

Lesson 13 Lecture

1 Corinthians 5-6

A belated Happy New Year! I hope you all had a blessed Christmas season. Well, we have some light reading to go through today, right?

Before we get into the reading, we need to remember some key context to this epistle:

- Much of the letter, including today's reading is a letter of rebuke and correction to the Corinthian church the Apostle Paul had founded. They had gotten off course from Paul's teaching, so this letter is designed to set them straight on what is true. Dellena covered the issue of disunity in the Body of Christ in chapters 1 & 2, and last week Steve focused on the challenges new or immature Christians deal with in chapters 3 & 4. Today's reading addresses another area of correction – immorality within the church. The church had allowed and welcomed in ungodly behavior from the Corinthian society.
- Corinth was a commercial center of the Roman empire
- The city was melting pot of cultures, professions. J. Vernon McGee described it as, "*The vices of the East and of the West met and clasped hands in the work of human degradation*". Does that sound familiar? As I look at this context, linking it today's major cities is pretty easy. Most large, U.S. cities are melting pots of cultures and world views.
- There was much idol worship – one of the more infamous examples was a temple built for the Greek goddess Aphrodite, or Venus. Sex was a religion at this place, and there were a thousand priestesses whose mission was to spread immorality. I believe Hollywood is today's version of Aphrodite's temple.

- Tragically, too much of the church today is doing the same thing the Corinthian church was doing – failing to biblically respond and adhere to immoral behavior within its own walls. I’ll have some additional thoughts on this issue in a few minutes.

Our reading opens up with a case of incest in the church. This is not gossip – it is a fact, and it is widely known within the church. A man has been sleeping with his father’s wife – his stepmother. What’s worse, is the church appears to be *proudly* accepting this behavior. While most of us know this is unacceptable, I find Paul’s commentary in verse 1 of Chapter 5 interesting. He says that what this man is doing *even the pagans*, or Gentiles, don’t tolerate. What he is saying is that even amongst the corrupt and defiled Corinthian society, they saw what this man was doing was evil. In verse 2, Paul tells them what the course of action they should take – they should put the man out of their fellowship.

Jesus clearly laid out the handling of sin within the church. Let’s take a look at Matthew 18:15-17, *“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”* The Lord lays out a progressive set of steps to managing sinful conduct within the church.

1. We are to approach a brother/sister in sin *one on one*. We are not to make a public pronouncement to shame or humiliate them – the goal, or end game, in our confronting the individual is **restoration** - to get them to confess and repent. Paul emphasized the purpose of confronting a sinner within the

church in Galatians 6:1, “*Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently.*”

2. Should the person in sin continue in the sin, the next step is to take some trusted witnesses and meet with individual – again, with the goal of restoration. Good choices for witnesses are elders or deacons.
3. Should the person be determined to continue the sin, he/she should be put out of the church, or excommunicated. **Sin must be dealt with within the church.** If it is not, we are, in effect, abusing and diminishing the grace of God accomplished at the cross. Ananias and Sapphira learned that the hard way Acts 5. They lied about the totality of the money they received from selling their possessions to give to the church. They were both killed on the spot by God. The message was clear – the Body of Christ is to be a mirror image of a holy God. Leviticus 19:2 plainly states, “*Be holy because I, the Lord your God, is holy.*” People who are determined to remain in their sin should feel the judgment of that sin. Being excommunicated is only a permanent sentence if the individual continues his/her sinful ways. Should they repent, they should be welcomed back into the church.

I would suspect many of you had an issue with verse 5, “*hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.*” Why would Paul exhort someone who has been saved to be handed over to Satan? By being excommunicated from the church, we lose a spiritual covering of blessing from God. I believe this does not mean the individual has lost his/her salvation. I think the latter portion of this verse proves that – “*so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord*”. The objective of the act of being handed over to Satan, whose sole goal is to destroy, is that the inevitable pain and suffering of sin will become so overwhelming, the person will finally turn to Jesus, ask for

forgiveness, and repent. Imagine a child who keeps trying to put his hands on the stove. You keep pushing him away to protect him from hurting himself. However, he won't give up. Finally, you let him go ahead and feel the pain of his determined behavior. Chances are, the painful result of his determined bad behavior will teach him a lesson about the risks of his actions.

