

Tough Love

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. Good to see you this morning. Let's pray and come now as we finish our journey through 2 Corinthians and come to this passage that Gene read for us.

Please do keep your Bibles open there because I will be referring to verses. I won't be putting them up on the screen this time. There's a few verses that we need to get to, so you keep your Bibles open and follow along. I'm going to pray.

Yes, Lord, we thank you for your provision. We thank you for how you incorporate us as your church into your important, vital work of salvation in the world and bringing new life and restoration into a world of death and chaos.

Thank you, Lord, that we can be part of that. Thank you for providing for us in the form of a new pastor. We do pray for Dylan as he prepares to come here, that you would help him in all the preparation he needs to do.

We also pray this morning that you would be with us and speak to us as we look at this passage in your word. In Jesus' name, amen. It is not the place of the church to judge.

[1 : 11] Have you heard that? It's not the place of the church to pass judgment on its members. And that's a very common idea in today's world, especially with the sexual revolution.

And when it comes to people's sexual preferences and sexual orientation, we are told time and time again the church shouldn't discriminate between its members based on their likes and their preferences.

The church is there to teach the Bible, but it oversteps its boundary when it starts passing judgment on people. That is the view. But it's wrong.

Because what people fail to realize is that we cannot proclaim the truth of the gospel without proclaiming the judgment that accompanies that truth. It just can't happen.

A doctor, for example, can't do his job if he can't give the patient a prognosis. You know what I mean? When you go to the doctor and he examines you, he has the right and the responsibility to judge your medical situation and to tell you to change your behavior if it's going to endanger your health.

[2 : 22] And when he does that, when he says, listen, I think your high cholesterol or whatever it is, your blood pressure means you need to change your habits, you need to change your diet, you don't sit there in the doctor's room going, you have no right to judge me, doctor.

You have no right to judge my diet. That's between me and me alone. And of course you wouldn't say that, because that's his job. That's what you want him to do, even if it's uncomfortable.

Well, in the same way, we mustn't think that when we come to church and we ask to be taught the truth, that that truth's not going to judge us where we're wrong. Just like a doctor, those who teach the truth of God have a right and a responsibility to give you a spiritual prognosis.

In other words, to judge your situation and to state clearly where you're living wrongly and to tell you that you need to change. And that is how Paul, when he's writing this letter to the Corinthians, that is the idea as he's closing.

That's his major point in these statements to the Corinthian church. Now these words that Gene read for us, these are actually Paul's last recorded written words to the Corinthian church.

[3 : 37] And so he finishes with a bang. He finishes with a sobering warning of judgment that he might have to come and bring them when he visits them again. So he's warning twice here in this passage.

He warns that he's coming for a third visit. But what he says about this third visit is that it's going to be different to his previous visits in that he's going to have to deal once and for all decisively with any remaining sin and rebellion.

That's why he's been straining himself to write these letters to correct the Corinthians because he doesn't want to bring judgment. He needs to warn them and he needs to warn them because they don't think he's serious.

Up until now, his visits, he's been quite timid. He's been quite patient. He's been quite gentle with them. And he's not being that scary. To them, Paul is not a scary guy.

And so he says this in verse 1. He says, This will be my third visit to you. Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

[4 : 38] And that's an old Jewish rule for jurisprudence, for justice. But he's probably now referring to the two previous visits he made as his two previous witnesses.

He said, Listen, I gave you a chance. I've come, I've kind of laid down the rules. I've been gentle with you. But this is the third time. And, you know, this strike three and you're out, basically, is what he's saying.

And verse 2. I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent. On my return, I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me.

He is not weak in dealing with you but is powerful among you. For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him yet by God's power we will live with him in our dealing with you.

Okay, this is some serious words Paul is laying down for these Corinthians. He's saying, you know, if you really want proof that Jesus is working through me, you'll see when I come to exercise his authority.

[5 : 42] And you don't want that. And the reason I seemed weak before was the same reason Jesus seemed weak when he died on the cross. For your salvation and for your good. But just because he seemed weak when he died on the cross doesn't mean that he's not coming to judge.

