

1 CORINTHIANS 5

INTRODUCTION

Imagine if a Christian we know, one who is in membership of an Evangelical church that we also know goes out and commits immorality by choosing to sleep with his Stepmother. How would we expect that church to react? How would that church react? What if it was our church and one of our members how would we react as a church? Well I hope that we would be horrified and disgusted and angry for that is what you would expect but not at Corinth.

Even though someone in the church was involved in an incestuous relationship the church at Corinth does not seem to be shocked or disgusted. The church had become very complacent, as indeed had the sinning brother for he continues to meet with the church every Sunday and nobody seems to mind.

The standards in the church had slipped to such a degree that such behaviour had become acceptable or at least such behaviour was not dealt with because the church were complacent and careless about such issues.

This is why Paul writes to the church at Corinth he wants to give them and indeed all churches clear guidance about how to deal with sin in the church.

1. THE NEED FOR DISCIPLINE IN THE CHURCH (vs. 1-2a)

The first thing that the Corinthians needed to see was the need for discipline because they apparently had rationalised the immorality so that they did not see a need for discipline. Paul's first task is to get the church to see that immorality is sinful, serious and should not be tolerated within God's church.

Of course the church knew this but the spiritual state of the church was at such low ebb that they had somehow reasoned away this man's sin so that they did not see the need for church discipline. This man's sin was not a secret for Paul says that "it is reported" in other words this is common knowledge that is being passed around and yet the church does nothing about it even though its testimony is being spoilt.

Now the church at Corinth had been well taught by Paul and others they knew this man's sin was wrong, they also had been instructed by Paul about church discipline (v 9) but sadly the church had allowed the general culture of Corinth to creep into the church. They simply had become used to immorality and therefore were blasé about it. The city of Corinth was well known for its immorality and the church had allowed the standards of the world to be implemented in the church. But although immorality was normal in a city like Corinth the type of immorality that this professing Christian was guilty of was of a kind that is not usually found in a pagan city like Corinth.

Even the residents of Corinth would find sleeping with your stepmother repulsive. This type of incestuous relationship was actually against Roman law which says something about how it was viewed by the unbelieving world yet the church accepted it and allowed it to happen without taking any sort of action.

The tense used in the Greek suggests that this relationship had been going on for some time (is) and was still going on. This is not a one-time affair that can happen on the spare of the moment but this was continuous and open. They may even have been living together as man and wife. There is no mention of discipline for the woman involved here which might suggest that this woman was not a believer.

If this is so then not only is the man involved in a sinful relationship but also he is also involved with an unbeliever which of course is against God's word (2 Corinthians 6:14).

However as far as Paul is concerning the thing that is more shocking if anything could be more shocking is the fact that the church is tolerate of this man's sin. By refusing to act in discipline they are by implication condoning this man's sinful behaviour (v 2). The church had become so proud and arrogant that nothing seems to break through their pride.

They as a church were so self-satisfied and self-confident that they probably excused or rationalised this man's wicked behaviour. Perhaps they looked upon this man's relationship as an expression of Christian freedom or liberty or perhaps they looked at their toleration of this man's sin as an expression of Christian love. Whatever their reasoning was Paul says that it's their pride that has blinded them to the clear truth of God's word and to his moral standards.

But Paul tells them that they should have been filled with grief. Paul knows that a church that does not grieve over sin especially sin within its own membership is on the verge of disaster. When Christians cease to be shocked by sin then we are losing a strong defence against it. It is so easy to become less shocked than we should be when we see sin rampant in our society and when it is glamorised on the television and is encouraged by our Government.

The church at Corinth had become so like its own culture that it proudly followed its own feelings and rationalisations rather than God's word and as a result the church found itself ignoring and perhaps even justifying flagrant sin in her midst.

God takes the sin of his people seriously and he expects his people to take it seriously. Sadly when sin is not repented off and is tolerated then it increases and spreads like an infectious disease therefore the church must not tolerate sin in its midst, this is why church discipline is necessary.

