



Week 3: Confrontation

1 Corinthians
April 12, 2009

Divisions over Church Discipline (5:1-13)

The Question (5:1)

Paul has received a report that there is a man in their congregation who is having an illicit affair with his step-mother. From what we see here, it seems that most everybody in the church knows about this incestuous relationship, but that nobody seems concerned enough to do anything about it.

You can't just chalk this up to some prudish value of Paul on the matter of sexual expression, either, for he tells us in verse 1 that pagans wouldn't put up with this kind of behavior. It is a repugnant act, and nobody in the church seems to be concerned about it.

This is classic conflict avoidance. The Corinthians are afraid to deal with the situation. The Corinthians are ignoring blatant sin.

Answer: Confrontation with humility and sorrow (5:2)

Paul says the Corinthians have not confronted this man involved in this incestuous relationship because they are proud, or as one translation puts it, they are puffed up. Paul says the Corinthians should have been just sick over this situation, mourning and grieving about it. But instead they are walking around, puffed up, as if there is nothing wrong.

When we go to confront, it should grieve us. I should make our heart sick. As we understand the seriousness of confronting someone with sin, it should cause us to mourn. Confrontation of sin is not supposed to be a joyful experience. We should never relish the idea of confronting someone with his or her sin.

Instead we need to always confront sin with an attitude of humility. We should never confront

someone thinking we are any better than that person, thinking that we are smarter or stronger than that person. We must always have the perspective that says, "But for the grace of God, there walk I." We need to come with humility and grace, seeking what is best for that person, never from a position of power, but always from a submissive spirit (Galatians 6:1).

Answer: Confrontation with the goal of restoration (5:3-5)

Paul states he has already judged this offender, and that they should together with him, excommunicate this person and "deliver such a one to Satan." But look at Paul's reasoning and his motivation. Why does Paul kick him out? So that "he may be saved in the Day of the Lord."

Paul is saying that it is time to allow this person to face the consequences of their behavior. Paul wants the Corinthians to stop being codependents and allow this man to face up to the consequences of their behavior. They are to turn this man over to the pain and destruction that Satan will bring to a person who wallows in sin. Then, in the midst of his pain and suffering he may finally come to their senses and return to Christ. Often it is only when someone reaches the end of themselves, when life is miserable and empty, that a person finally decides to repent. Paul is saying it is time to let that happen to this man.

It may sound harsh, but the goal is always restoration.

Answer: Confrontation before the problem spreads (5:6-8)

It has always amazed me how that little teaspoon of yeast will cause the ingredients in your bread to grow and expand. Paul is right when

he says a little yeast affects the entire loaf of bread.

The same is true in the church. It just takes a little conflict, a little sin before it grows and expands. Then this little matter all of a sudden affects the whole church. A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

The longer it is not dealt with the more other people get involved. Suddenly private matters become public matters. Then people begin taking up sides and pointing fingers. Soon it seems the whole church is involved in a matter which could have best been dealt with only a few people.

Answer: Confrontation is not for nonbelievers (5:9-13)

Paul says the Corinthians are to kick the sinner out of the church and not associate with him. But he then makes it clear that he is only talking about confrontation with fellow Christians. He is not telling us to stop associating with sinful unbelievers. In fact, Paul says here we aren't to judge unbelievers. He says that is God's prerogative, not ours.

If the church were to never associate with unbelieving sinners, then we would never have the opportunity to show them the love of Jesus. We

would never have a chance to help them examine the claims of Christ. We would never be able to fulfill Jesus' command for the church to make disciples through the entire world.

As Christians, it is not our job to judge unbelievers. God will judge them. That's his job. For us, the issue with an unbeliever is not their immoral behavior; it is their need for a savior. We can't hold people outside the church to our standard of morality. Rather than accuse and judge non-believers, we need to seek ways to demonstrate God's love to them.

Unfortunately, this tends to be just the opposite of how we handle things in the church. We tend to judge unbelievers and then tolerate immorality within the church. Paul says to do just the opposite. We should be quick to confront our brothers & sisters in Christ and be very tolerant of the non-believer.

When you look at the life of Jesus that is how he lived. Jesus dealt most harshly with the religious leaders. Jesus reserves his most severe judgment for those who professed to be the most religious. But then, when he encountered prostitutes, the woman at the well, tax collectors and sinners, Jesus was tolerant and very non-judgmental.

Divisions and External Litigation (6:1-11)

The Question (6:1)

Here are at least two members of the Corinthian church, in the midst of some kind of dispute. And now, one of them has taken the other to court to sue the other. The conflict has blown up to the point where the parties are in litigation, being unable to resolve it among themselves. The church itself has now been dragged into the courtroom as these fellow Christians argue over some petty manner.

The Answer: Do not take our conflicts to worldly courts (6:2-5)

Paul is incensed that the Corinthians would dare take their disputes to court. He gives us a couple of reasons why this is wrong.

First, a worldly court will be using a different standard by which it makes its judgments. Certainly a judge will try to settle the dispute in a fair manner, and will issue a judgment to that effect. But his judgment will only be able to affect the external. He can only require external punishments, such as monetary awards. But he can not affect the heart. He can not require reconciliation between the parties. There maybe a

fair result, but the parties will still likely hate each other.

Within the church, our goal is not just to seek a fair judgment. Our goal should be for reconciliation between the parties. A dispute within the church should seek changes in the heart, where both parties can love one another. If we have decided to take a dispute to court, we are saying at that point that we just want what we think we deserve and we have given up on reconciliation (6:7)

Secondly, Paul says it is wrong to take our disputes to a worldly court because we need the practice (6:2-5). As Christians, in the new heaven and new earth to come, we will become judges and magistrates of the heavenly beings.

If there is no sin in the next world, what kind of disputes will we be settling? The bible isn't clear on this point. But I think this comes from a general misunderstanding about heaven. We will not be just sitting around on clouds strumming harps. We will have responsibilities in the next life. We will have authority over other beings. Paul's point is if we can't settle the petty disputes of this temporal world we live in, how do we think we will be able to serve as judges in heaven?

The answer: Be willing to give up our rights (6:6-8)

Sometimes we may win the battle, but still lose the war. When we are too stubborn to give up our rights, when we are so focused on winning the argument rather than reconciliation with our brother or sister in Christ, we have become selfish, vengeful, and arrogant. It is more important to be reconciled with someone than it is to win the dispute.

We may be in the right. We may be entitled to whatever we are fighting over. But if we win the dispute but lose our relationship with a brother or sister in Christ, we have lost the war while winning the battle.

Are you willing to give up your rights so that you can be reconciled? Jesus did. He gave up his right as the son of God, became a man, and died on the cross, so that we could be reconciled to him. Jesus had every right to stay in heaven and avoid the public humiliation, the lack of respect, the pain and suffering he faced. But to him, reconciliation was more important than his rights.