That's, by the way, a big mistake people make. Now look at Jesus. He was a carpenter in Nazareth. He died on the cross. He was seemingly overpowered by the Jews and the Romans.

He wasn't really because he let them do that to save us. And people think, well, that's not, we don't have to worry about Jesus.

Gentle Jesus, meek and mild. Holding a lamb in his arms and while he's wearing a nightie. That's the pictures that we see of him. But he's coming to judge. We learned on Ascension Day he is sitting on David's throne and he's coming back to bring justice to the whole world.

And that is a scary proposition. And that's what Paul's saying about his messengers. He's saying, listen, just because we were weak and gentle and patient with you before doesn't mean when I come back I'm not going to lay down the law.

[6 : 44] And so he warns them that he's coming to judge them. But also, as you read this, throughout his warnings he says again and again that he doesn't want to have to do this.

He doesn't relish the thought of judging them. Look, for example, at chapter 12, verse 21. He says, I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of their impurity, sexual sin, and debauchery in which they have indulged.

Now, the word humble just means to be brought low. And when he says, you know, God's going to humble me before you, then he means he will be brought low and he will be ashamed and embarrassed by their ongoing sin when he, in the meantime, told everyone that they were solid Christians.

Just like he said back in chapter 7, verse 14, when he boasted to Titus, you'll remember, about their faith. And Titus was a bit skeptical and Paul said, no, these are good guys.

Paul says, I don't want you to embarrass me when I come back. So repent before it's too late. Verse 10, this is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority.

[8 : 02] The authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down. So it's clear, isn't it? He doesn't want to judge them. He doesn't like the thought. But it's also clear that he might have to.

He might have to use his authority that God gave him, even though God gave him that authority for building up, not tearing down. What that tells us is that if he has to be harsh and bring judgment against his will, it's still ultimately for the building up of the church because that authority he has was

for building up the church.

He states that. He also states that he might have to bring judgment, i.e. him bringing judgment is for the ultimate building up the church. Maybe not for the Corinthian local church but for the church in general.

And that's the point I want us to see this morning that I want us to think through. Which is that just as necessary as us proclaiming the truth for building up the church, so discipline and judgment are necessary for the building up of the church.

And that is something that today's world of so-called tolerance does not want to hear. Just as necessary as us proclaiming the truth for building up the church, so discipline and judgment within the church are necessary for the building up of the church.

[9 : 20] That's Paul's point in this passage. And we need to see why that is. We don't like the idea of judgment and discipline, church discipline of church members.

I don't like that. I'm a pastor. I don't like the idea because I have to initiate it and do it and it's not pleasant. So we definitely need to see why it's important. And there will be times in any local church where judgment is necessary, where we will have to call out sin and warn individual people to change their ways at pain of excommunication, losing their place in the church.

And it will be ugly. It has been when it's had to happen in the past. We've been accused of being judgmental, being legalistic, being bigoted. I've been accused of that to my face.

And so this morning, using Paul's argument, I want to convince you why, especially in this world that's telling us not to judge, why it's such a necessary part of a healthy church, this idea of church discipline.

And there are four reasons I want to draw out of this passage. The first reason it's necessary is because we can't believe what we want anymore. We can't believe what we want anymore.

[10 : 36] Another truth that the world doesn't like to hear. We can't believe what we want anymore. Not that we ever really could, but Paul says something interesting to the Athenians when he's in the Areopagus, evangelizing, all of these Greek philosophers.

We can read about that in Acts 17. I'll just, you don't have to turn there. I'll just read to you what one of the things he says to them. He says, in the past, God overlooked such ignorance about him.

But now, he commands all people everywhere to repent for he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed and he has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.

Okay, so now, now that God has given his final revelation to us, humanity, and he has proved his final revelation to be true through Jesus Christ rising physically from the dead, a historical fact because God has done everything to show us that, to convince us that his word is true.

Now, anyone can know the truth about life, about what we're doing here, about eternity, about where we're going. Anyone is able to know that truth because God has made it known, but because of that, because his final revelation came in Jesus and now the truth is out there and it is known, that also means you and I have no more excuse to ignore it.

