



If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you, to some extent—not to put it too severely. ⁶ The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. ⁷ Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. ⁸ I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. ⁹ The reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. ¹⁰ If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, ¹¹ in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

Two weeks ago we talked about the importance of speaking truth into one another's lives. Paul spoke hard truths to the church in Corinth and we need to do the same for one another. We talked about this that same night in our Life Group and I asked this question. "What would happen if everyone in the church invited at least one trusted friend to regularly speak truth into their life?" The answers were all unanimous—if we did this, we would all grow in our faith much more quickly and much more deeply.

The very best way to speak truth into someone's life is to do it in small, regular doses. And please don't forget—the key is inviting others to speak truth into your life. If you regularly invite others to speak truth to you then it is much more likely to happen. Karen pulled me aside this past week and warned me that I really needed to be careful about my negative attitude around the kids in regard to a certain topic. She was absolutely right and I immediately went and apologized to my kids for my negative comment and bad attitude. I don't mean to imply that it always goes this way. Sometimes we don't share the truth in a loving way and sometimes we don't respond well, but this was one of the times it worked out well. My point is that it is far easier to catch such things while they are small. It is a little like brushing your teeth. Tell me—do you brush your teeth 2-3 times a day or do you brush them one time per week but do a really thorough job? The second option is rather disgusting, but someone could respond—"Look, I spent a full twenty minutes brushing my teeth last week. I flossed for five minutes, brushed for fourteen—I spent 30 seconds on each tooth!—and then I rinsed and gargled for a minute. I did a meticulous job."

No one would care for their teeth that way but that is how we tend to speak truth into one another's lives. We tend to wait until the proverbial teeth are rotting and the stench is so bad that

we are nearly forced to say something. In other words, rather than a regular does of speaking the truth, we wait until someone has made a really big mistake or committed a huge sin and then we try to speak truth to them and correct them. By then it's often too late; either the damage has been done or else they are completely closed to the truth. How much better is it to speak truth to one another in small, regular doses, which we could call smart, relationship maintenance. This is the kind of relationships I wish every Christian had with others.

Karen brought out a good point about this topic that I had at least implied before but need to make explicit. It is not enough to ask someone whom you trust to speak truth into your life. That person needs to know you well enough to speak truth to you. This means that we need to be vulnerable in your relationships so that this level of knowledge and trust can be developed, even before you give the invitation to them.

However, in the absence of healthy relationship maintenance and accountability, there are times when sin needs to be confronted at the next level, which is generally called church discipline. This is the context of this morning's passage, but understand that we are seeing the "other side" of church discipline. This is the conclusion of the process of church discipline which resulted in genuine repentance by the one who sinned. Repentance and reconciliation is always the goal of all church discipline, therefore Paul rejoiced at the repentant sinner and he had to write this portion of the letter to remind the believers to "forgive and comfort him" and to "reaffirm your love for him." It's unfortunate that Paul had to go out of his way to make sure this vital step was done, but for whatever reason, they were not eager to welcome him back into their fellowship.

This is interesting because prior to this, they were not willing to confront the sin at all. In 1 Corinthians, Paul was beside himself because the believers blatantly ignored gross sin in their body. "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not even occur among pagans: A man has his father's wife. And you are proud!" Not only did they not confront this man's sin but they were seemingly proud of having ignored it. We see then the two opposite errors of confronting sin and helping one another overcome sin. On the one hand many are reluctant to confront sin and on the other hand, many are too eager to confront or not able to forgive the repentant sinner. None of us is perfectly balanced and each of us has a tendency toward one of these two errors. Before we go further, I would ask you to examine your heart. Which error are you prone to follow—do you tend to ignore sin and are afraid to confront it in others or are you too eager to confront sin and not restore a fallen brother or sister in Christ? Both are terribly wrong and need to be balanced by a Biblical understanding. Therefore, this is what I want to do this morning. Since we only have one side of the story, as it were, I want to go back to 1 Corinthians chapter five and explain the process of church discipline. Next, we will look at 2 Corinthians chapter seven where Paul explains the response of repentance and then finally we will return to chapter two and consider Paul's encouragement to restore the repentant sinner. Paul addresses all three of the phases in his letter and I think it would be wise to see them all put together.

Let me read 1 Corinthians 5 and pull out several brief principles.

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. 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? 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.*⁴ *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.*

⁶ 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.

⁹ 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.

¹² 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. "Expel the wicked man from among you."

