

Cancer Surgery

June 25 – 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

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Day 176 – 189 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul addressed another serious issue in the Corinthian church related to a degenerate member committing sexual immorality (v.1). As if that weren't bad enough, the church tolerated the sin instead of mourning and dealing with it (v.2). Corinthian believers even boasted about it (v.6a), perhaps claiming inclusiveness or forgiveness, or that all things were lawful now that Christ had freed them from sin. But even the Gentiles (Romans, Greeks) did not allow such debauchery to exist in their society (v.1). So then, Paul's purpose for this chapter was to point out the severity of such behavior for both the man and the church.

First, Paul reminded the Corinthians that in an earlier letter (that no longer exists), he had warned them not to associate with immoral people (v.9). However, it seems the church interpreted Paul's instruction as not to associate with the people of the world (unbelievers). That would be impossible, he said (v.10). His warning was meant for believers (Christians) in the church who were misbehaving (v.11). It is for God to judge those outside the church, but **He's given us the responsibility to govern and judge those inside the church** (v.12, 13).

Next, Paul provided the reason for judging those within the church. "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough," he asked (v.6b). In the New Testament, leaven is a symbol of influence. Remember Jesus warned of the leaven of the Pharisees who negatively influenced the Jews? Here, this immoral man was negatively influencing other members of the church and, consequently, the church had a negative reputation and hindered influence in the community. **Scandalous sins are like a cancer to a church. If the cancer is left alone, it will grow, spread, and kill the body.** Since Christ died for the Church, to make her holy, then we must protect her from impurity and wickedness. **Thus, we must remove any cancerous cells for the sake of the body** (v.2, 13).

Paul's warnings are the basis for what is called **church discipline**. Jesus provided the process for such discipline in *Matthew 18:15-20*. Though it begins with a personal and private appeal, if the individual refuses to listen, he may be reprimanded before the church and eventually removed. Of course, our purpose should be for restoration of the individual and the church. Our desire should never be retribution or revenge.

Daily Reflection

Just as a human body will not function properly if cancer cells are allowed to spread, so **a church body cannot function properly if cancerous members are allowed to continue in their blatant immoral behavior without removal.**

How does your church handle "cancerous" behavior? Is there a system or structure in place for church discipline? Explain.

If a church does not practice systematic discipline, can you predict the results? What does that communicate to God, to outsiders?

To Court or Not to Court?

June 26 – 1 Corinthians 6:1-11

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Day 177 – 188 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul addressed another problem in the Corinthian church, that of suing believers. Rather than work through their differences discretely, they were taking church members to court. Paul was astounded at this news for several reasons, and he wanted them to think carefully about their actions.

First, he pointed out that the saints (Christians) will one day judge lost men and fallen angels (v.2, 3). While we don't know much about this future event, the New Testament hints that believers will play a role and join the Lord Jesus in the judgment of nations and demons (*Dan. 7:22; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6; Rev. 2:26, 27; 3:1*). Paul's point was this — since believers will have such a high honor and responsibility, they are equipped with the tools (i.e., Spirit, God's Word, wisdom) to judge smaller matters in the church.

Second, Paul wrote that if church members have internal disputes, they should not involve people outside the church (*1 Cor. 6:4, 5*). Outsiders (non-church members) are not only uninformed about the nature and function of the church, but they are also ill-equipped to handle church problems (without the Spirit, don't understand scripture). **Asking non-church members to settle differences within the church is a shame to God's people and a stain on the reputation of Christ's church.** Issues between believers should be handled within the church, perhaps by elders (pastors) or by church members with the gift of discernment.

Third, Paul said that issues between righteous believers in Christ should not be judged by unrighteous unbelievers for "they will not inherit the kingdom of God" (v.1, 6, 9, 10). Simply put, the saved should not be judged by the lost. Though Christians were formerly lost, we have been "washed, sanctified, and justified" by the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit (v.11). That which is unclean is in no position to judge what is now clean.

Daily Reflection

This passage does not insinuate that we should disrespect our civil judges. They play an important God-given role in upholding law and order in our society. However, what happens inside the church is outside their jurisdiction. God has given His people a structure of church governance, as well as procedures to follow in case of personal disputes (*Matt. 18:15-17*). **If we are not willing to follow these guidelines, then Paul said it is better to be wronged or defrauded than to shame the Lord's church.**

Furthermore, this passage does not insinuate that we should suffer abuse or wrongdoing in silence or without due process. We should always seek to protect church members against wickedness. However, the Corinthian lawsuits were just another way that they were divided (*1 Cor. 1*), and they were using natural men to evaluate spiritual matters (*2:12*). **Their actions were dishonoring to Christ and His church.**

We are so often consumed by thoughts of our own well-being that we lose sight of the bigger picture, that of the glory of God and the protection of His church. Sometimes, to achieve those goals we must sacrifice personally.