[12 : 10] We have no excuse to ignore that we have a God who made us, who we're accountable to, who we will stand before one day and who is calling us to live a particular way, but who has also given us a way out of his judgment.

We have no excuse to live life like we want and ignore those truths because God has made them known. And that has been Paul's whole point through this letter to Corinthians regarding these false teachers who are bringing them lies and telling them what their itching ears want to hear, just like many false teachers who dress up as Christian preachers today, but they just tell people what they want to hear instead of the actual truth of Jesus coming to judge and his resurrection and what it means for our lives.

So Paul has been saying that about the false teachers in Corinth. He's been saying you can't just listen to whatever teachings you like the sound of anymore. You can't choose your teachers like you choose your ice cream. Right?

What suits you? What matches your tastes? And the reason is because God has spoken through Jesus and his apostles and so we can't anymore ignore what he said through them.

We have to take it seriously. We have to not come to church just when we feel like it or when we want to boost. We come to church because we need to hear this revelation. And we need to line up our lives to it.

[13 : 32] And so Paul says to these Corinthians you've got to choose between me or these false teachers. And so we also have to choose between teachers who teach the truth as the apostles taught it or teachers who tell us what we want to hear.

And so that's why in this passage and before Paul is trying to convince these guys he's the real deal. He's a genuine apostle.

They're not. And he does that again here in the beginning of the passage we read this morning 12, 11 to 13 where he's basically just saying I'm not inferior to these super apostles.

Now that might also mean the underlying language might also mean the preeminent apostles, the first apostles. We're not quite sure. And he's, I think it makes more sense that he's comparing himself to the original apostles and saying that he has the same authority as them as shown by the signs that accompanied his ministry just like it did for them but not for these false apostles.

But whatever he means by super apostles or preeminent apostles, the point is the same. The point is that God has revealed truth through his apostles and if that is true then there is a right and a wrong way to live.

[14 : 43] Either we live in line with the truth or we live in opposition to that truth. There's no middle ground. If you're not living in line with the apostles teaching that God has revealed through them then you are living in opposition to it and you will stand and be held accountable for that one day.

In other words the principle to sum it up is with the privilege of knowing truth comes the responsibility of living according to it.

So a pregnant mother drinking alcohol may not know that can actually harm her baby. But if someone comes and tells her alcohol can actually lead to your baby having issues, it can harm your baby if you drink alcohol when you're pregnant.

If someone comes and tells her that and she carries on drinking alcohol then she is accountable for that because she knows something she didn't know before. Do you see with the privilege of knowledge comes responsibility to act in line with that knowledge.

Or another example. If you saw a deadly poisonous snake sliver into your friend's shoe and you just sat there and you watched your friend come along and put his shoe on and then he got bitten and he got killed and you didn't say anything.

[16 : 16] That's on you. Just because you didn't kill him doesn't mean that you don't bear that responsibility. You saw the snake crawl into the shoe. You had the knowledge and you didn't act upon it. So you see with knowledge comes responsibility.

Do you see what I'm saying? And that's the whole point of what Paul is saying here. We have knowledge because God has spoken now. He's revealed himself and so we have a responsibility to act on that knowledge.

And in that way the gospel message is not just a blessing it's also a curse for those who ignore it. It declares them guilty.

And that's why you'll remember back in chapter 2 verse 16 of this letter to Corinthians. Paul said to some we the gospel messengers are an aroma that brings life while to others we are the stench of death.

The gospel message is both a blessing and a curse. Now why is it a curse as well? Why can the gospel be a curse? Well because as we learned on ascension day if you were here you'll remember the gospel message is not just Jesus died so that you can have your sins forgiven and have eternal life in heaven.

[17 : 30] that's only part of it. The gospel message is also that Jesus is now sitting in David's throne making his enemies his footstool and is coming back to judge all who have not submitted to his kingly rule.

That is also part of the gospel message. And so that is bad news for anyone who is not in submission to Jesus. And if the church here is the place where we gain that knowledge that's also going to be the place where that knowledge is put into practice and lived out.

And so part of the church's job is not just to teach the truth but to help its members to live according to the truth and to discipline them when they don't for their own good for the upbuilding of the church.

