

Church Discipline

1 Cor 5: 1-13

" IT is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you and of a kind that that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. 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? Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgement on the one who did this just as if I was present. When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit and he power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.

Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? 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. 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.

I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people- 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. 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.

What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you.""

Good morning, this is one of those chapters of the Bible that we would rather skip through and move on to the next one rather than hearing the truth that is in it. Discipline is never an easy topic to hear about or to speak on. But the fact that it is here in God's word and also in other chapters of the Bible probably most well known is Matthew 18:15-17 which clearly gives us instructions on how to deal with a brother who sins against us. There are also a whole list of commands, many of which include discipline in the sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5.

I want to say here that I am not aware of anyone in our congregation at present who is tainted by what I am about to say, but it is only by the grace of God and I am aware of folk not too far away from us who have been affected by it and it is not to say we won't be at some future date.

The first part of the chapter (1-8) deals with a very unsavoury sexual affair between a man and his step-mother. The man would appear to be in a fairly senior position in the church and rather than condemning him for his behaviour the congregation it is being reported widely in the world outside of the church that they are condoning it and letting the affair continue right under their noses with no action being taken against him.

Note in verse one it says "It is actually reported". This is not someone from within the church expressing concern to Paul, although hopefully there was such a person, but Paul is hearing these

reports from non Christians. One of the things that happens, as I'm sure you will have experienced, when you openly declare your Christianity is that it is almost as if you are in a greenhouse. All your non Christian and some Christian friends look on your life far more closely and if you do the slightest thing wrong they are often heard to exclaim, hopefully to you, but probably more often those around them that " As a Christian I didn't think He/she would do that, or say that, or go there, or speak to them or--- any number of other things" That is what has happened here. News of what this man is doing has got out into the wider world and the reaction of the church fellowship to what is going on is also subject to discussion as well. Never underestimate the people around you who are not Christians who will seize every opportunity they can to discredit you and by implication the church. It is for this reason that Paul is writing to the Corinthian church in very blunt terms about the action they should be taking about this man. He bluntly tells them that it doesn't matter what position he holds he needs to be treated as any other would - they are to take him out of fellowship and "hand this man over to Satan" not literally but Satan is the ruler of the non Christian world and it is to that world he should be returned, not out of spite or malice but in the hope that he will come to his senses and realise that he is losing far more by being taken out of fellowship with Christ than the short term gratification he is getting from his liaison, he would earnestly repent and turn again to the Lord.

Paul uses the example of yeast in bread to show that just as a small amount will spread throughout the whole loaf, then one sin left to develop and remain unchallenged will soon spread throughout the whole church. Better to expel the yeast of malice and wickedness and eat instead unleavened bread the bread of sincerity and truth.

Paul then goes on to express his thoughts about how the Corinthians and we should live and act in this corrupt world around us and the discipline we as Christians should impose on ourselves and those who are brothers and sisters in Christ.

What is sin? In Corinth and if we're honest in our own hearts we have certain "pet" sins for which we have tons of tolerance, whilst there are others that we condemn immediately. This list hits every area of our lives and should convict everyone of us in way as none of us are perfect and all of us fail to measure up. A very simple example is the speed limits of our land. Believe it or not it is 70 mph on motorways and 30 mph in town. I was convicted of driving above these limits regularly some years ago now by a sermon brought by Fiona's son Neil and almost always now drive at or within the legal limits. It's amazing, especially in built up areas how many people will pip their horns to try to move you faster than the 30 limit. I share that not to sound pious, although I probably do, but as an example of one of the sins I condemn immediately (breaking the law of the land is a sin!)

So how are we to judge or make distinctions?

Are we all one sin away from excommunication and condemnation? No! That is not good news! So who does this apply to and why?

When sin by a Christian brother or sister is exposed or even held up then we, both pastor and church have a responsibility to confront it and encourage brothers and sisters to repent and walk in a manner worthy of our calling. We do so lovingly and help them escape from sin because they

are part of our family. This is not the one off sin that we all commit from time to time but a continuous pattern of sin from which they do not show any sign of relinquishing.

