

Biblical Solutions for Life Issues

Topic 9 – Role of the Church in Addressing Sin in a Believer’s Life

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Introduction

So far, we have looked at the believer’s mandate to make disciples, the attributes of God which should take us to our knees in worship, sin and its consequences, the definition of true saving faith and the amazing work of God in the believer’s life at salvation, worship and the work of the Holy Spirit to fill believers, the powerful Word of God and its work in the believer, and the work of the Spirit and the Word to progressively sanctify believers. Today, we will look at God’s plan for the body of Christ in helping individual believers address sin and difficult life issues.

The Church

“Church” translates the Greek *ekklesia* meaning “a called out group”. This called out group is not people who simply profess to know Jesus nor those who identify themselves with a particular Christian group (Matt 7:21-23).

²¹“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. ²²“Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ ²³“And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’ Matt 7:21-23

When born again, believers are immediately placed by the Holy Spirit into one united spiritual Body (1 Cor 12:12-27) whose head is Jesus (Col 1:18).

¹²For even as the body is one and *yet* has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. 1 Cor 12:12-13

¹⁸He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. Col 1:18

The church then is the total group of individuals who exercise true saving faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. It is a united spiritual organism consisting of all members of the body of Christ (Matt 16:18; 1 Cor 12:12-13; Col 1:18; Eph 2:11, 3:6; 3:10).

❖ **Do I view all my brothers/sisters as a special relationship given by God?**

The church is an organized organism which is described by several metaphors in Scripture: a bride (Eph 5:25-32), a building (1 Pet 2:4-5), branches (John 15:1-11), and a body (Rom 12:5).

The rich doctrine of the church as Christ’s Body is a metaphor that shows the church not as an organization but as a living organism made up of many interrelated and mutually dependent parts. Christ is the head of that Body, and the Holy Spirit is, as it were, its lifeblood. ... Members of the Body of Christ are inextricably united in their Lord, and when one member malfunctions, the whole Body is weakened. When its members disobey the Head, the Body limps and stumbles. Yet when its members faithfully respond to the Head, the church manifests the Lord’s beauty, power, and glory. MacArthur’s New Testament Commentary: Ephesians

The body figure illustrates the diverse-unity and interdependence that is present in the church. The body is made up of unique individuals who are united by the indwelling Holy Spirit. The many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another (Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:12-27).

⁴For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵so **we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.** Rom 12:4-5

²⁷**Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.** 1 Cor 12:27

Being a member of Christ's body comes with responsibilities toward Him and the other members. Our motivation for striving to excel at relationships in our life (particularly within the body of Christ) is the incredible mercy and grace we have been shown. We once walked in those things for which the wrath of God will come. We have been chosen by God, separated from sin, and beloved by Him. Therefore, we should put on those qualities that build unity in the body (Col 3:5-15).

¹²So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; ¹³bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

¹⁴Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity. ¹⁵Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Col 3:12-15

Believer to Believer Ministry

Scripture gives us many commands that have been termed the "one-another's" because they are commands directed at the relationship between believers. They describe how believers are to interact with and treat other believers. Here is a partial list:

- Love one another (John 15:12; 3:16; 13:34-35; 1 John 4:11-12; 1 Cor 13:4-7; 1 Pet 4:8)
- Forgive one another (Eph 4:32; Col 3:12-13; Matt 18:21-22)
- Build up one another (Rom 14:19)
- Give preference to one another (Phil 2:3-4; Rom 12:10)
- Encourage one another (1 Thess 5:11; Heb 3:13; 10:24-25)
- Admonish one another (Rom 15:14)
- Edify one another (1 Thess 5:11; Eph 4:29)
- Serve one another (Gal 5:13; 1 Pet 4:10)
- Accept one another (Rom 15:7)
- Be devoted to one another (Rom 12:10)
- Be affectionate to one another (1 Pet 5:14)
- Be hospitable to one another (1 Pet 4:9)
- Confess sins to and pray for one another (James 5:16)
- Bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:2)
- Comfort one another (1 Thess 4:18)
- Live harmoniously with one another (Rom 15:15; 1 Thess 5:13)
- Show tolerance for one another (Eph 4:2)
- Be kind to one another (Eph 4:32)