And that's what Paul was doing here. And just like he told the Corinthian church back in his first letter, the Corinthian church had to do that discipline to its members.

In 1 Corinthians 5 he says expel the immoral brother. It's hard words but it's what he says the church has to do. And it's our responsibility as a church to keep our members accountable to the word if they want to be considered part of the church.

[18 : 47] And that's why members of our church sign a membership agreement. The membership agreement is basically a request to be held accountable by the church leadership.

And we take it seriously. Because this is serious business. This is not a squash club. Right? This is the church of the living God.

And so we've got to take it seriously and that's why church discipline is important. The second reason church discipline is important is because parents discipline children that they love.

That's in fact what Hebrews, the book of Hebrews says about God disciplining his children. In Hebrews chapter 12 it says the Lord disciplines the one he loves and he chastens everyone he accepts as a son.

And Paul says the same basically for his relationship with the Corinthian church here in verse 14 to 15 of our passage. before warning them of judgment he describes himself as their parent.

[19 : 53] So before saying listen guys I'm coming back for a third visit and I'm going to lay down the law and it's not going to be pretty so please do repent before I get there. Before saying that he uses very tender words to describe his relationship with them.

And he describes himself as himself as their parent. in fact what he's doing here in 14 and 15 of chapter 12 is he's responding to the accusation.

They took offense that he didn't accept money from them. Now we've looked at why the particular situation in the Corinthian church why Paul didn't accept money from them because all the false teachers were charging for their preaching and Paul didn't want to be associated with them so he deliberately didn't charge for his ministry.

And their response was why aren't you taking our money? That's offensive.

Don't you think we're worthy of supporting you? So they were quite offended by this. And so he responds here to this accusation and he says listen guys would a parent accept payment for looking after their child?

[21 : 05] I mean imagine I charged Alex pocket money. for raising him. You know I give him pocket money and then oh but there's the raising fee you've got to pay me back because I'm your parent and I render services to you.

Of course parents don't charge their children for raising them and that's what Paul is saying in verse 14. Children should not have to save up for their parents but parents for their children.

So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well. that's what he's saying to the Corinthians. That because of his relationship with them that's why he's not charging them for his services.

Now that's not saying children shouldn't look after their parents when they're old. They must. But children while they're still children don't pay for their parents service and that's why Paul didn't insist on the Corinthians doing the same.

Christian giving by the way shouldn't ever be paying for a service. In our consumer culture that's often how it's seen. You come to church.

[22 : 13] The preacher renders a service to you and so you've got to pay the service fee. That's not what Christian giving is. That's why we actually tell visitors listen guys we don't expect you to put in the offering bag because giving money is actually investing in the kingdom.

It's a privilege that you can have. Not something you have to do but as we learned in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 it's something that God gives us the privilege to be involved in his kingdom work in the world and we do that through our money our giving amongst other things.

Okay but the fact that Paul's talking about this before his warning of judgment means that even judgment and discipline is all part of his responsibility as a parent as any good parent will know.

You know the Bible says the parent who summarized spare the rod ruin the child that's the heart of it. The proverb is slightly different. Still it's got the same same essence.

If you are not willing to discipline your children then actually it's bad for them in the long run. It's all part of Paul's responsibility as their spiritual father.

[23 : 23] And just as our parents needed to discipline us to raise us physically our pastors and church councils and church leaders may need to do that as they help raise us spiritually for our good.

Okay so that's the second reason church discipline is necessary because of this parent child relationship between Paul i.e. those who teach and bring the apostolic word and those who receive it.

Third reason church discipline helps you know that you're really a Christian. Now this is a controversial one. Church discipline helps you know that you're really a Christian.

Because now in verse 5 Paul goes on to say one of his more well known but one of his most misunderstood sayings. Have a look. Verse 5 he says examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith.

Now more often than not when this verse is quoted it's taught like this. You see examine yourselves it's your responsibility to keep checking that your faith is real like you keep checking your pulse.

[24 : 34] Make sure keep checking that your faith is the real thing. That's how this verse is normally taught. Now there's some truth to that. James for example says that you've got to make sure that your deeds match your words.

