

# Going Deeper: Church Discipline and Tough Love

*A study Guide & Resources for Spiritual Growth Based on 1 Corinthians 5*

## Sermon Summary: “Tough Love”

This message explores one of Scripture's most challenging topics: church discipline. Using **1 Corinthians 5** as the foundation, the sermon examines how the Corinthian church failed to address a scandalous situation—a man living with his stepmother—and Paul's firm response calling for accountability within the body of Christ.

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## Key Themes

### 1. The Balance of Grace and Boundaries

The sermon opens with James Dobson's concept that “**love must be tough**”—genuine love requires both grace and boundaries. Just as the father in the prodigal son story allowed his son to leave while maintaining standards, the church must balance unconditional love with accountability.

### 2. The Scandal in Corinth

Paul addresses a situation so egregious that even pagan Roman and Greek society condemned it. The Greek word *porneia* (sexual immorality) is used, and this particular case involved incest—a relationship with a stepmother that violated both biblical and cultural norms.

### 3. The Church's Arrogance

Rather than mourning this sin, the Corinthian church was arrogant—possibly believing their “grace-filled” tolerance demonstrated spiritual maturity. Paul rejects this moral relativism, calling it arrogance rather than love.

### 4. The Purpose of Discipline

Church discipline is never punitive but restorative. Paul instructs the church to:

“Deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved”  
(*1 Corinthians 5:5*)

This means removing the protective covering of Christian community so the person experiences the full consequences of sin and is led back to repentance and ultimately restoration.

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# Interesting Background Facts

## Cultural Context of Corinth

- Corinth was so notorious for sexual immorality that “*to Corinthianize*” became slang for sexual deviancy.
- The city housed the **Temple of Aphrodite**, known for cult prostitution.
- Greek culture commonly accepted the saying:  
“*Mistresses for pleasure, concubines for daily care, wives for legitimate children.*”

## The Meaning of “Handing Over to Satan”

The Pastor Ron uses a **sunscreen analogy**: Christian community provides spiritual protection (like sunscreen against radiation). Removal from fellowship exposes someone to the consequences of their choices—not as punishment, but as a wake-up call.

## Paul’s Previous Letter

1 Corinthians is actually Paul’s **second letter** to this church. An earlier (now lost) letter had been misunderstood. The Corinthians thought Paul meant avoiding all immoral people, which would mean *leaving the world*. Paul clarifies that he is referring to unrepentant believers, not unbelievers.

## The Leaven Metaphor

Using Passover imagery, Paul explains that just as a little yeast spreads through dough, unaddressed sin affects the entire community. This is not about perfection, but about protecting the church’s witness and the sinner’s soul.

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## Biblical Framework: Matthew 18 Process

Though not explored in detail during the sermon, **Matthew 18:15–17** is mentioned. It outlines the process of church discipline:

1. **Private confrontation** – One-on-one conversation
2. **Small group intervention** – Two or three witnesses
3. **Church leadership involvement** – Elders or leaders engage
4. **Removal from fellowship** – If unrepentant, treated “as a Gentile and tax collector”

**The goal at every stage:** restoration, not punishment.

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# Modern Day Application

## Three Types of Church Involvement

- **Visitors** – Exploring, no covenant commitment
- **Attenders** – Regular involvement without membership
- **Covenant Members** – Fully engaged, mutually accountable participants

Church discipline applies primarily to **covenant members** who have voluntarily agreed to biblical standards and accountability.

## When Leadership Is Involved

Discipline among regular members is usually private and relational. However, when elders, pastors, or staff are involved, greater public disclosure may be necessary due to their influence and visibility.

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## Activation Questions for Personal Reflection

### Understanding the Text

1. Why does Paul say the church should be *mourning* rather than boasting?
2. How does viewing discipline as restorative reshape how we understand accountability?

### Personal Application

3. Where have you confused being gracious with avoiding hard conversations?
4. Which moral framework most influences you: divine law, moral individualism, or expressive individualism?

### Community Engagement

5. How can a church be welcoming to seekers while holding covenant members to biblical standards?
6. What distinguishes gossip from appropriate concern about ongoing sin?

### Deeper Discipleship

7. Read **Luke 15:11–32** (the prodigal son). How does the father model both grace and boundaries?
8. How does this teaching change your view of church membership and covenant commitment?

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# Recommended Resources

## Books

- *Love Must Be Tough* — **James Dobson**
- *The Discipline of Grace* — **Jerry Bridges**
- *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* — **Paul David Tripp**

## For Further Study

- **2 Corinthians 2:5–11** – Restoration after discipline
- **Acts 5:1–11** – Ananias and Sapphira
- **Galatians 6:1–5** – Restoring with gentleness

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## Closing Reflection

Church discipline is uncomfortable because it forces us to hold two truths in tension:

- We are all sinners saved by grace
- We are called to holiness and mutual accountability

The goal is not judgment or fear, but loving faithfulness.

"No one can go too far that they cannot be redeemed by the blood of Christ.  
But it starts with recognizing who He is, His holiness, our sin, and our willingness to grieve and repent."

**True love—tough love—prioritizes eternal restoration over temporary comfort.**