

## 1Corinthians 5:1-5 "Discipline of Unrepentant Sin"

1CO 5:1-5 "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. 2 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? 3 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. 4 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, 5 hand this man over to Satan, so that the flesh may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord."

This is probably one of the most sobering portions of God's word that deals not with God-haters, or people who want nothing to do with the Church for which Christ came to die, or with the unbelieving world in general, but with people who name the name of Christ and are a part of the body of Christ.

Of all of the duties an apostle had, I suspect that this was one of the least favorite. And though church discipline is still in effect in all ages, this particular aspect of church discipline is one that seems to be reserved only for special occasions, and implemented primarily through those who were apostles.

This does not mean to suggest that the outcome of this kind of discipline may not be the same today as we read in verse 5, but that would be determined by God Himself and not simply by a Pastor or elder who decides to call down such discipline.

As we go through this section we'll see why, but we'll also see why no one today can think himself or herself above such extreme disciplinary action which may actually involve the literal destruction of the flesh or body, which infers death.

Now, let me say at the outset that though this teaching may not be your typical feel-good, warm and fuzzy message, it is one that is important, but one that is not without some real encouragement and uplifting truths and promises from our God. So, let's dig in.

As a quick recap we must remember the context in which this portion of the letter was written. Paul has just recently addressed some people in this church who were assuming a leadership role,

and yet were leading these people astray with a false sense of security that since Paul was so far away he couldn't touch them.

He encourages these particular people by giving them the option of either remaining in their sin and being greeted by Paul with discipline, as seen in his expression of coming with a rod or whip, or repenting and being greeted by Paul with love and a spirit of gentleness as we see in verse 21 of chapter 4.

Up to this point Paul has been dealing in general terms as he points out that having such an attitude toward sin is not a healthy way for the church to grow and mature in their faith.

The same problem exists today in the church world-wide. It seems that since we live in an era of grace that somehow we exclude the idea of consequences to sin and that the church has no business getting involved with personal matters of anyone in the body under any circumstance.

Now, granted, it is not the business of the church to peer into every aspect of the life of any individual in the body; but what Paul is talking about here in our text is not some personal sin which has no effect on anyone else, but rather, sin of the type that is detrimental to both the individual as well as the body-at-large.

All of us sin. But, when we begin discussing church discipline as a means of dealing with sin, we're talking about the kind of unrepentant sin that can actually destroy the life of the body of Christ, either through false teaching, divisive attitudes which include gossip, backbiting and so forth, or sins of the magnitude which Paul deals with in our text.

1CO 5:1 "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."

I'm often amused when people make the comment that it would be so wonderful to be part of the early church when it was in its most pure state. But, whenever you are dealing with human beings, be they saved or not, you always run the risk of seeing a side of people that is not very becoming; and this in any age.

As Paul points out, this would be an understatement as it relates to the activity of a particular individual in the church at Corinth.

It's not easily seen in the English, but in the Greek the beginning of verse 5 is an emphatic way of saying that Paul has received

great detail of the facts of this case. "It is actually reported". In other words, 'Someone has given me such detailed information that I cannot help but be compelled, by the living God, to bring this to your attention', is the sense of what Paul is saying.

Now, Paul doesn't reveal who his source is. But we know that Paul lived by the same word that we do; that we don't take such drastic measures unless those involved have first gone to the individual to help them see their sin as they are encouraged to repent. If that doesn't work they bring others. And if that doesn't work then they bring it to the church. Phase three is where Paul is as he has become the arbitrator for the church in this matter.

But, we also know that Paul would never have simply taken the word of just anyone on this matter, and in all likelihood would have demanded corroborating evidence from others before taking such action. And the beginning of this letter to the Corinthians seems to allude to that.

1CO 1:11 "My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you."

Later in this same letter Paul reminds them that he knows of such things taking place at Corinth because of the presence of others who are actually there with the church, which means that some of these same people have approached the members of that church in question who are practicing this ungodly behavior.

1CO 11:18 "In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it."

And so, this is not hear-say. Nor should it ever be hear-say when the issue of church discipline comes up. A certain amount of investigation must take place and witnesses must be brought to bear if such action is to be taken. Remember, this kind of action is last resort, not the first thing we should consider.