Faith without works is dead. We saw in Ephesians 4 earlier that we must live a life worthy of our calling. We must make sure that our lives line up with what we say we believe.

And while that is true Paul is not actually talking about that here. And he's not saying that a Christian should constantly wonder whether they're in the faith and look inside themselves for that assurance.

That's how people are reading this verse wrongly. I believe. Because think about it. I mean if I had to look inside myself. For assurance of my salvation I would constantly be anxious.

If I had to find things about myself to assure me that I was saved. I would always be going yeah but is that enough? I don't know if I'm doing enough.

[25 : 35] I don't know if I'm thinking the right way. Because I'm still a sinner. And I still have temptations. And I still have sinful thoughts. And I still do sinful things. And so if I had to keep looking inside myself. For assurance.

Assurance. Like this verse is often read. Then I would never have assurance. But thanks be to God that's not what Paul is saying here. And if you read it in its context.

Then it's quite clear that it's not. So in this section. Let me help you to do that. In this section. Paul is trying to convince the Corinthians. That he carries Christ's authority. Because he is a legitimate apostle.

And that's why they must take him seriously. And that's why they must be ready before he comes to judge. That's the context of what he's saying here. And the problem is that they're not taking him seriously. In fact.

They still want to test him. And make sure that he is a legitimate apostle. Even after all this time. And so. How does he respond to that? Well he says. You want to test me? Well I'll tell you how you can test.

[26 : 35] That I'm a genuine apostle. Test yourselves. Examine whether you're in the faith. And you will see that you are. The very next thing he says is. Don't you realize Christ is in you?

Not. Is Christ in you? He says Christ is in you as a church community. So examine yourself. See that Christ is in you. And ask yourself where you got that from. And you'll realize you got it from me. You got it from my gospel. And therefore I'm a legitimate apostle. And you must take me seriously. So do you see how it changes its meaning when you put it in context? Like many verses in the Bible. He's saying by testing yourself you'll be testing me.

And that's why the next verse he says and I trust that you will discover that you have not failed the test. No. He doesn't. He says I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test because by testing yourself you'll be testing us.

And so if they failed the test the apostles would fail the test and that's not what Paul is aiming for. He's assuming they will pass the test. He's assuming that Christ is in them. It's the same in fact as what he said in chapter three verse two.

[27 : 41] You'll remember that if you were with us. When he said when they were asking for letters of recommendation remember that? They were asking for reference letters for Paul even after they'd known him and he had planted that church.

And he says that's ridiculous. You don't need letters of recommendation. You are our letters of recommendation. Look at yourselves. Look at your own faith and you'll see that's that's our letter of

reference. You are.

And he's saying the same thing here. Examine yourselves. You'll see that Christ is in you and that'll prove our apostleship. And he's talking to the community as a whole by the way not individuals. We like to read the Bible individualistically think everything is just talking to us as individuals but he's talking to the whole church community saying Christ is in you and you as a church community must examine yourself as a community to make sure that you are living and being a church in line with the apostles teaching.

And so do you see how this verse means something different to what we think when we read it in context. And just as an aside that is necessary to do. We live in an age where we don't like reading more than a paragraph at a time.

[28 : 54] We're used to tweets of 120 characters no more. And we as Christians need to really get in the habit of reading more. reading the Bible more. Not just taking these little verses out of context but reading whole sections of the Bible to see the flow of the argument.

I've said it before if a friend wrote you a letter you wouldn't just read one sentence of that letter which may mean something totally different than if you read the whole thing. You would read the whole thing. We've got to do that with the Bible.

We've got to set aside time to read the Bible properly. But that's also I know you busy. So that's why God has given pastors to help you to read the Bible in context.

But the verse doesn't mean what we think it means. In fact it almost means the opposite. Rather than getting Christians to doubt their faith it's encouraging them to take comfort that they are in the faith.

To rest in that fact. Because they're in the community of faith that follows the apostolic word. And that is God's grace. God is not this principle who's making sure that we'll only be accepted if we totally keep in line.

