Growing in Grace; Growing in Community: Life Lessons on Maturity with the Corinthians

***Accountability: How do we deal with flagrant, public sin?*** 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

The Corinthians’ arrogance showed itself in their disregard for apostolic and biblical authority, preferring their “tribal” loyalties. But Paul has learned that they also were excusing or tolerating sin, and bragging about it. They were being “open minded” and “spiritual,” in other words, they were not concerned about these “sins of the body.” Paul is outraged, and sets the stage for what we normally call “church discipline.” This passage is the outworking of Jesus’ instructions in Matthew 18:15-20. Jesus tells us to exclude the unrepentant from fellowship, only as a last resort, and even then, with the goal of restoration.

❖ The problem: Flagrant sin has produced pride. vv. 1, 2

But sin is cause for mourning, not naivete and “tolerance.”

❖ The measured response: Decisively dissociate with a view to restore. vv. 3-5

The church, not just its leaders, has a responsibility to act.

❖ The biblical principle: Unconfessed sin is incompatible with the Body of Christ. vv. 6-8

Jesus died to free us from sin, not help us live with it.

❖ The clarification: Discipline is for disciples. vv. 9-13

The church’s goal is not the reformation of outsiders, but the transformation of its members.

**Growth Principle #6: The spiritually mature Christian respects and protects the reputation and purity of Christ’s Body by separating from professing believers who continue unrepentant in their sin.**

**This situation calls for us to ask three key questions:**

***1. What is a church?***

This passage calls for us to ask the differences between a church and a chapel, a pastor and a chaplain, accountability and attendance. If a church is merely another institution to meet social and physical needs, its nature has been betrayed. A church is not a repository of “nice people.” It is a body of redeemed sinners who have grieved their sin and the sins of others and who now seek to live holy lives. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” Matthew 5:4

***2. What is sin?***

Church discipline presupposes that sin is an offense against God to be repented of and forgiven. Sin is not a poor choice or a disease or “something I have to work through.” Sin is the reason Jesus died, and so when we take sin lightly, we take hope away from the sinner, confirming him in sin, for we are distracting him/her from the joyful liberty and full restoration that only confession and forgiveness bring. “Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin.” John 8:11; Matthew 18:15-20; 2 Thessalonians 3:13-15

***3. Who is Jesus?***

Church discipline presupposes that He is the unseen, but powerfully present, Guest of Honor at every gathering of His people. When we think of Him as a sickly, weak character who tolerates any insult to His purity, we have forgotten that He is the Son of God who died because of our sin. “For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them.” Matthew 18:20 (Again, note: Jesus LOVES sinners and SAVES sinners and RESTORES sinners, but He calls on them to confess and forsake their sin. Therefore, those who SAY they are His should be those who depart from sin, not embrace it. 2 Tim. 2:19)



***Going Deeper--For Growth Groups:***

1. What are the problems we encounter if and when we confront someone about a flagrant sin? How does our culture view this kind of thing? Could cultural issues have played a part in the Corinthians’ not dealing with this particular scandal?

2. What kind of church would be able to follow Paul’s instructions in any meaningful way? And what should be done if the offending party merely ignores the church’s pleas, and begins attending the church down the road? Do you know of any situations like the one Paul describes? What happened, and was a resolution ever reached?