we have, like the children’s or youth protection policies. Maybe that’s obvious, but I got to say it.

Complication #3. Elder Sin

Paul tells Timothy how an Elder should be addressed when accused of sin. Like Matthew 18, if someone witnesses an Elder sinning, they should go to them directly and talk about it. And Paul adds this:

1 Timothy 5:19-21 (ESV)

19 Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. 20 As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. 21 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality.

What’s different about this approach is that two or three witnesses need to affirm the charge brought against an Elder. It can’t just be one person’s opinion. This is here to protect Elders from faulty charges. Satan always wants to bring down church leaders by any means possible. We should never be flippantly throwing out accusations against our Elders. They have a special responsibility before God that deserves extra respect.

Paul goes out of his way to tell the Elders not to show favoritism, but to investigate and if necessary, correct. Because an Elder is a leader and a spiritual authority in a church, if they persist in the sin, they are to be publicly rebuked. That sounds really difficult, really hard, but it’s not meant to punish or embarrass, but to correct, restore, and serve as a warning to others.

If a doctor were sick, and wouldn't admit it, you wouldn't want him or her to work on you. You'd want them to take care of themselves before healing others. If you can't get spiritually healthy yourself, you can't lead others towards spiritual health. I ran across this real-life example as I was doing reading for my Doctorate of Ministry (D.Min) studies.

A church leader described to me a session he had led during which a congregation had received back a previous leader who had failed morally. After accepting discipline, receiving counseling, and seeking reconciliation (Matt. 18:15), he was accepted back by the community at a special service. The session leader said, "No other organization in the world deals with failures like the church does, when God gives second chances to sinners. Isn't the church amazing when it works well?" 360-Degree Leadership by Michael J. Quicke

"No other organization in the world deals with failures like the church does, when God gives second chances to sinners." Accountability and discipline is all about having a second chance, and sometimes third and fourth chances. *Complication #1. Divisiveness/False Teaching; Complication #2. Egregious Sin; Complication #3. Elder Sin*

In closing... Let's create a place of healing and hope.

We have some of the best hospitals in the world in Boston. We're so grateful some in our church family have benefited from them. Newsweek ranked Mass General #3 in the world in 2020. They ranked Boston's Brigham and Women's #17. These hospitals have the best medical research and care on the planet. This undoubtedly comes down to their doctors, nurses, systems, employees, and people all working together to create the best hospitals. When people look at those hospitals they recognize these are places of healing.

We have an opportunity to build the kind of church where people in our community recognize us as a place of healing. Cornerstone is a hospital where sick people go to get well. It's a place where people can meet the Great Physician, Jesus Christ, who came to bear our sins and make us whole again. To create that kind of place we have to work together as Elders and members and church people. Together with Jesus let's make Cornerstone a place of healing and hope. Let's pray.

Jude 24-25 (NIV)

To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— 25 to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes endnotes and references, or share it through Apple podcasts or Google Play Music. Read the story of our church here.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think the church is like a hospital? In what ways?
2. Why do we do accountability and even discipline?
3. Describe the process of "repentance > confession > restoration." Would you add anything?
4. What are the variations/complications in church accountability and discipline? How should they be addressed?
5. How does the gospel of Jesus give us healing and hope?

Sources

Code Blue, Code Red, Code Black: Definition of Hospital Color Codes. Published May 2, 2018. Accessed October 24, 2020. <https://www.healthline.com/health/code-blue#takeaway>

Quicke, Michael J.. *360-Degree Leadership* (pp. 63-64). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

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