

Intro:

Church: are you serious? Hope is to move from disgust and distance to dedication to Jesus and his desires for the church. Today we tackle the general issue of how do we help each other deal with our moral and spiritual shortcomings, our sins (sins are the things we do that go what God desires for us), so that we can become more like the people Jesus wants us to be?

A couple of things to note:

- We need each other. Some of us, perhaps many of us, think spirituality is a private thing that we shouldn't talk about. We may feel a bit hesitant today as we embark on our conversation. But the reality is that we need each other. Hopefully, by the end of our time, you'll be more open to that idea.

- We need a moral standard beyond ourselves. What do I mean?

Some of us might react to this passage by saying, "this is why I don't like the church, they're they get in my business when they shouldn't (a reaction from our private spirituality), and they get hung up about morality that seems nit-picky and narrow-minded (although that feeling probably comes from a misapplication of this passage)!" Yet at the same time, we're probably the ones that also say, "I don't like church because they're full of a bunch of hypocrites. The church needs to deal with hypocrisy."

What can we say about this? Well, first off- yes, Christians can indeed be too narrow minded, adding on to the teachings of Jesus in ways that speak more of cultural preference than the way of Jesus. And yes, the church can be full of hypocrisy- terrible hypocrisy that must be corrected.

But I hope we realize that as we say and think these things, we are essentially acknowledging that someone does need to set a standard- a standard that can push back on the narrow mindedness out there, and a standard that can also address the hypocrisy in the church. Usually we're setting the standard. But I want to propose to you that God is probably better at setting the standard than us. And so I hope that today we can come with an open heart and mind to Him, and this passage of the Bible, letting it call the shot for us. It'll cause some reactions, yes, but try and wait till the end before concluding anything.

What I'd like to do is go through this passage and understand it on its own terms first, and then take a step back and ask the broader question: How do we help each other with our shortcomings, our sins, in the church community? As we've noted before, our conversations here have involved getting into an ancient letter written almost 2000 years ago. As such, it's important to understand the context, or else our application to today can go awry. And so we'll be sure to dive into the passage and what it meant.

Read Text: 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

You can see that this is a passage about dealing with a very specific situation in a very specific community. We need to beware of generalizing in ways that are incorrect, given the very specific nature of this. Let's go through the specifics in this passage first, and then take a step back and talk about the bigger issue of how to help each other deal with our sins in this community.

Three things we need to be clear on with this text:

1. The sin involved

- a. Involves person who claims to be a Jesus follower, but is completely out of line with the lifestyle Jesus asks for (v.11). This is not meant for a person still seeking Jesus.
- b. A sin that is clear, not grey (v.1)
- c. Ongoing (v.1)
- d. No sense of guilt, no mourning, no prick of conscience, no conviction (v.2)
- e. Communal approval (v.2)

Summary: Clear, ongoing, deliberate, sin in a supposed Christian where there is no pang of wrong doing and no effort to change. This passage and its actions do not apply to Christians who experience sin as a struggle- who have given their lives to Jesus and are trying to change, but can't seem to change. This does not apply to lifestyle preferences that are where it may unclear if the action is sinful or not: Chapters 7-9 will deal more with what we might call grey areas or issues. This passage and its actions do not apply to those of us who have not made a decision to follow Jesus yet. No, we're dealing with a clear, ongoing, deliberate sin where there is no sense of conviction in the individual and the community.

2. The Action Involved

Put people out of the Christian community (v.3-5)

This is mentioned at the end of v. 2, and elaborated in the second paragraph. Paul puts it in what seems to be a confusing and rather horrifying way to us at first- hand this person over to Satan! What is he talking about? Two things to understand. 1) Satan is the one who is control of the world; us as followers of Jesus and as a church were taken out of his domain when we decided to follow Jesus (1 John 5:19, Col. 1 :13), 2) Flesh and spirit are terms used in Paul's writings not to refer to the body and spirit, but to modes of existence. The flesh refers to a mode of existence completely void of God. The spirit refers to a mode of existence completely in line with God. So what the passage is saying here that the community should put someone out of the church community, out of fellowship, into the "world," for the hopes that their sinful way of living might be destroyed, and that their life for God might be brought out and lived out. This idea of putting out is confirmed in v.2, 13.

