

# 10. Handling a church scandal

August 5, 2018

We are living in the world that practically worships the idol of sex. Whether you are in the primitive areas of the deep jungle of Africa, or highly sophisticated glitzy Lower Manhattan of New York City, or ever-exaggerated and falsely glorified Tinsletown Hollywood, sex is the topic of the conversations, included in people's lifestyles, fashions, all the forms of media, internet, newspaper, books, magazines, movies, and more.

Unfortunately, Christian churches are not immune to this, nor do they actively shun this idol from their Christian living, whether it was the Corinthian church or 21st century churches in America. The church congregation of Corinth came out of their previous loose lifestyle when they received Christ into their hearts, but some of the old habits and ideologies were still lingering in the back of their minds.

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul rebukes not only this man's sin, but the Corinthian church as well. They were proud of their liberal tolerance, which blinded them to the need for a reprimand. Paul shows them the seriousness of this complacency and teaches them that true love is tenacious – especially in the face of a scandal. I believe that the Lord has a very important lesson that we must heed as we live in the world that worship the idol of sex.

## A. INSULATION, NOT ISOLATION

*John 17:15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.*

Let's imagine that we all are in a boat in the midst of an ocean that is known as the ungodly world. A boat that is not in the water is worthless, but the boat with water inside is useless and is ready for a Titanic sequel. How can we insulate ourselves from the world without isolating ourselves from people? How can we stay pure when the world's contaminated waters constantly seep into our boat?

*1 Corinthians 5:1 It is (1) actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that (2) does not occur even among pagans: (3) A man has his father's wife.*

We can make three significant observations from this verse:

### 1) The sin was well known.

Paul says, "It is actually reported." This was no secret scandal. It was a front page news in the Corinthian Times.

### 2) The Corinthian Christians were complacent.

Even the godless Gentiles were repulsed by this sin that the Romans prohibited by law.

### 3) The sin was incestuous.

The man was committing this abomination with his stepmother.

I asked y'all to underline the words "sexual immorality." The ancient Greek word for these is "porneia" that we get our English word "pornography." It covers all types of sexual activities outside of marriage, including homosexuality.

Let me make it very clear here. Sex is NOT wrong as long as it is limited between husband and wife, because it is a part of the ordination of marriage that is instituted by our God. Any deviation outside of that relationship is immoral and ungodly.

I know that the current world accepts homosexuality as normal. They say, "It is the love between the same sex people." No, it is mere lust and perversion between two sinful human beings. I know some will say, "Isn't that harsh? Where is the love of God in that?" Since you are thinking about this question in your heart, let me answer it by referring you to one of the most clear answers regarding homosexuality in the Bible.

*Romans 1:26-27 For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. 27 Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.*

Our God is not asking us to be politically correct, rather Godly correct, if you want to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

*1 Corinthians 5:2-3 And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. 3 For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed.*

Surprisingly, the Corinthians were not repulsed. They had been neck deep in waters of pride so long that they failed to see the real filth of this situation. They had adopted a destructive view of grace. They thought that salvation in Christ permits believers to do whatever they want. They should have grieved over their brother's sin.

How do you view sin? Like the Corinthians, do you shrug it off arrogantly? Or do you see it as God sees it? Does your heart break when you sin or when you see other brothers or sisters sin? God's heart is broken by our sins. As Christians, we should be the same way, not winking at sins, including our own.

As the apostle of Christ Jesus, Paul is pulling his rank on the Corinthians. He is telling them that his authority is still good in Corinth, because he is an apostle and the founder of that church of Corinth.

In our society today, even within churches, there is often a pride in their tolerance of sin. We should be embarrassed to stand by and let people destroy themselves without speaking up and taking action. Ignoring destructive sin in the church is nothing to be proud of.

## **B. DELIVERING SOMEONE TO SATAN**

*1 Corinthians 5:4-5 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 5 (1) deliver such a one to satan (2) for the destruction of the flesh, that (3) his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

Paul doesn't appeal to church traditions or their bylaws. He exhorts the Corinthian congregation to apply correction in the name and power of Jesus Christ. If the church fails to do so, they invite the moral pollution to stay, jeopardizing the spiritual purity of the entire congregation.

### **1) "Deliver such a one to satan"**

The Corinthian church is to excommunicate sinning Christians, releasing them into satan's domain – the world. Outside of the spiritual protection of the church, they will be unable to repel the attacks of satan, who seeks to destroy the body of Christ.

