

This morning, I am continuing in my sermon series called The Gospel Changes Everything, based on the New Testament book 1 Corinthians, Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth, a church he started around the year 50 AD. He has since left the church in the hands of other leaders so that he might start other churches, and he writes this letter around the year 54-55 AD in response to what he is hearing about some of the issues in the Corinthian church. Before we turn to chapter 5, let me quickly summarize what Paul has said so far.

In the first four chapters, Paul has confronted the Corinthian church because of the sinful pride he sees in them, letting them know that they are not as spiritually mature and wise as they think they are. He points out two things in particular:

- 1) They are seeking their own glory instead of glorifying and serving God, boasting in themselves and not in God.
- 2) They are evaluating themselves by the standards of the world, thinking that because they are wealthy and not facing troubles that God is blessing them

As a result of their arrogance and self-serving behavior, they are divided and forming rivalries within the church, threatening to destroy the church from within. For this reason, Paul is challenging them and reminding them of what it means to be a Christian. He has highlighted three things in particular that they need to remember:

- 1) They need to remember the gospel, that they are saved by grace, not works, so there is no place for boasting and arrogance
- 2) They need to remember that they are all equal members in Christ, so it makes no sense to be trying to take pride over each other.
- 3) They need to remember that to follow Jesus means to walk in the way of the cross by humbling themselves and serving each other sacrificially, not to exalt themselves.

**In today's passage**, Paul gives them two specific examples of things that he hears are happening in their church that show just how immature and foolish they are:

The first is that they are afraid to confront and discipline a church member who is in a sexual relationship with his father's wife (either his mother or stepmother). The second is that two members have brought a lawsuit against each other outside

of the church, to civil court. The main messages he wants to communicate to them are that **God's honor and reputation are more important than their own self-interest**, and that therefore the church needs to be distinct from the world in both their moral conduct and their love for one another; so that their witness might be strong and so God might be honored in the world. Let's read chapters 5:1 – 6:11:

***1 Corinthians 5:1 - 6:11** - It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. <sup>2</sup> And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? <sup>3</sup> Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. <sup>4</sup> When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, <sup>5</sup> hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord. <sup>6</sup> Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? <sup>7</sup> Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast-- as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. <sup>8</sup> Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth. <sup>9</sup> I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people-- <sup>10</sup> not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. <sup>11</sup> But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. <sup>12</sup> What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? <sup>13</sup> God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you." <sup>NIV</sup> **1 Corinthians 6:1** If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? <sup>2</sup> Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! <sup>4</sup> Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! <sup>5</sup> I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? <sup>6</sup> But instead, one brother goes to law against another-- and this in front of unbelievers! <sup>7</sup> The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? <sup>8</sup> Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers. <sup>9</sup> Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the*

*sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders <sup>10</sup> nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup> And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

**Can you hear Paul's heart in his words?** The church is to be a place where people are transformed and disciplined into Christlikeness, into conformity to God's Word and God's will, into the men and women God created you to be. If you know Jesus, if He has changed your life, if His Holy Spirit is in you, then you will be different in your conduct and your love than the people of the world. And you will live in a way that shows that God's honor and reputation is more important than your self-interest.

So first, Paul begins by dealing with an issue of church discipline – a man is in a sexual relationship with either his mother or stepmother.

*It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. <sup>2</sup> And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?*

His main issue is with the church more than it is with the individual. He is asking the church, "how can you let this man continue in fellowship with you, calling himself a Christian, when his behavior is so obviously against the law of God?" If you are God's temple, the house of God, how can you allow this thing to happen and not put him out of the church?

Paul calls for them to exercise church discipline on this man and to cast him out of the church. Why haven't they? Probably because he was a man of social standing that they were afraid to confront, for fear of the repercussions.

### **What is church discipline?**

Some of you may have had negative experiences, while others of you may have never heard this phrase.

Our goal is that individually and collectively we would be like Jesus. The church is to be a place where people are disciplined into Christlikeness, into conformity to God's Word and God's will. It begins by recognizing that

### 1) God disciplines us for our good

*Hebrews 12:4-12 - In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. <sup>5</sup> And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, <sup>6</sup> because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." <sup>7</sup> Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? <sup>8</sup> If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. <sup>9</sup> Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! <sup>10</sup> Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. <sup>11</sup> No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. <sup>12</sup> Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.*

### 2) We are to discipline each other for our good

None of us are finished projects. We need not only to be healed and inspired but also challenged and corrected.

*Proverbs 27:17 - As **iron sharpens iron**, so one man **sharpens** another.*

This is the church at its best – spurring one another on to become our best selves, the men and women God created us to be.

**There is a difference between the man who is struggling but trying to overcome sin, and the man who calls himself a Christian but is living in sin with no desire to repent.** The first needs encouragement, support, and accountability. The second needs confrontation.