Note:

This sort of action is the last resort. I say this because this passage is based on both the prior teachings in the Bible, one of which includes the teaching of Jesus. Jesus has this sort of action as being for the last resort (Matt 18:15-17). The second half of our discussion here today will be about how we can deal with sin without having to getting to the last resort, so we'll pick that up a little later. Needless to say, in our context here this Corinthian church had to take this last resort and put this person out.

3. *The purpose of the action.*

There are three reasons given.

- a. For the sake of the individual. (v. 5)
- b. For the sake of the community. (v.6)
- c. For the sake of our identity. (v. 7)

The latter two are described in the next paragraph. A couple of background facts you need to know to get the point here.

1. Leaven was the small batch of dough that you would keep from last week's dough to put in this week's dough so that the bread this week would rise. It contained yeast- that's why it would rise- and that would permeate the entire dough. The metaphor is clear: a little bit of sin can influence the whole group. So this action is need for the sake of the community and its well being.

2. The passage also assumes the backdrop of the Jewish Feast of Unleavened Bread. First described in Exodus 12, this was a feast to commemorate the greatest act of salvation recorded in the first part of the Bible- the Exodus, or deliverance of the Jewish people out of Egyptian slavery.

Two important things to remember about the story. First, God convinced the Egyptians to let the Jewish people go with a number of plagues, the last of which was the most deadly: the killing of all firstborn sons in the country in a single night. However, a son could be spared if a family did the following: kill a lamb, take the blood of the lamb and put it on the doorposts of the house before that evening came. If God saw a house with the blood of a lamb on the doorpost, he would pass over that house and not touch the firstborn there (hence, the English name for the day).

Second, the Jewish people were to make for themselves bread without leaven in preparation to leave. The thinking was that they would not have enough time to wait for the leaven to work; they had to leave quickly in the night.

Both of these details were memorialized by the Jewish people through a yearly festival still celebrated today in the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is also sometimes simply called the Passover (although slightly modified from its original guidelines in Exodus 12). This festival in Biblical times would start with the sacrifice and consumption of a lamb, and then involve the disposal of all leaven and yeast items in a household. For the whole week, no leaven or yeast items were allowed in the house. Bread was still to be eaten, but without any yeast- a new piece of dough would without yeast would be used. And then, after the week, yeast would be allowed back in, and the process of keeping a bit from the previous week for the present week would start over.

Why do we need to know all this? Simply put- Paul is using this whole celebration as a metaphor to explain why they needed to take this sort of drastic action we've been talking about. And specifically, he will emphasize an issue of identity. Notice how he does this:

He says put out the old leaven, as in the first day of the festival. Meaning: get rid of sin. But then he goes on: Be the new batch of dough (lump), that leaven-free batch. Be free of sin. This is an issue of our identity- "to be" something has to do with our identity. As Jesus followers, we are people who are considered as holy, people who are no longer defined by sin. How is this possible? The passage continues: You are already leaven-free, because of the Passover lamb. You

are already free of sin, because Jesus has died for you. And so we should celebrate the festival- live lives leaven-free lives!

This touches on a key point that we emphasized at the beginning of the series, a key point reiterated throughout the Bible. The Bible never asks us to do good things on our own so we can somehow attain to a certain spiritual status like holiness or purity- "yes, you are holy, now you can be accepted by God." The Bible's process is this: Jesus makes you new, he makes you holy- so live like it! You and I have a new identity.

Summary: For the sake of the individual, the church community, and their identity, the Christians at Corinth had to take these serious measures.

