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Church Discipline

1 Corinthians 5:1-5, “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.

³ For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. ⁴ When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, 2001)

1 Corinthians 5 is a passage about a member of the body of Christ living in unrepentant sin. This man had “suffered shipwreck in regard to [his] faith.” (1 Timothy 1:19) Though he knew God’s word said that what he was doing was wrong, he nevertheless refused to listen. His sin was too

lovely.

Sadly such a spiritual travesty is all too common in the body of Christ (one is too common). It was in Paul's day where we read of

- Demas.
- Alexander the coppersmith.
- Hymenaeus.
- Judas.

So what are we to do when a brother or sister chooses this path? The good news is that it is not up for discussion. We do not need to speculate! God has given us very specific guidelines for what ought to be done. The foundation upon which the teaching and instruction of church discipline is founded gives us an important pastoral tool.

The Foundation of Church Discipline

Church discipline is founded upon the kingdom of God.

Genesis 1:27-28, "And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'"

Genesis 2:15, "Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it."

Genesis 2:20, "And the man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him."

The opening chapters of the Bible tell us much more than simply "God created all things." They reveal the establishing of the Kingdom of God on this earth. This is shown to us through the use of royal language:

- Regency.
- Co-reigning.
- Ruling.
- Serving.
- Caring for.

This language continues throughout God's word. The Lord is a King, brothers and sisters. And when He created this world, He fashioned it to be His Kingdom! From Genesis we see it further in the royal dominions. Meredith Kline has observed that the first three days of creation involved the making of three spheres in which the "rulers" of days 4-6 were to reign (Kline, 2011)¹:

| Spheres of Rule | Rulers |
|--|--|
| <u>Day 1</u> : Day and Night | <u>Day 4</u> : Sun to rule by day and the Moon to rule by night |
| <u>Day 2</u> : Water below and Sky above | <u>Day 5</u> : Birds and Fish to rule Sky and Water |
| <u>Day 3</u> : Dry land and Vegetation | <u>Day 6</u> : Animals ruling over the land and Man ruling over all! |

Genesis 1 also uses the language of royal prerogatives. Throughout God establishes the names of things.

Genesis 1:5, “And God called the light day, and the darkness He called night...”

This culminated in Adam, as God’s vice-regent, naming the animals.

Genesis 2:19, “And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought *them* to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name.”

Furthermore, we read of the divine fiat, the royal command which instantly comes to pass.

Genesis 1:3a, “Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light...”

And then we read of the royal calling given when God created man and fashioned him in His own image, He called him to co-reign and co-rule with God.

Genesis 1:26, “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’”

As we gaze upon Genesis 1-2 we behold far more than simply the creation of a physical world; we view the creation and the establishment of a Kingdom in which God would co-reign with and through man unto His own glory and pleasure.

The Coup

After God created man and placed him in the garden, God set the terms of the relationship.

Genesis 2:16-17, “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die.’”

Properly speaking, we call this the Covenant of Works. This covenant outlines those things which govern God’s relationship with man and man’s relationship with God. As mini-kings and queens,

man was to co-reign with God over creation. However their status and position would be predicated on their obedience to the revealed will of the Lord.

At this point, all was fine in paradise. Yet lurking amongst God's children was the devil who was jealous of the worship and the authority that God exercised over creation. (cf. Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:11-19). And so in the attempt to harm the Lord, Satan endeavored to capture the heart and mind of God's co-regents, turn them against God, and ultimately make them subject to his — the devil's — own dominion and authority.

Genesis 3:1-6, "Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Indeed, has God said, "You shall not eat from any tree of the garden"?' [Notice that this was a lie. God did NOT say they couldn't eat from any tree in the garden, just of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Yet through the lie, Satan implanted a suggestion into the minds of Adam and Eve that God did not have their best in mind; that He wasn't good, but stingy and mean!] And the woman said to the serpent, 'From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, "You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.'" [Notice, God did not say they couldn't touch the tree or its fruit. This addition indicates that Satan's scheme was working. Already Adam and Eve were being critical of God.] And the serpent said to the woman, 'You surely shall not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' [This is the final sortie! Here Satan draws into question BOTH the truthfulness of the Word of God AND God's right to rule over the man and the woman. "*You are a king and queen! Why not rule on your own authority? Why must you do what God says?*"] When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make *one* wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate."