How should disputes between church members be settled in a way that glorifies the Lord and protects the church?

One Master or Many?

June 27 – 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

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Day 178 – 187 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We continued Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. After a brief section about lawsuits (6:1-11), Paul returned to the topic of sexual immorality (see 5:1-13). Evidently, sexual sins were prevalent among the Greeks. For example, some of the temples had prostitutes, and therefore sex was associated with the worship of a god or goddess. In other words, in their minds, worshiping a deity validated immoral sexual behavior. **But such behavior is not befitting a follower of Christ.**

The Corinthians had two popular slogans to justify their actions. First, they would say, "All things are lawful to us" (v.12). Since Christ had set them free from the penalty of sin, and by His grace they had been forgiven of their sins past, present, and future, then the Corinthians believed it was okay to enjoy all things, even sexual improprieties. In view of God's grace, they were free to sin even more.

Paul confronted this thinking. While all things may be lawful, he said, "not all things are profitable" or beneficial. Even though we may be free to do certain things that does not mean that they are appropriate or helpful to our spiritual growth or witness. Furthermore, **since Christ has set us free from the power of sin, we should no longer be mastered by sinful behavior.** Remember what Paul wrote to the Galatians? "It was for freedom that Christ set us free, therefore do not be subject again to the yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1).

The second Corinthian slogan Paul addressed was this — "Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food" (1 Cor. 6:13). This saying may have been their way of dismissing their behavior, as if to say the body is for sex and sex is for the body. In other words, sex is a natural human appetite, so what is wrong with fulfilling that desire any way we can. It's just as natural as eating food to satisfy one's hunger pains.

But Paul confronted this error by explaining that our bodies are not our own, but they belong to the Lord (v.13-20). We are His property, both by creation and regeneration (redemption). In fact, He indwells us with His Spirit. Therefore, **we are to glorify God in our bodies and refrain from any activity that would dishonor Him.**

Daily Reflection

Sexual immorality is prevalent in our society. Our music, movies, TV shows, and media have normalized it. But just because it is accepted in our culture does not mean that it is acceptable to God. Christians should not fiddle with it but rather do what Paul said. Flee it! Is there sexual sin in your life? Are you fiddling or fleeing?

While this passage focused on sexual sins, Paul expanded the topic to any activity that might control us, saying, **"I will not be mastered by anything"** (v.12). To be mastered is to be overpowered, conquered, controlled, or ruled by something or someone. **We are the Lord's now. He is our Master. Nothing else should control us.**

Do you have any sins, habits, passions, people, appetites, or activities that master you? What about food, drinks, work, pornography, hobbies, gambling, entertainment, vices, or devices? The first step to bringing them under the Lord's control is to identify them. What are they?

Re-read 1 Corinthians 6:12, 20. How could these verses be applied to gray areas, those things you are not sure are right or wrong?

Marriage Counseling

June 28 – 1 Corinthians 7:1-40

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Day 179 – 186 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We transitioned to a new section of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians in which he addressed questions they had about Christian living (v.1). The first question related to marital issues. He masterfully connected this topic to the previous section on sexual immorality (6:12-20).

Paul started this section with a possible quote or philosophy being promoted by ascetics (those who believed it was best to retreat from the world completely to be holy, i.e., hermits), "It is good for a man not to touch a woman" (v.1). Though that was a personal preference, Paul did not affirm it as a commandment of God. **Rather to avoid immoralities or sexual sins, sex is to be enjoyed within the confines of marriage, each spouse meeting the other's needs** (v.2-6). "For it is better to marry," he wrote, "than to burn with passion (v.9).

The second marital issue Paul addressed was divorce, particularly as it related to an unbelieving or unsaved spouse (v.10-16). As the gospel made it to Greece, it was common for one spouse to follow Christ while the other did not. The Corinthians asked Paul what to do in that situation. **Paul advised them to stay together unless the unbeliever desired to walk away** (v.12, 13, 15). If they stayed together, it would be difficult. However, **the believing spouse would provide a sanctifying presence in the marriage and family**. He was not suggesting that the unbelieving spouse or children would be saved but that they would be influenced by the faith, prayers, and growth of the believer.