Sin must be exposed and dealt with and this is not just the job of the Pastor or Elders but every church member has a responsibility to make sure that church discipline is exercised in the church. Ultimately discipline in the church is to be done by all the members of the church. It is so easy to leave it to others and to wash our hands of such actions but according to the bible it is the whole church that acts (Matthew 18:15-20). If we fail to do so as individual members then the truth is that we are tolerating and rationalising sin in the church. It was not easy for the church at Corinth to take action because the church knew the person who is sinning. They had sat around the Lord's table with him, enjoyed bible studies with him and had prayed with him perhaps this is why the church did not act as they should have because they knew the person involved in this sin.

But Paul establishes this point and we must establish it in our minds that when a fellow member is guilty of public sin and refuses to repent then the church must take action otherwise we are as guilty as the person involved in the sin.

God's honour is at stake and the church's reputation is at stake so learn this principles and understand that exercising discipline is never easy but is always necessary for the good of the sinning Christian and for the good of the church and ultimately for the glory of God.

2. THE METHOD OF DISCIPLINE IN THE CHURCH (vs. 2b-5)

Paul does not mess around by hinting or suggesting what should have happened in this situation. He is clear that the man who refused to repent of his sin and forsake his immoral relationship should have been removed from the membership of the church (2b). Now we need to be clear that this sort of discipline is not inconsistent with love in fact it is lack of discipline that is inconsistent

with love. If we love our children we will discipline them and our failure to discipline children is because of our failure to really love them.

Is this not the way the Lord treats his people (Hebrews 12:6). He disciplines us because he loves us and therefore churches will discipline sinning members who remain unrepentant because we love them. Perhaps the lack of real discipline in our churches today says something about the lack of real love in our churches.

Now even though Paul is not present in the church at Corinth he has already decided what should happen just as if he was a member in the church (v 3). There is nothing hard about this case says Paul this is clear-cut. The brother is sinning it is clear that he is refusing to repent otherwise Paul wouldn't even mention it and if it is clear to him from the distance of Ephesus then surely it should be clear to the church. Therefore Paul is urging the church to take the appropriate action.

How are they to do it, how do they exercise discipline? Paul says that when the church gathers they do so in the name of the Lord Jesus and therefore Jesus is among them in power (v 4). Therefore they must come together as a church and do what they know is Christ's will in this situation. They are to do what He would do if he were physically present with the church. He is present with them by his Spirit therefore they must act in his name and with his power.

The church would have known the principles taught by Jesus (Matthew 18:15-20) but now Paul wants them to apply those principles in the situation at Corinth. When they do act in Jesus name, that is according to his word and will; then they can be sure that they are acting in his power. You see a powerful church is a church that exercises discipline when a church carries out discipline then it is the same as the Lord Jesus disciplining the sinning person.

They are to put the sinning man out of the church and Paul is not talking about the church building here but the church membership. To do so is to hand the man over to Satan (v 5). Now to hand a person over to Satan simply means to hand him over to the realm where Satan rules and we know that Satan is the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4). So Paul is saying that to remove someone from church membership is to place that person back into the world with all the other unbelievers, it is to withdraw from him the care and support that belonging to a church offered him.

The purpose of such discipline is corrective. It is for the purpose of seeing "the sinful nature may be destroyed," which means that this action of discipline is done so that the sinning man sees the seriousness of his sin and turns in repentance to God. His sin is dealt with and he is restored again to church membership. Therefore he will prove himself to be a true believer and he will be saved on the judgement day.

Paul is probably talking about this same sinning brother in 2 Corinthians 2:7-8 where he pleads for the church to forgive and comfort this man who has now repented.

Therefore the point of church discipline is to see the sinning brother restored to full church membership again. This is why such action is a demonstration of love. If the church at Corinth continues to allow this man to remain in this sinful relationship without doing anything about it, then the man might begin to think that his sin is OK that it is acceptable and that it is not serious. However the church by taking action says to the man your sin is serious, your relationship with this woman is wrong, therefore you must repent and turn back to the Lord and back to the church again.

All church discipline is for the good of the sinning brother or sister. When we as a church have to act in discipline we are saying to the sinning person that we take sin seriously and that our church does not tolerate sin because sin is serious to God and He does not tolerate it.

You see if we fail to act in church discipline then we are telling sinning Christians and the world that sin is not that serious. If we give that impression then that also dilutes the glorious work of Christ on the cross. If sin is not serious then Christ's death for sin is minimised and the gospel is emptied of its power. So I hope you can see that church discipline is important.