[30 : 08] That's not what grace is. God's grace is such that he doesn't expect us to jump through hoops before we can know that we're saved. But simply all he does is confess faith, believe and be baptized into my people and I will give you assurance.

That is God's grace. In how he opens the door of his covenant community to anyone through faith alone. That's one of the touch points of the Reformation.

Sola fides. S. It's the Latin for by faith alone. Not by jumping through hoops or you know checking that we are doing what we must do before we can have assurance.

And so in summary Paul is what he's doing here he's giving his readers he's giving the whole Corinthian church the benefit of the doubt. He's not encouraging them to doubt.

Because that is what we can do for those who are in good standing in a local church. We can give them the benefit of the doubt. So notice very important in verse 11 of chapter 13.

[31 : 19] Look what Paul calls all of the Corinthians. He calls them brothers. Now that is a very deep theological term. It's not just a friendly greeting.

He calls them brothers because he is assuming that because they are part of the church that is following the word they are part of the covenant community and they are in the family. Now how can he call them brothers when he doesn't even know all of them individually because they are members of a church that he does know and that is held accountable to his words.

And that is the whole point of this section. That he is going to hold them accountable to his words. He needs to come and hold them accountable to his words so that he can still call everyone in that church brothers.

If he didn't hold them accountable and they could do what they wanted as a church then he couldn't call them brothers. He can call them brothers because he is coming to bring judgment. Do you see the point? Are you following the logic here?

In other words by planning to execute discipline and throw out the mutineers out of off the ship he is ensuring that the ship is still sound and that those who are still in the ship are safe.

[32 : 36] And so that he can assure anyone in the ship that they are safe that they are still heading towards their destination because he knows the ship is not sinking. And that same thing can be said of you if you are in a church that does church discipline according to the Bible.

The reassurance that gives you if you are not under discipline it means you are still in the ship. You are still safe and it is still heading towards the destination. And that is where you can get your assurance from that you are a member of God's covenant.

Assurance you see comes corporately not individually like we want it to. We want to have these fuzzy feelings to be assured. But God has created and established a church. His covenant people with covenant responsibilities and requirements to give you assurance that you are part of these people. Not fuzzy feelings. Now that is not to say you cannot fake it. And that you cannot be a member in good standing of the church when actually your faith is not true. But then you will know that anyway and so you cannot have any assurance from that anyway because your conscience will tell you.

[33 : 49] But if your faith is genuine and you are in a local church that is doing its job and you are allowed to partake in communion in good conscience that means and this is what God wants you to know it means that you are in his covenant people and all of his promises towards his people apply to you.

And that is what God is telling you every time you partake in communion. That is one of the reasons that that has been established by God. He is saying you know because you are in my church and you believe the promises that are here represented in the bread and the wine.

Jesus death therefore counts as yours and your sins are forgiven by his blood because you believe the promises are made to the church and you taking communion are part of that church. And that is why interestingly traditionally communion was so important for church discipline.

It has kind of lost that emphasis I think to our detriment. So back in the day and I am not proposing we reintroduce this but back in the day you had communion rails in the front of the church.

You may go to churches where that still is here. In fact you can see the holes on the stage here where the communion rail used to be. And the reason they had that, the reason the communion rail existed was so that the pastor could withhold communion from someone who was under church discipline so that they couldn't take it.

[35 : 16] So that was the reason everybody had to come forward and the pastor had to give them communion so he could pass. It would be pretty embarrassing. That's why people who are under church discipline know not to come forward so that he could withhold communion.

Now we don't do that anymore. We do do it in a different way though. We issue warnings and if you are under church discipline you will be phoned and told not to partake in communion. And if you do it's to your detriment. And now again that's not to say you can't hide your sins from the church and still be a member in good standing while being a rebel against God.

That is always possible. But then as I said you're not going to get any comfort from communion anyway because your conscience will tell you that you're not taking it in a worthy manner. You'll know you're a fraud.

But that doesn't mean a genuine Christian can't get comfort from that means of grace God has given to comfort them. Because communion like with baptism is the way God has chosen to make a promise to you.

The reformers they had many many many many debates about these things communion and baptism and the significance of it. And there were people from all forms of the spectrum.

