

Tough Love

Shouldn't you rather have gone into mourning and have put out of your fellowship the man who has been [sexually immoral]? (1 Corinthians 5:2).

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 5:1-5

Song: “They Will Know We Are Christian by Our Love”

The tension in the room hung like a fog. It is still a vivid memory. I watched as the church elders confronted the married couple who had sinned against members of the church.

Church discipline is a stressful, yet beneficial, process for the health of the church. When the body of Christ is infected with the persistent sin of a member, the individual must stop sinning or be put out.

The motivation for discipline is love—tough love. When a church disciplines one of its members, it is to be for the purpose of restoration. As Paul said, the hope is that by barring the sinner from the church, not only will the body of Christ be preserved but the sinner might be restored. We must be sure to correct in love those who need discipline, in accordance with God's Word. Our goal is to restore them as part of the church and strengthen the church to honor God.

Father, help us learn to love others like You love us, even if that requires church discipline. Give us wisdom in this matter. In Jesus' name, amen.

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 May 3–9. **Timothy Wade** lives in north Texas with his wife, Kara, and their three young children. Tim is a lifelong learner who loves Bible study, reading, writing, and teaching others to pursue God with him. He enjoys spending time with his family, hiking, and fishing.

Establishing Boundaries

“Do not spread false reports. Do not help a guilty person by being a malicious witness. Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong” (Exodus 23:1-2).

Scripture: Exodus 23:1-9

Song: “If You Love Me, Keep My Commandments”

I have a 3-year-old son who is very active. He is a little daredevil who loves heights, jumping before looking, and generally scaring his parents with his young boldness. Because I love him, I constantly tell him to avoid the activities that would hurt him. I caution, “Do not climb the bookshelf” or “Don’t ride your bike down the driveway.” I am thankful to say he is learning to obey such commands.

In this passage from Exodus, God is acting as a loving father by telling His people how they should act. In this particular passage, God is commanding His people regarding what they should not do. Because these commands are offered in the negative, some might not recognize them to be given out of love, but they are.

The love of God is laced throughout the Bible—in both the Old and New Testaments. It does not diminish in the parts of the Bible that offer commands to not do something. God shows His love by offering restrictions, and we love God by following them. God gave us the commands within this passage in Exodus so we might love Him by obeying in everything that He wants us to do, as well as what He does not want us to do.

Father, thank You for loving me so much that You give me warnings and boundaries for my good. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Plans for Your Future

“I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11).

Scripture: Jeremiah 29:10-14

Song: “I Know Who Holds Tomorrow “

The words of Jeremiah 29:11 were emblazoned in many prominent places at the Christian university I attended. The promise gave a frequent reminder that God has a plan for those who belong to Him. The consistent affirmation was good in those days and still is now.

We know the past, we're focused on the present, but some aspects of the future remain unknown. This can make the future a frightening prospect. But the promise God gave to His people in Jeremiah's time still resounds for His people today.

God knows the future of all people. He sees it unfold and has all of it in His hands. Added to His knowledge and dominion is His love for all people. With His love and power, God directs the future for us, His people. When we recognize God's knowledge, receive His love, and seek Him with all our hearts, we learn to trust Him for our future. As we stand at the brink of each moment always moving into the future, we can be sure that God is there with us and that He is working out His plan for each of us. He is our hope for our future.

Father, I praise You for loving me so much that You have a plan for my future. Help me recognize Your grace to trust You each moment. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Danger of Human Traditions

“You [the Pharisees] have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions” (Mark 7:8).

Scripture: Mark 7:1-8

Song: “Create in Me a Clean Heart, O God”

Years ago, another Christian discovered that I did not adhere to a tradition he thought essential. He let me know that he thought I was not a “true Christian.”

He broke fellowship with me over a minor human tradition. I tried to explain that we did not have to agree on everything outside the firm tenets of the faith, but he was not going to hear any of that. It underscored for me that the traditions of man divide but the Word of God unites.

Jesus faced a similar scenario. When the Pharisees and teachers questioned Jesus because He didn't follow the traditions they started, the Lord rebuked them as hypocrites. He condemned them for their superficial religious actions and not understanding the heart of God's law.

