

CGYG & LIFE Bible Study: 1 Corinthians 5:6-13

Bob and Larry had grown up in the church and were good friends. One day, Larry told Bob and some others in his men's group that he was in a sexual relationship with someone from his workplace. Bob and the others from the group spent a lot of time in the next few weeks with Larry, trying to explain from Scripture why this was wrong and to call on him to end the relationship. In the end, Larry refused to break off the relationship. As Bob and the others left Larry's place, Bob said, "I'm sorry, Larry. We've been friends for a long time and I love you, but you leave us no option but to bring this forward to the church"; to which Larry replied, "Why don't you guys just stop judging me? You're so concerned about what the Bible says about what I'm doing, but aren't you forgetting that Jesus told you to take the plank out of your eye before taking the speck out of your brother's eye? Some of you guys have shared in men's group about your struggles with lust, and Jesus said that whoever looks lustfully at a woman has committed adultery with her in his heart. So how are you and I any different? Maybe I should bring all of you forward to the church?" What (if anything) would you say in response?

Read 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

-For review: What problems in the church at Corinth does Paul deal with in this chapter?

- Sexual sin / immorality within the church, and of a kind not even tolerated by pagans
 - e.g. a man having an ongoing sexual relationship with his father's wife
- But perhaps just as disturbing to Paul was the lax attitude the Corinthians seemed to have towards sin in their midst
 - accepted/tolerated this immorality in their midst as if nothing were wrong
- pride/arrogance (v.2, 6) – previously, we saw they were boasting about various leaders (chapters 1-4) and some were acting arrogantly against Paul & his authority
 - possibly they were even proud/boasting about their tolerance/acceptance of this man's immorality

-In v. 2-5, what does Paul command the Corinthians to do (cf. Matthew 18:15-20), and to what end?

- calls on the Corinthians to remove the man from fellowship (and stop associating with him – 5:9-11)
 - calls on the church to follow through on Jesus' command in Matt. 18:17 – when gathered in his name and in His power
 - Paul refers to this as delivering the man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh
 - putting the man out of the fellowship of the people of God, and back into the world (i.e. the domain of Satan)
 - “for the destruction of the flesh” – i.e. so that he might come to repentance- ‘flesh’ refers not necessarily to the physical body, but to the passions/desires of the flesh
 - in repentance, the flesh/sinful nature needs to be crucified/put to death
 - The goal of this process is restoration – “so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord” (v.5)

Read 1 Corinthians 5:6-8

-What imagery is Paul is alluding to in these verses, and what does it say about Christian living? (cf. Exodus 12:1-20) How did it apply to the situation in Corinth, and how does it apply today?

- Paul uses the imagery of the celebration of the Passover (Exodus 12:1-20) – maybe he was writing around the time of Passover
 - Passover is a commemoration of God's deliverance of His people Israel from Egypt
 - The Israelites were instructed to kill a lamb and put some of its blood on doorposts of their houses
 - God struck down the firstborn of the Egyptians but passed over & spared the people of Israel when He saw the blood
 - The Israelites had to leave Egypt in haste – ate unleavened bread (i.e. without yeast) because there was no time for the bread to be leavened (Exod. 12:39)
 - In the Passover feast, the Israelites were commanded not only to eat unleavened bread for 7 days, but to remove all leaven out of their houses for 7 days
 - anyone who ate anything leavened would be cut off from the congregation (Exod. 20:19)
- Paul uses the Passover as an image of the deliverance that we have in Christ
 - Christ as the Passover lamb who was sacrificed (1 Cor. 5:7) so that God, seeing His blood, would pass over us and spare us from His judgment
 - leaven (i.e. a small piece of fermented dough left over from the last batch) is used as a picture of sin/contamination
 - just as a small amount of leaven spreads through an entire lump of dough, so a small amount of sin can spread through and contaminate the entire church, if not dealt with & cleansed out (v.6-7)
- Paul likens leaven to malice & evil - which were infecting the Corinthian church
 - calls on the Corinthians to rid themselves of these and instead to celebrate what Christ has done for us with the 'unleavened bread of sincerity and truth' (v.8)
 - calls on the Corinthians to become what they already are in Christ (since Jesus Christ has already been sacrificed as our Passover lamb) – a 'new lump' without leaven
 - i.e. we are already justified & sanctified in Christ – we ought therefore to live out this reality, and maintain purity in our own lives, and in the Church
 - includes the exercise of proper discipline, if needed – those who ate leavened bread during the Passover feast were to be cut off from the people, as Paul commands the Corinthians to do with the man living in sin

Read 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

-Why does Paul make a distinction between associating with the people “of this world” who may live immorally and with those who call themselves brothers (i.e. Christians) but live the same way?

