

Christian Judgment

1 Cor 5:9-13

I. INTRODUCTION.

A. There is a story told of the famous denominational pastor Dr. George W. Truett.

1. The story is that a young lady was brought before the church for discipline because of a violation of the church covenant.
2. It was suggested that she be dropped from the roll of the church.
 - a. As the debate developed the pastor said: "Let us also call the church treasurer and have him read the record of the giving of every member, and let us vote to drop everyone who has violated God's law against covetousness."
 - b. That bombshell cleared the air of accusers, as did the reminder of Jesus: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."

B. Anytime we speak of judging one another, we're going to hear people declare that it's wrong to judge.

1. Jesus, after all, said to those who had brought the adulterous woman before him, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (Jn 8:7).
 - a. The argument goes: I'm not without sin, so I can't condemn anyone of sin.
 - b. That attitude totally ignores the context John 8.
 - The teachers of the law and the Pharisees bring a woman to Jesus caught in adultery and demand that she be stoned according to the Law.
 - Jesus *DID NOT* set the Law aside:
 - "If a man commits adultery with another man's wife—with the wife of his neighbor—both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death" (Lev 20:10).
 - The Law also required at least two witnesses: "One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses" (Deut 19:15).
 - How many witnesses had caught this woman in the act of adultery? Adultery is, by its very nature, a very private act.
 - If one of these men had walked in on this woman and her companion, he couldn't have her condemned to death.
 - Some scholars believe that some of these men had been adulterous with this woman, and others believe that these men had set up the woman and her companion.
 - However these men tried to get around the idea of having more than one witness, they likely did so in a dishonest manner.
 - c. Thus, when Jesus said, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone," he was speaking to scribes and Pharisees who had concocted a difficult scenario and when stoning this woman would have violated the Law, rather than upheld it.
2. There is that other statement of Jesus which causes many people grief.
 - a. It's found in the Sermon on the Mount: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Mt 7:1-2).

- In context, Jesus' point is obviously about looking at yourself closely and not spend so much time in condemning everyone else.
 - He speaks of getting the speck out of your neighbor's eye when there's a beam in yours.
 - b. It's no excuse not to judge at all, but it's instruction not to judge harshly, especially when you yourself are in sin.
 - C. Apparently for some reason the Corinthian congregation bought into the idea that they should not judge.
 - a. They had a man living with his stepmother, and they weren't about to say a single word.
 - b. Paul writes to the Corinthians in the text before us this morning and says, "You'd better get to judging, and you'd better get to judging appropriately." He tells them: DON'T JUDGE THOSE OUTSIDE & DO JUDGE THOSE INSIDE.
- II. DON'T JUDGE THOSE OUTSIDE, vv. 9-10, 12-13.
- A. Paul writes, "I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case, you would have to leave this world," vv. 9-10.
1. Paul had apparently written a previous letter to this congregation which has not survived.
 - a. The fact that Paul gives this letter authority—he told these brethren how to live in this now non-existent letter—makes me think it was just as inspired of God as the one we are reading this morning.
 - In fact, from the way Paul writes in 2 Cor 2, most scholars believe that Paul wrote a letter between 1 & 2 Cor that we don't have.
 - Thus, Paul likely wrote four letters to the Corinthians, but we only have two of them.
 - b. What are we to make of having only half the correspondence from Paul to the Corinthians? Why don't we have the other two epistles?
 - I wouldn't spend time talking about it this morning if I weren't persuaded it was important.
 - I'm convinced the reasoning is this: We have every single word from God that we need, and we don't need those other two epistles to know God's will for our lives.
 - Do you recall what Paul wrote to Timothy? 2 Tm 3:16-17.
 - Granted, the apostle was undoubtedly speaking of the Hebrew Scriptures, for they were the only Scriptures Timothy could possibly have known from childhood.
 - However, the principle is apt: Scripture allows the man of God to be *completely* equipped for every good work.
 - We do not lack a thing to be the men and women God needs us to be.
 - 2. In that previous letter, Paul told the Corinthians to have no contact with sexually immoral people.
 - a. Paul may have heard there was sexual immorality in the congregation and warned them about it, or he may have simply warned them about it because Corinth was known for sexual immorality in the ancient world.
 - b. Apparently the church got that letter and took it to heart.
 - Paul's wording here really makes me believe that they did.
 - If they had a good friend who was sexually immoral, they cut him off.
 - If they had a friend who was greedy, they cut him off.
 - The problem was that they were more than ready to cut off their friends who were living in sin but not their own brethren who were living in sin.

