

1Corinthians 5:9-13 "Put An Unrepentant Sinner Out"

This morning we're going to finish this section which has been dealing with the discipline of an individual in the church at Corinth. The entire fifth chapter has addressed the problem of this person, but it has also addressed the general problem of the church which has not dealt with it very effectively.

It takes a letter from an apostle hundreds of miles away, who has been informed by a number of different people in this church, who had presumably approached the sinning parties at some point, and yet these parties are not willing to repent or take action, and so Paul feels compelled to step in and do something about it.

He reminds them that despite the distance separating them, God is not separated from them and the Lord will simply declare through His apostle that biblical action is about to enter into the picture to the point where unless this person repents, Satan will be used to ultimately destroy his flesh.

The question is, what does this mean in light of the context?

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

Though Paul has already passed judgment the church or leadership in Corinth is commanded to hand this man over to Satan.

Whatever else is being said here it is obviously part of church discipline that is going on. But this does raise another question. To what end is church discipline enacted on any individual? Well, the same Paul who wrote to the Corinthians is the same Paul who wrote to another church that was being tempted to teach another gospel.

Galatians 6:1 ^{NAU} Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

So, it would seem that restoration is the object of approaching anyone in the church to repent of their sin and be complete or

restored in their faith. But, it is assumed that the one in Galatians is willing to repent.

What if, as in the case of the man who had his father's wife, he was not willing to repent, as seems to be the issue? Are those Christians in Corinth still obligated to restore such a man?

The answer is yes. But the means to that end is more severe since an unrepentant person in the church hurts not only himself but the body as a whole. But the severity in the case at Corinth is not a command from Paul to the church to do bodily harm to the offender but to turn this man over to Satan, which is another way of saying to put him out of the protection of the church in an environment where the flesh and the devil have the effect of humbling this man.

Notice Paul does not say to hand him over to Satan to die but that his flesh may be destroyed, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.

I don't think Paul is absolutely convinced that this man was a true believer who must have his flesh humbled so that his spirit may be saved, but that if he is a true believer and is forced out of the church for a time to suffer under the influences of the world and Satan, then like the prodigal son who wallowed with the swine, he will see his need to return to his heavenly Father as he repents and is subsequently restored.

This is similar to the exhortation Paul gave to Timothy regarding two men in the church who also came under church discipline as they were apparently put out of the body of Christ so that they might learn not to blaspheme the Lord.

1 Timothy 1:19-20 ¹⁹ keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. ²⁰ Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme.

We're not told specifically what constituted them blaspheming God in this case but it may be related to a teaching that Paul would later point out to Timothy in a second letter that does give us one instance where Hymenaeus was causing problems with false teaching in the body.

2 Timothy 2:16-18 ¹⁶ But avoid worldly *and* empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, ¹⁷ and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, ¹⁸ *men* who

have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some.

In the next verse Paul then adds the thought that even though Hymenaeus was a member of that congregation, and who had been handed over to Satan for discipline, Paul leaves the door open that would suggest that Hymenaeus, though part of that body, may or may not be a true believer as he questions the motives of his actions.

2 Timothy 2:19 ¹⁹ Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness."

The lesson here is that one's actions give insights into one's faith. And when one's actions in the body hurt the church and they are unrepentant there are biblical steps to be followed that ultimately lead to excommunication when the sinner is unwilling to repent.

Having said that there was one instance in which church discipline was taken out of the hands of the church and was enacted directly by an apostle to the end that the offenders who were part of the body lost their lives, not at the hands of Satan, but by God Himself.

Acts 5:1-11 ^{NAU} But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, ² and kept back *some* of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet. ³ But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back *some* of the price of the land? ⁴ "While it remained *unsold*, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." ⁵ And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it. ⁶ The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him. ⁷ Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ And Peter responded to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?" And she said, "Yes, that was the price." ⁹ Then Peter *said* to her, "Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out *as well*." ¹⁰ And immediately she fell at his feet and

breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.

Unfortunately, the church at Corinth had not done their due diligence when it came to the issue of this man who had his father's wife and as a result became complicit by allowing the yeast of his sin to effect the congregation there in Corinth.

