



“Let’s Take Sin Seriously”
I Corinthians 5:1-8
June 27, 2021

Please join me in I Corinthians Chapter 5.

Brothers and sisters, sometimes we read things in the pages of Scripture and those things make our jaws drop to the floor. In the pages of the Old Testament and in the pages of the New Testament, what we find is that Scripture makes no attempt to conceal the sins of the people of God. Rather, it seems intent on bringing such things out into the open.

The passage before us this morning contains a shocking exposure of sin that was taking place in the First Century Corinth. It is the infamous case of a member of the Corinthian church who was in an ongoing sexual relationship with his stepmother. This is right here for us in the pages of Scripture.

As we open to I Corinthians Chapter 5, the amazing thing is that there is not one but there are two glaring issues in this text. One is the case of immorality itself, and the second case is the churches Blaise response to it; its relaxed attitude toward it.

One commentator, Craig Blomberg, wrote in his book on I Corinthians:

The church’s reaction to this affair was as bad or worse than the affair itself. Instead of grieving over sin in their midst, they were actually smug over their newfound “enlightened” tolerance as Christians. Paul recoils in horror.

The Holy Spirit has included this in His Word. God wants us to deal with it. Not only has the Holy Spirit included this in Scripture for the people of God to deal with, but He has drawn my heart to it, even in something of a survey of the New Testament.

Brothers and sisters, I could have just gone right passed this and maybe think I should have. But as I have been planning this series, this passage has been drawn in because as a church in view of the glory, holiness, and the grace of God, we need to be a people who take sin seriously, because it is deadly.

So as we continue in this series, *O Church, Arise*, as we dig into this passage of Scripture this morning, we are seeking grace from God to take sin seriously and to trust in God’s wisdom so completely that we will practice church discipline when it becomes necessary.

This morning what we find is that church discipline was something that the Corinthians were not willing to do or that they had no sense of urgency to do. Yet, this is something that all churches of God, carried by the Spirit, will do. They will deal with ongoing, high-handed sin in their midst. They will deal with it with grace and integrity.

This comes to us from the heart of God through the Apostle and it comes to us with something of a strong tone. The Lord prompted Paul to deal with this head-on. So let's see how he began in I Corinthians Chapter 5 and Verses 1 and 2:

¹It 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. ²And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

So as Paul stood beside himself dealing with this situation, we can see very plainly that there are two aspects of this that I mentioned in our introduction. First, was the ongoing sexual immorality, this relationship that was being tolerated by the church of Corinth. Second, the church was so relaxed and even arrogant with this sin that was happening in their midst.

Paul said, And you are arrogant! And you are a boastful church! So the nature of that arrogance is something that we can wonder and ask about. It could have been that they were arrogant in view of this sin, as many would understand it to be. Or it could have been that they were arrogant in spite of it, or maybe a mixture of both.

So it could have been that there was just a relaxed attitude about it; some people in the church, saying, So these two are attracted to each other. So she was involved with his father first. So they found each other and they love each other. After all, love is love. Maybe they are just meant to be together and, after all, aren't we people saved by grace. We are people righteous in Christ.

So there could have been this kind of attitude of arrogance in view of this sin that was taking place, or it could have been in spite of it. It could have been something that they were continued to view themselves as such a mature and healthy church, even in the midst of things that were happening like this.

The church of Corinth, it was a puffed up church. You see this all through the pages of Scripture. That language of them being puffed up is used repeatedly. They were measuring their maturity in their so-called ability, which was actually something that was not good, to kind of dress up Gospel teaching in the language of the sophistry of the day.

Others view their maturity in view of their ability to speak in tongues and have ecstatic experiences. That comes later in the book of First Corinthians. But one way or the other, Paul was saying, You cannot view yourself as mature in Christ if harmful, sinful patterns are being allowed to go unchecked, unchallenged, undealt with.

So Paul said, Ought you not rather to grieve? Shouldn't you be mourning over this? It is interesting that Paul used the language of bereavement. You should be in sorrow over this! We are reminded, brothers and sisters, that sin is deadly. Sin kills.

Sin kills relationships. Sin can destroy churches. Sin can deaden the human soul. So these concerns were weighing on Paul's heart, and he said, This person should have already been removed from among you.