The next time we have to exercise discipline in our church I trust that we will be courageous enough to do what is right and remove an unrepentant and sinning member from our membership in order that that person may come to their senses and repent. If that happens then I trust we will be gracious and loving enough to welcome repentant ones back into our church membership once again.

3. THE REASON FOR DISCIPLINE (vs. 6-8)

Paul has already given one reason for church discipline by implication in the previous verse but now he gives the church a very clear reason why the exercise of church discipline is vital. The removal of someone from church membership might seem severe but Paul here warns that refusing to do so will be much more severe on the church.

However the Corinthians found the truth hard to face and one reason for this is because of their boastful attitude (v 6). Perhaps they boasted about their tolerance or of the liberty that their members exercised or just about their wisdom in this situation. Paul does not tell us directly what they boasted about but he does tell us that their boasting is not good (v 6).

Their boasting is leading the church down a dangerous path because of its failure to exercise discipline; the church is in danger of being destroyed. Paul uses the illustration of yeast in dough. It only takes a little yeast to work through a whole batch of dough and so in the same way it only takes one sinning brother who is left in the church to corrupt the whole church. Now yeast or leaven as it should read is used in the bible to illustrate influence. Most of the time it represents evil influence.

Paul's point is very simple if sin is allowed to exist unchallenged in the church then it won't be long before the influence of one sinning brother begins to influence others and before long the whole church will be corrupted. If sin is not taken seriously in a church then others will notice and they will begin to take sin less seriously than they did before and before we know it the church is rife with sin. One bad influence can have an incredible affect upon a good solid Evangelical church.

This is why church discipline is vital. It sends out a message to other members in a church who might be tempted to sin in the same way and therefore acts as a restraint within the church. It removes the sinning person so that they cannot influence the rest of the members in their sinning ways.

Therefore the church at Corinth must act and get rid of the sinning person who is like old yeast that corrupts the whole dough of the church (v 7). If they do act in church discipline then they will be like a new batch of dough which does not possess any yeast (sinning and unrepentant brothers). In other words deal with sin and the sinning brother and the church will be preserved as pure. For this is exactly how the church should be. Did Christ their Passover Lamb not die for them in order that they could be made pure? (v 7).

Now it is clear that Paul has the book of Exodus in mind here. According to Exodus 12:39 on the occasion of the first Passover Israel left Egypt so rapidly that there was insufficient time for that day's quota of bread to be leavened. Had the people delayed in order to prepare their loaves they would have been held up which would have implied a desire to remain in Egypt?

In the event they came out of Egypt “in haste” because they knew that this was their only sensible option (Deuteronomy 16:3); they could not afford to waste time. So taking that background Paul asserts that if the Corinthians do not remove the sinning brother from the church they will demonstrate that they wish to belong to the world from which their Passover Lamb has redeemed them.

Therefore Paul’s conclusion is found in verse 8. Again he is thinking of the Passover Festival which was kept every year. Well says Paul let us be like those in the time of Moses and keep the Passover Festival without yeast. Let’s remove from our lives and church the yeast of malice and wickedness and instead celebrate the festival with bread without yeast the bread of sincerity and truth.

Obviously the things mentioned were problems in the church and probably were problems in the life of the sinning brother who is to be put out of the church. The church will never deal with malice and wickedness by allowing it to stay in the church. The church will never be sincere or truthful by allowing unrepentant sinners to remain within its membership.

I know Paul’s argument is a little hard to follow but what he is saying is that the church at Corinth must remove the sinning brother from its membership and in doing so it is doing the will of God and is exercising God’s power in the church. Its reason for doing so is to restore the sinning brother by making him realise the seriousness of his sin and ultimately in exercising church discipline they will be helping to keep the church pure from sinful and evil influences.

As I finish let us be clear about the need for church discipline in our time. Let us be clear about the method that needs to be applied and let us never forget that any action of church discipline is done in love, for the good of the sinning person and for the purity of Christ’s church. Ultimately church discipline is to be exercised to the glory of God

Amen

1 CORINTHIANS 6:1-11

INTRODUCTION

I was watching the news this week when a Journalist with a Sunday paper was describing how an article of his gets printed in a newspaper that he works for. After writing an article it is edited and corrected by the editors and then it goes to the newspaper's legal team who read it to see if anyone could object to what was written and sue the paper.