The third issue related to the circumstances in which one found himself when he was called by God to salvation (v.17-24). Paul made it clear to **remain in the condition in which he was called** (v.17, 20, 23). For example, one who is circumcised did not need to be uncircumcised (v.18, 19). One who was a servant did not need to free himself (v.21, 22). Simply put, **we can obey and glorify God in the setting in which we**

are called (v.19), which includes a marriage with an unbelieving spouse.

The fourth marital issue regarded singleness (v.7, 8, 25-40). **While marriage is a gift of God, it is not required. In fact, Paul gave several reasons why singleness is a more desirable option.** For example, singles avoid the "present distress" (v.26, regarding the issues in the Corinthian church), and they avoid many other troubles related to marriage (v.28). They are free from divided interests (concern for their spouse) and can make the most of their time completely devoted to Christ (v.29-35).

Although there is disagreement regarding the three verses in the middle of this section (v.36-38), whether Paul is referring to daughters or fiancées, the point is clear. **Marriage and singleness are both acceptable in God's eyes** (v.38). However, once married, the union is permanent until broken by death (v.39).

Daily Reflection

After reading Paul's counsel, what are your thoughts on marriage and singleness?

Notice that Paul "did not have a command from the Lord" regarding singleness, but he had an opinion (v.25, 40). Should we view Paul's opinions as authoritative or not? Explain.

The Vow of a Vegetarian

June 29 – 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 180 – 185 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul addressed the Corinthians' second question "concerning things sacrificed to idols" (v.1). Some believed that Christ had set them free to do anything without consequences (like sexual immorality 6:12). Therefore, they were free to eat whatever they wanted. But is it okay for Christians to eat meat dedicated to the worship of false gods? Paul answered this question two ways, through knowledge and love (v.1).

First, mature believers know that there are no other gods. The Lord is the one true God (v.4-6). So then, to eat meat dedicated to false gods is no big deal because there are no other real gods. Furthermore, neither eating foods nor abstaining from foods dedicated to idols earns favor with God (v.8). Therefore, in their minds, the case was closed. It was just food. No foul was committed. No harm was done.

While that may be true, Paul inserted his second point. Such knowledge or assurance causes some to become arrogant and selfish (v.1). As a result, they lose sight of what is loving or good for others. **In their liberty and knowledge, these Corinthians were ignoring the fact that they were causing others to stumble** (v.9). How so?

Some Corinthian Christians believed that eating food sacrificed to idols or gods was wrong or sinful because they were saved from the sin of idolatry. Thus, when they saw "those with knowledge" eating in the temples of false gods, they were tempted to sin by either eating the food or worshiping the idols (v.10). Thus, by causing others to sin, "those with knowledge" had sinned against the Lord (11, 12).

Therefore, Paul's conclusion was this — while it may be theologically okay to eat meat sacrificed to idols (since those gods are fake), **eating the meat might cause others to stumble** (v.13). Thus, our decisions must not only be made based on truth (knowledge), but we must also consider the spiritual wellbeing of others (love).

Daily Reflection

When I was a teenager in the 1980s, I listened to both secular (worldly) and Christian music. Although I knew that listening to secular music did not compromise my spiritual walk (so I thought), it did send a mixed message to the underclassmen at church. When I gave them rides to school or to an event, I played both types of music. I did not recognize the inconsistency until someone pointed it out to me. My dabbling with worldly influences was a bad example to those students whose faith had not yet solidified. My actions were causing others to stumble. When I began to have children, I saw the inconsistency even more clearly. **For the sake of others' wellbeing, I needed to cut out a potential stumbling block.**

There are a host of activities in which you participate that could be a negative influence on someone else. Name a few.

How would you apply Paul's conviction to your life, **"If food causes my brother to stumble, then I will never eat meat again"** (v.13).

Will you take the vow of the spiritual vegetarian and cut out the "meat" in your life to avoid causing others to stumble? In the long run, it would probably be healthier for them and you.

Compete to Win

June 30 – 1 Corinthians 9:1-27

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Today in Your Reading

Paul continued addressing the issue of personal liberty, not using it to become a stumbling block to others (8:1-13). While Christ has set us free from sin, we still must be careful how we use our freedom. We must be sensitive to those around us and avoid any words or actions that might lead them to stumble or fall.

Paul gave an example of how he modeled this principle (8:9). "Am I not free too," Paul asked (9:1). He then asked a dozen rhetorical questions regarding his liberty (v.1-12). The point is that he, too, was free to do a lot of things, but he chose not to do them that he might not hinder the gospel.