### 3) We are to confront sin as quietly and as lovingly as possible

**As quietly as possible**

*Matthew 18:15-17 - "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.*

*<sup>16</sup> But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' <sup>17</sup> If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.*

If someone who claims to be a Christian refuses to live as a Christian should live, we need to exclude them from membership in the church

### **As lovingly as possible**

***Galatians 6:1-2** - Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. <sup>2</sup> Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*

The call for church discipline is a strong argument for church membership – there was obviously some clear understanding in the Corinthian church of who was a part of the church and who was not

#### **4) When there is no repentance, an individual is removed from membership**

*5 hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.*

Hand him over for the destruction of the flesh – not life, but his sinful nature. The hope is that as he is excluded from Christ's presence in the community, he will repent.

### **Why does it matter?**

#### **1) Unrepentant sin harms the church's witness and God's reputation**

There is no such thing as private morality or personal sin. Unrepentant sin harms the church's witness (no holiness, hypocrisy), confirming to outsiders that there is something wrong about believers. – the church should be different in their love and life.

#### **2) Unrepentant sin threatens the church's spiritual life**

*Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? <sup>7</sup> Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast-- as you really are.*

Corrupting power of leaven – leaven produces rising. It can penetrate and transform dough. Leaven was made by keeping back a piece of the previous week's dough, storing it in suitable conditions, and adding juices to promote the process of fermentation. This could go bad and become a contaminant. Sin is like a toxin that will infect and ruin the whole community.

### **3) Unrepentant sin leads others in the church astray**

It makes other impressionable believers believe that this behavior is okay. Same reason you discipline your children.

There is no such thing as private morality

### **4) Unrepentant sin can lead the sinner to spiritual death**

Discipline can wake a believer up to the consequences of his sin

The church is to be a place where people are discipled into Christlikeness, into conformity to God's Word and God's will. If you know Jesus, if He has changed your life, if His Holy Spirit is in you, then you will be different in your conduct and your love than the people of the world. And you will live in a way that shows that God's honor is more important than your self-interest. But if someone who calls themselves a Christian lives in unrepentant sin, with no desire to live their lives in honor to God and service to their brothers and sisters, they need to be confronted, for the sake of their soul, the soul of others, the spiritual health of the church, and the witness of the church to the world.

**The second issue is that two members have brought a lawsuit to civil court.** Once again, people are putting their own self-interest above the honor of God

What he argues

### **1) Don't manipulate fellow Christians for personal advantage**

*If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints?... <sup>6</sup> But instead, one brother goes to law against another-- and this in front of unbelievers! <sup>7</sup> The very fact that you have*

*lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? <sup>8</sup> Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers.*

In those days judges could be bought and sold in civil court, so the wealthy could easily take advantage of the poor. This is why Paul is so adamant that going to civil court is a terrible idea for believers. Why seek judgment where there are questionable verdicts? This will just breed more factionalism and division in the church.

## **2) Better to yield your own rights than to harm the church's witness and God's reputation**

*<sup>7</sup> The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? <sup>8</sup> Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers.*

They have failed to judge their own disputes. This breeds envy and factionalism, and it hurts their witness to be a place of love. No matter who wins, it is a loss for the kingdom of God. Paul wants them to exchange their pursuit of honor and material advantage for sacrificial love for their brother

## **3) Use the wisdom and love of God to settle church disputes**

*<sup>2</sup> Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! <sup>4</sup> Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! <sup>5</sup> I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers?*

They will judge angels. They should be able to judge cases in the church

He closes this section with this:

*<sup>9</sup> Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders <sup>10</sup> nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup> And that is what*

*some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

Are you hearing the underlying themes? The church is to be a place where people are disciplined into Christlikeness, into conformity to God's Word and God's will. If you know Jesus, if He has changed your life, if His Holy Spirit is in you, then you will be different in your conduct and your love than the people of the world. **And most importantly, you will live in a way that shows that God's honor is more important than your self-interest.**

## **Implications**

### **1) We need to remember the gospel**

*<sup>7</sup> Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast-- as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed*

Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed – the atonement for our sins. Christ died for our sins. We are loved. He rescued us, doing something we could not do for ourselves. Live for His glory

**You are no longer people of the world** – you have been born again, so live like it. Do not live as people of the world do, in self-interest, exploiting others for your own personal gain. We don't sequester ourselves from society, but we don't compromise our purity and ruin our witness

### **2) We need to know and be accountable to one other**

We need accountability and to fight against the pull to secrecy and isolation. Join community groups. Share your life with each other.

### **3) We need to lovingly confront sin where we see it**

Give people permission to speak into your life. Somehow we are to be welcoming as a church while not being morally lax. Everyone is welcome to come as they are, but they will be challenged and encouraged not to stay as they are but to become more like Jesus.

### **4) We need to put God's reputation and His kingdom over our self-interest**

We are not lone rangers. We belong to each other, and we represent our Father. Be willing to lay down your rights and desires rather than harm the witness of the church and the reputation of Christ