The fall of man centered upon the issue of God's right to rule over Adam and Eve. Now our first parents, ignorant of the objective of Satan, succumbed to his devices and so boldly declared their independence from God. Yet as it was then, so it is now, God has only allowed two kingdoms to exist in this world and one of them is NOT the kingdom of man! Speaking of Satan, Luke records this:

Luke 4:5-6, "And he led [Jesus] up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, 'I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish.'"

Every nation, kingdom, country, and people of this world is, in reality, a subject of the kingdom of Satan. To speak of a man's sovereignty or autonomy is to speak of an illusion!

1 John 5:19, "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in *the power of* the evil one."

This passage says it all! There are only two kingdoms present today, the Kingdom of God and the

kingdom of Satan! Upon their rebellion from God's authority, mankind did not become a free, autonomous entity. Rather they became subjects to the authority, dominion, and rule of Satan.

The Counter-Attack

Because of the fall of man, the Lord met out the requisite curses on each of the rebelling parties, starting with the tempter.

Genesis 3:14-15, "And the Lord God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, cursed are you more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly shall you go, and dust shall you eat all the days of your life; and I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.'"

You all know that this passage is nothing less than the first announcement of the gospel. The "seed" of the woman ultimately is Christ. The distinction between a head-wound and a heel-wound is a distinction between a mortal wound and a flesh wound. So from this passage we anticipate a time when Satan would inflict a flesh-wound on Christ, but Christ in return would inflict a death-wound on him.

It was at the cross that Christ was delivered over to Satan, and the deceiver had Him crucified; that was merely a flesh wound, for Christ rose from the dead! And in so-doing, Christ brought about the destruction of Satan's Kingdom.

Hebrews 2:14-15, "Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives."

Whether you realize it or not, we are reading of the re-introduction of God's Kingdom to this world. When mankind fell, the world became the sole dominion of Satan. But with the advent of Christ to this world, God's Kingdom was re-established! That is why when Christ entered into this world, THE message; THE Gospel revolved around the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 4:23, "And *Jesus* was going about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom..."

In fact, the first message that both John the baptizer and Christ proclaimed was the message of the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 3:1-2, "Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

Matthew 4:17, "From that time Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

From the Bible we now can view history aright. God created this world to be a Kingdom over which He and mankind would rule. Satan overthrew the Kingdom of God making man his subjects over which he and his demons would rule. God, being zealous for His glory and on account of His love for mankind, led a counter-attack against Satan by which He toppled the authority of the devil over man and laid the ground work for the consummation of Christ's kingdom when He returns to this earth. Does that mean that on account of Christ's cross-work all mankind have been liberated from the reign and rule of Satan? No! And that brings us to the contract.

The Contract

While there are many passages at which we could look in our attempt to understand the basis upon which a man is brought back into the Kingdom of God, we are only going to examine what is called, "The Abrahamic Covenant."

Genesis 12:1-3, "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'"

There is much to the Abrahamic covenant. In fact there is so much that it cannot all be addressed here; yet, when Abraham was a lost rebel in the kingdom of Satan, God placed His love upon him and so deigned to deliver him from Satan's domain. Now as we've already seen, we know ultimately this would be through the cross-work of Christ. In His first advent Jesus was born under the covenant of works and fulfilled it; He had no sin (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 5:12, 18-19)! As such He could freely offer Himself up as a sacrifice in the place of those who were subject to death on account of the violation of the covenant of works (cf. Isaiah 53:6). It was this that we preached to Abraham.

Galatians 3:6-8a, "Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham..."

In Genesis 12:1-3 God preached the gospel to Abraham by which this young Christian was given the incredible promises that I just mentioned. Now notice, though Christ was not mentioned by name in Genesis 12, nevertheless His cross-work was presumed. Paul continues explaining this in Galatians 3.

