

A Sinful Brother

1 Cor 5:1-5

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. A sociology professor says that many of Winnipeg's better class prostitutes are suburban housewives who help out with the family budget.
 - 1. Professor William Morrison, head of the sociology department of the University of Winnipeg, is conducting research in sex-for-hire among housewives. He reports that he interviewed more than 50 prostitutes who said that they were happily married, and many had families.
 - 2. Some said that their husbands know what they are doing and don't mind because it brings more money to support their families.
 - a. The women and their clients are upper-middle-class people. The housewife-prostitutes actually believe that they are doing service to society.
 - b. Mr. Morrison says that he sees no reason why prostitution should not be made legal in Canada. He is writing a book that will give the prostitute "a better name than she has been labeled with in the past."
- B. There is absolutely no doubt but that we are living in a very morally lax society.
 - 1. On television and in the movies, we see sexual promiscuity paraded in front of us all the time.
 - a. Shows such as *Sex in the City* and *Desperate Housewives* declare that there is absolutely no reason for monogamous sexual relationships within marriage. Since we are sexual creatures, we might as well find enjoyment where we can in life, or so the argument goes.
 - b. How many times do we stay away from movies where the storyline seems absolutely fantastic and the producers have found a terrific cast because we know that if we go we will see immorality paraded in front of us for two hours?
 - 2. Many high schools give instructions for "safe sex" to students, because, the argument goes, they are going to have sex, so we need to keep them "safe."
- C. Although we live in a morally lax society, the text before us this morning makes quite clear that times haven't changed much since the first century.
 - 1. In the Ancient World, Corinth was known for its immorality, and Paul makes clear that such immorality had permeated the Corinthian church.
 - 2. A man in the Corinthian church was living with his father's wife.
 - a. In this morning's text, Paul tells the church how to deal with such sin.
 - b. In telling the church how to deal with such sin, Paul tells the church about: A PAGAN SIN, A PRIDEFUL SHAME, A PRESENT SENTENCE, & A PRESENT FOR SATAN.

II. A PAGAN SIN, v. 1.

- A. It had been reported to Paul that there was sexual immorality among the Corinthians.
 - 1. Apparently those from Chloe's household who delivered the letter from Corinth to Paul told the Apostle about the sexual immorality he discusses in this section.
 - 2. There was sexual immorality among the Corinthians.
 - a. The Greek term for "sexual immorality" originally referred to sex with prostitutes, but by Paul's time the term referred to any sexual relations outside marriage.

- b. Sexual immorality has absolutely no place among the people of God.
 - Sexual immorality is mentioned as an act of the flesh (Gal 5:19).
 - Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: "It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God" (1 Thess 4:3-5).
3. Have we made room for sexual immorality among us?
 - a. I know you're probably thinking, "Justin, look, I'm faithful to my wife, or I'm faithful to my husband."
 - b. Great! Yet, there is more involved in being sexually pure than being faithful to our spouses.
 - Jesus said there was more involved in sexual purity than not having sex outside of marriage: "I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5:28).
 - Just how well do we guard our hearts?
 - Do we stay away from movies, television programs, or music that might incite our lusts?
 - Do we stay away from Internet sites that might incite our lusts, or do we think, "It's not going to hurt. I'm not having sex"?
 - How faithful are we in giving ourselves to our husbands or wives that their sexual urges will remain where they ought to be?
 - The Scriptures do not only teach that we should we never have sex outside of marriage but that we should have regular sex in marriage: 1 Cor 7:2-5.
 - God created us as sexual beings, and God's Word does not envision a sex-less marriage.
- C. The type of sexual immorality present among the Corinthians was not even common among pagans: a man had his mother's wife.
 1. It certainly seems that this woman was the man's step-mother, for Paul calls her his father's wife rather than his mother.
 2. In the ancient world such a relationship would have been viewed as incestuous.
 - a. Even pagans abhorred incest.
 - b. Some emperors would marry their mothers or step-mothers or sisters, and the Roman world unanimously denounced such immorality.
 3. The OT denounced such a relationship: "Do not have sexual relations with your father's wife; that would dishonor your father" (Lev 18:8). Paul's wording here takes that OT prohibition and applies it to the modern age.
- D. I've struggled this week with what to do with this text.
 1. There's not a one of us involved in an incestuous relationship, and we've already discussed sexual immorality. What other point could I possibly make?
 2. I think the answer lies in the type of sexual immorality this man was involved: "a kind that does not occur even among pagans."
 - a. Could you imagine what would have happened in Corinth if someone had heard about this Christian group and wanted to find out more and showed up at the Lord's Day assembly, only to find that someone they knew was involved in serious moral error a member of that group? What would that person think of the Christians there in Corinth?
 - b. Whether or not we want to admit it, for many the validity of Christian claims rise or fall on our conduct.
 - What would happen if we lost our temper in public because someone got a parking space we wanted and then that person showed up on Sunday morning?