- c. Paul says, "Look, I didn't mean for you to segregate yourselves from others in Corinth. If you were going to have no contact with sinners, you'd have to leave this world."
- There are some who have tried that in the past.
 - They have gone and built monasteries out away from civilization where the people of God could be "pure."
 - I know many of you enjoy visiting the Amish. Isn't this almost a mark of being Amish? Segregating yourself away from the rest of society.
 - The Apostle informs the Corinthians that's not the proper way.
 - That's not the proper way, for that wasn't Jesus' way.
 - Jesus said of himself, "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and 'sinners'" (Mt 11:17).
 - Jesus taught us to go to those lost in sin: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19).
 - How could we ever reach people for Christ if we refuse to touch them with a ten foot pole?
 - How many of you were converted because someone in Christ reached out to you when you were lost in sin?
 - Try going to work in the morning and say to a coworker: "Look, I'd like you to come to church with me this coming Sunday, but don't touch me, you stay over there on your side and don't you sit with me at church; you're a sinner." How many of you suspect that person would be here next Lord's Day?
- B. Paul also seems to deal with the idea that we Christians should make this world a better place when he writes: "What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? God will judge those outside," vv. 12-13.
1. There are so many Christians in this world who believe they have an obligation to serve as the moral police.
 - a. They will speak out against gambling, against homosexuality, against fornication, against alcohol abuse and against a whole host of sins because God says people shouldn't do such things.
 - b. It's true that God's Word condemns gambling, homosexuality, fornication, alcohol abuse, and a whole host of other sins.
 2. But, the apostle says that I shouldn't worry about holding people to high standards on those things who are not in Christ.
 - a. I think I know why Paul writes such words; he writes elsewhere: "The mind [set on the flesh] is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the mind [set on the flesh] is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the [flesh] cannot please God" (Rm 8:6-8).
 - b. I don't believe I have an obligation to tell people they can't gamble or be homosexual or commit sexual immorality or abuse alcohol or any other sin; I have an obligation to teach them the gospel of Jesus and encourage them to respond to the cross in order that they might receive the Spirit and be transformed into what God wants us to be.
 - c. I do, however, believe I have an obligation to support the powerless when they are harmed by sin.
 - I have an obligation to oppose abortion with every fiber of my being, for it harms innocent, unborn children.
 - I have an obligation to oppose gambling with every fiber of my being, for innocent children get hurt when Mommy and Daddy gamble too much.

- I have an obligation to oppose smut on TV with every fiber of my being, for such smut teachers impure normalcy to our children.
- d. Yet, in such cases, all judgment belongs to God and God alone.

III. DO JUDGE THOSE INSIDE, vv. 11-13.

- A. Paul establishes two standards for judgment in our passage—one for those outside the church and another for those inside the church.
- B. He specifically writes, “Now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat,” v. 11.
1. Because the Corinthians had misunderstood the previous letter the Apostle wrote, he spells out precisely what he means.
 2. The Corinthians were not to associate with anyone who claimed to be a Christian and lived in sin.
 - a. The term “associate” is in the present tense and thus points to a continual association with those living in sin.
 - Paul is talking about seeing such people at the marketplace or at school functions or passing them on the street.
 - Paul is, instead, speaking of friendships and close relationships with such individuals. Paul even clarifies what he says when he declares, “With such a man do not even eat.”
 - You understand that in the ancient world eating together was equivalent to have very close relationships; you ate with your closest friends, not your enemies.
 - Even in our own day, a lot of that holds true, doesn’t it? How many times do we go out to eat with or have someone in our home to eat that we just cannot stand?
 - b. How do we carry out such judgments as a congregation?
 - It all starts with the elders as the shepherds of the sheep.
 - “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God” (Acts 20:28).
 - I as the preacher, you as another member do not have the right to exercise discipline unilaterally.
 - Discipline begins with elders going to reach those sheep who have wandered from the fold.
 - As the elders work with people who have left the fold and as they bring the others of us on board, Jesus has outlined precisely the steps we’re to take: Mt 18:15-17.
 - What are we to do if the elders determine they must bring disciplinary action against a person before the entire congregation?
 - That action at once severs any fellowship we had with that person—we cannot have that person into our homes, we cannot go into his, we cannot call him on the phone, we cannot go out to eat with him. In other words, we can have absolutely nothing to do with him.
 - As we’ve discussed, that doesn’t mean we don’t care about his soul. The whole purpose of such discipline, according to Paul, is that the “spirit [may be] saved on the day of the Lord” (v. 5).
 - If we really care about someone and want to see him repent, we’ll take disciplinary action in order that he might be brought back to Jesus in humility and repentance.
 - We also will be ready, just like the father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, to welcome people home in repentance and humility.

- C. Paul concludes this section by writing, “Are you not to judge those inside? ‘Expel the wicked man from among you,’” vv. 12-13.
1. Paul rhetorical question makes it clear that he expects Christians to judge fellow Christians.
 - a. We have come to Christ, we have submitted to the cross, and we have picked up the cross to carry in humble submission to Jesus.
 - As part of that, following of Jesus, I have a right to call you to high moral standards—the standards of Jesus—and you have a right to call me to those same standards.
 - If we don’t follow such high moral standards, we have to expect judgment.
 - b. That judgment is exclusion from the community of Christians.
 2. Let us be clear: we’re not at all talking about committing a sin here and there; we’re talking about sinning, continuing to sin, and showing no repentance.
 - a. There’s not a one of us perfect; we are all sinners saved through the blood of Jesus.
 - b. Therefore, we cannot dwell in sin, and if we do, we should expect exclusion from the community of believers.
 3. Do you need to come this morning and pick up your cross and join the family of believers where there is real, deep, abiding fellowship?