

1 Corinthians 5:1-13

Do you ever have family meetings? You know, the serious ones. Where the meeting is announced and you know you are going to confront the big issue and everyone has to participate because it affects the whole family. Some of us approach those meetings with relief; “finally we can get over this bump...”, some of us approach them with apprehension; “can’t we just not have any confrontation...”

But these types of meetings are important because something big is on the line - the family. There is straining of the bonds that keep us together and if the tension is not resolved it will break.

This is 1 Corinthians. We can think of it as if Dad is away on business but he has called in to lead the conversation with the whole family, to shepherd, act as a father and protect the family. This letter would have been read by the church gathered, maybe even in a special service at one of the homes bringing everyone together. And as the first several paragraphs have been read, there would have been subtle rejoicing at the truth of what Jesus accomplished and how he has called the church together for his glory. Then there would have been some hard swallowing as Paul calls out the penchant for division in the church and the weird adoption of the standards of the “world” to define progress, wisdom and worth.

But with every passing pen stroke the church gets an increasing sense that all these things matter because of Christ and him crucified. From that event in Jerusalem years before, their identity changed. At hearing and believing this good news preached about Jesus the church was formed and purposed with ongoing proclamation of this gospel. It is gifted and grown for the increasing glory of God and the good of his children. And their lives have new priorities and perspectives.

As Paul talks of being a Father in Christ, he invites imitation, modeling the way of Christ, getting low and relying on Jesus and he continues the correction for the family, to get them back on the right path. It lands us in a difficult but encouraging text not only for the saints gathered in Corinth reading this letter hot off the press, but also for us in our modern gathering of this family of believers.

Discipline is family business meant for restoration and witness.

Here we have a gnarly situation. It has been reported to Paul that there is sexual immorality in the church - that even the Corinthian society would frown upon. A man has taken his Father’s wife as his own. Paul doesn’t unpack the exact circumstances but there is this man in an ongoing physical relationship with his stepmother - and since only he is addressed we can assume only

he is a member of the church - living in unrepentant sin and the church is arrogant about it. There is a permissive boasting going on that accepts this man's sin rather than call it what it is.

Maybe he was a patron of the church, giving a lot of money or lending his home for meetings, maybe he was influential in the market or political realms of Corinth and people didn't want to lose out on the benefits they received by going to church with this guy. Whatever the reason, Paul calls them out for not confronting his lack of repentance, 'shouldn't you be mourning over sin, rather than giddy about it?'

In this confrontation the Apostle prescribes a course of action for the church to be who they are in Christ. Doing so isn't the easy road, but the family investments are the ways grace is applied and people transformed.

There are three benchmarks here that guide the church; 1) The Church is Holy, 2) Discipline is aimed toward restoration, and 3) The Context of Discipline is the Church. *When their powers combine... **Discipline is family business meant for restoration and witness.***

1) The Church is Holy

This isn't a new concept that he only bring to bear here, it is actually the truth that exists as the foundation for all the correction he has brought to this point.

1:2 "To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those **sanctified** in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together..." In his calls for unity, even in the cherishing of the diversity of the church, they are holy, set apart, chosen, made into a people by and for Jesus.

And this sanctifying makes them different - not just from who they were before but from the pervasive attitude of the day. As they are holy they are meant to be distinctive.

"The church is called to be a *tertium genus*, a third race, the alternative community in society: in the words of Peter (**1 Pet. 2:9-10**), 'You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.'"

This is also Paul's reminder - they are new, a holy people bound to each other in Christ.

5:6-8 "Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? [7] Cleanse out the old leaven **that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened.** For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. [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."

Paul uses the imagery of the Passover dinner, where before the lamb was slaughtered to protect the household from death, families would ensure there was no leaven in the house. Leaven is fermented dough that was kept from a previous loath to help bread rise (not unlike yeast). The supper was meant to have unleavened bread, so as to not taint the meal it was discarded. And the church is like the bread prepared for Passover; as a new lump, “you really are unleavened,” already clean, holy.

This is the pattern of the redemptive story of Scripture, God forming a people starkly different than cultures around them - it is fulfilled as the church. Being this new lump they rejoice, celebrating redemption with sincerity and truth because the true Passover Lamb, Christ has been sacrificed once for all. The church is set apart and made holy, made unique, unleavened, for God’s glory by Christ’s sacrifice.

This is glorious news that has individual implications - those that believe in Jesus are made clean, made holy, wear his righteousness; but the individual is meant to be part of a lump, part of the new bread of the church. Where the gospel is at work, holiness results. The work of the sacrifice continues to unfold, freeing captives, changing lives and forging a people together.