What is the charge in Corinth? Sexual immorality of the kind which the pagans don't even practice. In this case someone has his father's wife. And so, we're talking about incest. Now, the way in which this is written leads us to believe that this individual is committing adultery with his step-mother.

If this were his biological mother Paul would likely have said that he was sexually immoral with his mother, not his father's wife.

The way in which this is written suggests that this is not a one-time event, but on-going.

And this is why it has become such an issue because no one in leadership has taken the initiative to address this problem and deal with it in a biblical way, which at this point would be excommunication because of the unrepentant attitude of this person.

By excommunication we mean that the person is put outside of the scope and protection of the church, not to share in the grace and blessings which are found there. And the whole procedure of this kind of discipline is designed to shame the person into repentance so that they can ultimately be restored to Christ and His church.

We usually think of the world of that day as being so depraved and ungodly that anything and everything was okay, and yet during this time in history the Roman empire actually had laws against such behavior as incest.

And so, the charge that not even the pagans or Gentiles were permitted to practice such behavior really brought the heinousness of this sin to the forefront.

But it wasn't the civil law of Rome that motivated Paul to bring this charge against these people, but the law of God.

LEV 18:8 "Do not have sexual relations with your father's wife; that would dishonor your father."

DEU 22:30 "A man is not to marry his father's wife; he must not dishonor his father's bed."

And so, we see clear cases where God's law, even in the midst of an era of grace, still applies in a general sense in directing us to the ways that please God, as well as displeasing Him, and we should abide in His word in such matters.

It's also interesting to note that Paul doesn't even address the woman in this case, only the son of the father whose wife he is with. This might suggest that the woman is probably not a part of the church there in Corinth, which further complicates the problem of being unequally yoked to an unbeliever.

In fact, later in this same chapter Paul tells us that his concern is not judging those outside the church because that is not his jurisdiction.

1CO 5:12-13 "What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? 13 God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."

But as we come back to our text we see that this problem of sexual sin is not the only thing that outrages Paul. That's bad enough, but what heightens this problem is the church's apparent acceptance of it, or at least its indifference to it.

1CO 5:2 "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?"

This idea of being proud is a theme that Paul has brought up earlier in this letter when he confronted these people of taking pride over other people and lifting them up in a way that was not biblical.

The word pride in verse two of our text is the exact same word in the Greek which is translated arrogant in 1CO 4:18 "Some of you have become *arrogant*, as if I were not coming to you."

The idea is being puffed up, having a sense of not being accountable to anyone but themselves. And so, here in our text these people felt that no one, including Paul, had any business in addressing personal matters in the church and that if they felt like dealing with it they would. If they didn't that was okay as well.

But there was another danger here that Paul saw clearly in not dealing with this matter and that was that they may have felt that since we have liberties in Christ this situation could have fallen into that category.

In other words, since we have forgiveness, anything goes and it will be covered without any consequences. But Paul loves these people too much not to straighten out this misconception of the grace of God, if in fact this is what they thought.

And there's little reason not to believe they did have a somewhat twisted view of God's grace when they were willing to come drunk to church as we see in the eleventh chapter of this letter, and to think that it was all right to do such things. But Paul now says something very interesting in the next verse of our text.

1CO 5:3 "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."

A couple of things should be noted here. First, Paul speaks of being with them in spirit. What does this mean? And second, he is passing judgment. I thought we were to judge no man.

Let's deal with the first thing of being there in spirit.

When Paul says that "though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit," he doesn't simply mean that in some sentimental way as though the only sense of his considering them is just in thought.

To be with them in spirit is to be with them as his spirit is in communion with the Father who unites all of us in Christ.

There is no separation in time or in location when you approach God. When we pray for people in Africa, for example, we may not actually be there in the flesh, but because God is there, and we are praying for those people, there is a literal spiritual connection as we intercede on their behalf before God.

This is not to suggest that our spirits somehow transcend to that location as though we're participating in some sort of out of body experience, but it does mean that we can know, because of the fellowship and unity we have in the Holy Spirit, that He brings us together in a way as though He were personally mediating that prayer on their behalf through us, which of course He does.

With God there are no boundaries, which is why Paul can assuredly say that he has already judged this individual as if he were present. Why? Because as God's representative he didn't need to be physically in Corinth to represent God as judge in this matter, because God isn't limited to any location.