Church discipline is necessary because sin can spread like gangrene within the body of Christ. In verse six Paul used the familiar illustration of yeast—a “little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.” Actually, Paul’s illustration is better than the illustration of gangrene. If a foot becomes gangrenous, sometimes you have to cut off the whole foot in order to save the leg. But with yeast and dough, the yeast inevitably spreads throughout the dough. Gangrene may be able to be stopped with drastic action but yeast can never be removed from a lump of dough. In the process of church discipline, if the sinner does not eventually repent, that person must be removed from the church fellowship. Paul says as much in different ways.

v. 2—*Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?*

v. 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.*

v.7—*Get rid of the old yeast*

v.11—*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.*

v.13—*Expel the wicked man from among you.*

Do you get the picture? No less than five times in thirteen verses Paul called for a removal of the offending brother from their fellowship. Understand that this is the last and most desperate step of church discipline. It is implied that this brother was stubbornly unrepentant. He was unrepentant, the other believers did not seem to care and they were all proud of his so-called “Christian liberty.” Most of you know the basic steps of church discipline from Matthew 18. First you go to the offending person one on one. If he or she is unresponsive you are to take 1-2 people with you and if that does not work, you are to “tell it to the church” and remove them from the church fellowship. What Paul describes in this chapter is the final step in that painful process. If this is done with much prayer, dependency and extra doses of love, then the effect is to remove the yeast from the lump of dough before it could mix in and start to penetrate. It is far

better for everyone if the unrepentant sinner is removed from the body so that the sinful tendencies does not spread in the body.

I hope it is clear to you why sin would spread like yeast. If a local body of Christ merely accepts every sinful choice that comes along, it is as if the pastor or elders stood up and explicitly taught the church that these things are acceptable for a confessing Christian. Complicity is the same thing as acceptance. We understand this in the criminal justice system. For example, if I know that my next door neighbor robbed the Kwik Trip last week, I am complicit in the crime if I do not report it to the police. The same is true for unrepentant and serious sin in the church. If we do nothing, we are all complicit and we all support the sinful actions by our complicity.

There is another serious problem when church discipline is necessary. The energy spent on church discipline takes away from the preaching of the gospel and the purpose of the church. We see this most clearly in vv 12-13. *Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said good-bye to them and went on to Macedonia.* Let's take apart these two verses to understand what was happening. Paul went to Troas to preach the gospel and he gladly found an "open door." The people of the city were receptive to his preaching. He probably already had a handful of converts and there appeared to be a wide opening for the gospel to flourish. But while Paul was having this effective preaching ministry, he was waiting for Titus to arrive to give him an update about the church in Corinth. Paul wanted to know the church discipline was proceeding there. Did the church obey his teaching and confront the sinner? Had they removed him from the church? Had the sinner repented? On the one hand he had this extremely effective preaching ministry. We know that this was not always the case. Many cities rejected Paul and sent him running for his very life. But on the other hand, he was totally preoccupied with receiving news from Corinth. The issue of church discipline consumed his daily thoughts, so much so that he had to make the incredibly difficult decision to leave Troas and go to Macedonia to try and find Titus. This means that Paul's concern for the church in Corinth exceeded his desire and wide open door to preach the gospel in Troas. If it had happened today, Titus could have sent a quick text message informing Paul that all was well. Did he make the right decision? I don't think it was necessarily a matter of right and wrong but my point is that the church conflict in Corinth was a major distraction to the preaching of the gospel. Many did not hear the gospel because of the sin and conflict on the other side of the Aegean Sea. Isn't that sad?

I know we can all relate to this on one level. We know what it is like to have to spend time on urgent things instead of on important things. An issue like church discipline is urgent and important, but its urgency has a way of supplanting the importance of things like preaching the gospel. How many times have you gotten caught up in good things at the expense of better things? Furthermore, this story about Paul needing to stop preaching illustrates the lie of what some call private sins. Some Christians commit sins and they justify them by saying, "Look, this is just something I do in private. This is just something I do on my own and I'm certainly not hurting anyone else." There is no such thing as a private sin. When we sin it always has consequences on others as well. The consequences of our sin may not have as great of consequence as they had on Paul, but your sin always affects someone else.

So far we have the unrepentant sinner, the damaging effect it had on Paul's ministry and the call to administer church discipline. Next we will see the good news in this story—the stage of repentance. As we have seen, in chapter two Paul was calling for the restoration of the sinner back into full fellowship. Paul could never have asked them to restore the man unless he had fully repented. This is recorded for us in chapter seven.

Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while— yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.

We can tell that Paul is responding to the repentance of more than one person here. Paul had written them a “painful letter” which confronted all sorts of problems and rebellion within the church. Paul had more than the man undergoing church discipline in mind here but this description of repentance would apply to him as well. I know I preached about repentance a few months back but it is always helpful to look closely at what repentance really looks like.

True repentance will always begin with Godly sorrow. We all know many people who have been sorry for their sin but not truly repentant. So how do you know if sorrow is worldly sorrow or Godly sorrow? The person experiencing Godly sorrow does not have a halo around their head so there must be other ways to be sure. The key is in the last two verses.

See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.