- What if we ordered a glass of wine at a nice restaurant, only to have the waiter as a guest on Sunday?
- c. Brethren, we need to think seriously about our conduct, sexual and otherwise, and how it can impact this world for good rather than evil.

III. A PRIDEFUL SHAME, v. 2.

A. The Corinthians were prideful to have this wicked, immoral couple in their midst.

1. There have been several theories advocated by scholars as to why the church was proud over this relationship.
 - a. As I have suggested previously, some scholars believe the church was proud to be so open-minded.
 - b. Others have suggested that this lady inherited her late husband's money and that the man married his step-mother to keep the money in the family.
 - c. Others believe that this couple may have been wealthy, and that they were providing a large part of the funds for the Corinthian church and possibly allowing the church to meet in their homes. Therefore, it wasn't very practical from an earthly perspective to rebuke this couple.
 2. Those scenarios are certainly possible—I personally favor the church's claiming to be open-minded—but, we really don't know why they were proud.
 3. We live in a world where many are proud of sin.
 - a. Several sinners in Scriptures seem to have been proud:
 - In writing about pagan sinners in the opening chapter of Romans, Paul declares, "Although they claimed to be *wise*, they became fools" (Rm 1:22)—In the context of that chapter, these pagans seem to have boasted, "Look at how wise we are to discover all these gods. Look at how wise we are to use our bodies sexually the way we do."
 - 2 Pt 3:3-4. These people are proud that they're not so "stupid" as to believe Scripture; they know that Jesus will never come back because the world continues as it always has. They forget, Peter declares, how suddenly the Day of the Lord will come.
 - b. How many in our own day are proud of the sin in which they're involved?
 - I was reading *The Humanist*, the official publication of the American Humanist Association, not long ago.
 - In the front section was an article about Sherry Matulis who had an illegal abortion years ago.
 - She proudly declares to anyone who will listen that she had had an illegal abortion and works tirelessly for pro-abortion groups. (July-August 2007)
 - If you've been following the table games debate in the "Reader's Voice" of the *Gazette*, many are glad to be free from "Bible-thumpers" and to be able to do what they choose.
 - c. It's easy to see the problems with such philosophies, but what about us?
 - Do we boast in our sin?
 - Do we ever think, "No one's ever going to find out about this"?
 - Do we ever think, "Sure I've got a problem or two, but at least it's not as bad as the problem so and so has," or do we constantly examine ourselves to see how we can rid ourselves of sin?
- #### B. Paul declares that instead of boating about this man's living with his step-mother, they should have been filled with grief and put the man out of their fellowship.
1. How can we not be grieved at sin, regardless of how mundane it might seem to us?

- a. We know that sin grieves God: “The LORD saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, *and his heart was filled with pain*” (Gn 6:5-6).
- b. How can we not be grieved at sin when sin caused the precious, sinless Son of God to die?
2. Not only should the Corinthians have been grieved, but they should have excluded this man from his fellowship.
 - a. Jews of this time period had replaced the death penalty of the OT with exclusion from the Jewish community and from the synagogue.
 - b. Paul is going to outline in this text the parameters the Corinthians were to go through to exclude this man from their fellowship.

IV. A PRESENT JUDGMENT, v. 3.

- A. Paul was not physically present with the Corinthians, but he was with them in spirit.
 1. It was quite common in the ancient world for authors of letters to declare that they were with their reader “in spirit.” This was not some sort of metaphysical statement (where the writer would be saying: “Part of my spirit is really there with you”), but it was an expression of intimacy.
 2. Paul says, in essence, “I’m there with you. I’m thinking about you. I’ll back you up.”
 3. Isn’t there a sense in which Paul is present with us this morning in spirit?
 - a. As we read his words this morning, words inspired of God, is it not true that we have an intimacy with him?
 - b. Is it not also true that as we open Scripture, Paul still speaks to us through the living Word of God?
- B. Further, Paul had passed judgment on this incestuous relationship as if he were present in the church.
 1. Paul says, “Look, folks, this is an illicit relationship that needs desperately to be corrected. Even though I’m not there with you; I know that. Get that sin away from you.”
 2. Is it not true that as we read the words of Scripture, the apostles continue to judge us and to hold us up to a very high standard?

