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**GENUINE SPIRITUALITY: A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS**  
**#13**

**GENUINE SPIRITUALITY REQUIRES DISCIPLINE**  
**[PART 2]**  
**1 CORINTHIANS 5:1-13**

**INTRODUCTION**

In last week's message we covered 1 Corinthians 5 and we primarily focused on God's demand for holiness among the Corinthian believers. The church had become unholy and one specific sin had become very well known [1 Corinthians 5:1]. Paul rebuked the arrogance of the Corinthian believers and he commanded them to exercise judgment on the sinning individual using the process Paul lays out for them [1 Corinthians 5:2-13]. Their judgment was to align with God's judgment concerning this man and his sin. We call this process *formal church discipline*. Scripture teaches us that the church cannot refrain from these types of judgments no matter how unpopular or painful the process becomes.

1 Corinthians 5 primarily addresses the issue of *formal church discipline*. But numerous other themes subtly emerge as we study this text and consider its implications for local churches. The themes I want us to look at today include: (1) authority within the local church, (2) church membership, and (3) sin within the believing community.

**1. AUTHORITY WITHIN THE LOCAL CHURCH**

The biblical truth which undergirds everything in this passage is the idea that every local church has the responsibility and authority to identify unrepentant sinners, who claim to be Christians, and discipline them. Notice: the church has the authority to identify what is immoral and what is not (v1). The church also has the authority to deliver this one over to Satan (v5). The church has the authority to exclude someone from the Lord's Table (vv6-8). From whom does the church derive its authority?

Jesus is the source of the church's authority. Acts 17:30-31 declares, *30"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, 31because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."* In Matthew 18:18-20, Jesus says *18"Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. 19"Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. 20"For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."* The words promise that when the church speaks in concert with God's revealed will, Jesus empowers our obedience. In other words, when the judgment of a local church aligns with Scripture, that judgment carries the authority of Jesus Himself.

Calvin wrote, *Whoever, after committing a crime, humbly confesses his fault, and entreats the Church to forgive him, is absolved not only by men, but by God himself; and, on the other hand, whoever treats with*

*ridicule the reproofs and threatenings of the Church, if he is condemned by her, the decision which men have given will be ratified in heaven...Men do no injury to the authority of God when they pronounce nothing but what comes from his mouth, and only endeavor faithfully to execute what he has commanded.*

When an unrepentant brother is disciplined, he must be excluded from the Lord's Table. This is most likely what Paul refers to both to his analogy of the Feasts of Unleavened Bread and Passover (vv6-8) and in his command *not to even eat with such a one* (v11). His point is not that the church should completely avoid this man, but rather they should not allow him to eat from the Lord's Table. The Lord's Table speaks of a genuine communion with Christ and other believers. Yet this kind of man is not in true fellowship with either. Therefore, church discipline refuses to let unrepentant sinners define Biblical faith before the eyes of the world. He is living a "false gospel" and must be removed so as not to contaminate the Word and Sacraments that attend the true gospel. This is the God-given authority and responsibility of every local church. As Edmund Clowney writes, *the Church is Christ's. We cannot exclude those whom he [Jesus] welcomes, or welcome those whom he excludes.*

## **2. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP**

Ecclesiastical authority, as all forms of authority, must recognize God-imposed limits. The authority of a local church does not extend to those outside that particular church (vv9-13). The same is true for civil authorities who govern nations; their authority is only recognized within their borders. The church must seek to evangelize those outside of its membership, not discipline them.

This truth demands that we have some idea who is in the church and who is not. Thus, the concept of church membership becomes extremely important. While there are surely some true believers who are not members of any local church, this is not the biblical norm. In the New Testament, identifying yourself with Christ meant identifying yourself with a local group of believers as well [Acts 2:41-47]. This should move us to strongly consider the Lord's command that we be baptized as the external sign of entrance into the Church and the example of early believers to unite with a local congregation as evidence of an ongoing commitment to Christ.

What we must have is an identifiable group of leaders governing and answering to an identifiable group of believers willingly functioning under those leaders' authority [1 Timothy 5:17-20]. 1 Corinthians 5 implies that Paul knew the members of the Corinthian church; he wasn't writing to a nameless and faceless obscure group of people. The writer of Hebrews must believe in some similar concept of church membership when he writes, *7Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith... 17Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you (Hebrews 13:7, 17).* All the commands in this passage from Hebrews require a deep level of commitment on our part to the local church and its leaders. 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 exhorts the Elders to be committed to those God entrusts to their care and this means we must know who is under our care, *12But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. 14We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.*

### 3. SIN WITHIN THE BELIEVING COMMUNITY

Sin that starts out as private sin does not remain that way very long. According to verse 1, the report of this man's sexual sin was well known in the community. Numbers 32:23 reminds us, *you have sinned against the LORD, and be sure your sin will find you out*. Jesus affirmed this truth when He said, *"Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. 2" But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. 3" Accordingly, whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in the inner rooms will be proclaimed upon the housetops (Luke 12:1-3)*. Private sin only remains private for a little while, then it goes public. Sins committed in quiet, dark places are often judged before the eyes of many interested folks.

Paul reminds us that one sin easily leads to another sin as leaven spreads through dough. This is true in the individual Christian and in the Christian community. What often lies at the heart of our sin is the false assumption that "what I'm doing is my business and really hurts no one but me". Now we have become guilty of another sin; the sin of individualism [to use Doug Wilson's phrase]. When you sin, every entity of which you are a part now experiences that sin to some lesser or greater degree; your family and church feel the repercussions. Satan often fools us by offering us the allusion of privacy. But is anything really private that will not one day *be proclaimed upon the housetops*? Sin spreads. Our sin often hurts those whom we would least like it to hurt, but that is the destructive nature of sin.

### CONCLUSION

Obviously, there are no perfect churches, nor are there any perfect church members. The church often misuses [or ignores] its authority and church members often neglect to take seriously their duties. This is why the church is built on the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus declared that anyone who repents and trusts Him will be forgiven. This is the foundational message of the church. We proclaim this by mouth and by signs: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Each of you must strongly consider the importance of identifying yourself with a true local church. That means a church that (1) preaches the gospel, (2) correctly observes the sacraments and (3) practices biblical church discipline to preserve the purity of both the gospel and the sacraments.