

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:
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I Corinthians 5:1-6, 9-13 “Should the Church Tolerate Open Sin?”

Intro. Almost 5 years ago my mother died from a brain tumor. When she first manifested symptoms, the doctor misdiagnosed her problem. They thought she was having seizures or mini strokes. So instead of treating the problem, the cancer only grew and spread. When they finally diagnosed the brain tumor, it was basically too late. I wonder what would have happened if they found the problem early on, and were able to remove the tumor when it was small. She probably would still be alive today.

When sin entered into our world, there were many bad results, including sickness, disease, and death. I believe that cancer is an illustration of sin. Sin, like cancer, has a tendency to grow and spread until it destroys the very life that enables it to exist.

Well, the Corinthian church had a serious problem with sin in the body of Christ, the Church. A member of the church was living in flagrant sexual immorality. And not just the normal kind of immorality, but even an incestuous relationship with his stepmother. God’s law was clearly against such behavior, as stated in Lev. 18 (vv. 7-8, 29; 20:11; cf. Dt. 22:30). It was sinful even according to most non-Christian standards! It should also be noted that this was a continuing relationship. This was not a moral “slip”, a one night stand, for “has” in v.1 is a present tense.

That was not the only sin in the church. In v.2 Paul rebukes the sin of pride. They were puffed up about it. In v.6 Paul says, “Your glorying [or boasting] is not good.” What could they have been boasting about? Some liberal churches and denomination boast about how open minded and tolerate they are. Perhaps the Corinthians church was boasting that they were so “open-minded” and so free in Christ that they could do things that most even in Corinthians society did not do! But the main sin of the Corinthian Church was the sin of condoning what the church member was doing by their inaction.

So what are we to do when we personally know of a professing Christian in our church who persists in what is *clearly* sinful according to the Word of God? Paul gives some examples of such clear sins in v.11, such as sexual immorality, drunkenness, or stealing. The world says today that individual freedom takes priority over everything. And so today’s culture tolerates more and more sin. We tolerate abortion; we tolerate homosexuality; we tolerate profanity and pornography. Shall we follow the doctrine of “Live, and let live”? Shall we follow the world, or shall we follow the Bible? Well let’s see what the Bible says, and make an informed decision.

So this morning I want to share what God’s Word says we should do regarding a professing Christian in our church who persists in what is clearly sinful. First of all:

I. WE SHOULD RECOGNIZE THE SERIOUSNESS OF SIN

We are so flippant about sin today. Too often we view sin as harmless fun. Or it’s just a passing phase. We say, “Boys will be boys.” Many today get drunk, have casual sex, cuss, and laugh about it and exhibit no shame whatsoever. Many today even deny

that there is such a thing as sin and morality. If man is just a chance product of evolution, and if God does not exist, then there is no sin, and no standard of right and wrong.

But friend, there is a God who made heaven & earth, and He is holy and righteous. He expects us to be holy and righteous as well. Therefore, sin is a very serious matter, especially in the life of a professing Christian. And Paul gives 2 evidences of the serious nature of sin in this text of Scripture.

A. Sin Is So Serious We Should Mourn Over Its Manifestation – Paul says in v.2 regarding the report of the sin of incest, “And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned....” Paul said they should have mourned over the sinning believer. Can you imagine your reaction if you told your best friend that their son was killed in a car wreck and they just said, “Oh well, we all have to die sometime.” No! The only proper reaction would be to mourn, for you recognize the seriousness of what just happened. Even so, whenever a Christian brother or sister persists in open sin, it is time for the family to mourn and to seek to help the fallen believer (Gal. 6:1-2). And when a believer or a church does not grieve over sin, it is on the edge of spiritual disaster.

In our personal lives, one of the first steps to overcoming sin is to mourn over it. James, the brother of Jesus, gave the following step toward getting right with God, “Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning...” (4:9). Paul said in 2 Cor. 7:10, “For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted....”

What is your attitude toward sin in your own life, or in the life of others close to you? Do you mourn and grieve over it? Do you care? I challenge you to recognize the seriousness of sin, and mourn over any manifestation of persistent sin.

B. Sin Is So Serious Because It Spreads and Corrupts - The spreading and corrupting nature of sin is also illustrated by the apostle Paul in v.6. He compares sin to leaven. In fact, leaven is an Old Testament symbol of sin. Furthermore, in v.8 he speaks of the “leaven of malice and wickedness.” So Paul says, “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” What does leaven do? When you add yeast to the dough, it spreads and affects the whole lump, causing the bread to rise. Likewise, one bad apple can spoil all the rest in a basket. Even so, whenever sin is not dealt with, it increases and spreads its infection.