❖ **Do I love to the point of being involved in by brother's and sister's lives to be able to live out the "one-another's"?**

❖ **Which "one-another" do I struggle the most at living out?**

❖ **What am I trying to accomplish by not living out a particular "one-another"?**

A subset of the members of the body to which God has called us to additional responsibilities are elders. Elders are men (1 Tim 2:12-14) who aspire to the office of overseer (1 Tim 3:1) and are set apart and qualified by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28) for prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4). They must meet specific character and ministry qualifications (1 Tim 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9). They are the caretakers of the church (1 Tim 3:5). They rule and exercise oversight (1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 5:17; 1 Pet 5:2). They shepherd the flock of God (Acts 20:28): to feed (1 Tim 3:2), to lead (Heb 13:7; 1 Pet 5:2), to protect and watch over (Heb 13:17), to care for (1 Thess 2:7), and to equip (Eph 4:11-12). They preach and teach the Word (1 Tim 5:17). What is my responsibility to them?

- Appreciate and very highly esteem

¹²But we request of you, brethren, that you **appreciate** those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, ¹³and that you **esteem them very highly in love because of their work**. Live in peace with one another. 1 Thess 5:12-13

- Obey and submit

¹⁷**Obey your leaders and submit to them**, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. Heb 13:17

- Be subject to them

⁵You younger men, likewise, be subject to *your* elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. 1 Pet 5:5

❖ **How do I think of, speak about, and treat my elders?**

Caring for Sinning and Hurting Brethren

All of the “one-another’s” involve edification, service, and love of others. Love is the sacrificial commitment of my will to another’s needs and best interests regardless of the cost to myself. Love seeks another’s highest good, even if it costs a great deal; even if there is no response of love or gratitude. Love is not an impulse from the feelings. It does not always run with the natural inclinations nor does it spend itself only upon those whom we like or deem worthy to receive love. It is an act of the will, so we can choose to love even if we do not feel like doing it.

A significant demonstration of love between believers is be concerned about each another’s walk with Christ and therefore enter into difficult conversations and actions that are best for each other. Look at what the Spirit said through Paul.

²⁸We **proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom**, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. ²⁹For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me. Col 1:28-29

¹Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, **you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one** looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

²**Bear one another’s burdens**, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. Gal 6:1-2

❖ **Do I love to the point of extending myself into those difficult situations/conversations?**

Let’s look at three ways to care for other believers in their relationship with Jesus as they deal with sin and difficult life issues.

¹⁴We urge you, brethren, **admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone**. 1 Thess 5:14

Heart Attitude

The heart attitude of those who desire to obey the Word of God and bring Biblical care to hurting or sinning believers is vitally important. Here are just a few passages that address this.

In this passage in 1 Thessalonians, the one who is seeking to minister to a hurting or sinning believer is commanded to be “patient with everyone”.

The one who is seeking to minister to a hurting or sinning believer is to be “spiritual” or filled with the Spirit. They are to be gentle and careful to not fall into sin themselves.

¹Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, **restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.** Gal 6:1

The one who is seeking to minister to a hurting or sinning believer is to ensure they are not hypocritical and hold onto sin as they tell others to deal with their own sin. They must first be putting off all known sin themselves.

¹“Do not judge so that you will not be judged. ²For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. ³**Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?** ⁴Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? ⁵You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye. Matt 7:1-5

The one who is seeking to minister to a hurting or sinning believer is also to not be quarrelsome, but kind to all, themselves teachable, patient, and gentle. They display this character because they know that the work of bringing people to repentance is God’s and not theirs.

