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Sermon Notes

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Church Discipline: The Commitment to Holiness

1 Corinthians 5:1-13

What is a Church?

Is it “wherever two or three are gathered in Christ’s name?” Or is it more than that?

Is a faithful street evangelist up on a podium in Central Park New York preaching the gospel to a mixed group... is that a church?

How about a Campus Fellowship’s Friday night meeting, where students gather to sing praise songs to guitar music and hear messages about practical topics?

During the 16th century, when the Reformation was going on, the Roman Catholic church rejected the reforms of Martin Luther and excommunicated any who followed Protestant teachings

Many people began to ask Biblically, “What is a church?”

Some theologians discerned three key items

- 1) Where the word of God is preached faithfully in Christ’s name
- 2) Where the ordinances (baptism and Lord’s Supper) are faithfully administered
- 3) Where CHURCH DISCIPLINE is faithfully practiced... there you have a church

Baptists determined that the local church should as much as possible be made up only of people who were truly Christians... ; two great safeguards to this: 1) believer’s baptism, and 2) church discipline

Behind the zeal for church discipline was a greater zeal for the HOLINESS of the church

The deep desire of God’s heart for his people:

Leviticus 11:44; 1 Peter 1:16 Be holy, because I am holy.

Many people have a negative view of holiness... as though it is essentially misery, as though God were a cosmic kill-joy, demanding that all people everywhere spend their whole time in fasting and mourning and ascetic misery

A critic of the Puritans, a people clearly committed to holiness, defined Puritanism as “the haunting fear that somewhere on earth someone is happy.”

But people who fear holiness and hate holiness do so from a deep-seated misunderstanding of the evil of sin and the beauty of goodness

1 John 1:5 God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

KJV Psalm 29:2 Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.

There is a perfect beauty of holiness... the happiness that comes from holiness

Jonathan Edwards: Holiness, as I then wrote down some of my contemplations on it, appeared to me to be of a sweet, pleasant, charming, serene, calm nature; which brought an inexpressible purity, brightness, peacefulness and rapture to the soul. In other words, that it made the soul like a field or garden of God, with all manner of pleasant flowers; all pleasant, delightful, and undisturbed: enjoying a sweet calm. and the gently vivifying beams of the sun. The soul of a true Christian... appeared like such a little white flower as we see in the spring of the years; low and humble on the ground, opening its bosom to receive the pleasant beams of the sun's glory; rejoicing as it were in a calm rapture; diffusing around a sweet fragrant; standing peacefully and lovingly, in the midst of other flowers round about; all in like manner opening their bosoms, to drink in the light of the sun.

Heaven is a perfect place of holiness, where happiness is also perfect

So, we should understand sin as the greatest enemy the people of God will ever face... so a healthy church MUST address the sin of its people to be glorifying to God and fruitful, as well as truly happy and at peace

I. Our Context: Tolerance, Not Holiness

A. America's Prevailing Spirit: Relativism and Tolerance of Sin

1. Postmodern era... absolute uncertainty about absolute truths
2. Relativism: “What is truth?” Truth is relative to your perspective
3. Individualism:
 - a. every person is an island
 - b. mutual accountability to a group is avoided
4. Question Authority
 - a. “what right do you have to tell me what to do?”
5. Tolerance: America's Greatest Virtue??

Ayn Rand claims, "We must have tolerance for the opinions of others, because tolerance is the greatest virtue...."

American educators have imbibed this... mixing a potent cocktail of self-esteem + tolerance as the ideal for interpersonal relations; public schools teach tolerance of things openly condemned in the Bible like homosexuality

The attitude is "live and let live"... "judge not, lest ye be judged..."

