

1 Corinthians 5A (2013)

- Today we move into the second major section of Paul's letter
 - In the first four chapters of his letter, Paul spoke to the Corinthian church about their pride, arrogance and spiritual immaturity
 - He was addressing the underlying cause for so much of their troubles and missteps
 - Arrogance and pride are so dangerous in the lives of Christians because they become excuses for doing whatever we want and thinking ourselves OK in the process
 - Paul has disabused this notion in Chapters 1-4
 - They are not wise; they are acting foolishly
 - They are not powerful and successful; they are living in their flesh like the spiritual infants they are
 - Paul made this observation based on feedback he received from Chloe's delegation
 - But we've yet to learn what Paul heard that prompted this stern correction
 - What did Chloe report to Paul?
 - The answer to that question dominates the rest of the letter
 - In this next section, we'll learn what Paul heard
 - He will take each allegation and address it in turn
 - In each case, Paul issues an admonition
 - He will provide teaching in combination with discipline or correction
 - Generally, each issue is allocated one or more chapters, so the breaks in topics will follow chapter breaks
- This morning, Paul addresses perhaps the most serious sin of all he heard about: tolerating serious sexual immorality within the church body
 - Paul explains what he's heard in Chapter 5 vs.1-2

[1Cor. 5:1](#) It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife.

[1Cor. 5:2](#) You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst.

- Paul says it is “actually” reported that there is immorality among you
 - This report is Chloe's report, as we said
 - Paul says it was actually reported...
 - Paul uses the Greek word *holos* which means “completely”
 - The sense of that word in this context is one of incredulity
 - Paul can hardly believe his ears
 - So Paul says I find this hard to believe, but I'm told you are engaging in immorality, which is the Greek word *porneia*
 - That word can have wide meaning, but it generally describes sexual activity prior to and outside the institution of marriage
 - Among Hellenistic Jews, the word *porneia* referred to any kind of extramarital affair, including homosexuality
 - The New Testament letters routinely warn against *porneia* precisely because it was such a common behavior among newly-converted Greek believers
 - Paul names the specific sin involved: a man who has his father's wife
 - Paul doesn't say a man has his mother, but his father's wife
 - And Paul uses a Greek verb meaning “to have” in the present tense
 - When used in a sexual context, it refers to an ongoing relationship, not a single encounter
 - So, putting all this together, it seems that a man was now living with a woman who used to be (or perhaps still was) his stepmother
 - While divorce was common in Greek society, both Greeks and Romans took a dim view of incest and Roman law prohibited it

- So Paul says this kind of adulterous, immoral behavior is not even tolerated by the Greeks
 - What kind of thinking must be present in the church of God for men to think they have freedom to engage in behavior that even the unbelieving world rejects as too sinful?
 - Paul names it in v.2
 - He says the church is showing evidence of arrogance
 - The word arrogance is *hubris*, thinking we are above accountability
 - Which leads to outlandish behavior unrestrained by a fear of consequences
 - This church was arrogant, without fear of consequences for immoral behavior
 - The proof of their arrogance was their willingness to tolerate this behavior within the church
 - Presumably, this couple were welcomed to church meetings, participating in the gathering without concern
 - No one said anything to them, no one made any demands that they repent and turn to godliness
 - Paul says no one mourned what they saw
 - The proper thing for this church to do would be to set this couple outside the fellowship of the church until they repented and corrected their behavior
 - Paul is speaking of church discipline, the process of using the influence of the body to motivate its members to put away sin and live holy and pleasing lives to the Lord
 - Frankly, the church has limited weapons in the battle against sin and corruption in the body
 - We admonish, we counsel, we pray and when necessary, we set people outside fellowship
- While the sin of this couple is very significant, don't overlook that Paul reserved the focus of his critique for the church body itself

- The church's failure to "put this couple out" of the church is Paul's principle concern in this chapter
 - Every church body will encounter bad behavior from time to time among its members
 - And sometimes that behavior will be especially egregious, as it was in this case
 - But in all cases, the test of maturity and sobriety in a church is how the church body responds to such things
 - Do we acknowledge it?
 - Do we confront it?
 - Do we address it?
- How did Paul expect this church to respond to the circumstances at hand?
 - He gives his admonition beginning in v.3

[1Cor. 5:3](#) For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present.

[1Cor. 5:4](#) In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus,

[1Cor. 5:5](#) I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

- This is a rare expression of Paul's apostolic authority
- Paul says he has executed a judgment upon this man from a distance
- Paul was physically absent from Corinth at the time he wrote this letter (i.e., "absent in body")
- But his apostolic powers didn't depart from Corinth when his body did
- So Paul says he has already made a determination or judgment of how this couple is to be disciplined and that judgment will now take place
 - Remember the apostles had powers to execute earthly judgment on Christ's behalf for the good of the church

- As we saw with Peter putting Ananias & Sapphira to death over their sin of lying
 - This is Paul's Ananias & Sapphira moment
- So what exactly was Paul commanding to take place?
 - First, notice in v.3, Paul is disciplining only the man in the situation
 - This was in keeping with the culture
 - The woman was also guilty of sin, but women were presumed to be victims of male authority in these circumstances
 - Much the way a student assaulted by a teacher is not held to account in the same way that the teacher will be
 - So while the woman has engaged in sin, her sin is not the focus of the discipline
 - Furthermore, her sin will end when the man is put out of fellowship
 - Secondly, Paul commands the church to assemble
 - Paul is requiring that the process of putting the member outside fellowship take place when the entire church was gathered
 - Presumably, the leaders of the church would explain the man's sin to the congregation
 - Then the leaders would announce that Paul had determined this man must be put outside fellowship
- Third, Paul says the man's personal consequence for this sin will be to see his flesh destroyed at the hands of Satan yet his spirit saved
 - Paul is describing excommunication, that is the cutting off of fellowship in the church
 - In this vulnerable position, the man is left without the support structure of the church
 - And Paul says that the Lord will permit Satan to attack this man in such a way that his earthly life will come to a premature end
 - We can imagine what that might look like
 - Disease, Roman persecution, violence