²⁴The Lord’s bond-servant must **not be quarrelsome**, but be **kind to all, able to teach, patient** when wronged, ²⁵with **gentleness** correcting those who are in opposition, if **perhaps God may grant them repentance** leading to the knowledge of the truth, ²⁶and they may come to their senses *and escape* from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. 2 Tim 2:24-26

❖ **When I extend myself to care for people, do I first ensure that I am worshipping (filled with the Spirit)?**

Admonish the Unruly

The first group mentioned is the “unruly”. “Unruly” [ataktos] literally means “out of step” or “out of order”. This person has stepped out of line in their obedience to God’s Word and is going their own way. It describes people who are defiant and in rebellion against God. These people are living in unrepentant sin. They know they are sinning and they do not care. They are stiff-necked and refuse to agree with God that they are sinning and that He requires repentance.

❖ **Am I unrepentant in any area of my life?**

We are called to “admonish” this group. “Admonish” [noutheteo] describes alerting someone of the serious consequences of their actions; to warn them. It conveys the ideas of encouraging, advising, and warning people of the consequences of their behavior. It speaks of encouraging counsel in view of sin and coming punishment. The word implies a definite exhortation, correction, and warning. When it is used, there is always the implication of a problem; an obstacle that must be removed or changed.

To those that are God's children; those that have exercised true saving faith yet walk in willful, unrepentant sin; there is the fearful expectation of discipline (Heb 12:4-13). God will not allow His true children to continue in rebellion; discipline is imminent. This discipline can take on many forms like: God's heavy hand of conviction (Psa 32:1-5; Psa 38:1-5, 18), sickness and death (1 Cor 11:27-32), church discipline (Matt 18:15-17).

"It is truly amazing that He does not instantly strike dead those who so brazenly defy Him."
A. W. Pink in *The Attributes of God*

While admonish means "warn", there is a stronger word used to describe how we are to address sinning believers – "rebuke".

³Be on your guard! **If your brother sins, rebuke him**; and if he repents, forgive him. Luke 17:3

"Rebuke" [epitimao] means to censure severely, to express strong disapproval of, or to denounce; to charge someone as being blamable; to strongly admonish. It is a reprimand.

When an individual knows the truth of God's Word and yet chooses to act in disobedience to it, there is no other recourse than to rebuke. This is the responsibility of every believer.

^{3:1}Then He said to me, "Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel."²So I opened my mouth, and He fed me this scroll. ³He said to me, "Son of man, feed your stomach and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you." Then I ate it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth. ⁴Then He said to me, "Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them. ... ^{33:7}"Now as for you, son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; so you will hear a message from My mouth and give them warning from Me. ⁸When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require from your hand. ⁹But if you on your part warn a wicked man to turn from his way and he does not turn from his way, he will die in his iniquity, but you have delivered your life. Ezek 3:1-4, 33: 7-9 (see also 3:17-21)

This first time we rebuke is the beginning stage of the ministry of restoration called "church discipline". This loving act towards sinning brethren is taught by Jesus in Matthew 18. The goal of church discipline is the restoration of the true believer to God as he/she repents from sin.

The context in which church discipline is taught includes:

- Dealing decisively and extremely with sin.

⁸"If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire. ⁹If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell. Matt 18:8-9

❖ **Do I hate my sin?**

- Being concerned and caring for other believers.

¹⁰"See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven. ¹¹[For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.] Matt 18:10-11

❖ **Am I concerned about the spiritual condition of other people?**

- Value pursuing wayward believers.

¹²“What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? ¹³If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. ¹⁴So it is not *the* will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish. Matt 18:12-14

❖ **Do I love Christ and therefore my brothers and sisters enough to pursue those that choose to walk in sin?**

The process of church discipline for the purpose of restoring a sinning believer’s relationship with Christ is detailed here in Matthew (this information is from the VBC Position Paper on Church Discipline).