Have you ever prayed for someone in another state or country only to find out later that God actually answered that prayer for them? In that sense we are there in spirit because it is the Holy Spirit who makes that connection and puts feet to our requests as though we were there in their presence precisely because we were previously in the presence of God on their behalf.

Our spiritual unity with the rest of the body of Christ world-wide is not some wishful thinking on our behalf, it is reality in the spiritual realm because of Christ's involvement in our lives as He joins us all together into one family.

Now, as far as Paul judging people in the case that we have before us in our text, we need to realize that there is no biblical deterrent

for such judgment. There is a vast difference between this type of judgment and the judgmentalism that Jesus speaks of.

MAT 7:1-5 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. 3 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

This portion of Matthew is in the context of the Sermon on the Mount which is dealing with the abuses of the law. There were Jews, including the Pharisees, who were making up their own rules and then trying to blend them with the word of God.

They were judging people based on their own standard of righteousness, or trying to judge the intent of the heart in certain matters which only God knows.

Those kinds of judgments are not permitted by us and, in fact, if we are trying to simply look for problems in other people's lives as we "play" Holy Spirit, then we've overstepped the biblical boundaries and we should consider our own lives before stepping out on such ground and ask the Spirit to search our hearts.

But, we are commanded by God to judge those in the church when such sin arises that is unrepentant, especially as it will affect the body of Christ in a detrimental way.

In the same gospel of Matthew, we quoted a moment ago, Jesus lays down the rules for proper judgment in the church to help others, not to just point out there sin.

MAT 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. 16 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.' 17 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."

In this case judgment goes from personal involvement between the two parties to bringing the whole church into the matter. The only

way such action can be taken is if a judgment takes place. But it's a judgment based on the word of God.

Luke sums it up well when quoting Jesus in LUK 17:3 "So watch yourselves. "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him."

No church discipline has to take place in such instances when a brother or sister is willing to repent. But, it's the unrepentant attitude that worries Paul. And in such cases a judgment must take place according to the word of God.

And so, Paul has made a judgment based on the information he has received from other believers, and now is taking the appropriate biblical action based on that information.

1CO 5:4-5 "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, 5 hand this man over to Satan, so that the flesh may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord."

This is no longer a private matter. The whole church is to be involved to a lesser or greater degree. The letter is addressed to the entire church in Corinth and yet it is inferred that the leadership deal with this matter as they should have previously, given the authority and power they have in Christ.

As we saw last week this type of authority is not given to every member of the body of Christ. Someone has to actually carry out such discipline. And this task has been delegated by Christ to the Pastor and elders as they involve the congregation to the degree that they alert them to the action and the reasons for such action, in some cases calling on them to be witnesses, and of course involving their prayers as well.

And so, Paul is commanding, not requesting, that the leadership at Corinth carry out the judgment Paul has delegated to them. Now here's the problem we're faced with in our text. What does it mean to hand this man over to Satan?

Well, it would appear that whatever it means it certainly has some dire consequences to it. To involve the father of lies, the one who was a murderer from the beginning, the one who is the accuser of the brethren, the one opposed to God and His people is no small matter.

Again, keep in mind that this action is to be done as they are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus, the One who is supreme in authority. And it is also done with the understanding that the power of the Lord Jesus is present. This is not some make-believe process where we all make ourselves feel better for dealing with a problem.

Remember, where two or three are gathered in Christ's name He is there in their presence. It is worth noting that when Jesus uttered those words it was in the context of disciplining those members who were unrepentant. In fact, it's from the very portion of Matthew 18 we looked at a moment ago regarding if your brother sins against you go to him, etc.

MAT 18:18-20 "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven. 19 "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. 20 ***For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.***"

In the context here Jesus is saying that in cases of church discipline He will stand as the ultimate judge in the matter in the very presence of the assembly of the church. This takes church discipline to new heights as we begin to understand that our Lord does not just overlook unrepentant sin.

In the case before us in Corinth, this man has not only been judged by Paul, but more important, has been judged by Jesus Christ Himself. This doesn't mean that this man will lose his salvation if he is a true believer, but it does mean that there are consequences to his sin. Judging in this case is not the equivalent to condemnation in an eternal sense.

ROM 8:1 "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus..."