Galatians 3:13-14, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us- for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree' - in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

In light of this sacrifice, God approached Abraham and established a contract with him (which we call “a covenant”) by which the Lord essentially said this:

Since you stand guilty before me of violating the covenant of works, I’ll uphold both My side and your side of the original agreement. By this you and your descendants once again will become a prince/princess in My Kingdom which is yet to come. Until then I will

1. Lead you, direct you, and walk with you,
2. I will be your God and you will be My people- including you, your wife, your children, and your household!
3. I will protect you from Satan, his demons, and his kingdom,
4. Whoever would seek to harm you, I will deal with, and
5. I will use you to deliver many others out of the kingdom of Satan!”

Today by virtue of the Abrahamic Covenant and the redeeming work of Christ in His first advent we confess that:

- There exists on this earth two separate and distinct Kingdoms; the Kingdom of Satan which encompasses all nations and religions on this earth and the Kingdom of God which is comprised of Christ, the first born from the dead and all those whom He has delivered out of the Kingdom of Satan.
- Re-entry into the Kingdom of God therefore is by grace through faith. As an individual abandons his autonomy and relies upon the cross-work of Christ as the payment for their sin, they are redeemed- bought back- from their servitude to Satan, and once again they become co-rulers with God over creation!

The Consequences

As citizens of the Kingdom of God, we enjoy protection from the enemies of God.

1 Peter 2:9, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for *God’s* own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

There is a great significance to this passage as it relates our sojourn on this earth! We are God’s people; we are a set-apart nation; we constitute the Kingdom of God! As such, we enjoy the protection and care promised Abraham so long ago!

This partly is what is involved in being a “saint” a set apart one. Because we have been “set apart” we have become the property of God! Satan cannot initiate an attack against us without the prior approval of the Lord. Though Satan desired the destruction of Job, he was impotent to do anything about it until God removed the boundary of His care. Until then, all that Satan could do was scheme for Job’s downfall.

Job 1:11-12, “‘But put forth Thy hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse Thee to Thy face.’ Then the Lord said to Satan, ‘Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.’ So Satan departed from the presence of the Lord.”

Satan is impotent to do anything to a citizen of God’s kingdom because of the Covenant.

Genesis 15:1b, “...do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you...”

1 John 4:4b, “...greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.”

When it came to Satan’s attack on Job, the devil was impotent to do anything except what God authorized! You say, “This passage is amongst the poetic books of the Bible; so we shouldn’t conclude anything from this about our security in Christ.” Consider this:

Luke 22:31-32a, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you...”

Though this is speaking of Peter, nevertheless the teaching holds true for all God’s children. As citizens of the Kingdom of God, in and through all things we are protected by God. Peter gave this word of comfort to a persecuted church:

1 Peter 1:5, “...we are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

To attack a child of God is to level an attack against God directly. The apostle Paul had great passion prior to his conversion and was going after Christians.

Acts 9:1-2a, 4b, “Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus... [Paul wanted to kill the Christians in Damascus. But when Christ approached him on the road to Damascus, listen to what the Lord said], “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

This is an amazing truth. Because we are the body of Christ, to attack a Christian is to attack Christ! We enjoy this standing before God today on account of God’s Kingdom!

A problem arose in the early church when only one head of a household was converted to Christ. Was the house in the Kingdom of God or of Satan’s domain? If in Satan’s domain, ought the Christian to divorce their unbelieving spouse? Listen to what Paul said this:

1 Corinthians 7:12-14, “But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, let him not send her away. And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, let her not send her husband away. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy.”-

This is an amazing truth! When God brings a member of a household into the Kingdom of God, the protection and care promised in the covenant are extended to the entire household. If a Christian is married to a non-believer, that doesn't place the household in the domain of Satan as we might fear. Rather, by virtue of the child of God living in the home, the household receives God's protection!

From these passages and the many more that detail our position before God in Christ, we conclude that as members of the Kingdom of God, we are protected by the power of God! Though Satan would like nothing less than to sift us like wheat, he is impotent to do so. As a toothless, clawless foe, all he can do is growl at us unless God deems otherwise!

That is most encouraging! Yet there is more. As citizens of the Kingdom of God, we enjoy protection even from ourselves. There couldn't be a more obvious truth that in our sin we are set on self-destruction.

Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?"

In contexts which proclaim the sinfulness of our hearts, I have been quick to teach that oft-times the greatest threat to our welfare today in Christ is NOT

- A bad companion.
- An evil government.
- The threat of religious persecution.
- Or Satan himself.

BUT ourselves! As Christians we are our worst enemy! Aren't we?

Job 5:7, "For man is born for trouble, as sparks fly upward."

This is not talking about lost and fallen man, but every man on account of his sin. In fact, sin is our greatest lament. Speaking as a Christian, Paul confessed this:

Romans 7:14-15, "For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate."

Though God has delivered us out of the reign and rule of Satan and placed us in His Kingdom, we oft-times play the fool.

Proverbs 26:11, "Like a dog that returns to its vomit is a fool who repeats his folly."

In fact, when we are most confident, that is when we are most vulnerable.

Proverbs 16:18, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling."

As our King, what has God done in light of this propensity? Through the process of sanctification, the Lord continues to keep us from self-destruction. Paul put it this way:

Romans 7:22-25a, "For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. [Once again, we see our bent for self-destruction. Yet notice the solution...] Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Jude put it this way;

Jude 24, "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy..."-

As citizens of the Kingdom of God, the Lord won't allow us free access to the sin we so eagerly desire. God is not against us for our sin, but for us against our sin! In fact God tells us this when speaking to His rebellious people.

Hosea 2:6-7a, "Therefore, behold, I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her so that she cannot find her paths. And she will pursue her lovers, but she will not overtake them; and she will seek them, but will not find *them*..."

Isn't this wonderful? In His sovereignty God has deigned to protect us from ourselves! If God gave His Son that we might be delivered from our sin, to what length will He go to protect us from our sin? Through Isaiah God gave this incredible word of hope:

Isaiah 41:10, "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."

The sovereign rule of God NOT ONLY results in the protection of His people from Satan, his demons, and his followers, BUT ALSO from our own bent on self-destruction! In His providence, the Lord lost us once. He will not do it again! Rather He will preserve us and grow us unto the day of consummation; to the praise of the glory of His grace!

That brings us back to 1 Corinthians 5:1-5. Remember that in Corinth an individual fell into horrible sin. A man who took his father's wife; most likely his step-mother, and was sleeping with her! This perversion of God's creation violates so many boundaries of righteousness and decency in the Kingdom of God, that even in pagan societies it is unthinkable!

This man was unrepentant. And because he was a child of God, a citizen of the Kingdom of God, Paul instructed the leadership of the church, to deliver him to Satan! Paul is instructing the church, because of this man's unrepentant sin, to place a child of God where he will not enjoy the

protection of the Lord. Here a soldier of the Lord is abandoned, as it were, in the middle of the battle!

This is what God instructs a true church to do in the case of the unrepentant sinner! When a valid church court excommunicates an individual, God lifts His covenant protection, and the man is abandoned to live on this earth without the special care of God.

Now, it is very tempting to say this; “So big deal. The person now lives like most of the world, outside of Christ.” Yet that is not exactly the case. A man is not living as the non-Christian does. Satan has no qualms with his followers. The vast majority are free to live their life of delusion untouched by him. Rather the disciplined Christian is living as a traitor in a land filled with demons, rogues, and criminals who now have free access to him.

For example, it is much like policemen behind bars or a traitor being returned to the country he betrayed. This is what takes place when a person is excommunicated from the church; they are handed over to the enemy!

It is so important that we understand this. It is not that we are moralistic prudes that are so upset by another’s sin that we kick him out of our club. Rather, it is God, moved by love, withdrawing His covenant care from a man that has sworn allegiance to Christ and thus is still the enemy of Satan! As we understand this, we should be enabled more and more to minister to the unrepentant Christian and pray for him, plead with him, weep with and for him unto the glory of God.

Galatians 6:1, “Look to yourselves, lest we likewise are tempted.”

Endnotes

¹ This is not meant to be an endorsement or debate on the merits of Dr. Kline’s framework hypothesis. This would take an entire series of sermons.

Bibliography

The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. (2001). Wheaton, IL: Standard Bible Society.
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About the Preacher

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