¹⁵“If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. ¹⁷If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Matt 18:15-17

Step 1 – Personal Contact (Matt 18:15) – The first step is an individual conversation that takes place when we are convinced that a fellow believer has performed an unrepentant, willful act of sin. This confrontation should be from the Word of God (Heb 4:12) and done in private. If they do not listen, then we are to go to step two.

Step 2 – Group Contact (Matt 18:16) – The second step is to confront with two or three individuals who are witnesses. These individuals are there to confirm every fact. If they do not listen, then we are to go to step three.

Step 3 – Church Contact (Matt 18:17) – The third step is to tell it to the church. The goal is to have every relationship in the church used by God to persuade a person toward repentance. If they do not listen to the church, then we are to go to step four.

Step 4 – Non-Contact (Matt 18:17) – The fourth and final step is to treat the sinning believer as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer. This is commonly referred to as disfellowshipping. The church at this point would have no further social contact with the individual. This is clear from 1 Cor 5:11 where we are instructed “not even to eat with such a one.”

This does not mean that if we see them that we cannot acknowledge them. We should not be rude, but every interaction should be brought back to their sin and unrepentance. It simply means that we are to keep our distance from them socially until they repent. We should never give the impression that the sin issue is not important. This action on the part of the church, which severs the ties with the sinning brother and thrusts them into the world which is Satan’s domain, hopefully would lead them to a point of repentance.

❖ **Do I view this ministry as loving or hating?**

If a person continues in unrepentant sin, this calls into question their profession of faith. Potentially, they never really exercised true saving faith. A denial of Christ is evidence that salvation never took place.

¹⁹They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. 1 John 2:19

³³“But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. Matt 10:33

A believer who loves enough to do the hard work to restore another sinning believer may see the fruit of a soul that is truly saved.

¹⁹My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, ²⁰let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins. James 5:19-20

❖ **Do I love Christ enough to follow the difficult commands?**

Encourage the Fainthearted

The second group is the “fainthearted”. “Fainthearted” [oligopsuchos] literally means “little-spirited” or “small-souled”. It conveys the idea of despondent, weary, timid, discouraged, or worried. It describes people who feel their resources are too small for a given situation and therefore are despondent or discouraged. These people have been worn down by the circumstances of life.

The issue here is not rebellion, but a feeling of defeat. While anxiety is a sin (Luke 12:22; Phil 4:6-7), these people are not necessarily sinning, but have not yet matured in their walk with Christ so as to see everything through the lens of Scripture. These people fail to accept at the heart-level God’s precious and magnificent promises (2 Pet 1:4) and then step out in faith being a doer of God’s Word (James 1:22-25).

❖ **Am I fainthearted? What of God’s magnificent promises am I not (heart) believing?**

We are called to “encourage” this group. It is significant that we are not called to “admonish” these precious saints, but instead to “encourage”. “Encourage” [paramutheomai] means to relate near, console (to serve as a source of comfort in disappointment, loss, sadness, trouble). The idea is to speak kindly, soothingly, to comfort. This is communication of God’s Word in love in ways that strengthen Christians to be doers of God’s Word.

Previously in 1 Thessalonians, Paul talked about his love, care, and concern for the Thessalonian believers. This is the heart of encouragement.

⁷But **we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.** ⁸Having so **fond an affection for you**, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. ⁹For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, *how* working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰You are witnesses, and *so is* God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; ¹¹just as you know how **we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children,** ¹²**so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.** 1 Thess 2:7-12

“This can include the encouragement for personal fellowship, the encouragement of prayer to the God of all encouragement, the encouragement of gospel hope, the encouragement of a secure salvation, the encouragement of God as a sovereign God with purpose and providence to effect His will, the encouragement of the love of Christ, the encouragement of the final resurrection, the encouragement of sharing the sufferings of Christ, whatever encouragement.” MacArthur’s sermon on 1 Thess 5:14-15

How do we encourage these people? (just a few)