V. A PRESENT FOR SATAN, vv. 4-5.

- A. Paul says, “Give Satan a present.” He writes, “When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan, so that the [flesh] may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.”
- B. These Christians would be assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 1. The reference to being assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus probably comes from Mt 18:20: “Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”
 2. I find it interesting that Paul mentions the church’s being together in the name of the *Lord* Jesus Christ.
 - a. The reference to Jesus as “Lord” here probably serves to remind the Corinthians that because Jesus Christ is Lord there are moral obligations for the Christian to follow.
 - There are obligations to follow because Jesus is Lord; this man living with his step-mother couldn’t live however he wanted—Jesus was his Lord and he needed to follow Jesus.
 - As Christians, we cannot live however we want—Jesus is our Lord and we need to follow Jesus.
 - b. Also, because Jesus as “Lord” is head of his church, the Corinthian church couldn’t disfellowship whomever they wanted.

- Those who preferred Paul's preaching couldn't refuse association with those who preferred Apollos' preaching; the rich couldn't refuse association with the poor.
 - We can't exclude whomever we want from our fellowship, for Jesus is Lord.
 - If someone who is dirt poor wants to come to Jesus, we need to welcome him as he names Jesus as Lord. If someone who has lived an immoral life wants to come to Jesus, we need to welcome him as he names Jesus as Lord.
 - It is not up to us to determine who can be part of this fellowship; that's up to the Lord Jesus.
- C. Paul would be present in spirit; Paul and the Corinthians would act in unison, for they would be doing what he instructed.
- D. The power of the Lord Jesus would be present.
1. Again, notice that Jesus is referred to as "the Lord Jesus."
 2. Jesus' power would be present in that the congregation would act under and by his authority.
- E. This wicked brother was to be delivered to Satan for the destruction of his flesh.
1. There have been numerous pages written as to what delivering this man over to Satan means.
 - a. Personally, I think Paul means, "If this man wants to live in sin, fine. You let him go further in sin and see how he likes it. Get him out of the congregation."
 - b. I think that because of other passages speaking of church discipline:
 - "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" (1 Cor 5:11).
 - "Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him" (Tit 3:10).
 2. This man was to be withdrawn from the congregation for the destruction of his flesh.
 - a. If you're reading from the NIV, you'll notice that the text refers to the "sinful nature."
 - I started using the NIV because many of you use it, and the more I've read it, the more I like it. But, I absolutely hate the translation of "sinful nature" for the term "flesh," because I'm afraid it gives into the Calvinistic idea that we are sinners from birth—therefore, our very nature is sinful.
 - But, if you're an astute reader of Paul's Epistles, you'll notice that he often uses the term "flesh" to refer to man's sinful self. Paul obviously references that sinful side of man in this sentence.
 - I really wonder if the translation "sinful inclinations" wouldn't better fit here.
 - b. This wicked brother needed to get rid of such inclinations, and putting him outside the Christian fellowship was to help with that process.
 - How could such a break of fellowship aid with getting rid of sin?
 - Think of it this way:
 - Most all of your closest friends, those whom are as close as your own flesh and blood, are members of the church.
 - The church withdraws fellowship from you.
 - When you meet your friends in the street, they turn and refuse to speak. Your closest friend, the one who did everything with, won't even let you in his home. That friend you used to go and catch a movie with, won't invite you and refuses any attempts you make at friendship.
 - Would that not get us thinking seriously about that state of our souls?
- F. Yet, the purpose in withdrawing fellowship from this brother was not punitive; it was to see his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.

1. That's the purpose of church discipline: to see people restored to Christ and saved on that final and terrible day.
2. We don't discipline our children to punish them, do we? Aren't we interested in forming them to be great men and women?
3. Likewise, the church should discipline members, not to punish, but to help them be great members of the Kingdom of God.
4. Do you need to come this morning and rid yourself of your sinful inclinations by crucifying them to the cross of Jesus? Do you need to come and be baptized to crucify the desires of your flesh and be raised to honor Jesus as Lord?