LIFE BIBLE MINISTRY

1 Corinthians 5

Sexual immorality in the Church

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SERMON TRANSCRIPT

We're back with our study in 1 Corinthians, and we are in chapter 5. I believe this is study number 7 as we continue our study through the book of 1 Corinthians. And this is where the Apostle Paul really starts to get into it. He's been talking to them about various issues in the Corinthian church, but now he's going to start to really address some very serious implications of the sin that was going on there in Corinth. And he begins here in chapter 5 by saying, "...it is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife." Let's stop here for just a moment and let's talk about what's going on.

First of all, Paul says that he has received a report concerning the Corinthians that there is someone within the body of Christ who is involved with some kind of sexual immorality. Now the words sexual immorality in the English come from one single Greek word which is pornea. That's where we get our word pornography, but it is a word in the Greek that covers a general, a more general sort of an understanding of all kinds of sexual immorality, including fornication and several other things. Many things would fall under this category of pornea. In this case, it is a situation where a man has taken his father's wife.

Now this doesn't mean this is a man who is having a relationship with his biological mother. He is rather having a relationship with his stepmom. And perhaps the father passed away, we don't know, but for some reason or another, this man took the woman that his father had married and was now having a physical relationship with her. And this is what Paul is confronting them about, and he says here that this is something that even the pagans don't put up with. They think this is horrible.

How are the Corinthians feeling about it? Well, look at verse 2. It says, and you are arrogant, ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. Now when Paul says you're arrogant, obviously they're not having the kind of a reaction to this sinful behavior that Paul would have expected.

He expected them to see this for what it was and to respond accordingly, and yet he said you are arrogant. Other Bible translations say you are proud, and the idea behind this is that for some reason the response of the Corinthian church was one that embraced this thing somehow. We don't know why. We don't know all of the reasons why they were feeling the way they did. They felt that the grace that God had given them, you know, to forgive and to move beyond such things was evident, and they were boasting in the fact that perhaps they had great forgiveness and great grace to deal with this sort of a thing and just to embrace this man in whatever sexual sort of a situation he was in.

Regardless of why they felt this way, Paul is aghast, and he says to them there at the end of verse 2, let him who has done this be removed from among you, and this is where we're going to start getting into some aspects of this chapter that frankly can be kind of dicey because we're going to start talking here about church discipline, and that's a topic I don't think anybody frankly likes to discuss. And you know, as someone who has been a pastor for 40 plus years, I can tell you that church discipline is one of the most difficult and challenging things that a pastor and church leaders ever attempt to do because essentially church discipline involves confronting someone who is involved in sinful behavior but is either ignorant of that behavior, being wrong, or they are well aware that it's wrong and they just don't care, and sometimes that happens too. So as we get in and start talking about this, we need to really walk in wisdom and we need to walk in understanding as to what church discipline is and how it should be brought about. I think a lot of people's lives over the years have been negatively impacted by church discipline that was done badly. So let's see what we can pick up in this chapter to help us understand what the Apostle Paul is advising for the body of Christ in Corinth as it relates to this particular situation.

He goes on in verse 3 to say, For though absent in body, meaning, although I'm not there with you, he says, I am present in spirit, and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. This is heavy talk. Paul is saying, I've already made up my mind. I know what's going on. Paul was aware of this church.

He brought the gospel to this fellowship. He may have even personally known this person that we're dealing with in this letter, but he makes it very clear. He says, I have already pronounced judgment. In other words, I've already made a decision about what needs to be done, about what's going on and what needs to happen. And he says in verse 4, When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus, and remember, name in this context means authority.

So he's saying, when you have come together in the authority that is granted to you through the name of the Lord Jesus, and my spirit is present with you, he says, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to

deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. Wow, right? Yeah, these are challenging words. What is Paul telling them to do? A lot of people have read these verses with a great deal of consternation.

What are we being told in this passage? And what does it mean to hand someone over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh? Well, Paul has already talked about what he means by turning someone over to the enemy. He said earlier that this man is to be removed from among you. So he is to be cast out.

He is to be told that you may not fellowship among us as you're living in this sinful situation. And that is what Paul is referring to when he talks about turning this man over, delivering this man over to the work of the enemy. Now, the enemy, we know, always comes to destroy. That's his MO. That's his purpose and desire.