Think of the impact of what this man was doing. If he could commit incest without any rebuke or correction by his church, then it must be OK for others to do it. And if carried to its logical conclusion, lesser forms of sexual immorality certainly must be OK!

So I hope that you have enough discernment to recognize how serious sin is. If your child is hanging around with someone who is living a sinful lifestyle, then chances are very high that your child will become like their friend.

C. Sin Is So Serious Because It is Deadly and Destructive – The Bible says, “The soul that sins shall die” and “The wages of sin is death.” In John 10:9 Jesus likened the devil to the thief that only comes to kill, steal, and destroy. Sin destroys lives, destroys homes, destroys communities, and destroys nations. Prov. 14:34 says, “Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a reproach to any people.” We see this also in v.5. There we see

that Satan's work includes the destruction of the flesh. All sin is destructive, and some sins are especially destructive.

Friday night David woke me up when he came home from work. That time I was glad he did. You see, I had a weird dream. I dreamed that somehow I had acquired a new pet: a rattle snake! But this snake seemed to be such a good pet that it had free reign of the house. It was like a puppy dog. It went wherever I went. It seemed to want to be with me. It was kind of fun having that pet rattle snake. But in the back of my mind I knew that such a pet could turn deadly, but David woke me up before it did.

Friend, your pet sin of pornography, or immorality, or drug abuse, or whatever may seem like fun, but just wait. In time its deadly fangs will strike. There has been many a young person whose lives were cut short because of sin. What a tragedy!

Now if we will accept the seriousness of sin, then we should be willing to follow the guidance of what Jesus said in Mt. 18:15-18. First, whatever believer is most closely affected by the sin in question should confront the person and encourage repentance. Or if you are in a position of authority over than person you should take the first step. If the person is a member of our church and refuses to forsake his sin, then you should notify one of the pastors or deacons. Then 2 or 3 of us should confront the person, show them from the Word of God that what they are doing is sinful, and give them opportunity to repent. If they still refuse to repent, then that leads to the action that Paul commands in our text of Scripture. Not only should we recognize the seriousness of sin, but:

II. WE SHOULD REMOVE THE SOURCE OF SUCH OPEN SIN

Paul doesn't waste any time getting to the point of what the church should have done. He says in the last of v.2, "that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you." The word translated "taken away" (*exairo*) literally means "to lift out." The same word is also found in v.13, "Therefore put away from yourselves the evil person." Paul also says in v.7a, "Therefore purge out the old leaven..." It is not enough to mourn over sin, and even deplore it. We must take action to remove the corrupting influence of such open sin from the church. That includes removing them from the membership of the church. Church membership is only for born again believers in Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches in 1 John 3:6-9 & elsewhere that if you practice sin, you are probably not a true Christian. And if we do nothing about a member who is practicing sin, we are giving them a false sense of security regarding their salvation.

You say, "Oh, that seems so harsh and unloving." No, what is unloving is to have a rattle snake loose in the house and do nothing about it. What is unloving is to suspect that a loved one has cancer, and you do nothing about it. What is unloving is to see your child going down the destructive path of sin and do little or nothing about it. The most loving thing we can do is help someone overcome sin in their lives. In Rev. 3:19 Jesus said, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten..." Prov. 13:24 says, "He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly."

You see, the influence and forces of sin are so strong and powerful that we need several different ways to help us avoid sin, or overcome sin. And one of the tools God has provided is for each of us to have accountability partners. Children have parents, husbands have wives!, and church members have pastors, deacons, and other Christians

that should help keep them straight. And when we do wrong, our accountability partners should rebuke us, and when necessary, discipline us.

Let me give one of the arguments for taking such strong action as prescribed here in 1 Cor. 5. In v.13 Paul is probably quoting from the Old Testament. About 9 times in the book of Deuteronomy God told His people Israel to remove those who committed serious sin, and then said something like, "So you shall put away the evil from your midst" (Dt. 13:5; cf. 17:7, 12, 19; 21:21; 22:21-24; 24:7). God knew that if open sin is not removed, but spreads like gangrene.

Our society is really stupid. Because of pornography, incest, and other forms of sexual immorality, our society is producing more and more child molesters. They eventually get caught and stand before judges. They slap them on the wrist so to speak and let them out. And just recently we have heard of 2-3 girls who were raped and murdered because we do not follow God's directive to remove from society those who commit evil.