- Prayer (Col 4:3-4; Eph 6:19; 2 Thess 3:1; Heb 13:18; Phil 1:18-19; 2 Cor 1:8-11; Rom 15:30; Philemon 1:22)

³⁰Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, Rom 15:30

❖ **Do I view praying for the brethren as a vital way to encourage?**

- Speaking the truth in love

¹⁴as a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; ¹⁵but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, Eph 4:14-15

❖ **Do I speak the Word of truth to the brethren?**

- Providing for physical needs

¹⁵If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that? James 2:15-16

❖ **Do I love in word and deed?**

Help the Weak

The third group is the “weak”. “Weak” [asthenes] describes one's state of limited capacity to do or be something. It is also translated sick. These people are somehow deficient. It describes people who may struggle with abandoning sin and obeying God's will. A particular application of this would be those are weak in Christian liberty.

“...some believers are weak through lack of knowledge of the will of God, some through lack of courage to trust God; some, who are timorous or over scrupulous, hesitate to use their liberty in Christ, some, through lack of stability or purpose, are easily carried away; some lack courage to face, or will to endure; persecution or criticism; some are unable to control the appetites of the body or the impulses of the mind. Collected Writings of W. E. Vine

We are called to “help” this group. “Help” [antechomai] describes strongly laying hold of someone with the idea of supporting them; keeping one's self directly opposite another, so as to sustain them. These brothers and sisters need more than encouragement; they need someone to come alongside and support them to do what they need to do.

Bringing help to the weak includes extending ourselves in love; helping them bear their particular burden.

²Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

- ❖ Am I willing to hold up my weak brothers and sisters?

Conclusion

We are commanded to extend ourselves in love to care for the brethren.

“Picture your arm pointing to the unruly saying, “No more.” Picture it touching the shoulder of the fainthearted to let them know you care and are beside them for encouragement. And picture your arm actually holding and lifting the weak since they need extraordinary help.” John Piper at desiringgod.org

Yet, the Spirit through Paul tells us to not treat everyone the same.

“We are called to broaden our vision, to work out of our comfort zone. A hammer thinks everything is a nail; a blanket, treats everyone as shivering; a wheelchair thinks everyone needs a lift. But wisdom sees people for what they are and gives what is needed” David Powlison in “Familial Counseling: The Paradigm for Counselor-Counselee Relationships in 1 Thessalonians 5,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Winter 2007, PP2-16)

Will you become a doer of the body of Christ one-another's?

Biblical Solutions for Life Issues

Topic 9 – Body Dynamics – Additional Study

Look up the passages for each one-another answer these questions for each:

- Am I a doer of the Word in this area?
- What keeps me from doing this one-another?
- What am I trying to accomplish when I do not or do this one-another?
- Who am I seeking to honor by doing this one-another?

After answering the questions, pray that God would work in you to increase your desire to do each one-another and honor Him.

- Love one another (John 15:12; 3:16; 13:34-35; 1 John 4:11-12; 1 Cor 13:4-7; 1 Pet 4:8)
- Forgive one another (Eph 4:32; Col 3:12-13; Matt 18:21-22)
- Build up one another (Rom 14:19)
- Give preference to one another (Phil 2:3-4; Rom 12:10)
- Encourage one another (1 Thess 5:11; Heb 3:13; 10:24-25)
- Admonish one another (Rom 15:14)
- Edify one another (1 Thess 5:11; Eph 4:29)
- Serve one another (Gal 5:13; 1 Pet 4:10)
- Accept one another (Rom 15:7)
- Be devoted to one another (Rom 12:10)
- Be affectionate to one another (1 Pet 5:14)
- Be hospitable to one another (1 Pet 4:9)
- Confess sins to and pray for one another (James 5:16)
- Bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:2)
- Comfort one another (1 Thess 4:18)
- Live harmoniously with one another (Rom 15:15; 1 Thess 5:13)
- Show tolerance for one another (Eph 4:2)
- Be kind to one another (Eph 4:32)