

Some portions of God's Word are sweet to the taste and pleasant to the ear...

Some portions, however, are difficult. Jeremiah said, "But if I say, 'I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,' his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot (Jer 20:9)." Some places in God's Word are hard. I don't mean hard to understand, but hard to put into practice. They're unpopular. But they are just as good, vital, and needed as the "pleasant" sections.

We come to such a text this evening—1 Corinthians 5. 1 Corinthians is a church letter that shows us how to deal with problems. It's very helpful to us for it reveals two critical things: 1) There is no such thing as a problem-free church. 2) The church that pleases God is the church that deals with its problems in a God-honoring way.

Q: What was the first problem Paul addressed in this letter (in chs 1-4)?

He addresses the second beginning in chapter 5. This perhaps is one of the most "blunt" chapters in the NT. If your goal is political correctness, it will not sit well. If you have bought the tenets of humanism and believe that every man has a "right" to his own self-expression, you will choke on what you are about to hear.

But God is good, and His Word is good—even the parts that seem "hard" to us. After all, He is God, and He knows what is best for us. He's our Maker. He's omniscient. And He gave His life to rescue us from eternal destruction. How could we question the goodness of the Word He has given us?

I. Paul exposed two problems in the church (1-2).

Q: How did he find out about the problems? V 1 (see 1:11)

The KJV says, "It is reported commonly." What Paul is about to address was public knowledge. That's what made it so grievous to him. We're not supposed to be "detectives" snooping around in the church looking for problems. Not at all. But when problems surface, especially when they become common knowledge, we must take action. In fact, we must take action *before* our problems become public knowledge in the world.

Discuss: Why so? What happens when the world finds out about church problems?

A. There was the sin of immorality (1).

Paul tells us a couple of things about this immorality...

1. *It was in the church family.*
2. *It was unacceptable even to pagans.*

Q: What did he say was taking place? "A man has his father's wife." Incest. Roman society was very immoral, but even there this sin was viewed as taboo.

The way Paul words the phrase "his father's wife" indicates the woman was not the man's mother, but likely his *stepmother*. And the fact

that Paul doesn't tell the church to do anything with the woman indicates what? She wasn't part of the church. She apparently was an unbeliever.

There's the situation. A church member was involved sexually with his step-mother, an *unregenerate* step-mother to make a wicked matter even more horrendous. And his behavior was public knowledge.

That wasn't the only sin, however.

B. There was the sin of tolerating sin (2).

Q: Who was guilty of this sin?

Q: How had the church responded to this situation? V 2 "And you are *proud*." The word means "to puff or blow up." Apparently, the church members were priding themselves in their tolerance. "We're a loving church. No one's perfect, after all. We accept people just the way they are."

How should the church have responded?

1. The church should have been filled with grief.

The Greek word he used means "to mourn over the dead."¹

Q: What does that indicate about what should happen to a church when it discovers that one of its members is living in sin?

2. The church should have removed the man.

The NIV uses the phrase "put out of your fellowship." The KJV says, "That he that hath done this deed might be *taken away* from among you." The word is from the Greek term *airo*, which is the same word in John 15:2 to describe what the Father does with fruitless branches. "He *cuts off* every branch in me that doesn't bear fruit."

We'll see in a moment what Paul meant by this act of "putting out" the man. For now...

Discuss: What do Paul's words teach us about the attitude that church members should have towards sin?

Warren Wiersbe offers a helpful sense of balance here, "Discipline in the church is not like a policeman arresting a culprit; rather, it is like a father chastening his son. The first motive is to help the sinner, to show Christian love in seeking to bring him to repentance. For us to allow church members to live in open sin hurts them as well as Christ and the church."²

II. Paul proposed the solution (3-5).

He tells first what he did, and next what they needed to do...

A. He stated what he did (3).

Two things...

¹Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books) 1992.

²Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books) 1992.

1. *He took personal responsibility.* He says in v 3, “Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit.”

Paul was a couple hundred miles away from Corinth, in Ephesus at the time. He had plenty of other things with which to concern himself. Yet he said, “I am with you in spirit.” He felt responsible for this church—God used him to start it. And he took responsibility.

Discuss: What do people often do when they find out there are problems in a church? Some choose to leave. Why?

Do you think Paul’s counsel to the Corinthians in chapter 5 made him more or less popular with the people?

What motivated him then to get involved in this touchy matter?

His goal in life, which was what? 2 Cor 5:9

Paul did something else...

2. *He passed judgment.*

Read the end of v 3...

You say, “I thought we weren’t supposed to judge people.” Jesus did say in Matthew 7, “Judge not lest you be judged.”

Discuss: How do we reconcile these two texts?