## 2) "For the destruction of the flesh"

This phrase may include physical death, but, more than likely, it refers to defeating a sinner's fleshly desires by allowing satan to push those passions to extremes, creating such an anguish in the sinner that his lust is destroyed. Sin has pleasure for a season without a doubt, but after that seemingly sweet pleasure, there are terrible consequences to pay. You name the man's sins, I will give you the consequences that those sins lead us to. The consequences are brought by ourselves and satan. But God is so good that at the end of the consequences, He still prepares the way for us to get out.

By the way, this is how I pray for those who are backslidden in my Friday prayer. You don't want to be in my Friday prayer list, because I ask the Lord to do whatever it takes, including death and terminal illness to get their attention so that they may return to the Lord. Your spirit in heaven is more important than good health on earth with a sinful spirit that will end up in hell.

## 3) "His spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus"

The goal of this harsh discipline is not punishment. This is only the means to an end, and that end is restoration. Discipline should never be exercised for the satisfaction of the person who exercises it, but always for the mending of the person who has sinned and for the sake of the church. Discipline must never be vengeful; it must always be curative.

I don't know where you are spiritually today. You can pretend all you want, the people around may fall for it. But the Lord who knows all things knows you and you yourself know about you. I know that no one is perfect except Jesus, but human imperfection must never be an excuse for sin, because when you sin, nobody forces you to sin except by your own choice.

## C. THE UNLEAVENED BREAD OF SINCERITY AND TRUTH

*1 Corinthians 5:6-8 Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. 8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

Because we are all part of the body of Christ, we directly affect other for good or for bad. As leaven invades every part of bread, so one unchecked and undisciplined Christian's sin can corrupt the entire church congregation.

On the day before the Passover feast, the OT law commands that the Jews have to light a candle to search the house for leaven, and that every bit must be cast out. At the end of this morning's service, we are going to take communion. Before you take that communion of the bread and the fruit of vine, take your spiritual candle and examining your heart for sins. Even "smallest" sins. Because sin, like leaven, can start out small, but it will eventually permeate everything it touches.

## D. THE IMPORTANCE OF SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD

*1 Corinthians 5:9-13 I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. 10 Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 11 But now I have*

*written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.* 12 For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? 13 But those who are outside God judges. Therefore “put away from yourselves the evil person.”

I’ve said this before and I will say it again – “A dog barks and a sinner sins.” Unbelievers are doing what they do best – ungodly things. Their judgment is coming, and God will take care of it. Here Paul emphasized once again the importance of separation from the world. Christians are not to be isolated, but insulated from the worldly influences. We cannot avoid contact with sinners, but we can avoid contamination by sinners.

If a professed Christian is guilty of the sins, the church must deal with him or her. Church discipline is for Christians who stubbornly and willfully continue in sin.

Speaking of church discipline, it is not easy or popular, but it is important. Unfortunately, there are churches that choose not to discipline their congregation who willfully sin against the Lord without repentance in the fear of loss of the church income or numbers of the church attendance. If it is done properly, God can use it to convict and restore an erring believer. 2 Corinthians 2:1–11 indicates that this man did repent and was restored to the fellowship.

Church discipline is very hard on the one who receives as well as the one who administers that is the pastor of the person’s church. If the person who receives the church discipline repents of one’s sins quickly, it is so much easier from then on. But if that person rejects God’s discipline and plays the victim’s attitude and goes around and tells those who do not know the whole situation that he or she has been mistreated for a tiny, minuscule sin by the big bad mean pastor, that person is adding more sins to oneself, like deception and gossip.

I asked you to underline the last part of v11 – “not even to eat with such a person.” The idea of excommunication is to cut off any connection with the one who willfully sinned against the Lord without any intention of repentance. By not having any contact with the fellow believers, that person will realize the consequences of his sin through the isolation from the Lord and His people.

## **E. APPLICATIONS**

### **1) Overlooking sin is not gracious, but dangerous.**

Just as ignoring a bulge in your tire or a rattlesnake in your yard can result in disaster, so allowing a sinning believer to go uncorrected can destroy a church.

### **2) Rebuking sinning believers in love is not optional but essential.**

Both God and the world expect our churches to be bastions of holiness. But when sin defiantly breaks out within even one of our churches, the Lord is dishonored, His church defamed, and the world dismayed and has an opportunity to blaspheme the Lord.

### **3) Dealing with sinful situations should not be done for the sake of punishment, but to bring them to repentance and restoration.**

We are not to be arrogant spiritual vultures, preying on fallen Christians. We should, however, be like divine physicians, restoring those members who are out of joint with the body of Christ.

#### **4) Correcting disorders is not external but internal.**

Christian discipline is strictly a family matter; it's to be carried out by believers and for believers. But church correction would never have to occur if Christians would keep their private worlds centered around the Lord rather than themselves.