

T. Shane Martin
 Green Run Baptist Church
 June 24, 2007

GENUINE SPIRITUALITY: A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS
#12

GENUINE SPIRITUALITY REQUIRES DISCIPLINE
1 CORINTHIANS 5:1-13

INTRODUCTION

The Church is often criticized for two reasons: (1) being filled with hypocrites, and (2) being too judgmental. It is true that the Church has some hypocrites within its membership. It is also true that the Church has been unnecessarily judgmental. But what is ironic is that the Biblical way to deal with hypocrisy in the Church is to confront hypocrites in a stern but gracious manner. When the Church confronts sin in a stern manner, the Church will be labeled as judgmental by unbelieving or carnal people. So how do we address hypocrites in the Church and yet not be labeled as judgmental? Here are 2 proposed answers to that difficult question: (1) We must be courageous enough to obey the biblical commands regarding disciplining and forgiving hypocrites within the Church, and (2) we must stop being overly concerned with what unbelievers and very immature Christians say about our church.

Paul faces a situation within the Corinthian church requiring clear judgment and stern discipline. The Bible speaks of at least 4 kinds of discipline which are necessary for genuine spirituality within every local church.

1. Self-discipline- *I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified* (1 Corinthians 9:27).
2. Informal church discipline- *Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted* (Galatians 6:1).
3. Formal church discipline- *15" If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16" But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. 17" If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 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."* (Matthew 18:15-20).
4. God's direct discipline- Many examples of this exist in Scripture: Moses not entering the Promised Land, David's child dying after his adulterous affair, Ananias and Sapphira killed because they lied to the Holy Spirit and the Apostles.

There was little self-discipline in the Corinthian church and this was apparently weekly when they gathered for worship and it turned into a drunken tongue-speaking competition. The church was collectively immature and therefore, there was little informal church discipline [1

Corinthians 3:3]. When churches lack self-discipline and informal church discipline, the only alternative is formal church discipline. This is the topic Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 5.

1. THE PROBLEM WITHIN THE CHURCH AT CORINTH (5:1)

The problem within the Corinthian church was a severe one. A man within the church was living in an incestuous relationship with his stepmother. This man and woman appear to have been living together in immorality for some time because the words used by Paul make us aware that this relationship was common knowledge among the members of the church. It is also apparent that those outside of the church knew about this sin as well. While the believers within the church tolerated the sin, the godless pagans outside the church condemned this type of immorality.

This situation within the Corinthian church should not shock us. We must remember that the Corinthians were often very immoral before they were called to belong to Jesus Christ. It is not unusual that these people would struggle with immorality after their new birth and conversion. The woman mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:1 is never addressed at any other place in First Corinthians or Second Corinthians. Because of this, it is safe to assume that she was an unbeliever and not within the church.

This type of sin was specifically condemned in the Old Testament (See Leviticus 18:6-8; 20:11). The teachings of Jesus forbade immorality as well (Matthew 5:27-28). Therefore, the leaders of the Corinthian church have ample explanation concerning the sinfulness of this man's situation. The church had solid authority to deal with the problem, but their response was anything but authoritative.

2. THE RESPONSES TO THE PROBLEM (5:2-3)

The Corinthians' response to this man's sin was one of pride and permissiveness. They had not dealt with this sin in any way. As a matter of fact, they prided themselves in their acceptance of this man. They had adopted a destructive view of grace. They had begun to believe that God's grace allowed this man to live any type of lifestyle that he chose. They did not understand that God's grace leads to a changed life. Paul tried to teach them this in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, *9Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. 11Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.*

Paul responded to the situation with caring judgment. Paul openly declared that he had judged this man as sinning even though Paul was not in Corinth at the time. How could Paul do this? Paul knew that this man had clearly and persistently violated Scripture. So Paul's authority to judge this man's actions came directly from the fact that God had already judged his actions as sinful and revealed this in the Old Testament and the words of Jesus. Paul was simply agreeing with God's revealed truth. The revealed truth of God is our authority to judge or forgive sin. God's word is truth for all people, all times and all places. Paul now calls the church to confront this man in a spiritual manner.

