

Dare to Discipline

Brynmawr Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 27th Nov 2010

Intro-

- In part 1 of Corinthians we looked at Paul's introduction to his letter to the Church and noted Paul's ability to celebrate the grace of God in the lives of the believers at Corinth despite the serious pastoral problems they displayed.
- In part 2 of Corinthians we looked at the first pastoral situation that Paul addressed in his letter- that of division within the Church. In so doing we noted that unity is more important than personal preference. Unity is strengthened through a shared theology built on the foundation of the simple message of the cross. Unity takes humility.
- This week we will look at how Paul addresses serious moral sin which has come into the Church. In so doing we will gain God's perspective on what our stance should be where individuals refuse to address blatant sin.

Read 1Cor 5 & 6

The Church must set the example in morality- 'you truly are unleavened' (v7)

- The situation here is that a man was having sexual relations with his step-mother. This was shocking even for the pagan society of the time.
- Recent examples of moral failures in the Church- Catholic scandal of child abuse. Homosexuality in the Anglican Church. Leaders whom we respect messing up morally. Is this something new? What should our response be?
- Our response must first be that we should not tolerate sin. Paul uses an illustration to help the Corinthians understand this. He uses the picture of the Jewish feast of Unleavened Bread (which was a 7-day observance starting the day after Passover). Read Ex 12:15. The Israelites observed Passover on their last day as slaves in Egypt. The very next day was the Exodus- they only had time to eat unleavened bread as they rushed out of the land of bondage and became free. The feast of unleavened bread thus takes place on the very same day that the Jews came out of bondage, and it was and still is a reminder of going from slavery to freedom. For the Christians, it reminds us of being set free from sin, following Jesus' death on the cross for us, which was also on the same day as Passover, to give the Passover its fullest meaning.
- According to Jewish scholar Arnold Fruchtenbaum there are 3 key ceremonies Jews perform relating to the cleansing of the leaven:
 1. **The search for the leaven**- Performed night before Passover- they go through all the house looking for any scattered pieces of leaven. Now custom to make sure there is some to find- dad goes to 10 corners of the house to sprinkle crumbs of leavened bread, then followed by his kids picks up the crumbs with a spoon and a feather, dumps it in a linen napkin and wraps the napkin around the spoon and feather ready to be disposed of.
 2. **The renunciation of the leaven**- When they are sure all the leaven has been found they recite a special blessing in case there is some undiscovered leaven still in the house. With this special blessing any undiscovered leaven is nullified.
 3. **The burning of the leaven**- this is done the morning of the first night of Passover- all leaven discovered is burned in a special bonfire, signifying this Jewish home is now ready and worthy to eat the Passover.
- Leaven is a picture of sin (v8). Just as the Jews go throughout their house looking for any leaven and thoroughly disposing of it, we need to allow the Holy Spirit to do the same in every room of our lives. We need to not play with sin or entertain it, but to deal decisively with it. We do this through confession and repentance (1John 1:8-9).
- Jesus is the true unleavened bread- i.e. He really had no sin (unleavened bread is

like a cracker, but to be 'cosher' it must be striped and pieced many times to allow the air to escape to prevent any rising. Jesus was also striped and pierced). He is also our passover lamb- the sacrifice which takes away our sin, so that we too become like unleavened bread. Therefore we too are to live as sanctified because that is what we really are- see v7. Paul gives the metaphorical picture for this in v8. We are saved from sin, so we are to live like we are saved from it- are you?

- If a little bit of leaven was left in the bread it would affect the whole loaf (v6). In the same way, if we allow blatant sin to remain in our lives and in the Church unchecked it will spread. Unrepentant sin becomes addictive. Unrepentant people influence others to follow their example. When leaders fall people can be quick to use their error as an excuse to also sin. Disappointment and disillusionment then also become lame excuses to sin.
- Leaven is also a picture of pride- it make the bread expand or 'puff up'. 'Puffed up'- v2 refers to their pride in how much they thought they knew- see 4:10,18. Paul has already addressed their pride, thinking they know it all by highlighting that whilst there are divisions amongst them they are still worldly. Now he points out that whilst they are proudly thinking they are further on than Paul himself they have a humungous blind spot which is so serious they should rather be weeping in repentance. What about us? Do we sometimes equate knowledge with maturity, all the while sweeping certain sins under the carpet?
- The world is looking at the Church- we are the light of the world according to Jesus. How are we doing? How are you doing? Like the Church in Corinth are we doing anything that would even shock unbelievers?