I thought that it is a sign of the times when before anything appears in print it is inspected by a legal team. That is because we live in a society that is increasingly looking for opportunities to sue because in many ways litigation is easy money. Well the society of Corinth was no different from our own. We have seen this in so many ways already and it was so similar to ours in this area of litigation.

Now the church at Corinth was failing to live up to its name because it was full of strife, it was divided and it was immoral. In many ways the church had lapsed into so many of their previous sinful ways that it was increasingly difficult to distinguish the church from the rest of pagan society at Corinth. The church at Corinth was so like its society that its light was becoming dimmer. Paul now addresses another area where the church was so like its society, it is this area of litigation. The Corinthians were always taking one another to court.

If a dispute was not settled privately then the courts sorted it out and the Corinthian believers had been so used to arguing and disputing and taking one another to court before they were saved that they carried on these selfish attitudes and habits after their conversions. Paul writes to the church because it was wrong to take fellow believers to court and totally unnecessary.

Paul gives three reasons why it is wrong to take litigation against fellow Christians.

1. IT IS WRONG BECAUSE OF WHO WE ARE (vs. 1-6)

The words "a dispute with another" translate three Greek words, which were commonly used to indicate a lawsuit. So it is clear that the Christians at Corinth were taking lawsuits against one another and going to a court of law to settle their disputes. In other words they were hanging their dirty washing out in public for all to see. Those who judged their lawsuits were unbelieving people and therefore what sort of witness was that having upon the unbelievers who heard their case. Paul is asking the church how this can be. This is not even a one off incident that Paul is thinking about for the word translated "dare" (v 1) is in the present tense indicating that this was a continual practise.

Now Paul's concern is not that believers would get an unfair hearing in the public courts with unbelievers judging their cases. They may well have received fair hearings and correct judgements from the unbelievers but Paul is concerned because the Christians at Corinth seem to have so little respect for the authority and ability of the church to settle its own disputes.

Christians are members of Christ's body, the church and they are indwelt with the Holy Spirit therefore is the church not able to judge and settle cases of dispute within the church? It is simply inconceivable that Christians should take one another to court when the church is empowered and equipped by God the Holy Spirit to settle matters of dispute. All the resources needed to settle any dispute reside within the membership of the church of Jesus Christ.

Surely when Christians take one another to court where unbelievers reside then it is a confession that the church is lacking in something needed to settle these cases.

Also when Christians go to court with other Christians then surely they are more concerned with revenge or gain than they are with the unity and well being of the church of Jesus Christ. Disputes between Christians should therefore be settled by and among Christians, for if we who have wonderful resources in Christ cannot settle a dispute then how can we expect the unbelievers to do so?

Paul insists that Christians and the church are always able to resolve disputes within its membership. Because if we are one day going to judge the world and the angels (vs. 2-3 cf. Matthew 19:28 and Jude vs. 14-15) with Christ, then surely there is no case too hard for the church to settle here on earth.

But the Christians at Corinth are forgetting who they are, they are 'saints' equipped with the Holy Spirit, we have the word of God therefore why do Christians need to go to court against other Christians. Is God not able to enlighten the church over matters of dispute through his word and by His Holy Spirit? In fact Paul goes as far as to say that the weakest and most insignificant member in the church (if that is what the disputed phrase means), is more competent to judge cases between Christians than unbelieving judges. If that person possess the Holy Spirit which he does and has the word of God in his possession then what else is needed to settle disputable matters between God's people (v 4)?

Therefore Paul is ashamed of the behaviour of those in the church at Corinth for by the fact that they are going to the courts says to the world that there is nobody in the church at Corinth who is capable of hearing and resolving disputes between fellow Christians. Of course that is not true for every Christian has the Holy Spirit and the word of God and the wisdom of God therefore there are no matters that cannot be resolved.

By settling our own disputes within the church, the church is clearly testifying that we have all the resources that we need to settle disputes. It also says to the world that we value love and unity between Christians more highly than winning our case in a secular court of law.