We are kept safe in the body of Christ through accountability, through mutual intercessory prayer for one another, encouragement to just walk with the Lord each and every day. Now, what if somebody doesn't have that? What if somebody is outside of that protective element of the body of Christ? Well, there's a vulnerability in their lives. We see this in the animal kingdom all the time.

When an animal of the herd, if you will, gets separated from the rest of the herd or the flock, they become vulnerable to predators. And the predators are looking for those that get separated. In fact, some predators will actually work together to separate some of the weaker members of the herd or flock to get them alone so that they can attack and prey upon them. And, you know, the enemy does much the same thing. And that's one of the reasons why we're encouraged in the Word of God to be part of the body of Christ and to be connected, because there's safety in that connection.

But what happens when somebody becomes what I like to call a dismembered member? In other words, they're a member of the body of Christ by virtue of the fact that they've been born again, but they're dismembered from the standpoint that they're not being connected. There's not having regular fellowship. with other believers. What happens to that sort of a person?

Well, they're in a danger zone. The enemy sees that they've been separated from the body of Christ, and that person becomes much more vulnerable to the attacks of the enemy. But in this particular context, Paul is challenging the church to put this person in that vulnerable situation so that he might learn an important lesson. Now, you'll notice in here, he says that this man is to be delivered over to the enemy for the destruction of the flesh. Now, the word flesh is an important word there.

It is a Greek word that can refer both to the physical body, you know, our skin, our bones, our muscles, and everything that makes up our physical body. And it can also be used to refer to the nature of sin that is resident in all of us, what we call our sinful nature. And that's one of the reasons why, if you go back to the 1984 revision of the New International Version of the Bible, they literally rendered this verse that he might, for the destruction of the sinful nature. Okay? Now, in the 2011 revision of the NIV, they went back to the literal rendering of flesh.

I think, though, that sinful nature is actually a good rendering with the context that we're seeing here in this passage. Since the Greek word here can be translated the physical body or the sinful nature, how do we know which one Paul is referring to? Well, the only way we know is to look at the context, the context of the passage. What is behind this man's sinful behavior? What is behind his sexual immorality?

Well, obviously, he's given into his sinful nature. He's given into that bent that we all have to tend to run after sin and pleasure and that sort of thing. So Paul is saying to the Corinthians, hand this man over to the enemy. In other words, put him outside of the protective element of the body of Christ that his flesh, and I believe sinful nature, may literally be destroyed so that he himself and his spirit might be saved on the day of the Lord. So you can see here, and this is very important, that Paul's emphasis and goal of this church discipline that we're seeing is 100% restoration.

Paul's judgment of this man is not intended to be simply an act of anger or repudiation and condemnation. This is an act of restoration. Paul wants this man to get his life right with Jesus, but obviously, since they're taking such drastic action, there has been opportunities for this man to repent, but he has refused. He's refused to turn his back on this sinful behavior. And that's another thing that's important, I think, to say about church discipline.

You know, church discipline of this sort, the kind that Paul is recommending here in chapter five of 1 Corinthians, is not something that is done when somebody makes a mistake. There are many steps that go into, or I should say come into play before this sort of drastic action is taken. When somebody is involved in a sinful behavior, and believe me, as a pastor, I've confronted many people over the years, the first thing we do with that person is we make sure they understand what the Bible has to say on this matter, because many people are truly ignorant about such things, whether it's living together outside of marriage or involved in sexual relations of every kind. Some people are just ignorant, and so we go to them. We go with the Word of God.

We explain what the Word of God has to say. We talk to them. We exhort them. We pray with them. We bring them to a place of understanding.

Now, once they've come to that place of understanding, that's where the responsibility kicks in, and they are now responsible for their actions in a different sort of a way, because now they know this is not just a sinful behavior. This is a transgression, right? And the word transgression means I know this is wrong, right, but I'm doing it anyway. That's what it means to transgress. So once someone comes to that place of understanding and they nod their head in agreement, okay, I get this.

I see what the Bible is saying. Now we can take it up a notch. We can begin to hold them accountable for what's going on, and we can begin to ask serious questions like, are you gonna stop? Is this going to end, or do you plan to continue on? And if there is a stubborn, ongoing refusal to do anything about their sinful behavior, then this is where we begin to take stronger and more stringent actions as it relates to their sin.