From verse 6, Paul brings into the conversation yeast, or leaven. Leaven, in Scripture, is a symbol of evil. To help make sourdough, the Jews would use yeast, or leaven, and they would leave a little left over to help make the next loaf of bread. Paul mentions Christ as the Passover Lamb, and the Passover was known as the Feast of Unleavened bread. To make sure the Passover bread was truly unleavened, the ladies would scour their houses to find and remove any leftover leaven. Jesus was without sin – this is what made Him the perfect Passover Lamb to take away our leaven – our sin. Notice the behaviors linked to leavened bread – malice and wickedness – compared to the behaviors of unleavened bread – sincerity and truth.

In verse 9, we see there should be a distinction between our fellowship within the church and our life in the world. Within the church, we are not to associate or keep company with sexually immoral people, or fornicators – people having sex outside the confines of a biblical marriage. Again, we are to be conducting ourselves as children of God in His holy image. What's the reality? We're all sinners – we are all struggling with our inborn sin nature. However, as confessed followers of Jesus Christ, we are new creations and given the Holy Spirit as a down payment to our redemption, and we are born again. A critical and profound step for the believer is to understand that the newborn life led by the Spirit is **more powerful** than the crucified sin nature. The key to making that a reality is humbly submitting to God your weaknesses and releasing His power to overtake the temptation to honor the endless demands of your sin nature.

Outside the church, the world is awash with immoral people. Paul's point in verse 10 is being around such people is unavoidable. Moreover, some of them God has possibly brought into your life for the purpose of witnessing to them. We are to be a light in this dark world – not hiding away in some Christian bubble. Salvation isn't meant to be isolated – it's meant to be shared. Paul's point in this section is that within the church, we should see something different than what we see in the world. We should see a holy love – not an immoral love. Paul is very clear about the fact that within the church, we should not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister, but is intentionally sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. We're not even to eat with such people.

Heading into chapter 6, Paul takes up the issue of settling disputes between Christians. His objective is to take differences and disputes within the church and settle them via godly governance and judgment. This is another way for the church to distinguish itself from the world. When one Christian sues another one, it brings division in the church, which is counter to one of the foundations of the church, which is to be united in Christ. Paul said in Ephesians 4:3, "*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*" Because we are human, and we all wrestle with our sin nature, which drives selfishness, and, thusly, finding a lasting peace absent of Christ is impossible. However, if we can all agree on one thing – to fall under the Lordship of Jesus and submit to His Kingship, then there's a hope for common ground, which leads to the potential of a godly resolution.

Paul reveals in this exhortation a future role for us as believers. We will be judges in the Kingdom of God. We will even be judges of angels. Accordingly, by adhering to settling our differences within the church, we are in effect preparing and training for a future responsibility in the Kingdom. Paul also references in verse 5 the inherent conflict of a justice system that is rooted in the bias of a Satan-led world vs. justice dictated by God and his principles. The point he is making

here is the potential fairness of the results of a lawsuit adjudicated outside the church is reduced given the ungodly tendencies of a world who the church sees as adversarial to God.

For those of you who were around for my last lecture and stayed awake, you may recall I distinguished there are two types of witnessing: 1) In the moment witnessing; and, 2) Moment-by-moment witnessing. The first type is when we are sharing the Gospel with a specific person. The second type of witnessing is how we live our day-to-day lives. Are we walking and talking in a consistent and united manner that reflects God's character and love? In verse 7, Paul acknowledges the dangers when we as believers violate the unity of the church when we sue each other publicly. He said, *"The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already."* He follows up this statement by emphasizing a higher priority. We should rather be wronged or cheated rather than destroy our witness by making public our disputes and showing we can't settle our own affairs. Paul's mindset was laser focused – for the sake of winning more people to Christ, he would surrender his fleshly concept of right and wrong. Are we willing to do that?

In verses 9 and 10, he makes a powerful statement regarding the eternal destination of unrepentant sinners. *"Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."* Ok, I'm going to address the elephant in the room. What do we do with homosexual behavior within the church? Hollywood and the liberal press have a clear agenda to get society to buy into the lie that homosexuality is perfectly natural, and homosexual behavior should be accepted, welcomed, and honored everywhere. A component of the agenda that has gained a lot of traction lately is people are born

gay. By making the argument that people are born gay, they are equating their sexual preference as being as natural as someone being born a certain race or ethnicity. They make the point that being Hispanic or African American isn't a sin, so how can homosexuality be a sin?