B. Church Historical Context

1. Ongoing practice of discipline essential to Baptist life a century ago

Historian Greg Wills wrote, "To a nineteenth-century Baptist, a church without discipline would hardly have counted as a church."

a. Mid-19th century Baptist churches disciplined 2% of their membership annually

2. What happened?

a. some legalism

i) card playing, dancing, etc.... Greg Wills: Dancing the rock on which the ship of discipline foundered

b. More than anything, though, church's accommodation to society

C. Sin's Deadly Plague Unchecked

1. J.L Dagg: When discipline leaves a church, Christ goes with it

2. Sin is a deadly plague... not some minor annoyance

3. When we allow sin to spread unchecked, we are begging for disaster; the church loses all its power

4. Sinners are no longer converted... professing Christians in constant danger of backsliding... nothing can check it

5. End result: churches not much different from the world

II. Christ's Clear Steps for Dealing with Sin: Matthew 18

A. Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5

1. two key passages on church discipline...

2. however, slightly different focus

- a. Matthew 18 focuses more on inter-personal sins... sins from one individual to the next

Matthew 18:15-17 "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. ¹⁶ But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

- b. 1 Corinthians 5 focuses more on scandalous sins that affect the whole church immediately... there the issue is brought directly to the elders of the church to be dealt with publicly

III. Paul's Commands About Church Discipline

A. The Context: A Particularly Shocking Sin, and a Church's Blasé Reaction

1. A sin that would make all of pagan Corinth sit up and take notice
2. Paul himself is shocked

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

- a. Paul is clear that all sexual immorality is a very serious sin
 - b. But this is the kind of sin that even pagans would be shocked at
 - c. The sin is "being reported"... gossip is already spreading
 - d. Probably a man was sleeping with his step-mother... "a man has his father's wife" rather than "a man has his mother..."
3. Even worse, the Corinthian church has responded with PRIDE

Verse 2 And you are proud!

- a. The Corinthians' besetting sin in every area was pride... proud of their leaders, proud of their spiritual gifts; proud of their status within the city; proud at every level
- b. here, it was not so much that they were proud of the sin... but they were very proud of themselves despite such a heinous sin
- c. Paul's job: to shock them to their senses with their duty

1 Corinthians 5:2 And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?

So now we come directly to the issue of “excommunication”... the final stage of discipline in which a member is put out of the church because of sin

B. Paul’s Commands and Reasons Verse by Verse

1. verse 3 Paul’s Apostolic Judgment

1 Corinthians 5:3 Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present.

- a. Notice that Paul uses “judgment language”
- b. He will do it again at the end:

1 Corinthians 5:12-13 What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? ¹³ God will judge those outside.

- c. Clearly this is a limiting passage on the common understanding of “judge not lest you be judged”... apparently there are some judgments that it is sinful to make, and there are some other judgments that it is sinful NOT to make
- d. Paul in verse 3 is speaking as an Apostle who represents the authority of Christ in this church matter
- e. Paul has already passed judgment on this sinner... now the church, in order to stay obedient to Christ, must do the same
- f. Paul’s power is PRESENT in the 21st century church as well whenever we read his apostolic writings and acknowledge that he is speaking for Christ
- g. Paul clearly wants this sin to be dealt with IMMEDIATELY

2. verses 4-5 The Remedy Commanded

1 Corinthians 5:4-5 When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, ⁵ hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.

- a. Paul is giving his formal sentence in this matter, telling this local church precisely what they should do with this sinner
- b. First, the discipline must be done in public assembly, when the church is assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ
- c. Second, Paul says “he is with them in spirit”... the church must honor his authority as an Apostle by obeying his commands

- d. “the power of the Lord Jesus is present”: the Lord Jesus’ authority is there for this action by the Holy Spirit
 - i) an ominous reminder of Ananias and Sapphira in which two church members lied to the Apostle Peter, and the Spirit of Christ was present to put them both to death
 - ii) so here in Corinthian church, when Paul says “and the power of our Lord Jesus is present” he is referring to Christ’s power to cleanse His church, even by death if need be

1 Corinthians 11:29-30 For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.

- iii) This issue of sin in the church is DEADLY SERIOUS!
- e. Paul says, then, at this solemn assembly, “Hand this man over to Satan”
 - i) Paul says in verse 2, they should have put the man out of the fellowship
 - ii) He will say in verse 7, “Get rid of the old yeast...”
 - iii) He will say in verse 13, “Expel the wicked man from among you”
 - iv) All of this is saying the same thing: expel this former brother from church membership...
 - v) But here “Hand this man over to Satan” shows the spiritual result... Satan is called the “god of this world”... in other words, this man should now be cast adrift into Satan’s world as the unbeliever he is

f. Reason given:

1 Corinthians 5:5 hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.

- i) This is one of the key motives: that somehow this sinning man may in the end be saved on judgment day

3. verses 6-8 The Analogy of the Yeast

1 Corinthians 5:6-8 Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? ⁷ Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast-- as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸ Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.