So the teaching of the Word of God is very clear. When someone persists in what is clearly sinful, then they should be removed until there is clear evidence of repentance. I have a friend who serves with me on the Board of Trustees at Southeastern Seminary. He has, I believe, 7 children. His oldest son rebelled against God and family standards. When he turned 18 he told him to repent or move out. He moved out. After suffering poverty and hardship a while, he asked to move back home. But he had not repented. He still was living the life of sin. Well, for the sake of his other 6 children he refused to allow him to move back home. Well, he joined the army.

Now what Paul is commanding here is not easy. So let's take a closer look at how we should take such action. Notice from our text 3 things we should do as a church in such cases:

A. We Must Act in the Authority & Power of Christ - This is based upon what Paul says in v.4: "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is clearly a reference to Mt. 18, where He taught what we should do in the case of a sinning brother. Thus, we are to act "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." He commands us to confront sin, and remove sin from His Body. He commands that the unrepentant sinner should be regarded, not as a brother, but as an unbeliever. Then in Rev. 2:20 we read that the Lord rebuked the church in Thyatira for their tolerance of a certain woman in the church called Jezebel, who claimed to be a prophetess, but who taught believers that it was OK "to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols." The Lord rebuked their tolerance of such sin, especially in one who claimed to be a leader in the church. Thus, we act on behalf of Jesus, in His name, and by His command.

Furthermore, such action can only be taken by the gathered church. He says, "when you are gathered together." The final step of church discipline can be performed only in a duly called assembly of the congregation. The pastor or deacons can't act alone. Such action requires the affirmation of the church. If we ever bring such a matter to a vote, I hope you will follow the Word of God.

Furthermore, we act "with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ." I realize that this is not something that we want to do. Parental discipline, school discipline, work discipline, and church discipline is unpleasant work. But we must trust in God's enabling

power to do what is so difficult, especially in our society. This also is a reference to the Matt. 18 passage where Jesus promised, “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (v.20).

Once the decision is reached to remove the unrepentant sinner from the membership of the church, then we must take the next step:

B. We Must Withdraw Fellowship - Paul says in v.11, “...now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral...” To “keep company” (*sunanamignumi*) literally means “to mix up together.” Then it came to mean “to keep company with, be intimate with one.” The same word is used in 2 Thess. 3:14 regarding church discipline. Thus you withdraw social contact, such as eating together. In fact, Paul specifically says in the last of v.11, “not even to eat with such a person.” The prohibition not to eat with such a person certainly includes the Lord’s Supper. They should not be allowed to partake of communion. There should be no question in the person’s mind that his church & his Lord do not approve of his sinful practice. The congregation was not to be ugly or mean with the man, but on the other hand, they were not to treat him as if he were not living in sin.

Finally, the next step is really the result of the previous actions:

C. We Deliver Them to Satan’s Domain With a Goal of Repentance – Paul says in v.5 that they were to “deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” You see, when a Christian is in fellowship with the Lord and with the local church, he enjoys a special protection from Satan. Do you remember the book of Job? Satan could not touch Job without God’s permission. But when a person is out of fellowship with God and excommunicated from the local church, he is “fair game” for the enemy.

What kind of things can happen to a person who is living in Satan’s domain? If such a person is a true Christian, and if they continue to refuse to repent, then they may commit the sin unto death (1 Jn. 5:16). Right here in Corinthians, chapter 10, v.30, Paul said that there were some in the church who had died because of their rebellious sin in the way they observed the Lord’s Supper (cf. also Acts 5:1-11). At the very least he will suffer chastisement. Nothing will seem to go right. He will likely suffer the consequences of his sin, such as broken relationships, injury, disease, and loss of property. Instead of enjoying peace, he will experience constant turmoil.

But God has a saving purpose in this. Paul says in the last of v.5, “that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” When did the prodigal son return to his father? It was not while he was enjoying his sinful lifestyle. It was only after he began to reap the destructive consequences of his sin. It was only after he found himself hungry, working with the pig slop, that he decided to repent and return home. Many people have to hit bottom before they will repent and turn away from their sin. And when a prodigal Christian is separated from the fellowship and support of Christians, and then realizes what he is missing, he may turn back to the Lord. If he is not truly saved, he may at some point become a true believer. By the way, it seems from 2 Cor. 2:6-8 that this man did repent. And Paul told the church to lovingly forgive him and restore him to the fellowship of the church (cf. Gal. 6:1-2).

Sources: R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937); John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: I Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Jerry Vines, *God Speaks Today: A Study of I Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Wise: I Corinthians* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).