Living in response to that sacrifice of Christ, then the church endeavors to remain unleavened, untainted by sin, free from its bondage. The church as holy, is not to be stained by lessening the power of the blood of this sacrifice. But by allowing unconfessed sin to fester the loaf was being corrupted.

“One persistent, flagrant sinner who remains accepted without discipline within the Christian fellowship taints the whole body, Just as the Jews had to celebrate their deliverance from bondage with no leaven, so Christians must continually celebrate their deliverance from sin without any compromise with the very things from which they have been set free.”

Toward that end, Paul says the man must be disciplined, and set out that he might be saved.

2) Discipline is aimed toward restoration

As we have been studying 1 Corinthians there has been some thinking as I dive into a text each week about how it will be received. In this book there are themes that we rather leave in the first century and perhaps it would be easier if we skipped some of the heavier sections and focus on the verses that drip with grace, the things of new identity or inheritance in Christ.

We might even want to slip into the same error at the Corinthians and minimize sin within the church... because after all ‘we are all sinners.’ Yes, we are all sinners, called to repentance and new life in Christ. In our identity in Jesus we can see discipline as a good.

If we view it rightly, I think the call to discipline is actually a wonderful grace and gift for those in the church - because it says we won’t be left behind to remain lost in sin, but we have a family to

pull us out of it and to strengthen us in the faith. Together meeting the ramifications of sin, turning from it as we receive the grace of community.

Discipline makes no sense without Jesus, his work, his promise of transformation. Without the gospel, holiness can't be achieved, and attempts at living well have no true standard, and no hope of help to live different.

Discipline, or even right behavior is also not earning salvation... It is not moralism earning salvation - but living as who we already are in Christ.

Holiness in response not to obtain... the regenerates hearts are meant to desire holiness, living in repentance.

The church is to shed its arrogance, it's approval or ignoring of sin for the good of the body and the good of the sinner.

5:2 “And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.”

5:4-5 “When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, [5] 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.” ... “Purge the evil person from among you.”

This can seem so harsh... Paul passing judgment from afar... but it is unlikely that this is a new sin, a first offense. Following the model of confronting sin, church discipline given by Jesus and unpacked in the New Testament, there would have been opportunity to turn from sin in repentance... but instead there has been no movement only persistence and the church maybe experienced fatigue at bringing it up which became tacet approval now requiring separation.

The world and our fleshly inclinations say that discipline is merely about punishment, it is a negative things, unloving even.

Paul says, for the good of the church, the Christian community, you are to remove the unrepentant sinner. They can't participate in the life of the church, lest he leaven the lump - and this is narrowing in on just the sexual immoral, but all unrepentant sinners.

5:11 “I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.”

The ground for discipline, very simply put, is any moral wrong - whether it be sexual or social, immoral or unjust, done by someone who claims to be a Christian and refuses correction and

change. So it is not only the infamous sins but those we coddle and leave festering and unconfessed.

The aim of the discipline is not just casting someone out, but excluding them from the things that they have grown numb to in the hope that they would become sick of their sin and return to the forgiveness and grace of Christ.

This discipline removes the person from places of influence in the church, and from the key avenues of worship, the sacraments. Primarily communion, the Lord's Supper. This is what Paul means when he says they are to not even eat with such a one. He does not mean they can't have them over to dinner or even meet at Carls Jr. after the big game.

Communion was a much more experiential thing then compared to how we celebrate it today. It was a full meal, a time of contemplation, of worthiness in approaching the table and a shared reminder, a family function to proclaim the gospel to one another. We know it is a meal of remembrance in which we see our need for a savior, and the grace of the gift of Jesus, his body broken, his blood shed for us. But the unrepentant sinner has missed the weight of the meal by continuing in sin and can no longer participate. He can't keep the name badge, the family identity if he doesn't live it - not perfect but repentant.

He is to turned over to Satan - to the accuser, for the breaking of his fleshly pride that he would return - It's not condemnation or judgment but rather restoration - "that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord." This is all Paul and the church ever has in mind.

By his next letter to the church he is called them to restore someone sorrowful over their sin...

2 Corinthians 2:5-8 "Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. [6] For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, [7] so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. [8] So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him." In his final greeting of that letter he tells the church to "aim for restoration."

So we can see that this is the whole point of what we can label excommunication - it is not a permanent separation but something meant to draw the person back to Christ and him crucified.

This is when the promise of sanctification gets real. Because as believers we rejoice not only in our justification - being made right before God - but also our transformation, becoming more like Christ. And at times this discipline is what the Spirit uses to bring us closer, so we see it as a grace.