Paul had heard reports about what was happening and he was saying that excommunication ought already to have taken place with that man. Part of us wonders what happened to the woman. Where was she. Something within me takes notice of the fact that it is the exact opposite of what happened in John Chapter 8.

There was the woman caught in adultery and we wonder what happened to the men. In this situation it is the man and we wonder what happened to the woman. Most likely, she was not a member of the church. She was probably not saved. So, hence, the church's responsibilities with her were not the same as what it was to the man.

But Paul was saying that excommunication should have happened. Church discipline in excommunication is a biblical reality. Whenever there is someone who is continuing in a pattern of sin, feeling entitled in sin, even as brothers and sisters and leaders are pleading with them to repent in view of the clear teaching of Scripture, they are to be removed from the church.

As we proceed in this portion of Scripture, we see that there are two reasons why as laid out before us in this text. One, we will see that this is for the good of the person who is sinning. It is ultimately to shake them up and to awaken them to what is happening and to their need for repentance. It is good for the person sinning and it is for the good of the church community as well.

We will see this unfold as we see what is here in this passage of Scripture. First of all, church discipline takes place for:

1. The overall good of the person sinning (5:3-5)

Take a look at what it says as we continue into Verses 3 through 5. Paul said:

³for 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. ⁴When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵you 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.

As we deal with this passage of Scripture, let that final phrase be paramount in our eyes. Why did all of this take place? So that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. This was not punitive. This was redemptive. It was not meant to bring harm. It was meant to rescue by turning somebody from their sin back into the grace of the Lord.

We need discipline, brothers and sisters. We have all got seeds of rebellion still lingering within us. I remember a story that I heard a pastor tell. It was the story of a mom and her son who were in an airport terminal. They were in that airport terminal, waiting for the boarding of their flight.

The waiting area was full of people. The little boy was about five-years-old and he was being a bad boy! He was doing things that bad boys do. He was running the whole area like a wild man. He was making all kinds of noise and going up to people who were trying to relax and bothering them and throwing toys all around.

The young mom was desperate. She finally got the boy close to her and was pleading with him, saying, Son, please listen to your mommy. I need for you to calm down. I need for you to be quiet. I need for you to be a good boy.

The little boy got close to his mom. He put his hands on her face and he said, Noooooo! and he went running around the terminal once again. What is going to happen in the life of that boy as he grows into maturity if he keeps going unchecked? What does that little boy need?

He needs a whooping? The d word for whooping is discipline. He needs correction. There needs to be some painful consequences applied so that the child will wake up, understanding that rebellion leads to pain. And that is a mercy.

Likewise, even as people who have the grace of Christ for forgiveness, we still have that seed of Adam. We still have lingering sin that can lead us to walk in the exact opposite way of the will of the Lord that Christ is calling us back to.

Here in the situation in this passage, we see a person that was evidently in ongoing intimate relationship with his father's wife, and nobody was disciplining him. So Paul was telling the church to wake up! We are all capable of it and it is a mercy of God that we, brothers and sisters in Christ, keep each other in check.

As we keep each other in check by God's grace, it does not always lead to something this extreme. But when it comes to something this extreme, when there is an ongoing pattern of high-handed sin, the call of Scripture is the call to excommunication.

Paul put in very serious terms here when he said

⁵you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh

Wow! That is serious language. What is that talking about? We read in Colossians Chapter 1 and Verses 13 and 14 that God,

¹³He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

By God grace, there is a transfer that occurs from one domain to another. Paul was saying, By your prayer and by this act of excommunication, he is to be transferred back from the one domain to the other, where he will be exposed to satanic fury and be shocked back into his senses. If I understand this correctly, that is what Paul was saying.

It is so amazing because in the pages of Scripture we see that Paul in Ephesians Chapter 6 told the church to take shelter. Do you remember Ephesians Chapter and Verses 10 through 20—the full armor of God? Put on the full armor of God. Putting on the protection that God has given us against the enemy; against the evil one who would love to destroy us.