Yeast: a one-celled fungus that reproduces rapidly by simply dividing in two; it is used in baking to give breads and cakes a nice, fluffy texture. This happens when the yeast cells reproduce rapidly, using the starch and sugars in the batter to spread throughout the whole;

During this growth process, the yeast cells change sugars into alcohol and produce a gas, carbon dioxide. This gas spreads through the dough in the form of bubbles, making it light and fluffy.

Now, in the Bible, yeast is used as a metaphor for something that spreads rapidly and in a hidden fashion until the whole is permeated with it

- a. Paul reaches back for a little of his Jewish heritage in which Jews were called upon at the time of the Passover feast to get rid of all the yeast in their houses and eat only unleavened bread
 - b. The yeast became a spiritual symbol of impurity, of sin in the eyes of God
 - c. Paul uses that to refer to the sin in the church
 - d. The danger if they don't expel this wicked man is that soon the whole church will be infected with his sin... it will spread through the whole body and defile everyone...
 - e. Paul links the sacrifice of Christ as the final fulfillment of the Passover Symbolism... Christ has been sacrificed so that we will be pure and holy
 - f. So we Christians should do an even better job of purification than the Jews ever did... our Passover Lamb is infinitely better than the actual lambs that the Jews slaughter
 - g. So the Corinthians should get rid of spiritual yeast: malice, wickedness... so that they are pure, characterized only by sincerity and truth
4. verses 9-11 The Prohibition from Associating with Immoral So-Called Brothers

1 Corinthians 5:9-11 I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people-- ¹⁰ not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. ¹¹ But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

- a. Here Paul gets very specific about the end results of this expulsion
- b. The sinner who claims to be a Christian but who lives in such repulsive immorality is a GREAT DANGER to the church... such a man you must avoid at all costs

- c. Paul is clear that there is a big difference between unbelievers, the “people of this world” Paul calls them—who live in constant sin all the time
- d. Those people are enough of a threat, but their sin is different... we are aware that they are sinning and under the wrath of God; we can pity them, pray for them, seek to lead them to Christ; but their sin is not as great a threat as a hypocrite who claims to be a Christian but who is sexually immoral
- e. To avoid people of the world who sin would mean that we would have to leave this world... but clearly Jesus doesn't want that:
 - i) First of all, Jesus himself ate with tax collectors and sinners... He was constantly seeking to win them to repentance
 - ii) Second of all, Jesus prayed plainly in John 17 that He was leaving His disciples in the world
 - iii) Third, Paul's own statement here implies that we should associate with people of this world
 - iv) God wants His church to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth
 - v) In fact that's the whole point... we are here to lead the lost people out of darkness into the light of Christ... but if the church is polluted with sin, then we can do nothing for the lost of this world
 - vi) But he is just as clearly commanding that we have NOTHING TO DO WITH a man who claims to be a Christian but who is leading an immoral and wicked life...
 - vii) He lists specific sins:

is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler

- viii) This is clearly just a representative list... so any pattern of wickedness that would bring the name of Christ into reproach...
STAY AWAY FROM HIM

With such a man do not even eat

This is where the Amish and other Anabaptistic groups get what they call “the ban” or is sometimes called “shunning”

Jonathan Edwards helpfully explains this:

This doesn't mean we shouldn't give basic human kindness to them: medical assistance if they are in danger, common acts of kindness such as opening a door for them or picking up something they dropped on the ground;

Nor does it mean that husbands shouldn't eat with wives or wives with husbands; parents aren't free from showing common bonds of affection to their children or children to their parents, or biological brothers and sisters are forbidden to speak to each other... this is NOT what Paul has in mind!