However, this doesn't mean that there is no discipline for those who are in Christ Jesus. Now, before we get to the issue of what it means to be delivered over to Satan, I would just like to say that if Jesus is aware of this type of sin in the church, and is willing to discipline it in such an extreme manner, does it not stand to reason that He is aware of all of our sin and would be willing to discipline it accordingly, even though He may not use the leadership of the church to do it?

God doesn't wink at our sin and He expects us to be holy even as our heavenly Father is holy. But back to our text.

"Deliver such a one over to Satan so that the flesh may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord."

Many commentators believe this to mean that this man is to be excommunicated from the church. And this is true as Paul pointed out in verse two of our text. "Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?"

And by the way, the word grief is the Greek word *pentheo* which means to mourn and lament for someone. Is that how we view sin? But in the case before us, to put someone out of the church necessarily places that one in the realm of Satan as they are denied the fellowship of believers.

Now, this doesn't mean we can't have contact with such people, but it is clear that in these cases we are not to extend the right hand of fellowship until they repent. What it also means is that we are to treat them, as Jesus says, "as you would a pagan, or a tax collector." In other words, as an unbeliever. This discipline does not make them an unbeliever, but they are to be treated as though they were an unbeliever.

Now we shouldn't act like jerks around unbelievers, but rather we should have compassion and love for them as we bring them the gospel of Jesus Christ, encouraging them to repent and embrace the only One who can forgive our sin. For the unrepentant believer they should also be encouraged to come to Christ in repentance and faith.

Again, church discipline is not an abandonment of believers, but sometimes extreme measures to get their attention, directing them back to Christ for reconciliation.

But to suggest that excommunication is the only thing Paul means here is to miss the weightiness of this particular judgment. This is not the only time in which Paul makes such a judgment.

1TI 1:18-20 "Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, 19 holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith. 20 Among them are Hymenaeus and

Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme."

We know, for example that the Lord has used Satan in a variety of ways, even among the people of God. Job was an example of how Satan was allowed to deliver physical ailments to a child of God. Now, in Job's case it was not the kind of discipline we see in our text, but the Lord, none the less, allowed Satan to be involved in the process of teaching Job some very important lessons.

In this same letter, for example, Paul warns the church not to presume upon the grace of God as they, or we, willingly and unrepentantly approach Christ in the Lord's Supper.

1CO 11:28-30 "A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. 30 That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep."

The phrase "fallen asleep" is another way of saying some of your number have died for coming to the Lord in an unworthy manner. Ananias and Sapphira should not escape our notice either. Peter confronted them and the discipline which was enacted upon them was physical death as our Lord took them home. And it had its desired effect.

ACT 5:11 "Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events."

You can bet that there was no longer a lax attitude about sin in that community after that, but a holy reverence for God, at least for a while.

I told you that this was not going to be a warm and fuzzy message. Let me just quickly add that simply because someone in the church may get sick or even die, does not necessarily mean that God is judging us for some unconfessed sin. Remember, the curse of sin still exists in the world, which includes death.

But the issue of sin is not taken lightly by God as it pertains even to His people. We are called to be His ambassadors, His representatives. And though this kind of discipline of being handed over to Satan is an extreme case, Christ is not above using such measures to get the attention of the church.

In the case of this individual in Corinth it appears that the afflictions God placed on him at the hands of Satan were not fatal. But it does appear it had its desired effect of bringing him back into the fold as Paul's second letter points out.

Simply because we're forgiven in Christ does not mean that sin is now acceptable to practice with impunity. All sin, large or small, is still sin. We've been delivered from darkness to light, let us walk as children of light in the power of the Spirit, knowing that our Lord will never forsake us as we come to Him seeking forgiveness.

God hated sin enough to send His Son to die in our place to take our penalty for that sin. May we never treat sin lightly in our own lives or in the lives of others as we encourage each other toward love and good deeds in Christ.

Praise God we have forgiveness in Christ. Praise God there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, and praise God that we have the Holy Spirit who is not only our comforter and teacher but our source of strength who enables us to represent our Lord and Savior as others see Christ in us and desire the same gift we have. And praise God for His Spirit who seals us for the day of redemption.

Let me end with some very encouraging words from the apostle Paul.

COL 3:16-17 "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."