Here in this situation, Paul was saying, He needs to be stripped of his membership because he needs to be rattled awake. He needed a defibrillator to get woken up. Shocked back into his senses, for the salvation of his soul, Paul said. Wow!

Once exposed to the fury of satanic affliction in a way that seems comparable to Job, except Job was the other side of the equation. Job was a righteous man. Do you remember in Job Chapter 2, though? The hedge was removed. Satanic affliction was allowed so there would be a demonstration in Job's life of the perseverance of the saints.

In this situation it was for the sake of discipline. Let him be exposed to satanic attack. Let the hedge be removed. Then perhaps he would go on to experience things in his physical flesh comparable to what Job experienced and he would do so by the allowance of God.

There is a Satan. Satan is real but in the end, Satan is God's Satan and Satan is under the sovereignty of God. But God can and does use Satan. That was the case in Job and this is what we are talking about here.

All of this needed to take place so that this man would be brought back into the glory of repentance by power and the work of the Spirit in his life, and him not being stiff-necked against the power of the Spirit in his life.

Taking this measure, as he responded to it, the grace of the Lord is unleashed in his life in such a way that he is brought back into the refuge of God. As he comes back into the refuge of God, he is welcomed back with eyes opened to the glory of God and with God's arms wide opened to him in a way that is reminiscent of the arms of the father of the Prodigal Son.

This man might be in a sense very much smelling like swine and experiencing degradation, but even still as he comes back into the fold, he will be received with joy cleansed by grace, clothed with royal robes, and given a ring on his finger, because this excommunication was not to be mean but was meant to bring him back into a humble and obedient walk with his Living Savior to turn him from sin back into the life of the Lord.

This is the vision that is here—that his spirit, that his soul might be saved. We notice that all of this was to take place in the Name and in the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. Brothers and sisters, what we are reading here is in fact in keeping with the explicit teaching of Jesus the Savior, who laid out an entire plan that leads to church discipline whenever Christians are living in high-handed sin.

In Matthew Chapter 18, we have this process of church discipline instructed by Jesus who is the Lord of the church. He laid this out in the context of personal grievances. It is recognized that this is something that is applicable wherever there are people with flippant attitudes living in sin that are present in the church. This is a means of grace to help people be awakened.

So we read Jesus' teaching. Matthew Chapter 18 and Verses 15 through 17:

¹⁵If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.

That's the whole point—gaining the brother from a lifestyle of open sin. First, notice that this whole process is to be in as narrow of a circle as possible. If you are aware of something that is happening in somebody's life, just go and help them with it individually. Just you and them.

And certainly if they are sinning against you personally before you involve everybody else on earth except them, go to them personally. It is so easy to talk to everybody on earth except them, when Jesus says to talk to them.

Then Paul continued:

¹⁶But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

So you bring some people to be involved in helping this sin to be clarified in the eyes of the person that is practicing it.

In the case of a personal grievance, something that is personal just between you and another person, this does not mean that you go and get your two best friends and your aunt, people that are clearly going to take your perspective. It means you take a mature couple of brothers or sisters in Christ, who are going to be objective; who are going to be able to really look at the situation in a measured way.

Likewise, if there is ongoing damaging sin that is being practiced and it is something that a person is holding on to, you bring in mature followers of Jesus to try and bring them back to a walk with the Lord that is in keeping with what Scripture defines.

Then Jesus said next:

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.

Now Jesus loved Gentiles and tax collectors and went to them but in terms of First Century Israel, Paul said to treat them as a person who does not believe; as an unbeliever. You need to be taking measures to win them to Christ, instead of acting as though they are a church member who is part of the body of Christ. Again, this is something that is meant to shake them up and help rattle some conviction in their hearts when used by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Brothers and sisters, let's understand that not every sin is to be subject to church discipline. Furthermore, I will say not even every struggle with sin is to be brought for church discipline. I think this is probably the case that for all of us there are besetting struggles with sin.

You can read your journal from ten years ago and you will shake your head because you are still struggling with that same sin. It is still a battle. But the idea is that when walking in the Spirit, it is going to be a struggle. This is not the will of the Lord, this goes against the plan of God for my life. Lord, help me with this struggle. Help me. Help me. There is some conviction. There is some sorrow for the sin.