1 Corinthians 5:7-8 ⁷ Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are *in fact* unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. ⁸ Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

That's where we left off last week. And as we wrap up this section Paul is going to make it clear that one way or another God will not be mocked in the life of His people. God Himself is aware of the problem and He will personally deal with it if the church in Corinth won't.

1CO 5:9-11 "I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people - ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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."

Verse 9 would suggest that Paul had previously written a letter to these Corinthian believers dealing with some of the problems we now see in the letter before us. Some have suggested that if this is the case, then how can we call this letter "First Corinthians" when it's not the first?

Or, we could even go further and suggest that if a previous letter had been written to these people then somehow or another we've lost a Holy Spirit inspired writing from an apostle which should be a part of God's word. And if this is the case, then we do not have the entire Bible .

Now, before anyone begins to panic about such a thing, let me assure you that this Bible is complete from beginning to end. Remember, it is God who has given us His word and He has

miraculously preserved every jot and tittle that He wants us to have. Nothing is to be added, nothing taken away.

And so, simply because Paul may have written previously to these people doesn't mean that it was ever meant to be included in the canon of Scripture. We know that Paul had written a number of letters to churches which have never been found.

Well, how can this be? First, it needs to be noted that simply because Paul put pen to paper doesn't automatically make it Holy Spirit inspired, any more than when he taught in local churches at any particular time that every word that came out of his mouth should be recorded as the very word of God.

We know that he taught in Corinth for a least a year and a half. He taught in Ephesus for almost three and a half years. And in every church in which he taught he most certainly said things which were very instructive. But suppose some studious Christian had taken down his words during those teachings, word for word.

Would this necessarily have made them Scripture? Not at all. To suggest that every time Paul opened his mouth, or even wrote to someone, that he was speaking or writing infallibly would have placed Paul in a position that no mere mortal can claim.

Paul was not infallible. But, when moved by the Holy Spirit to write in such a way that God intended for those words to be recorded for all time for His people, then he wrote infallibly as he was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Suppose Paul wrote to his mom and dad in Tarsus, assuming they were still alive, and suppose he shared some perspective that was theological in nature in that letter. Does that necessarily make it the infallible word of God? No.

What makes it Scripture is what God intends to do with it. Could Paul have written a letter to his mom and dad which was instructive in nature, and God decided to include that as part of Scripture? Absolutely.

The point is that if God wanted any communication to be part of the written word of God which we have in our possession today, He would have moved heaven and earth to have included it in the canon of Scripture.

ISA 40:8 "The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever."

By the way, when we use the word canon, as in canon of Scripture, we simply mean the accepted books of Scripture. I touch on this because there are those both inside and outside of the church who would try to bring doubt and confusion by suggesting that God has hidden something from us by not giving us every letter any apostle ever wrote.

It is the Holy Spirit who determines what will be Scripture, not some individual person or group of persons who determine this. To put this power in the hands of fallible men is to create the possibility that what we have in our possession could in fact not be from God.

When Paul wrote to Timothy in his second letter that all Scripture is God-breathed, he means that what God wants to be Scripture will be so only as the Holy Spirit reveals it and is accepted by the world as the Spirit bears witness to the truth, and in the process the Spirit is directly involved in the providence and guidance of making His word a reality.

People want to get all hung up by suggesting that only men wrote the bible and therefore men have the final say as to what is contained in the Scriptures. If men can get in the way of what our Almighty God wants to reveal, then the word we possess leaves doubt as to its veracity.

If God can speak the universe into existence; if God can turn the hearts of people to seek Him; if He can come into this world as a man, die for our sin and then defeat the grave through His own resurrection, then how hard can it be for Him to make sure that we have His mind and will as it's revealed in the written word of God?

Don't let the world, or people who claim to be Christians, shake you when it comes to the very word of God. Study it, meditate upon it and know for certain that it is God who revealed it to men as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, and then walk according to it in the power of the Spirit.

Back to our text. Paul had previously written to this church in Corinth and what he wrote to them was that they shouldn't associate with sexually immoral people.

