

Day 87, 1 Corinthians 5

by David Servant

The church has a responsibility to judge and discipline its members, especially those who are living in immorality, in order to maintain its purity and holiness.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 6:9

Topics: "Church Discipline", "Sexual Purity"

Description

David Servant delves into why Paul did not instruct the Corinthian believers to follow Jesus' three steps of church discipline from Matthew 18 regarding the man living in sin with his stepmother. Paul discerned that the man was not a true believer, as he had previously warned against associating with immoral individuals who claim to be believers. Paul emphasized the importance of judging those within the church who are living in sin, highlighting the church's responsibility to maintain holiness and purity. By excommunicating the immoral man, the Corinthian believers aimed to send a message to the world about the importance of sexual purity and to the man himself in hopes of his repentance and salvation.

Transcript

Why didn't Paul instruct the Corinthian believers to follow Jesus' three steps of church discipline---which we read in Matthew 18---regarding the man in their midst who was living in a sexual relationship with his stepmother? The reason is because those are three steps that are to be taken with believers, but Paul rightfully judged that this perverted man was not a true believer. Paul had previously instructed the Corinthians "not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler--not even to eat with such a one" (5:11). Those who claim to be believers in Christ who are sexually immoral are not believers at all. This is also true for professing believers who are covetous, idolatrous, drunks and cheats. We will read in the very next chapter of Corinthians:

Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

Paul warned, "Do not be deceived." How tragic it is that so many within evangelical Christianity have believed the lie that such people can be classed as "carnal Christians," fully saved but walking after the flesh, indistinguishable from unbelievers. The Corinthians had adopted a similar attitude, accepting the immoral man's profession of faith as being genuine, proud of their tolerance, when they should have been

mourning that they had permitted such a blight in Christ's body (5:2). It is obvious that this immoral man was not a true Christian. Paul referred to him as being guilty of immorality "of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles" (5:1), as "a so-called brother" (5:11), as one who was worthy to be excommunicated and delivered to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, as a man who was not currently saved (5:5), and as a "wicked man" (5:13).

Without apology, Paul stated that he had already "judged" the immoral man (5:3). Obviously, there is nothing wrong with making such judgments. In fact, there is everything right about them. Paul unequivocally stated that those within the church have an obligation to judge those within the church (5:12). What a refreshing balance this brings to the common misunderstanding regarding passing judgment on others. Jesus' prohibition against passing judgment revolved around finding faults with others by those who possess greater faults (Matt. 7:1-5). But moral people in the church have every right to judge immoral people within their midst.

Clearly, the church of Jesus Christ is supposed to be a holy, self-cleansing body. And the responsibility for that self-cleansing does not just fall on the shoulders of pastors. Paul wasn't writing just to pastors. He was writing to the entire body in Corinth. We should all be devoted to keeping Christ's church a light that shines in the world's darkness, pure and holy, obedient to our Lord. This most basic quality of the church is virtually impossible to attain within common modern church structure, where the church is a group of people who know very little about each other and who gather for a weekly production under the leadership of a pastor who knows very little about them. The body of Christ cannot remain pure before the world apart from biblical churches that are small, where people actually know each other.

By excommunicating the immoral man in Corinth, the Corinthian believers sent a message to the watching world: "If you want to be one of us, you must be sexually pure." They additionally sent a message to the immoral man: "We do not accept your profession of faith in the Lord Jesus as genuine. However, we do not excommunicate out of hatred, but rather out of love, hoping our actions will wake you from your self-deception so that you may repent, be truly born again, and be 'saved in the day of the Lord Jesus'" (5:5). Apparently, the Corinthian believers formally delivered the immoral man "to Satan for the destruction of his flesh" (5:5). Finding himself ill and perhaps even dying, hopefully he would be saved. Serious stuff indeed!

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