Let's take these one or two at a time. First of all we are told that Godly sorrow produces earnestness or seriousness. By this Paul does not mean serious as opposed to funny, but serious in the sense of committed to the task at hand. If you try to speak truth into the life of another believer, you can tell fairly quickly if they intend to take what you say in an earnest, committed way. If they brush you off or don't show much interest in your concern for them, chances are good that they are not earnest about what you have to say. They don't even have to react in a defensive way. We know that when someone acts defensive at the very least they are taking you seriously—you have struck a nerve somewhere but one of the worst responses is an utter lack of serious reflection on what you are trying to say to them.

Second, Godly sorrow will produce an eagerness to clear yourselves. In our modern vernacular, “clearing ourselves” is what we do when we hire an attorney to keep us out of jail or else a publicist to scrub our image clean in the public eye. To clear ourselves is more akin to justifying our behavior with all manner of excuses. Paul has none of that in mind but rather a desire to make things right. I think this phrase is closely related to the last phrase—what readiness to see justice done. We have heard a lot of talk about justice and fairness in this past week in regard to the protests surrounding Governor Walker's budget bill. People on both sides of the issue are

clamoring for justice but justice for each of them probably means something very different. Both sides do want things to be fair and there are certainly good points on both sides of the issue, but there is also plenty of injustice on both sides. If you want to know which side is right, please talk to me after service and I will set you straight. 😊

But this is not even the kind of justice to which Paul refers. He means the type of justice that results in holiness. What happens to us when we are justified by faith in the blood of Christ? What happens in justification is that we are made holy. Our sin is removed and the holiness of Christ is credited to our account. Therefore, this type of justice is a desire to see a return to holiness. Now we can see how it is related the previous phrase—eagerness to clear yourself. Such a person has a strong desire to return to righteous and holy living and in doing so, in a sense, to “clear” their name of the sin that they have committed.

The last few words all hang together—*what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern*. Before a person can be serious about clearing themselves and working toward justice and holiness, this person must first be serious about their sin. They should have an appropriate sense of alarm. They should be indignant about their actions. They should have a reasonable level of disgust. The overall idea is that this person understand what they have done and they are shocked at their poor behavior. All of these things listed are indicators that can let you know if the sorrowful person is experiencing worldly sorrow or Godly sorrow. Notice this, however. Did Paul say anything about tears? Did he imply that if you are really sorry you will cry? Did you happen to read anything about sackcloth and ashes? Sackcloth and ashes is the Old Testament way of exhibiting sorrow and crocodile tears is the Hollywood version, but neither are necessary. Obviously, Godly sorrow will sometimes result in tears but I would bet that worldly sorrow results in tears even more often, so crying is not a reliable indicator and more than sackcloth and ashes would be.

All of these things are the result of Godly sorrow and we could also call them the fruits of repentance. They are helpful not only for big issues like church discipline, but they are helpful in your parenting. We have all witnessed our children offering an empty apology either to their siblings or to us. I know I have given less than soul-searching, Godly sorrow kinds of apologies to Karen over the years. This list of characteristics of repentance are helpful if you are evaluating someone else’s level of repentance, but they are most helpful when looking at your own heart.

The man in question in chapter two apparently did present the qualities of Godly sorrow and genuine repentance, but the church—who first felt proud of the man’s sin and then reversed course and removed him from the church—was now not willing to forgive him and welcome him back. Paul admonishes the congregation with the following.

Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow—7

I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him.—8

How often have you heard someone say, “Christians are the only ones who shoot their wounded”? This is what the believers in Corinth were doing. They demanded that the sinner repent but when he did eventually repent, they went back on their word. Why do we do this to one another? Was it possible that they did not believe his repentance? Was it possible they

adopted a “Let’s just wait and see” attitude? When someone has committed gross sin we should be a little leary about embracing them and restoring them immediately. There is wisdom in waiting for more fruits of repentance to be displayed in their life first. Maybe the church was just a little gun shy and that would be understandable. Regardless, Paul believed that the repentance was sincere and the man needed to be embraced and not shunned or shamed any further.

This incident highlights our tendency to punish sin too severely. We are sometimes too quick to judge and no little of grace. But we are also too quick to ignore sin and look the other way. If we are to truly help one another as we talked about last week, if we are to have good relationship maintenance where we can speak truth into one another’s lives, then we must develop a balance between these two errors. It is easy to live in the extremes. It is easy to have your list of unforgivable sins and anyone who commits them is forever labeled as bad. But it’s also easy to abuse Christian liberty and never confront sin. We fall into this extreme we may think we are living in a state of grace but we are actually dispensing cheap grace that doesn’t help anyone. As I asked earlier, which extreme are you more prone toward and what do you need to do to move toward a Biblically balanced view. If you can’t, you won’t be able to help your brother or sister in Christ and you are quite likely to harm them.

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