

I'd like to begin our study with the following illustration by Mike Yaconelli, "I live in a small, rural community. There are lots of cattle ranches around here, and, every once in a while, a cow wanders off and gets lost . . . Ask a rancher how a cow gets lost, and chances are he will reply, 'Well, the cow starts nibbling on a tuft of green grass, and when it finishes, it looks ahead to the next tuft of green grass and starts nibbling on that one, and then it nibbles on a tuft of grass right next to a hole in the fence. It then sees another tuft of green grass on the other side of the fence, so it nibbles on that one and then goes on to the next tuft. The next thing you know, the cow has nibbled itself into being lost.'"

Americans are in the process of nibbling their way to being lost. . . We keep moving from one tuft of activity to another, never noticing how far we have gone from home or how far away from the truth we have managed to end up.<sup>1</sup>"

God is good. God's Word is good. We get in trouble when we "nibble" our way away from God's Word and look for pasture elsewhere.

There's a subject that many churches have ignored, choosing to settle for man's substitute ideas. I'm talking about churches that profess to be "Bible believing" and "fundamental." It's not a popular subject. It's not something that most churches practice, yet the Scriptures have plenty to say about it. The subject is *church discipline*.

Paul addresses this matter in 1 Corinthians 5. If a church is going to please God and have a God-honoring testimony in a community, it must be committed to dealing with problems, especially the problem of professing followers of Christ who refuse to follow Christ.

What should a church do with a member who claims to be a Christian yet refuses to obey God's Word, and in fact consistently lives in disobedience to God's Word? We find the answer in 1 Corinthians 5, as we've been seeing...

*Two weeks ago...*

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

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

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

What was happening? A church member was involved sexually with his step-mother, an *unregenerate* step-mother. And his behavior was public knowledge.

There was another, equally serious sin-problem. What?

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

1. *The church should have been filled with grief.*
2. *The church should have removed the man.*

But it failed to do so. Consequently...

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

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<sup>1</sup> Mike Yaconelli, "The Wittenburg Door."

**A. He stated what he did (3).**

1. *He took personal responsibility.*

Even though absent from Corinth in Ephesus, Paul made it his business to get involved in this matter.

2. *He passed judgment.*

Granted, the Bible forbids self-righteous, hypocritical judging. If we've got a log in our own eye, we have no business to try and pull sawdust specks from a brother's eye (Matt 7:1-5).

Key: Until we've heeded Matthew 7 we're not ready to follow Matthew 18—and not before. But after we've heeded Matthew 7, we have no excuse for ignoring Matthew 18.

In a sense, in 1 Corinthians 5, Paul fleshes out Jesus' words in Matthew 18. Paul gives specific guidelines on how to do it with a specific sin issue—in this case, the man living in sexual sin.

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

1. *Assemble as a church.*

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.

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

If a person insists on living like the world, we must give the person what he requests—the world. We must remove the person from the protective umbrella of the church and place him 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.

⇒There may be physical destruction.

⇒The goal is to see his spirit saved.

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

*Last week...*

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).**

To support this drastic action, he appeals to a well-known picture from the OT, a holiday. Passover. To prepare for Passover, Jewish families swept out of the house all leavened bread crumbs. When they baked the bread for the Passover meal, they used unleavened dough.

1. *Christ is our Passover Lamb.*

2. *We must eliminate every trace of "yeast."*

Notice again v 8, "Let us keep the Festival. What *Festival*? The Festival of Unleavened Bread. Paul's not saying we must keep the literal

holiday, but the significance of it. Christ fulfilled Passover for us. We have been spared because His blood was shed for us. The death angel has passed over us.

Now we are called to live holy lives dedicated to the Lord. That's what the Feast of Unleavened Bread symbolized. Now that you are clean people (holy), live like it. Live holy lives.

Q: What must we do to live holy lives? We must get rid of every trace of sin, of "yeast" (8).

Key: Yes, church discipline is for the good of the person in sin, but there's an even greater good involved. It's for the glory of the Savior. It's so His church will be pure and give the world an accurate picture of what He's like.

The subject of church discipline can easily be twisted, and great harm can result. So the next section is vital...

*New Material...*

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

Just who is a church to discipline?

Discuss: Think about the following situations. What should we do when we find out that a person we know is involved in an adulterous relationship, *if* the following is true:

--the person is a professing believer who's a member of another church?

--the person is a member of our church?

--the person is a non-Christian acquaintance from work?

Paul gives us helpful guidance in the next verses...

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

Q: What phrase does Paul use to refer to non-Christians in v 9?

Q: What specific types of sinners does he list? We'll be seeing another list in v 11.

We're not supposed to "discipline"/remove ourselves from non-Christians living in sin. Why not? Paul states two reasons at the end of v 10...

1. *We can't avoid contact with ungodly pagans.* Why not?
2. *We'd have to leave the world.*

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

Q: What type of person does Paul say we must disciple? Notice two factors. One, he "calls himself a brother." And two, his life is characterized by sin. Not simply that he sins (we all sin), but that his life is marked by unrepentant sin. He *is* a... (and Paul lists six categories—notice what they are...this goes beyond sexual sin...).

Q: What two responsibilities must we carry out with unrepentant believers?

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

You say, "That sounds tough." It is. It is a severe penalty.

Discuss: What did eating together signify in the first century?

Discuss: Why must the action be "severe?"

It goes beyond the scope of this exposition of 1 Corinthians 5, but I need to mention something important at this point. "Lifestyle" sins are not the only ones that the Bible calls for action against. When should a church discipline a member?

Wiersbe gives five categories, "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."<sup>2</sup>

### **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.*

Discuss: What would happen today if the church took this instruction seriously?

Problem: Sadly, the trend today is to get it turned around. We want to attack sin in the world, and condone sin in the church. We mobilize the church to try and "save the culture." We get upset when Gay Rights activists flaunt their sinful lifestyle, when Planned Parenthood tries to promote its ungodly agenda, etc. And there's a place for righteous indignation.

But those folks are not the enemy. They are *victims* of the enemy. Yes, they need to change, but what biblical responsibility do we have to affect that change? We're supposed to pray for them, reach out to such individuals and share the gospel, and demonstrate compassion and burden for their lost souls.

On the other hand, we have a clear responsibility towards those within the church who are living in sin. What is it? We are to urge repentance and do all we can to help sinners repent. But if they refuse to do so, we're to take action to remove the sinner and the sin from our assembly.

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."<sup>3</sup>

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

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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!”<sup>4</sup>

Response: In light of what we’ve learned...

We do not have a current “discipline” situation in the church right now. This makes it a perfect time for us to ask some hard questions are we prepare to deal with things in a God-honoring way in the future.

Let’s make it personal and answer some important questions...

1. Do you believe that if a church is going to be truly *biblical*, it should deal with members who are living in unrepentant sin?
  2. Do you believe that to deal with such situations, we should follow the guidelines of Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5? We should approach such professing brothers and urge repentance, and do all we can to facilitate it. But if repentance is not forthcoming, do you believe we must discipline the individual and remove them from our fellowship?
  3. Will you agree today to deal with future situations as we have just learned, no matter who the person may be or how difficult it may be?
- May God help us to honor Him.

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