3. PAUL'S COUNSEL TO THE CHURCH CONCERNING HOW TO HANDLE UNREPENTANT BELIEVERS (5:4-13)

Paul demands that the Corinthians make a unified effort to correct this member's behavior. In verse 4, Paul instructed them to call an official church meeting for the purpose of dealing with the offender. They were to deal with his sin publicly because his sin was known publicly. Private sins can be confronted in a private manner, but sins that affect the entire church body must be addressed in a public manner. The church was to gather together to expel the offender from their congregation.

Verse 5 explains how they were to carry out this difficult task. [*Deliver such a one to Satan*] This meant that they were to put him back out into the world instead of allowing him to remain in the church. They were not claiming to take his salvation from him. The church doesn't give salvation, therefore we cannot take it away. But within the community of believers there is divine blessing and protection. God values the church and to be a part of a local body of believers is essential to Christian growth. So they were to turn this man back out into Satan's sphere where his hedge of protection was gone. [*for the destruction of his flesh*] Paul did not desire that this man be destroyed. He wanted this man's sinful desires to be destroyed. Often a believer will dabble in sin, but he may not completely give himself to sin. But if that believer is given over totally to sin for a period of time, Satan may push those sinful passions to extremes. When this happens, it may create such anguish in the sinner that his lust is destroyed. (This is illustrated well in the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15). [so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus] The goal of this harsh discipline is not punishment, but restoration. Paul wants the church to correct the man, not punish him.

One reason that Paul wanted this man to be dealt with was to keep similar sins from spreading throughout the church. He illustrates this by reminding the church of the Jewish Feast of Unleavened Bread and Passover. In some places, the Bible compares how sin works in the church with how yeast works in bread. The *old leaven* that Paul talks about here is a small portion of yeast kept back for the purpose of letting it ferment so that when it was added to new yeast it would cause the bread to rise to give it lightness (sourdough bread). Before the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the leader of the home would go through the house and remove all of this *old leaven*. One writer comments on this by saying, *Although the OT does not expressly so specify, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, as well as being a religious celebration, was probably a health provision. Because of the fermentation process, which week after week increased the dangers of infection, the Israelites were commanded once a year to purge their homes of all yeast (Exodus 12:14-20). During the Feast they would bake only unleavened bread, from which dough they would start up the process again after the Feast. Thus in the NT yeast became a symbol of the process by which an evil spreads insidiously in a community until the whole has been infected by it. So it was in Corinth. Their problem was that they were not taking this matter seriously, either the evil itself or their danger of being contaminated by it.*

Paul concludes this chapter by detailing how every local church should address similar situations. In verses 9-11, Paul clears up any confusion they may have by telling them not to feel that they cannot associate with sinful people because that would be impossible in this world. As believers we are not to isolate ourselves from the world. But when it comes to a brother who is living in continuous sin, we are to withdraw fellowship. Hopefully this will cause him to realize how serious his sin is and it should keep us from being tempted to join him. In verses 12-13, we should not be amazed when those outside of the church live like sinners. It is not our place to judge them and we do not need to judge them. God will judge those who reject His Son and

disobey His word. But when the rebellious are within the church, God has given us the responsibility of dealing with their sin because it harms the church.

CONCLUSION

Our confession, **The 1689 London Baptist Confession**, states *The purest churches under heaven are subject to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan; nevertheless Christ always hath had, and ever shall have a kingdom in this world, to the end thereof, of such as believe in him, and make profession of his name.*

Formal church discipline is necessary to keep the church from becoming a synagogue of Satan. There is no substitute in many cases. When done properly, formal church discipline is designed to restore a fallen brother or sister, to cause other believers to pause before entering into sin, to halt the expanding effects of sin while preserving the purity of the church and to preserve the honor of Christ's name.