[36 : 25] But Luther and Calvin and all the big reformers who we as a reformed church follow they defined communion and baptism as not just a sign but a seal as well.

And the idea was a wax seal. You know when you have an official letter or back in the day at least when you had official letters they would seal it with a wax seal with the initials of the people to show that it's genuine.

Well in the same way the sacraments baptism the Lord's Supper God is sealing us. He's confirming that you are under his covenant protection that you are still on the ship. And that's the significance. So do you see now how important being a member in good standing of a church actually is. Do you see that? If you see nothing else this morning I want you to see how being a member in good standing of a local church is actually very important.

It's not just administrative. It's not just a way we can keep your details and that you can vote at the AVM. It's far more than that. Being a member in good standing of a local church is to help you to know that you are a member of God's covenant people according to the Bible.

[37 : 36] And so if you are not a member of the church if you think it's not important then I want you to reconsider based on this whole idea of church discipline and the fact that church discipline can only be done if you sign up as a member and say I want to be held accountable.

If you don't then you're actually avoiding church discipline. And so if you're not a member of this church but you're a regular attendee I would seriously encourage you to reconsider.

We do have membership classes coming up next term and you can talk to Sylvia or myself about when those are. And that's why Paul's concern here is not just you know for individual Christians to search themselves but for the Christian community to make sure they are a legitimate Christian community so that members in good standing of that community can be assured by the promises God has given to all of his church as long as they believe them.

Which leads to the final quick point before I end about church discipline in this passage and it's the way that Paul ends this letter and that is with an emphasis on church unity.

And so the final point is church discipline is the only way to ensure real unity with each other and with God. So look look at verse 11 to 14.

[38 : 58] Finally brothers and sisters rejoice strive for full restoration encourage one another be of one mind live in peace and the God of love and peace will be with you.

Greet one another with a holy kiss all God's people here send their greetings and may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

So the push here is he wants them to be united to one another to God in Trinity God the Father Son and Holy Spirit this is in fact the only benediction that includes all three persons of the Trinity because Paul is trying to emphasize unity and unity with God and unity with one another and unity with the global church.

Which church discipline ensures it actually ensures unity. What's interesting is that in this whole passage Paul ends with this appeal for them to be unified and be at peace after he's just told them he's coming to judge and you'd think well Paul if you really want them to be at peace why don't you just leave them alone?

Why don't you just not visit them and come to judge? And the point is Paul knows that they will never truly be at peace with one another and with God unless they're in right well they'll never be at peace with one another unless they're in right relationship with God and that comes through adhering to God's word.

[40 : 20] And that's why he prays this benediction at the end. To seal it all up. May the grace of the Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you because because you need to be at peace with God you need to be in right relationship with God if you want to be in right relationship with each other.

And this is so important for us in a world that is telling us not to talk about sin because that's what that's what's happening. More and more in this world it is telling us we are not allowed to talk about sin.

And the reason they say that is because we all just want to get along. We all just want to be friends and so you're not allowed to talk about sin because then we won't get along. And the truth is what we discover in this passage is that unless we call sin what it actually is then we can never have any true unity because we'll be on the opposite sides of God.

And so talking about sin uncomfortable as it is it's necessary. Calling it out when we see it like Paul does here and holding each other accountable to live holy lives is not going to end up tearing down our relationships like we fear but it's going to do the opposite and it's going to build us up to be the holy and effective church that God wants us to be.

And so as we do that as we take all of what this letter has taught us over the last six months and help each other to live it out in our daily lives then may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all at St. Mark's.

[42 : 06] Amen. Let's pray. Lord we do thank you for your word we thank you for this letter that we've worked through and all that we've learned through it and we thank you that through it through hearing believing and living in line with these truths we can know your grace your love and your fellowship with us as a local church.

We pray that you would help us not to be intimidated by the world and to be scared to talk about what matters to talk about Jesus resurrected sitting at the right hand of God and coming back to judge and that people need to repent and believe before it's too late before he comes to judge help us Lord to be bold in telling people that and help us in our own lives to live it out and to spur each other on towards love and good deeds in Jesus name.

Amen.