And if after a period of time, they continue to refuse, we have to do something, not just for their sake, but for the sake of the rest of the body of Christ, because, and this is something Paul's gonna get into here as we go on in this chapter. Paul's gonna talk about the impact and the influence that this has on the rest of the body of Christ, and not just the man or woman, whichever the case may be, who is involved in the sinful behavior. And that is what Paul is gonna go on to talk about. In fact, in verse six, if you look with me in your Bible, Paul writes, your boasting is not good. And that word boasting in the Greek means proud confidence, all right?

Your proud confidence is not good. And this is where he asks the body of Christ a rhetorical question to help them understand the implications of harboring a sinful individual in the body of Christ without confrontation. He says, do you not know that a little leaven, or yeast, if you will, leavens the whole lump? And so he's using this picture that people were aware of in those days, everybody baked bread. We usually go to the store to buy bread, but in those days, every home baked bread and they knew what leaven did to the lump of dough that they worked it into.

That little bit of leaven permeated that dough in such a way that the whole lump was affected, if you will, by the leaven, so that it would rise as it's supposed to and so forth. But you'll remember that leaven is a picture in the Bible, a type of sin. And this is very clear in the Old Testament. In fact, during Passover and the associated feast of unleavened bread, once a year, God challenged the people of Israel to remove all of the leaven from their homes. And that was a picture, again, a type of removing sin from the believer's life because yeast is a really good picture of what sin can do because yeast, interestingly enough, actually has a corrupting influence on the batch of dough.

That's what causes it to have air bubbles and rise, cause the dough to rise when it's being baked and that sort of thing. So the picture from the Old Testament is to remove the leaven. And now Paul is using that picture with the Corinthians. And so he says to them in verse seven, cleanse out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump or a new batch of dough, if you will. And then look at what he says, as you really are unleavened.

In other words, God has done a work in the body of Christ to make it holy and sinless. We now have to choose to walk out that reality. He says, as you really are, you have been made unleavened, literally sinless through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Now he says, cleanse it out. So there's the responsibility on our part as believers.

He goes on here in the middle of verse seven, saying, for Christ, our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. Well, this is where Paul really brings the whole picture of. Passover from the Old Testament into view for the believer as it relates to how that Old Testament feast is fulfilled in the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is our Passover Lamb He is the one whose blood has been shed and you'll remember during Passover. They would sacrifice the Passover Lamb and put the blood of that Passover Lamb on the doorposts and lentils of their homes in remembrance of what took place in the final plague of Egypt when God delivered his people from their bondage and slavery in Egypt.

And you know, there's all kinds of types here. The picture of Israel being in slavery in Egypt was a picture of Believers, us being in bondage to sin. Egypt is a picture of slavery Pharaoh is even a picture if you will of the enemy who wants to keep us in slavery and so on and so on and yet Jesus is the one who Causes us to be saved from death as We shelter under his blood just as the original Israelites sheltered under the blood of the very first Passover Lamb, so Paul's making the whole connection here and he says then in verse 8 Let us therefore celebrate the festival not with the old leaven the leaven of malice and evil but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth What feast is he talking about when he says let us celebrate the festival? Is he talking about believers going back and celebrating the the festival of Passover? No, he's not because Passover you'll remember is fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ So the festival he's talking about is the ongoing celebration of our salvation in Jesus Christ It's not a once-a-year Festival or celebration it is a daily Celebration of our forgiveness and our position that is now a reality in Jesus Christ we have been forgiven of our sins cleansed of our sinful rebellion and We are now children of God.

So that's why he says let us now celebrate the festival in other words Let's celebrate every day the reality of who we are in Christ and what he has done for us Finishing out the chapter Paul goes on to say I

wrote to you in my letter And by the way, there was obviously a previous letter, right? We think you know, this is called 1st Corinthians But Paul obviously wrote them an earlier letter because he's now referencing that letter I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral People people involved with sexual immorality but then he goes on to say in verse 10 not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world or the greedy and Swindlers or idolaters since then you would need to go out of the world What's Paul saying? He had written to them earlier not to Not to have anything to do not to associate in any way with sexually immoral people But they misunderstood him and they thought he meant Any sexually immoral people? Well, Paul goes on to say in verse 10 I didn't mean the people of the world when I made that statement if I were to tell you you may not associate with anyone who's sexually immoral as Paul says you'd have to leave the world You'd have to live the rest of your life in a closet in order to get away from The sin that's going on rampantly in the world. No, no No, Paul says that's not what I was referring to.