The core of Christianity is loving God, and then everyone else. Christians will have different perspectives on minor points, but they are not issues that need divide us. To protect ourselves from the hypocrisy of worshipping Christ with our lips but having our hearts far from Him, we must remain faithful to read and understand Scripture and align our hearts and our lives with the Word. Faithfulness to God's instruction honors our Lord.

Father, forgive me when I follow human traditions before Your Word. Draw me close to You and revive my heart through Your Word that I might honor You. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Whole Story

I will besiege Ariel; she will mourn and lament. . . . But your many enemies will become like fine dust (Isaiah 29:2, 5).

Scripture: Isaiah 29:1-8

Song: “Deliverer”

I have listened to people pull out phrases from the Old Testament, such as those above in today’s passage, to conclude that God is vengeful and cruel. Yes, God speaks with judgment to the people of Jerusalem (Ariel). But then we read about God’s vengeance toward the enemies of Jerusalem (Isaiah 29:5). People who see only God’s anger and judgment are not giving their attention to everything God does. They miss His purpose for discipline.

God has been revealing His holiness, righteousness, justice, and love to all people. We can see these attributes in His righteous judgment of the people in Jerusalem and also of their enemies. The people were lamenting the impending destruction by Sennacherib, king of Assyria, who had surrounded Jerusalem with his army. King Hezekiah called out to God for deliverance (37:14-20). God listened and delivered Jerusalem (v. 36). The direction of God’s judgment changed because of His love.

God hears those who call out to Him, repent of their sin, and ask for His rescue. Jesus received the just punishment of the Father’s judgment that should have been directed at us for all our sin. By turning to Christ in faith and repenting of our sin, we are rescued and no longer face destruction. Do not miss God’s deliverance from the justice you deserve because of your sin.

Father, thank You for showing me Your holiness and for giving Your Son as a sacrifice for my salvation. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Understanding the Word of God

This whole vision is nothing but words sealed in a scroll. And if you give the scroll to someone who cannot read, and say, “Read this, please,” they will answer, “I don’t know how to read” (Isaiah 29:11-12).

Scripture: Isaiah 29:9-12

Song: “Open the Eyes of My Heart, Lord”

I was amazed at how the Bible came to life after I became a Christian. I was understanding it more fully. I had read the Bible before, but reading the Bible as a believer, with the Holy Spirit residing in me, made all the difference for growing deep in His Word.

The false prophets that Isaiah spoke to did not want to hear what God was telling them through Isaiah. They had no desire to truly know God or obey Him, and thus sealed themselves off from the law God gave them. It was as if they made themselves illiterate. But they could understand God’s message through Isaiah; they could hear God’s intent to bring them back into His blessing that comes by faith and obedience.

God wants all people to know and love Him (1 Timothy 2:4). Sincere Bible readers can understand its essential truths about God and their need for Him. God is just and loving toward all. He does not expect what is impossible from anyone. God’s Spirit works in and through the Scripture for our good, even if we are coming from far away spiritually, when we read with desire to know God.

Father, thank You for Your Word. Open our hearts and minds to the truth and goodness in Your Word. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Who Am I?

Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, “You did not make me”? Can the pot say to the potter, “You know nothing”? (Isaiah 29:16).

Scripture: Isaiah 29:13-24

Song: “Behold the Potter and the Clay”

I became a Christian during my teenage years. My faith kept me from several pitfalls that teenagers often tumble into; but I did not allow my faith to help me define my identity or purpose. I doubted myself, my worth, my abilities, and that God had created me for a purpose. I remember praying, “I didn’t ask to be created! Why am I here?” I was the clay questioning the potter.

The prophet Isaiah tells us that we become empty and lose our way when our hearts are far from Him (Isaiah 29:13). To know our purpose, we must first know who our God is and who we are in relation to Him. He is our Creator; we are His creation. This is why He sees us and knows us (v. 15).

Our good response is to humble ourselves, for it is the humble who recognize their need for God and rejoice in Him (v. 19) and gain their life’s direction. Humility that comes out of our deep need for God helps us recognize the work of His hands and how He is shaping the lump of clay that we each are. There is no better place to be on this side of Heaven than in the hands of the potter.

Father, thank You for making me. Help me become the person You desire. In Jesus’ name, amen.