If you are aware of a brother or sister who is pursuing a sin in overt, explicit or extreme manner, then they are choosing to be identified with their sin more than their Saviour. As a Christian you cannot pursue both. There is no place in the covenant family for those whose lives are defined by sin rather than Christ. It has to be judged, or it is accepted. It has to be purged or it is received. I would at this point suggest that this is best handled by the church pastor, unless he or she is involved themselves! And you should refer to them rather than confronting by yourself although this is not always possible.

When someone is in full pursuit of sin they need to be made aware it is not acceptable for citizens of the kingdom of God to continue to walk in darkness. They will believe, wrongly, if unchecked, that they can experience the benefits of the kingdom in this life and the next without submitting to the King. There can be no "double agent" ambassadors for Christ. You cannot have dual citizenship with the world and God's kingdom. A man cannot serve two masters. If someone continues to pursue sin it will be destructive, both to them and the church left unchecked.

Besides Jesus there is no-one perfect in the church. We all have sin past, present and future that we are confessing, asking forgiveness for and repenting of. We are also seeking to grow in our relationship with our Father God. A community defined and made distinct from the world by the gospel cannot be a place where some of us are actively fighting sin whilst others are pursuing the same sins. We are all recovering sin addicts. We are also seeking rest and refuge from sins committed to us or against us. Churches have walls and security. If someone has been the victim of sexual immorality or a greedy swindler, or any other number of sins; seeks asylum in the church and becomes a new citizen as Jesus promises all those who turn to Him in repentance. Then they need to have some expectation of safety when they are in the church. Evil allowed to remain within will tear down the walls from the inside. The church needs to be a safe place for God's saints to heal from the world and be equipped to return to the mission field.

The church needs to be distinct from the world around us. Sin is destructive, sin hurts and is never contained. Someone pursuing a life of sin whilst claiming to be a Christian and who has the tacit agreement of the church will come into contact with the world and the world will assume, not surprisingly, their actions and/or lifestyle are representative of the church and the kingdom they represent. People blatantly and deliberately pursuing a sinful lifestyle cannot be allowed to soil the reputation of the church or God by foolish destructive actions; they need to be dealt with.

Our expectations and our interactions within the church are, and if not should be, different than those within the world. We need to remember that this world is not our home. As a church and as ambassadors for Christ we need to acknowledge where our borders and authority ends.

We can grieve the sins of the world but our place is not to judge the sins of the world. That is the role of Jesus. He will return. There will be judgement. If your faith is in this world, then know that this world will pass away and there is wrath for those who don't serve Jesus. If your faith is in Jesus, He took the wrath of God on the cross for you and you will be a full citizen in the new kingdom. That is good news!

Revelation 21:1-5 tells us:

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 2 Behold the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away." And He who was seated on the throne said, "Behold I am making all things new."

We have been given the responsibility of being ambassadors for Christ's church until that day comes. We need to take our responsibilities seriously and where we see persistent wrong doing among our brothers and sisters in Christ, we need to confront it and deal with it, however painful that may be, in order to protect the individual and hopefully restore them to fellowship but also for the protection of the church and those who worship in it.

As I said at the beginning I am not aware of anything within our church at the present time that requires church discipline to be enacted, but please let's not get complacent, it may be and we're not aware of it yet, or it certainly could be at some point in the future. We need to be ever vigilant.

AMEN.

Further Scriptures: John 17: 14-18

Romans 5: 6-8

2 Cor 5: 17

1 Peter 2: 9-10

"The kingdom is to be in the midst of your enemies. And he who will not accept this does not want to be of the kingdom of Christ. He wants to be among friends, to sit among roses and lilies, not with the bad people. Oh you blasphemers and betrayers of Christ! If Christ had done what you are doing, who would ever have been spared?" - Martin Luther