For example, as an Apostle of Christ, Paul had a right to ask for offerings to support his ministry. A soldier doesn't work for free, he said; and consider the farmers and shepherds who enjoy the fruit of their work (v.7, 10). Even an ox, he wrote, should be free to eat what he can find while he is working (v.9). Couldn't Paul, then, ask for financial help from churches, since he was spending all his time ministering to them? Yes, but he didn't, so that money wouldn't be an obstacle to hearing the gospel preached (v.11, 12, 14).

If Paul were paid to preach the gospel, then he would have to do it out of obligation or "under compulsion," he said (v.16). But, instead, he preached the gospel voluntarily. His payment was not earthly money but heavenly rewards, "an imperishable wreath" (v.17, 25). Paul limited his freedom for the benefit of all. He even went on to say, "I have become all things to all men so that I by all means might save some" (v.22).

Finally, Paul used the illustrations of a runner who runs a race to win and a boxer who doesn't swing at the air. They discipline themselves so they might not be disqualified. **They want their efforts to count for something. They don't want**

to waste their time. If they are going to compete, they are going to compete to win.

Paul's challenge for the Corinthians is not to waste their liberty living for themselves but rather to discipline themselves to compete for souls, **to play the "game of life" with purpose, to win people for Jesus (v.26, 27).**

Daily Reflection

What would it look like today to "be all things to all people in order to save some"?

If you evaluated what consumed most of your time and energy in a day, week, month, or year, would you conclude that you are running the race to win and beat the air, or are you disciplining yourself to invest in others?

Let us not run the race to run
And think it's a job well done.
Let us not beat the air all day
And be content to walk away.

But rather let us run to win
And strive to save the souls of men.
And let us ever fix our eyes
To run and fight and win the prize.

Glorify and Edify

July 1 – 1 Corinthians 10:1-11:1

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Day 182 – 183 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul continued and finished his instruction regarding the Corinthians eating food dedicated to idols or false gods (started in 8:1). So far, he challenged them not to use their liberty in such a way that they might become a stumbling block to others (8:1-13). He also provided an example of how he did not use his liberty to require offerings to support his ministry, even though he could have used his authority as an apostle of Christ to do so (9:1-27).

At the end of yesterday's passage (9:24-27), Paul used the illustration of athletes who train their bodies to compete and win. Even though he was an apostle of Jesus Christ, he did not want to become disqualified as "a runner," forfeiting his influence and witness by his careless actions or words. In today's passage, Paul provided the example of Israel who, although it was God's chosen nation, forfeited His blessings by their careless and sinful actions (10:1-13). Though they were God's people, they still fell into temptation and committed shameful acts, like idolatry, immorality, testing God, and complaining (v.7-10).

Paul's point was that Israelites took their newfound freedom for granted, became prideful and careless, sinned against the Lord, and fell in disgrace. They disqualified themselves as having any moral authority or spiritual influence in the world. Therefore, "Let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall" (v.12). In other words, we can't allow the freedom we have in Christ to make us arrogant and careless, to sin against the Lord, and to disqualify us as the light of the world.

One might respond that temptations like idolatry, immorality, or complaining are forces too powerful to resist. But Paul reminded the Corinthians (and us) that no temptation that we face is uncommon or irresistible (v.13). There is always a way around it, and God promises to give us strength enough to endure it.

At this point, Paul returned to his original topic of idolatry, which he told the Corinthians to flee from it (v.14). Idol worship, he said, is really demon worship (v.20-22). We cannot worship demons and the Lord at the same time.

To wrap up his instruction, Paul laid down two principles regarding this issue. First, whether they decided to eat or drink (food dedicated to idols), **their top priority must be the glory of God** (v.31). If they could not participate in an activity and glorify God at the same time, then they should refrain from participating. Second, Paul challenged the Corinthians to **consider the spiritual wellbeing of others before themselves**. If possible, at all costs, do not offend others or become a stumbling block to them (v.32, 33).

Daily Reflection

Paul's words, wisdom, and example still challenge us today. We are to imitate him (11:1) by **glorifying God first, then edifying others second**. To edify others means to do those things that build them up or encourage their faith. How fitting for Paul's instructions to affirm Jesus' commands to love God first then others second (Mk. 12:30, 31).

Can you say that the glory of God is your number one priority? How are you doing?

Can you say that all your words and actions edify or build up others? How are you doing?