- Paul had previously written to the Corinthians to tell them not to associate with sexually immoral people (v.9)

- some may have misunderstood (or deliberately misapplied) Paul's teaching – Paul writes to clarify that he was referring not to non-believers who may be living immoral lifestyles, but to those doing so while calling themselves brothers (believers)
- Christ's followers are sent into the world to testify to the truth about God (e.g. Matthew 28:18-20; John 17:14-23)
 - not for us to judge those outside the church – that is left to God, at His appointed time (5:12)
 - rather, we are to share the Gospel with them; God can save even the foremost of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15)
 - bringing the good news of His salvation in Christ to the world requires that we interact with the world
 - at the same time, we are to be 'in the world' but not 'of the world' (John 17:14-16)
 - not to be tainted by/partake in the same sins that the world, as these things lead to destruction (e.g. 1 Cor. 6:9-20)
- But those who claim to know Christ (i.e. who bear the name of brother (or sister)) yet refuse to turn away from sin are not living consistently with who they are / what they've been called to be in Christ (cf. Passover analogy in 5:6-8)
 - deceiving themselves (cf. Gal. 6:7-8) and risk destruction
 - also risk leading other believers astray by their example → risks God's judgment/discipline

-What does Paul command the Corinthian church regarding those in their midst who identify as brothers (or sisters) in Christ but persist in sinful ways (cf. Matthew 18:15-17; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15)? What might this look like in the context of the church today?

- put them out of fellowship – remove from among you (v.1); not to associate with them (v.9); don't even eat with them (v.11); judge them (v.12); purge them from among you (v.13)
 - Matthew 18:17 – treat them as they (Jews) would Gentiles and tax collectors (i.e. no association)
 - 2 Thess. 3:14-15 – have nothing to do with them - not regarding as enemies, but warning them as brothers
- this applies not just to sexual immorality, but to other sins as well
 - for example, greed; idolaters, revilers (i.e. those who are hypocritical in an abusive or insulting way); drunkards; swindlers
 - not an exhaustive list; similar (but different) lists are provided elsewhere in Paul's epistles (e.g. Gal. 5:19-21)
 - at issue is not with people struggling with sin and failing, but with refusal to repent/stubborn persistence in sin, over against others in the Church calling on them to repent
- there are differences in opinion regarding the scope of this command – e.g. does this apply only to the church collectively and its relationship to the erring brother/sister (e.g. in the context of the Lord's Supper or other times the church is assembled), or should all members of the church also refuse to associate with the person on an individual basis?

-How does Paul's call to judge those inside the church (5:12) harmonize with Jesus' instructions in Matthew 7:1-5, to "Judge not, that you be not judged"? What happens when the church fails to exercise appropriate judgment?

- different kind of 'judgment' in view in 1 Cor. 5 than in Matt. 7 (different nuance in the use of 'judge')
- Matthew 7:1-5 speaks to a self-righteous, judgmental or critical spirit/attitude that calls out others' faults while ignoring your own
 - an attitude that seeks to tear down rather than build up
 - illustration of wanting to take a speck out of brother's eye while ignoring the log in your own eye
- 1 Cor. 5 speaks to the need to confront sin so that it can be confessed, repented of, and forgiven → so that restoration may occur
 - speaking the truth and conducting discipline in love, with grieving over the sin, and in recognition that all are in need to grace and forgiveness
 - aim is to restore and build up (5:5), not to tear down
- The church may fail to exercise appropriate judgment...
 - by neglecting to exercise needed discipline as described in 1 Cor. 5 → risks further spread of sin through the church, and inviting God's judgment/discipline
 - by being harsh & unloving in its judgments (not following the patterns laid down in passages like Matthew 18 or 1 Cor. 5) → damages people and the church

-What does 1 Corinthians 5 teach us about discipline in the Church?

- Discipline is necessary to maintain the purity of the Church and protect its members from the spreading corruption of sin
 - the sin of one affects the entire Body (5:6-8) – discipline helps the Church and her members live out what they are in Christ
- Discipline is applied to those in the church, not outside the church
 - in situations where there is an ongoing pattern of sin with an ongoing refusal to repent, it may become necessary to bring the matter to the whole church and removal from fellowship with stubborn refusal to repent
 - done with heavy hearts & mourning, but needs to be done regardless
- Goal (& hope) is repentance & restoration when there is repentance

Reflection and application

As we began to consider in our previous study in 1 Corinthians 5, we are called upon as members of Christ's Body to lovingly confront those in the church who are walking in sinful ways, and if necessary, to disfellowship those who reject repeated calls to repentance and instead stubbornly persist in sin. Though taking this step of removing a brother or sister from fellowship may be painful and seem harsh, Paul teaches us that it is necessary to prevent the corrupting influence of sin from spreading through the Body. When it is necessary to exercise such judgment, we need to do so with humility and gentleness, mindful of our own need for grace and forgiveness, yet at the same time with firmness and resolve, knowing that such judgment is exercised in the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, with the goal of bringing the errant brother or sister to repentance and restoration. Do you know a Christian brother (or sister) who is walking in sin? Pray that God would bring him to repentance, and reach out to him, speaking the truth in love and calling him to turn away from sin and to live as the new creation he is in Christ.