That is why we can pursue it even today. In an environment where it is too easy to disengage when things get real... If I am caught in sin and confronted, called to repentance and something

different, I can bail. Just go to another church down the street... The church might look at the same issue and say “what is the point” they will just leave and find a new congregation. Perhaps the church is more concerned to keep customers than to disciple a people.

But the church is family... biblical family, and we function as one. Family calls you to live as you “are in Christ.”

And being a family we know the boundaries of the body, which is helpful in keeping us from another error when it comes to discipline.

3) The Context of Discipline is the local Church

5:9-13 “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—[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. [11] But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. [12] For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? [13] God judges those outside.”

Paul is making clear that discipline is for the family. It is meant for the lump, to stay unleavened. The church heard Paul’s call to not associate with the immoral but they confused which immoral they were to avoid. It is fascinating that the church has been confusing this ever since. When it comes to calling out sin and disciplining we have been quick to judge the world, those not in Christ around us, rather than those claiming Jesus.

“We judge the world, but then soft-pedal the issue in-house. We don’t say hard things to people on the inside because we’re afraid of making things awkward. So we just condemn those on the outside, because it’s just easier that way.”

The problem for the church is not approval of sin without but approval of it within. Paul’s principle is clear and unambiguous: ‘strict discipline within: complete freedom of association outside.’

Paul doesn’t envision cloistered communities far removed from society, he sees the place of the church in the thick of it, but not mistaking it’s call to faithful presence with something as a condemning class geared to label all the evil outside but totally cool with the evil within.

And we are to handle discipline inside the family so that there is a faithful witness outside of it. That those in the world would see the importance the church places on holiness within and be enticed as they are loved by the church.

“The tragedy of so much modern Christianity - and, incidentally, the basic reason for so much ineffective evangelization - is that the Christian community is both remote from unbelievers and lax with fellow-believers who persist in sin of one kind or another. In a word, there is no distinctiveness.”

Discipline done in its context kills hypocrisy, we call each other to newness of life and to war on sin, and we live as agents of reconciliation outside of the church, giving grace, associating with drunkards and sinners... those that by our example may realize their need of a savior. This is our witness maintained by dealing with our own junk.

“Stop disciplining the world by attempting to force Christian ethics upon them. Instead enter into the world fully as witnesses. Remove the sinful aspects of the world from our midst and be in the world not of it...” Um

“The world is waiting to see such a church, a church which takes sin seriously, which enjoys forgiveness fully, which in its time of gathering together combines joyful celebration with an awesome sense of God’s immediacy and authority. ‘When we live in victory over the forces that destroy others, then people begin to see that there is meaning and purpose and reason for the salvation we profess to have’ (Stedman). But that will never happen if we refuse to come into costly, compassionate contact with men and women of the world.”

And we can do so without fear, because we have the family to guard us and correct us...

“Contrary to the conviction of legalists, ancient and modern, the more thoroughly Christians who are distinctive mix with unbelievers, the less dangers there is of moral compromise, especially if such witness is corporate, compassionate and clear testimony. Equally, unbelievers are drawn more effectively into Christian communities where there is an unmistakable and translucent distinctiveness in the things that really count: sex, money, possessions, drink and tongue.”

Discipline is family business meant for restoration and witness.

The church is holy, to be protected and not tainted by unrepentant sin; discipline is that protection and it works toward restoration of the saint and the body and ultimately the saint and Christ - all of this shapes our witness to a watching world that hungers for something genuine, something consistent, something divergent from what is normative and something that actually brings hope.

How can we apply this to us, today.

Live a New Life of Repentance - Because Christ, our Passover lamb has been sacrificed, when you believe in him you are made new. It is not a perfect life, but a life that is no longer under the control of sin. We are now free to not sin and we avoid sin by calling it what it is, repenting, turning from it and back to Christ our source. This is the way of Christ for us, a low posture that

is quick to rid our lives of the things that infect it. Live for this, not to turn back to death, but to live in Christ's holiness. Do it as part of the family.

Be part of the "lump," the church - At Grace we see membership reflected even here in a text on discipline - there are clear lines of in and out and the relationship has been defined. We are not meant for a solitary faith, we are meant to be part of a body, known, disciplined, fathered... Live that life of repentance committed to one another, to the family.

Live with Love - Let our witness be consistent, don't compromise but live with compassion for our neighbors and those not in the family. Showing by the way we care for one another the goodness of the values we cling to.

The witness of the church being distinctive and attractive. 1971 Canadian revival - Saskatoon... begin with prayer and conviction of witness - reconciliation, the restoration that is the work of discipline. Spread across the west - lives forever transformed.

This is the witness that discipline, graciousness and the gospel produce in the church. May the Lord do this among us as a family.