What it DOES mean, however, is the excommunicated person is seen by the church to be an unbeliever, and actually worse than any other unbeliever... they are living in open sin against Christ... how can we ever act "normal" with such a person again

There should be a constant sense of the seriousness of what has happened

With such a man do not even eat

5. verse 12-13 Judging those Inside, Not Outside the Church

1 Corinthians 5:12-13 What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? ¹³ God will judge those outside.

6. verse 13 The Command Given One Last Time

"Expel the wicked man from among you."

IV. The Purposes of Church Discipline

A. Above All Things: The Glory of God

1. The church exists above all things to be a display of the glory of God
2. Christ called us "**The light of the world**"... but said the light must not be hidden under a bushel
3. Paul said we are like **stars that shine in the darkness** as we **hold out the word of life** to perishing people
4. We therefore are called for God's glory, exist for God's glory, live for God's glory, die for God's glory
5. A sinful church does not rightly display the glory of God
6. The primary purpose of church discipline is the glory of God: that His attributes must be put on display: His holiness, His justice, His wisdom, His patience, His mercy, His love, His wrath... all these attributes put on clear display for all to see

B. The Salvation of the Individual

1. Jesus' steps in Matthew 18 have the restoration of the sinner in mind... trying to "win your brother over" to repentance

2. So also Paul here in 1 Corinthians 5 has the final salvation of the sinning person in view:

1 Corinthians 5:5 hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.

3. The idea is that he will come to his senses, hate the fleshly tendency inside him that led to this sin, and repent before God
4. The desire is the FULL RESTORATION of the sinner to a right relationship with God and his final salvation
5. The ultimate threat here is not church discipline... it is hell; to be cut off from Christ

Matthew 7:23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

C. The Purity of the Church

1. Paul's statement "**A little yeast leavens the whole loaf**" shows the great danger of sin... it NEVER stays put
 - a. The yeast image of hidden permeation is a powerful picture
 - b. Time and time again, churches have experienced this... perhaps some member commits adultery, and the church has no response... soon, the cases are multiplying
2. Christ said the church is the **salt of the earth**... we are the purifying agent that stops the spread of corruption in the world; but **if the salt loses its saltiness, it is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out onto the ground and trampled by men**
3. The clear idea is that an unholy church—a church that tolerates sin—is of NO USE in the purposes of God in the world
4. The church MUST deal with sin, and not allow it to permeate through its members

D. The Restoration of Unity in the Church

1. Sin produces a rupture in the beautiful unity of the church
2. It deeply harms relationships, alienates Christians from each other, causes us to stop loving one another as we should
3. The process of church discipline is essential for resolving sin-based conflicts and restoring the church to unity... relationships can be restored in

righteousness, not by sweeping sin under the rug, but by dealing with it honestly in the way that God has ordained

E. The Reputation of the Church and of the Lord

1. Paul said the sin was of a public, scandalous nature
2. The scandalous nature of sin can DESTROY a church's effectiveness in a community
3. Conversely, when a church is known in the community for being faithful to a holy God, its scope of ministry greatly increases; people hold such a church in HIGH ESTEEM

The Glory of God ... The Salvation of the Individual... The Purity of the Church... The Restoration of Unity in the Church... The Reputation of the Church and of the Lord

And now as we close, a word of comfort: Are you struggling hard with sin? Do you have a friend or family member who has drifted away from the Lord? Do you worry that your sin is too great for God to forgive? Then right now would you come to Christ? Confess and turn from your sins, and believe in Jesus, crucified, dead, buried, risen, and exalted. Come again to the cross. There you will find healing, forgiveness, restoration, and grace to help in your time of need.

An Ocean of Grace... our sin is like a flame... maybe a small match, maybe a candle, maybe a torch, maybe a bonfire, maybe a towering inferno... the Pacific Ocean could quench all

Our God is a gracious God, full of mercy and compassion, and to the humble especially He gives more grace. God's grace is greater, more extensive, and more powerful than *all* our sin.