Key: Keep in mind that Paul was an apostle. That was his calling. God commissioned him to take the gospel to the Gentile world, evangelize, establish churches, train and put into place elders to lead the churches, and then maintain contact with the churches to insure they operated in a God-honoring way. That’s why he wrote this letter.

B. He stated what the church needed to do (4-5).

The steps are very specific...

1. *Assemble as a church.*

Don’t ignore this any longer. Get the church members together and deal with it. Notice this wasn’t just the responsibility of the elders, but of the entire assembly. And notice this wasn’t to happen behind closed doors. The matter wasn’t to be swept under the carpet. It was to be dealt with in a public meeting of the church.

Q: What do the words, “assembled in the name of the Lord” indicate? It points to the following...

2. *Assemble to do the Lord’s work the Lord’s way.*

We’re not supposed to deal with sin-issues any way we like. We must do it God’s way. Some churches don’t deal with problems at all. Other churches may deal with them, but do so in unbiblical ways.

Discuss: What would be an example of an unbiblical way to handle this problem in Corinth?

3. *Hand the unrepentant sinner over to Satan.*

What does that mean? Wiersbe observes, “To “deliver a man to Satan” (v. 5) does not mean to send him to hell, for no church can do that.

Rather, it means to cut him off from church fellowship so that he must live in the world, which is controlled by Satan (John 12:31 and Col. 1:13). The purpose of such discipline is not to lose a member, but rather to bring the sinner to the place of repentance that he might be saved from loss of reward on the day of judgment.”³

To “hand a person over to Satan” is indeed a drastic course of action. It basically involves saying to a person who professes to know Christ yet wants to live like the world, “You can’t have it both ways. If you want to live for Christ, we’ll do all we can to help you. But if you insist on living like the world, we will give you what you request—the world. We will remove you from the protective umbrella of the church and place you on the turf of the Evil One.”

Such action is necessary for what reasons? Two...

a. This action is for the good of the man.

Q: How so according to v 5?

⇒ There may be physical destruction.

⇒ The goal is to see his spirit saved.

b. This action is for the good of the church.

That’s what Paul addresses next in verses 6ff.

Discuss: Let’s mention some ways it can be good for the church...

Next time...

III. Paul explained why church action is needed (6-8).

A. Sin spreads (6).

1. *It’s like yeast.*
2. *It affects everything it touches.*

B. Sin distorts our identity (7-8).

Wiersbe—“Leaven to the Jews was always a symbol of sin and corruption; so, before Passover, they always scoured their houses to remove all traces of leaven. Christians must have the same attitude; we dare not allow the yeast of sin to grow quietly in the church and produce trouble and shame. Christ died for us, not to make us like the world, but to make us like God.”⁴

1. *Christ is our Passover Lamb.*
2. *We must eliminate every trace of “yeast.”*

IV. Paul clarified what to do to insure no misunderstandings (9-13).

A. This doesn’t apply to our relationship with non-Christians (9-10).

1. *We can’t avoid contact with ungodly pagans.*
2. *We’d have to leave the world.*

³Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the New Testament*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books) 1992.

⁴Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the New Testament*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books) 1992.

B. This applies to our relationship with unrepentant, professing believers (11).

1. *Don't associate with a professing believer who lives in sin.*
2. *Don't even eat with such a person.*

When?

Wiersbe explains, "There are several kinds of Christians that we are warned about in the Bible, believers who should not be permitted fellowship in the local church: (1) the member who will not settle personal differences, Matt. 18:15–17; (2) the member who has a reputation for being a flagrant sinner, 1 Cor. 5:9–11; (3) those who hold false doctrine, 1 Tim. 1:18–20 and 2 Tim. 2:17–18; (4) those who cause divisions, Titus 3:10–11; (5) Christians who refuse to work for a living, 2 Thes. 3:6–12. Those who are suddenly overtaken by sin we should lovingly seek to restore; see Gal. 6:1."⁵

C. When it comes to judging...(12-13)

1. *We're not to judge those outside the church.*
2. *We are to judge those inside the church.*

Wiersbe is right, "The church cannot change the world if the church is like the world... One reason the church today has so little influence in the world is because the world has too much influence in the church."⁶

Wiersbe explains further, "It shocks some Christians when they realize that God expects us to exercise spiritual judgment in the church. We are not to judge the outsiders; God will do that. But we are to expel from church fellowship any Christian who will not confess sin and make things right. This is not to be done hastily; all parties involved must be permitted to state their case. There must be prayer and the ministry of the Word. There must be sincere Christian love. The very act of church discipline is a testimony to the world and a warning to the church, and especially to new believers, that God expects His children to be different from the world. To condone sin is to deny the very cross of Christ!"⁷

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