Going back to chapter 2 of Genesis – the very beginning of humanity, we read of God's original plan for humanity in verse 24, *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."* God did not create Adam and Steve or Amanda and Eve. He created man and woman, and by becoming "one flesh", he is saying God created sex to be between a man and a woman in marriage. Later in chapters 18 & 19 of Genesis, we read about the grievousness of Sodom's sin, and one of the noted sins is homosexuality in chapter 19, verse 5. Ultimately God would judge the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah by destroying these cities.

The truth of the matter is once we reach an age of accountability, we are indeed held accountable for how we were born - we are all born with a sin nature. We've established sin is a choice, and the Scriptures tell us homosexuality is a sin. The conclusion I arrive at is homosexuality is a choice and, therefore, those who are living that way are accountable for that choice. Verse 11 says, *"And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."* This verse testifies that homosexuality is a choice. *"And that is what some of you were."*

The implication with this word is a choice was made. If someone can make the choice to go from living a gay lifestyle to living heterosexually, then you can draw the conclusion that the opposite is true – that one who is heterosexual makes the choice to be a homosexual. More importantly, though, this verse makes it extremely clear homosexuality is a forgivable sin. Jesus said in John 3:16-17, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes*

in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”

Do you see any exceptions to God’s salvation in these verses? I don’t. The only unforgivable sin is to not believe in the One Who can forgive you. This is called the blaspheme of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit’s primary job function is to testify to the truth of Who Jesus is – God the Son and His sacrifice on the cross to offer forgiveness of sin. If you deny the truth of Who Jesus is as the sole source of forgiveness from God, then you are rejecting the testimony of the Holy Spirit. You can’t be forgiven by Someone in Whom you don’t believe.

Tragically, just as the Corinthian church failed in the handling of immoral behavior, so has much of the church today failed in its response to homosexuality. For the most part, the church has taken 3 positions regarding the homosexual community – and none of them are acceptable.

One component of the church has taken the terrible position of extreme hatred and condemnation. The Westboro-type churches are doing a terrible dishonoring of God’s true mindset to all of humanity, which is to look at them as targets of redemption, reconciling, and healing. These churches are filled with judgment on homosexuality as if it is an unforgivable sin, which it is not. If the goal of the church is to work in step with Jesus who came to save a lost world, what possible light can a homosexual see amidst such darkness, hatred, and judgment? Where’s the attraction in that?

Another component of the church has adopted the Corinthian approach – a liberal perspective of watering down, or flagrantly denying, the fact that the Word of God clearly states homosexuality is a sin. It is my opinion the majority of these churches that take the liberal route on the issue of homosexuality are taking this position out of fear. Their fears are rooted in their respective

leadership's decision to base the success of the church on how fast it is growing in membership. If they choose to take a biblical stand on homosexuality, they will be in direct conflict with society. That could slow down, or even retract their precious growth rates. For the sake of maintaining their carnal-driven objectives of becoming a bigger or mega-church, they compromise on standing on the principles of God's word.

When we opt to shy away from the ultimate and everlasting truth of God's Word, we are surrendering a component of the victory Jesus won at the cross. Part of the victory that Jesus won at the cross was we no longer need to be afraid of being bond slaves to sin and Satan. The power of the resurrection and the love that fueled it is far greater than the fear of slavery to sin and the condemning influences of a world who rejects the truth. Taking a biblical stand on the topic of immorality will draw the ire of a sin-drenched society, but we must remember Who our God is when the world is attacking us. Psalm 118:6 reminds us of this glorious truth, "*The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?*"

The third component of the church is that which just refuses to address the issue. It's kind of like the '*don't ask, don't tell*' approach. In my mind, this impotent position is doing a disservice to God and his commandments as well as to the homosexual community. Whether someone's sin is homosexuality, adultery, stealing, or anything else, we have a responsibility to tell these people the truth of their sinful conduct, and the consequences of their remaining in that sin. But that responsibility is two-fold. Not only are we tell them the truth, but we are to do it in love with a mindset of sharing this truth out of concern for their salvation.