Church discipline is to be applied when there is a situation either in the moral or doctrinal sphere of life where a person is walking in a sinful pattern, feels entitled to it, and says that is just how it is going to be.

Whenever there is this kind of attitude about sin, then the church is going to go through the process of church discipline, even to the point that it leads to excommunication from the church as an act of those who are members of it. That is the will of the Lord and all of this is to stir a person back to repentance.

We need to some sobriety in view of ongoing sin among church members. This is what the Scripture is calling us to. First of all, it is for the good of the person who is living in sin, that they might be brought back into the path of blessing and obedience to the Lord,

We continue and we see that there is another reason why church discipline takes place. It is for:

2. The overall good of the church community (5:6-8)

Wherever sin is left unchecked, it has the tendency to spread. That is what Paul addressed as we continue in what is here in this chapter. Paul said:

⁶Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

Don't you know that, the Apostle Paul said. Leaven was an ingredient in baking that would cause dough to rise. In the ancient world, yeast was not as common as it is now so they would use a little piece of fermented dough from the previous lump of leavened bread.

Then when making the next batch of leavened bread, they would take that little piece of fermented dough and mix it into the new dough they were making. They would then leave the dough overnight so that the microbes in the fermented piece would spread throughout the new lump and it would expand.

The churches boasting was not good!

⁶...Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

It spreads and it effects everything. Throughout the pages of the Old Testament, leaven is always pictured as moral evil. It is a picture of how small pieces of sin can spread and alter things very quickly, so it must be removed from a congregation before it has this kind of influence.

One of the obvious dangers of sin left unchecked in the local church is that when sin is allowed and tolerated in the lives of some, it may loosen the inhibitions that are within others in the body of Christ. That is just the nature of the deceptiveness of sin within us and the ongoing hold that it can have.

Other members see this and might say they are involved in that immoral relationship that is not in keeping the ways of the Lord, and they are not getting checked for it so that might suddenly loosen the restraints on other people as well. Then sin begins to proliferating throughout the body of Christ.

It could be that there is a doctrinal error that is tolerated and others get influenced by it. So it enters into the thinking of more than just the one, but then also into the thinking of many others as well. When there is a pattern of behavior in open sin that should not be allowed, it can lead also to disillusionment throughout the people of God, wondering what in the world is happening.

One of the besetting sins of many Christians in churches is the tongue. Speech. So that people start talking in ways that are not godly, not of the Spirit but of the flesh. There can be gossip. There can be bitter talk. There can be all kinds of things that happen, so Paul said:

⁶...Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

Whenever there is open sin, it has to be dealt with. This is what we see Paul saying. Then he continued in this text.

⁶...Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? ⁷Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Reading this, some understand that Paul may have been writing this book of I Corinthians sometime in early Spring when the Passover Feast with its conjoined feast of The Feast of the Unleavened Bread was approaching.

Paul was saying, Hey, there is this situation in your church. Deal with this situation, and deal with it swiftly so that you can worship and have this time of celebration in freedom. What we see here is that either way, the picture of the Passover Feast is used to illustrate Christ and the church.

Christ has His part and He has given us a part as well. When we think about the Passover Feast, Christ is the Passover Lamb who has shed His blood to deliver His people from slavery; to bring them out impending death. That is Christ.

Then, according to this, we are the unleavened bread that the people made in haste as they were departing from Egypt. We are to be the humble, nourishing, spiritual community containing the life of Christ within us. Do you see that in this text? Christ is the Lamb. We are the bread.

Brothers and sisters, Christ has clearly done the work of redemption in shedding His blood so that we can be delivered from slavery to sin. Now Christ has this ongoing work in our lives, in our church. Remember it is never that Christ did His part, now let's do ours.

Yes, there is an element of our involvement. We do obey but it is always Christ who is producing and working for that obedience and the growth within us. We think of Christ as the Good Physician, we also must think of Christ as the Master Baker because He is forming us to be like unleavened bread, simple, genuine, unpretentious, nourishing, and life-giving.

In order for this to happen, sin must be taken seriously in the local church because if it is not taken seriously, then people can consume things that are not life-giving. It will be the exact opposite. This is the work of Christ. This is what He is doing. He is seeking to keep us in the will of God, walking in obedience to the Scriptures by the power of His grace that we might truly be a nourishing community.