Questions?

How do we help each other with our shortcomings, our sins, in the church community?

1. Create Relationships of Grace

Its clear that none of this can happen without relationships. But we need a certain type of relationships- one full of grace.

Remember when Paul opens up this letter, this is his emphasis.

Paul... to the church of God that is in Corinth... grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus... 1 Corinthians 1:1-4

What is grace? God's love and acceptance, his care and good will toward us despite our performance, our worthiness or unworthiness, our success or failure. God's love and goodness simply because he wants to, because it gives him great joy. This sort of grace was expressed ultimately in Jesus and his first coming- his coming to us, his taking of our sins and the consequences of sin that should have come upon us. And this grace continues to us today as He is patient with us as we journey toward Him.

What does it mean to have relationships of grace? Embracing this grace for ourselves, showing this grace to others.

- Relationships where the backdrop is genuine love and care.
- Relationships where people know we have their best interest in mind.
- Relationships where there is patience yet firmness.
- Relationships where there is a great sense of safety.
- Relationships where we know that Jesus has already taken the consequences of sin- we don't have to make people take more.

Our challenge: many of us, I would guess, have never experienced grace. So we have to build up ourselves.

2. Be Clear and Honest

v. 8- sincerity and truth.

- Clarity on what is sin and not sin. This comes from getting into a relationship with Jesus in which he speaks to us from the Bible.
- Clarity and honesty with ourselves, God, and others if sin is present. Instead of hiding, we let people in.

3. Take Practical Steps Together

Matthew 18 is an example of some practical steps that Jesus gave as it deals with talking about sin- important to follow, or else we end up with things like gossip and slander, things we do not want to have.

But we also need practical steps as it relates to actually helping each other through our sins, especially since some of them can take some time to overcome.

****Testimony****

Challenge:

What is your next step?

- Get in a relationship and open up. With Jesus. With others.
- Be a person of grace.

Extra Study Notes:

v.1- the word translated “sexual immorality” is porneia, and was used in the Bible as a general term for all forms of prohibited and deviant sexual intercourse. Jesus uses the word in Matt. 5:32, 15:19, 19:9, Mark 7:21.

v.1- While the term is literally “father’s wife,” in Lev. 18:7-8, there is a distinction between someone’s “mother” and someone’s “father’s wife.” Because of this, most scholars agree that the text is talking stepmother here. That Greco Roman culture saw incest as bad is seen in many sources. One example is Cicero (Pro Cluentio 5.27): “mother-in-law marries son-in-law... Oh, to think of the woman’s sin, unbelievable, unheard of in all experience save for this single instance!”

v. 2- “arrogant” is the same word used 4:6, 18, 19.

v. 3- Present in S/spirit- most likely refers to both the Holy Spirit and Paul’s spirit. Because Paul is joined to them in Spirit (they are all one in Spirit given 6:17), somehow he is present there because the Spirit is there (3:16). This is in contrast to those who think he is not coming (4:18). See Col. 2:5.

v. 5- That the world outside of the church is the place of Satan, see Eph 2:2, Col. 1:13, 1 John 5:19). Christians have been rescued from this (Col 1:13, Acts 26:18).

v.6- “boasting”- the same root has been used so far in 1:29, 31; 3:21, 4:7.

v.9- for the timeline of the previous letter, see notes from our first talk in the series (www.ethnos.us).

v. 10, 11- Why these specific other sins listed? Two potential reasons: 1) The sins, according to Jewish and Greco-Roman thinking, could be associated with sexual immorality. 2) The sins were those that warranted exclusion from the community, according to Deuteronomy... fornicator-22:20-22, 30; idolater- 17:2-7; malicious false witness/reviler- 19:15-19; drunkard/rebellious son- 21:20-21; swindler/thief- 24:7.

v.13- A quotation used often in the Mosaic Law: Deut 13:5, 17:7, 19:1-20, 21:21, 24:7.