Our reading wraps up in Chapter 6, verses 19 & 20, "*Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God*

with your bodies.” He says in verse 15 as believers our bodies are part of Christ Himself. When we hear of the concept of redemption as part of salvation, we relish in the hope that we are no longer slaves to our flesh. The apostle acknowledges that with our freedom in Christ, we have the right to do anything. BUT, he acknowledges the risk in that thought process. We may have the right to do anything, but by taking too much liberty with that right, we run the risk of being mastered by that sense of having the right to do anything. Isn’t one of the main points of coming to faith in Christ is to no longer be mastered by a destructive force? Jesus said in Matthew 6:24, *“No one can serve two masters.”*

Redemption is a transfer of spiritual ownership. By our faith in Jesus’ sacrifice, we are agreeing to convert our spiritual ownership from Satan to God. Given Satan’s objective as a spiritual owner is to destroy us by relentlessly tempting our insatiable flesh, we in theory should be thankful that God’s methods of ownership are for healing, reconciliation, forgiveness, and restoration. We are, in effect, *“Under New Management”*. When you come to faith in Christ, you become His prized possession, and He’s never going to let you go.

Paul reminds us of the dangers of immorality – he links the truth of sex between two people makes them one. He is making the important point that as a purchased possession of Christ, we have no business being in sexual immorality – effectively becoming one with a sinner. Being united with the Lord is to be one with Him in the Spirit. We can’t be that if we’re conducting ourselves in a sexually immoral way. That includes living together outside the bonds of marriage as well as adultery. I would suspect most of us know adultery is wrong, but living together has become as commonly accepted as marriage. Living together is fornication, and there is no place in the Kingdom of God for this behavior.

I am fully aware that many people – even Christians - reject the biblical position on sexual immorality. One of the common arguments against the biblical

position is, *“If two people genuinely love each other, why would God have a problem with that?”* Another argument is, *“The bible is outdated – society has ‘progressed’”*. A few months ago, I attended a seminar on creationism. It was a video series presenting the scientific arguments for the biblical position that God created the worlds and humanity as opposed to the proponents of evolution or any other misinformed and deceived counter argument to creationism. The moderator was speaking to a specific point that was being made and asked why believing that point was important. Before I could really say anything, I just blurted, *“Because the truth matters”*. I knew this was a Holy Spirit-driven utterance because I’m neither that smart nor that fast to come up with such a foundational statement on my own.

The truth does matter. God’s Word is the truth. Psalm 119:160a says, *“The entirety of Your word is truth.”* Jesus said exactly that in John 17:17, and He told us He is the way, the truth, and the life as stated in John 14:6. Revelation 19:11a says this about Jesus, *“Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True.”* Finally, Hebrews 13:8 says, *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”* Let me ask you a question? – Does $2 + 2 = 4$? Has it always been the same? Has it ever changed? The truth of God being true and, therefore, His word being true is just as constant as $2+2$ equaling 4. The issue every one of us as believers must wrestle with is, are we going to stand on this truth, which comes with a price, or are we going to compromise to what we know is true and succumb to a Satan-led deceived society?

Brothers and sisters, the closer we draw to and align our lives with Jesus is going to put us in the cross-hairs of a God-rejecting and God-hating world. Jesus said if they persecuted Him, they’re going to persecute those who publicly demonstrate their allegiance to Him and His teaching. The Scriptures clearly tell us immorality is not to be tolerated within the church. If it is, we are no different than

the non-believer. The goal should always to be treat people living immorally with a design on restoration via repentance and forgiveness. We must demonstrate our love for them as another member of God's creation and His love for them by telling them the truth of their sinful behavior. Some are going to get angry with you and discontinue your friendship. Gasp – they may even unfollow you on Façade Book and Instasham!

Immorality is an ugly sin, but what sin is pretty? Whether it's immorality or any other sin, as followers of Jesus Christ, our mindset must be the same as His. What is God's mindset towards sinners? 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 says, "*Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.*" God's mindset for all of humanity – including those in immorality, is reconciling them to Himself through Jesus.

Here's the thing, Jesus proved that if there is going to be reconciliation, someone is going to have to die. He is the embodiment of the ministry of reconciliation. Therefore, as a human testimony to the character of your Lord and Savior - so must this ministry of reconciliation be at the forefront of your heart and mind. Whatever discomfort or distaste you may have for someone's sin, telling people the truth of their sin in love is the first step in the ministry of reconciliation. Being honest with people about their sin will cost you. You'll likely experience some death in friendships, acquaintances, social standing, and image. You'll pay a price in this ministry of reconciliation, but remember you are His, and He paid a much bigger price to reconcile you to the Father. God bless you for participating in this Bible study and your desire to know the truth. Let's pray.