2. IT IS WRONG BECAUSE WE ALWAYS LOSE SPIRITUALLY (vs. 7-8).

Taking our fellow Christians to court is wrong because we lose out spiritually by doing so. Even if we win our case in the law court we actually lose out spiritually. Lawsuits against a fellow brother and sister in Christ is always defeat in God's eyes. This is because his lawsuit says that he is selfish, that he is more concerned with his own rights than with showing love to his fellow believers.

Not only that but he is also clearly undermining the authority of the church and the ability of God's Holy Spirit and the Scriptures to speak on matters of disagreement. That means that although we might go to court and win our case we actually always lose out as a result. We lose out because we are doing something that God disapproves off and therefore He will never bless such an activity.

So what should we do if we simply cannot settle a disputed matter, well the Christian thing to do is to allow oneself to be wronged and cheated if necessary rather than take a fellow Christian to court. God will bless such an attitude. What Paul is saying is that it is far better to lose out financially than to lose out spiritually. Even when we are clearly legally right and even when it is clear that we have been wronged or cheated it is better spiritually to be wronged than to take a fellow saint to court.

We must leave the ultimate outcome of our wrong in the hands of Almighty God for we never lose out when we do the right thing by obeying God and his word. Even if we lose out materially, we

never lose out spiritually. However if we take a fellow Christian to court we might gain materially but we will lose out spiritually.

By allowing ourselves to be wronged by fellow Christians we are keeping the peace within the church and we are showing love to our fellow believers and we are keeping the unity within the church. But imagine the situation within a church when two Christians go to court against one another. There will be no harmony between them, little love will be shown and discord is certain not just between the Christians but in the local church as well.

Lawsuits leave people embittered and they break the cord of unity within churches. Therefore if matters can't be resolved between two Christians then get the church involved and if necessary suffer loss rather than lose out spiritually by bringing discord and disharmony into your relationship with other Christians and within the church.

3. IT IS WRONG BECAUSE OF THE CONTRAST BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND UNBELIEVERS (vs. 9-11)

Paul said in verse 1 that the church should take their cases of dispute to the church and not to the "ungodly." Surely it is better to have godly people within the church hearing your case than asking ungodly wicked sinners to hear it in a court of law. After all says Paul such people are not going to inherit the Kingdom of God because of their ungodliness and wickedness (v 9).

You are not going to spend eternity with those people but you are with those in the church. It is clear that there is a contrast between the church and the world. Perhaps the church has failed to understand this point. They have been so consumed with their rights and with their greed that they have not stopped to think about the differences between believers and unbelievers.

In fact their behaviour is more like what you expect from the unbelieving world than from the believing world (v 8). You can expect the unbelieving world to cheat and do wrong and take one another to court for they have no time for God but are self-focused. But you do not expect such behaviour from Christians within the church.

Yet in Corinth sadly there were Christians who were behaving like the unbelieving world especially in this area of litigation.

Paul is reminding them that they must behave differently because they are different (v 11). You can expect to find sexual immorality; idolatry, adultery, homosexuality, stealing, greed, drunkenness, slanderers and swindlers in the world but you do not expect to find such sins among God's people.

Yes it is true that before their conversion these sins were found within the lives of the Christians at Corinth (v 11). But now things are different they are changed people because they are washed, sanctified and justified by Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore by taking people to court and by doing things that encouraged people to sue was simply a denial of their new life in Christ. They are no longer unbelievers but they are now believers in Christ. Therefore they need to start living like it and one of the ways that they can show the difference between believers and unbelievers is by refusing to take a fellow Christian to court and by living as they should.

So there is no reason for a fellow Christian to even think about going to court. They can start living out their new life in Christ by simply being prepared to be wronged and cheated in order to obey God's word and in order to keep the unity and peace within God's church.

So let us be clear as we finish. We should not take our fellow Christians to court. If there is a dispute with another Christian in our church that cannot be resolved between us, then take the matter to the church. The church has all the resources needed for resolving our disputes. We have God's word and we have the Holy Spirit and we have the wisdom of God when we earnest seek it.

However at the end of the day it is better to allow ourselves to be wronged and even cheated in order to preserve the unity of the church rather than take a fellow believer to court.

Most of all it is very important that we live consistently so that no one has a reason to feel a grievance with us and therefore they have no reason to even think of taking us to court.

Finally let us be a people who not only claim to be Christians but who live consistent Christian lives before our fellow believers and before this ungodly world

Amen