The point that Paul is making here in this text is that when this happens, worship in the church is reinvigorated. Let us celebrate the festival, Paul said. Get the old toxins of leaven removed so that new spiritual energy and life can be experienced in the church.

How many of you remember that we had a guest speaker about two weeks ago, Steve Sturz. He gave us a very thoughtful discussion of Psalm 4. I appreciate the feedback that I have been receiving about that message.

However, there was a part in his message where he talked about a very difficult year that Bethel Grace had in 2003. I didn't know he was going to say that, but I'm so thankful that he did. There was such honesty and humility and transparency and in his words with which I agree, he said that there was wolf in sheep's clothing that needed to be removed from Bethel Grace.

2003 was a difficult year. It really got difficult moving into the holiday season because that is when things began really rising up. I remember at Thanksgiving and Christmas that year, it was heavy here. And it had to be dealt with, and it was dealt with.

Early 2004, guess what brothers and sisters, Easter came! That was a joyful Easter holiday compared to the Christmas that had just passed. We were able to have freedom in worship because there was heavy-handedness that got dealt with.

This is the kind of point that Paul was making in this text for the vibrancy of the community as a whole. Sin needs to be dealt with. A friend was asking me what the passage was for this morning's message. I said, Okay, put on your seatbelt and pray for me because I am dealing with a challenging portion of Scripture that is on the practice of church disciple.

I confided in that friend to pray that I can just strike the proper balance because historically, there have been so many occasions where vulnerable people were spiritually abused by heavy-handed church leaders, even going back into the colonial time. This friend had just read a book about that, where abusive things took place under the guise of church leadership. We don't want that!

On the other hand, you see that there are people that are involved in so-called Christian organizations that are abusers, and nobody is keeping them in check. Where the grace of the Holy Spirit is at work for the deliverance of such a person who is having this kind of an abusive pattern and effect on others, and for the good and the freedom of the whole church, sin needs to be dealt with. We need to pray that the Lord will give us power and grace from the Holy Spirit to see it through when it becomes necessary.

A few abiding applications. First,

1. Let's watch over one another with brotherly love.

Listen to these verses from Hebrews Chapter 3 and Verses 12 and 13:

¹²Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

We need to be watching over one another. We need to ask each other about struggles with sin. We ought to know where we are having difficulties, especially in circles of fellowship that need to be taking place throughout the church, that we might be watching over one another in brotherly love, so that it never has to come to that point of excommunication. We don't want that.

The second abiding application is:

2. Let's practice congregational discipline when necessary.

There are times when it becomes necessary. If it ever becomes necessary, brothers and sisters at Bethel Grace, let's realize it is in the pages of Scripture. It is in the instruction of Jesus for the good of Bethel Grace and its people.

Finally:

3. Let's rejoice in the mercy of the Messiah.

Let's rejoice in Him for the cleansing that He can bring to even the foulest stains.

There were two astonishing things that we saw at the outset in this passage—that there was such a sin that was taking place and that the church was not addressing it. But there are more astounding things in this portion of Scripture.

From the perspective of a First Century Jewish man or woman who was taught about the Christ from Paul, for them to realize by the Spirit that the Messiah, the Christ, is also the Passover Lamb! What?!

That the Ageless One, the King of kings, the Great Anointed One who entered into time from eternity, He is the Passover Lamb! He is the One who spilled His blood for the deliverance and cleansing of His people. Wow!

This is the love of Jesus Christ for His church—that He spilled His blood that we might be cleansed; that He lived a righteous life that we might be pure and righteous in the sight of God by being clothed in His righteousness.

What an amazing truth that even what we might see as the foulest spot can be totally cleansed in the sight of God by the grace of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who receives His contrite people into the fold and arms of His grace with a love that is immeasurable.

This is the love of Jesus Christ that we might be cleansed and set free and that we might be agents of His cleansing and His deliverance and with all of these things in view, brothers and sisters, let us rejoice in the mercy of the Messiah who loves us with a love that cannot be measured.

With that, let's close in prayer.