That would seem straight-forward enough, and yet it appears that these Corinthians had taken, what Paul assumed was a clear message, and turned it on its head. And so, now he is going to

make it quite clear by adding his own commentary on this previous letter.

They evidently thought that when Paul said not to associate with any immoral person that the "any" he was referring to were those outside of the body of Christ. In other words, the unbelieving world.

Now, it would be very easy to find immorality in the world. And so, to accomplish that misunderstood command, these Corinthians may have decided to avoid anybody outside of their fellowship. And so, in essence, if that was the case, they would have become a closed community.

The problem with this attitude is that if the church is meant to be reaching out to the lost, it's pretty hard to do this unless you come face to face with them. When Jesus gave us what we call the great commission He didn't mean we could accomplish this without going out to the world.

MAT 28:18-20 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

In fact, Paul most certainly taught these Corinthians about the life of Christ. And somewhere in that teaching they must have heard how Jesus didn't limit Himself to just the 12 while excluding everyone else in the world.

LUK 5:27-31 "... Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, 28 and Levi got up, left everything and followed him. 29 Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. 30 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" 31 Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.
32 I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Jesus sought sinners. And praise God, He continues to seek sinners like you and me and gives us life in Christ as we repent of

our sin and embrace our Lord's atoning sacrifice for the penalty of our sin.

If no one had shared the gospel with us, who were at one time part of the world, how would we have heard and known what Jesus has done for us? In fact, Paul reminds these Corinthians that they too were once part of the world to which they're now not going with the good news.

1CO 6:9-11 "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 ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ ***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."

Now, what Paul meant when he previously wrote these Corinthian believers is that all of those in the world who might fit the description he just gave, must still be sought and given the gospel.

That doesn't mean we participate in their deeds any more than Jesus did when He was with the tax gatherers and sinners of every stripe. But we must go, as Christ commands, into all the world with the gospel.

So, what did Paul mean by not associating with immoral people? Well, you would think this would have meant the world where this sort of thing goes on; not with the church where it shouldn't be going on.

But, as we've seen, this sort of thing can happen even in the church, but it is not to be overlooked. When referring to immoral people in his previous letter Paul makes it clear in our text who he is referring to.

1 Corinthians 5:10-11 ¹⁰ I *did* not at all *mean* with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. ¹¹ But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-- not even to eat with such a one.

Paul says, 'look, if I meant for you not to associate with anyone in the world who was immoral then you'd have to leave this planet

because it's full of immoral people. On the contrary, these are the very people you need to reach out to.

Rather, from a disciplinary stand-point, concerning one of those who is in the church, Paul is saying that not only are they to be put outside of the church, but they must also forfeit any fellowship of those within the church.

Until they repent, they are to have no association with other believers in the body of Christ. Notice in verse 11 that Paul makes that distinction. He says, [don't] "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."

Paul is making the statement that if someone in the church would sin in such a way as the world does, without any remorse or repentance when approached by others in the church, then who knows if they are true believers. But, he doesn't go so far as to say that they actually are unbelievers.

He refers to him as one who "calls himself a brother", but is immoral in behavior. The NASB uses the phrase "any so-called brother", while the NKJV uses the phrase, "anyone named a brother."

What he means by this is that if someone has made a credible profession of faith in Christ, and they are acting like this individual in Corinth, then they are Christian in name only as far as their behavior is concerned.

Again, this doesn't mean that they may not actually be a Christian, but you can't tell from their behavior, and since we don't ultimately know the heart, we must treat them as children of Christ who need His discipline.

We don't discipline unbelievers. Discipline is reserved only for God's covenant community in Christ even if they are believers in name only. Often times the wheat and tares reside together. But it is only for Christ to ultimately distinguish between them. We must go on what we've been told by the person.

Now, we might wonder if Paul isn't exaggerating a bit when he says that a brother may be sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. The fact is, that even though we've been delivered from such sin, it does not exclude the possibility of choosing such sin.