We must dare to discipline

- Paul says in v3 that even though he is absent he has already judged the man who did this. Paul was not afraid to challenge sin and bring discipline into play. He encourages them to also do the same as if he were with them, because in spirit he is with them. I do not personally think that this means that Paul is talking about his spirit-man travelling to be present at Corinth, although this is not to discount it as a possibility (Paul went to the third Heaven 2Cor 12:1-4), however, more likely he is talking about his agreement with disciplining the one who has sinned.
- Is it right to judge?
Is there a contradiction here with 4:3-5? I believe that in 4:3-5 Paul is saying that we should not glory in certain leaders, treating them like heroes, but rather view them as God's stewards- it is God's job to ultimately judge whether they have been obedient to their calling, not ours. Also Jesus said 'judge not, that you be not judged'- here Jesus is, I believe, speaking about us not having an over-critical spirit always criticising others or it will come back to bite us.
However, here Paul makes it clear- we are to judge a believer who is willfully engaging in a sinful lifestyle and causing the gospel to fall into disrepute. Paul makes it clear however, that we are not to judge non-Christians (1:12-13)- God will judge them, but we are to bring godly discipline to those within the Church for their benefit and the benefit of the body.
- There is a difference between how we deal with someone caught in a sin and someone who is in rebellion and denial. The former should be restored gently by those who are spiritual in the Church (Gal 6:1), but they must watch they too aren't tempted.
- What about those blatantly unrepentant? Going back to the analogy of leaven, the punishment for anyone found with leaven in their house was excommunication from the camp of Israel (Ex 12:15). Paul refers to this practise when he speaks about cutting association with the man who is sinning in Corinth. He encourages the Corinthians to '**purge out** the old leaven' (5:7), '**mourn** that he who has done this deed might be **taken from among them**' (5:2), '**deliver such a one over to Satan** for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord

Jesus' (5:5), '**not to keep company...eat**' (5:11). These all point to drastic action to try to bring the man back to his senses. Jesus spoke about this kind of Church discipline in Matt 18:15-17. 4 levels

1. Speak to the person alone
2. If they don't listen bring along one or two others
3. If they still won't listen get the whole church involved
4. Finally treat them as a heathen or tax-collector (i.e. excommunicate them, treat them as a non-believer) if they still refuse to listen.

It would appear that this man was at the final stage (see 5:4 -'when you are gathered together'). The 'destruction of the flesh' could mean physical death or affliction (it did in the case of Ananias and Sapphira) or simply to deal with the sinful nature. The aim is to make the person feel ashamed for their sin, so that they repent.

- 2Cor 2:5-8 indicates that this man repented! Paul then encourages them to receive him back and forgive him. This is the goal of true Church discipline- it is not pleasant at the time but yields good fruit.
- A word about 6:1-11. Is it ever right to go to court against another Christian? I think here we need to look at the context of what Paul is saying. He is right in the middle of discussing Church discipline regarding sexual immorality. He is challenging them that they have been slow to exercise godly judgement concerning someone in gross, unrepentant sin. But at the same time, Paul says, they have been quick to take each other to a secular court over minor matters. The point Paul is trying to make is that God has invested within His Holy people the ability to judge whether something is right or wrong and to bring about necessary discipline. I don't believe here Paul is ruling out forever the possibility of going to court against a Christian, but rather pointing out to them their neglect of their responsibilities regarding Church discipline. The matters they have gone to secular judges about really should have been sorted out through Church discipline. However, we are not naive and are aware that some matters need to go further than a local church level. For instance, where child-abuse has taken place, or murder, or assault, marital violence etc. Divorce has to go through the laws of the land to take place, and although God does not like divorce due to the pain it causes there is such a thing as biblical divorce.
- Often we avoid confrontation because it is unpleasant. Is there something that God/someone else has challenged in you that needs to change? Is there something in someone else you know God is flagging up to you to challenge but you have neglected doing it?

God wants us to keep our bodies holy

- In his final addressing of this issue of sexual immorality Paul gives the reason sexual sins should be sorted out rather than indulged.
- Temptation given into can develop into a stronghold- 6:12 'I will not be brought under the power of any'. Even good things, such as eating can become an addiction if done with the wrong motives (such as greed).
- Our bodies are not ours to do with as we please- they belong to God ultimately 6:13. We were bought at a costly price- the blood of Jesus (6:20). Our bodies are God's temple- He lives in us. Therefore we should respect our bodies as palaces fit for the King.
- Dualism was an ancient belief that the body was evil and the spirit good. In 6:14 Paul makes it clear that Jesus' physical body was raised up and so shall ours be. Therefore the body is not to be thought of as evil and the spirit good. What we do in the body has an effect on our spirits, therefore we should not abuse them.
- Sex is like a glue that joins 2 people together at the deepest level. According to the Bible the 2 become 1 flesh (see Gen 2:24). God in Genesis designed this closest of

unions to take place between a man and a woman within the covenant (contract) of marriage. We are one with Christ, therefore we should not join with a prostitute- it degrades the body of Christ.

- 'Every other sin is outside the body'- v18. Here Paul is saying, I believe, that when we sin sexually it is different from other sins which cause harm to others- we are actually harming ourselves by desecrating our temples- the place God designed to be His dwelling place. We are defiling our own bodies. In this way there are similarities to self-abuse habits such as self-harm, running ourselves down in conversation, smoking, self-hatred, bulimia. We are cheapening up something beautiful that Christ designed and died for. Therefore we should have self-respect for our bodies, and learn to love ourselves as Christ loves us.
- What if we've messed up? We all have (1John 1:8). Remember you are a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come (2Cor 5:17)! If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1John 1:9). Think about how brand new the woman caught in adultery felt after Jesus did not condemn her. However, Jesus said 'go and sin no more' (John 8:11). We need to confess our sins to God openly (and perhaps be accountable to someone) and then be of the mindset to sin no more- to get all the leaven out of every room.

Summary

- **The Church must set the example in morality**
- **We must dare to discipline**
- **God wants us to keep our bodies holy**

Song: *Purify my heart*