He says in verse 11. Here's where he gives clarity He says now I'm writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of a brother in other words says openly I am a Believer in Jesus Christ. All right, and yet who is guilty of sexual immorality or greed or an idolater a reviler a drunkard or a Swindler Paul says don't even eat with such a one, right? so once again, he's challenging the body of Christ to Withdraw from individuals who claim to be believers and yet who are living an openly sinful life and Again, this is a twofold sort of a plan if you will to bring a Sense of shame to the person who's involved in the sin, but also to protect oneself because again It just takes a little bit of leaven to affect or Influence the whole lump of dough and that's why Paul is giving these sorts of directives verse 12 Look at what Paul says for what have I to do with judging outsiders? In other words, why did you think that I was talking about?

judging He says that's That's not my calling and and it's none of our calling by the way to judge outsiders He says is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside Okay Very important. We see this God judges those outside. We don't But it's not the job of the church or your job as a member of the church to judge Unbelievers, it's not your job. It's not my job.

We don't Wag the bony finger at people outside of Christ Here's a good question We know that unbelievers Don't have the Holy Spirit living within them. They're essentially given over to the sinful nature So here's a question for the body of Christ. How do you expect unbelievers to live? What kind of lives do you expect them to live? Personally I expect them to live sinful lives.

I Expect people who don't know the Lord to live Literally to wallow in sin That's what I expect and so it's not what I like certainly But I don't expect more of them than they are capable of doing It is only

through the power of Jesus Christ that we can Conquer the draw the pull of sin and the sinful nature in our lives without Jesus I Remember what my life was like before I came to Jesus. I had no power I had no power over the sinful nature to restrain it in any way I just didn't possess it It was only after I came to Jesus that I began to experience freedom From sin and I have to this day not had 100% freedom I don't believe we ever will this side of glory have perfect freedom From sin until we are separated from these corruptible bodies But we certainly do see victories and those victories are because of the Holy Spirit Living in our lives, so we don't expect the world to live a sinless and holy life We just don't and that's why Paul says listen What business is it of mine to judge people outside of the church? It's not my business, but then he asked the other question is It not those inside the church in other words the body of Christ whom you are to judge Now when he says this he's not giving us freedom to be Judgmental from the standpoint of being cruel or heartless or mean And we're certainly not to be angry we are to love our brothers and sisters who are caught in sin and That love is to move our hearts to work with them to find freedom through Jesus Christ again in Drastic situations where a person is just simply unwilling To address their sin to repent of it and to turn the other way church discipline Needs to happen, but it's always done in love and with a broken heart We never ever turn our backs on people With an attitude of cruelty and a desire to see them suffer we want always for them to come to the Lord to repent of their sin and to walk in the freedom that we have in Jesus Christ, and so that's why Paul ends this chapter again by saying God judges those outside so purge the evil person from among you These are hard words church discipline is never easy never fun Ever and it's gotten Increasingly difficult. I believe as years have gone on I I've seen situations in my own ministry where we confronted someone in love and challenged them with their unbiblical and sinful behavior. And they looked us in the eye and simply got up and went to the church down the street and made no mention of their sinful lifestyle to that church so that they could attend there with impunity.

And that's what makes church discipline so difficult. You know, if someone was put out of the body of Christ there in Corinth, there wasn't another fellowship. There wasn't another body of Christ there for that person to go and hide inside. But today that is a reality and that makes church discipline difficult. It's one of the reasons why pastors need to know one another in a community so they can be aware.

And I've had that happen too. I've been privy to conversations with other pastors where they've contacted me and said, hey, just want to let you know there's a couple in our church that we confronted about their sinful behavior. And they decided to respond to our confrontation by leaving the church. So if they show up at your church, you know what's going on. And those are good communications between

pastors in a given city and can be very helpful to helping people finally confront what needs to be confronted.

Well, that's where we're going to finish off this chapter. So let's go ahead and close in prayer. Father, we thank you so much. We thank you for your word. And even though this is a hard word, this is a difficult word concerning church discipline.

Lord, give us wisdom, give us discernment and help us always to love our brothers and sisters who are caught in sin so that we might bring them to a place of restoration and reconciliation with you and with the body of Christ. We thank you and we praise you for the wisdom and the insight that we've gained from this chapter. Help us, Lord, to apply it with an equal amount of wisdom and grace. We ask all of this in the authority that is ours through our Savior, Christ the Lord. Amen.