The normal pattern for a believer should be holiness because our Father who purchased us through the shed blood of His Son is holy, but that pattern can be broken if the individual's selfishness and lack of regard for his heavenly Father takes precedence.

John MacArthur makes the statement though that "the believer will never become totally sinful, [he] may be sinful enough at certain points in his life to be characterized as an unbeliever."

This is what Paul is referring to here in our text. He's not addressing the person who sins, because we all sin, but the person who is making sin a pattern in his life. To break that pattern, God will often times use drastic measures, including the kind of discipline found in our text.

But, because a pattern of sin exists, which this person is not willing to repent of, part of that discipline must include a total removal from the church and those individuals in the church as it relates to the normal graces extended, including fellowship.

As a quick note here, Paul doesn't limit immorality to this man's adulterous relationship with his father's wife, but includes all types of unrepentant immorality like being greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler.

In fact, every one of these types of sin is implied in other individuals within this church. As we get further into this letter Paul points this out.

But back to our particular unrepentant sinner in Corinth. Paul says at the end of verse 11, don't even eat with such a one. Why would Paul say such a thing? Because this is designed to show the heart of this person. If they are a true believer then being scorned by the church will eventually soften their hearts to want to come back into fellowship.

And so, it's implied that when they are put out of the church, the grace to receive them back under the circumstances that they are repentant must be extended at the time of them being put out.

Again, discipline is not meant to abandon a brother or sister, but to finally reconcile a brother or sister after that discipline has had its desired effect by God as they recognize their sin and repent of it. This type of discipline is designed by God only for professing believers.

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."

Even as an apostle, Paul is not willing to make judgments on unbelievers which would result in some form of discipline. Paul is not concerned with going to individual unbelievers and trying to change their behavior through some form of discipline.

And even if he could modify their outward behavior, that wouldn't change their heart condition which only God can change. That doesn't mean Paul isn't concerned with the world's immorality, but primarily to the degree that that immorality will be paid for by the individual being eternally separated from God.

Church discipline won't change that for the world, the gospel will. And this is why Paul put his life on the line continually for Jesus Christ. And so, when he says that he has nothing to do with judging outsiders, it's in the context of church discipline and the type of judging reserved only for God.

But Paul assures us in verse 13 that God does judge those who are outside in the world. And when it comes to placing one outside of the church they are put in the world in a very real sense. And it is in that context that God will judge the unrepentant offender.

"Expel the wicked man from among you."

The writer of Hebrews also addresses a similar situation with those who say they have accepted Jesus Christ and yet because of their behavior have denied His grace through deliberate sinfulness.

HEB 10:29-31 "How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." 31 It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Only God ultimately knows the heart of a person. And His judgment in such matters, as we have in our text, will result in either the true believer being turned around or possibly being taken home to be with Christ, as with Ananias and Sapphira, so that they will not continue to dishonor the Lord.

Or that judgment will result in being condemned by God because they were not truly believers. But since we don't truly know the heart of a person we must treat them as brothers or sisters who have professed faith in Christ and carry out such discipline in the hopes that they do repent.

I like the way John MacArthur sums it up. "It is not the ones who recognize their sin and hunger for righteousness who are to be put out of fellowship, but those who persistently and unrepentantly continue in a pattern of sin about which they have been counseled and warned.....

..... We should continue to love them and pray for them that they repent and return to a pure life. If they do repent we should gladly and joyfully forgive and comfort them and welcome them back into fellowship."

As I mentioned a couple weeks ago this discipline seems to have been effective for this individual who had his father's wife. Paul writes in his second letter:

2CO 2:5-8 "If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you, to some extent - not to put it too severely. 6 The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. 7 Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. 8 I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him."

Whether it was this individual in 1Corinthians being referred to or not, the message is clear; forgive when they repent and embrace them back into the fellowship.

Love does cover a multitude of sins, especially the sins of a repentant brother or sister who seeks forgiveness from the Lord and in turn from the church. May we love God above all and not seek after our own ways, but may we also love one another to speak the truth in love so that none would fall into the ways of this world, or the desires of the flesh.

May God be glorified in our lives in everything we do and everything we say.