- But remember the story of Ananias & Sapphira
 - The man's ultimate end was likely something supernatural
 - His earthly life was cut short because Paul had judged him
 - And in v.4 Paul says he does so by the power given to him by the Lord as an apostle
- Yet Paul says there was a good outcome in this judgment, that the man's spirit is saved
 - What does "saved" mean in this context?
 - The key to interpreting this statement is found in the phrase "in the day of the Lord"
 - That day refers to the judgment day when the Lord judges believers and assigns rewards
 - That day is NOT the day we receive salvation...so Paul isn't talking about the man becoming a believer
 - The man IS a believer, so Paul is trying to preserve (i.e., save) his eternal reward, what little there remains of it
- The point is that it would be better for this man to see his earthly life cut short than to go on sinning in this way
 - Every day this man lives and continues in this terrible sin, his heavenly account balance is dropping
 - Like a man spending his retirement savings, this Christian was in danger of losing everything the Lord had stored up for him in the Kingdom
 - So if this man wasn't going to repent, then the next best possible outcome was to die early to minimize the damage he might inflict upon himself and others
- This is a sobering truth, isn't it?
 - The Lord is loving and generous, but He is also demanding and perfectly just in His judgments
 - If we use the time He has given us to serve Him well, as Paul said in Chapter 2

**1Cor. 2:9 but just as it is written,
“THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD,
AND which HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN,
ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.”**

- He has the power to reward us beyond anything we could want or even imagine in this world
- A wonderful and glorious life awaits God’s children in the Kingdom
- But the Lord is also a true and righteous judge
 - So He must also take into account our rebellion, unholiness, and faithlessness
 - He isn’t holding these sins against us for the sake of righteousness
 - We are declared righteous because we have been given Christ’s righteousness
- But there is still an accounting for our service, as how we serve determines how we will be rewarded
 - And if our service is not pleasing, then our reward will be less
 - It can get to zero, as Paul says in Chapter 3, like coming through fire with nothing
- Peter warns us to remain mindful of this coming judgment, knowing the Lord will deal with us in strict fairness

1Pet. 1:17 If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth;

- Knowing that the Lord is impartial and fair should motivate us to live sober and upright lives, aware the times are short
- And having concern for how that judgment will go for each of us
- Consider some of the warnings the apostles give us concerning how that day will go if we persist in disobedience

[Heb. 10:26](#) For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,
[Heb. 10:27](#) but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES.

[Heb. 10:30](#) For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE."

[Heb. 10:31](#) It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

[Heb. 10:35](#) Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.

[Heb. 10:36](#) For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

[Heb. 10:37](#) FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE,
 HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY.

[Heb. 10:38](#) BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH;
 AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM.

[Heb. 10:39](#) But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

- Paul delivered this man to Satan to end his life as a last-ditch effort to rescue his soul from the judgment he awaits
 - Had that man been allowed to live another decade or two engaged in this sin, who knows how bad that judgment would have been for him?
 - He still had eternal life
 - And salvation was never in question because he was saved by faith alone
 - But don't minimize the Lord's judgment because you have received grace
 - The writer of Hebrews says if those who disobeyed the Law of Moses suffered death of the body, how much worse will God's judgment be for those who have disgraced the blood of Christ?
 - It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of a living God
- So Paul directs three things: the man is to be set outside fellowship, the moment of discipline is to be public, and this earthly punishment is taken in the hope of obtaining a better spiritual judgment
 - These three principles must guide all forms of church discipline

- First, we must address willful sinning within the body of Christ when we are confronted by it
- Paul never suggests we are to form squads of inspectors to seek out sin or investigate church members
 - We should never want to pry or become busybodies
 - Our intent should also be loving and healthy
- But when immorality comes to our attention, we must have enough love and courage to act on the news
 - The New Testament gives us parameters for how to respond in love through our leaders
 - The first steps are always done in private with a hope of encouraging repentance and self-correction
- So the second principle is that when our private efforts to correct sin in the body fail, the church must be willing to take the matter public (meaning to the church body)
 - Not to the unbelieving world, but within the church
 - Our hope is that a public exposure of the matter might place additional pressure on the individual to do the right thing
 - At the very least, if the person continues to resist the will of the Lord and the church, then the rest of the church will have motivation to avoid making the same mistake
 - Since they will have witnessed this person's public shame and condemnation for their sin
 - And they will be admonished not to walk in their footsteps
- Finally, we take these hard steps in love in view of eternal consequences
 - We practice this process with an understanding that though the short term effect may be negative in terms of relationships and peace in the body...
 - ...we are working toward eternal outcomes
 - The person being disciplined may react very negatively to our efforts to correct their sin

- But these risks are well-worth the possibility of improving their eternal judgment
- Furthermore, we are working in the best interests of the body as a whole and the mission of representing Christ to the world
- I know of a case when a church exercised this discipline process with great positive outcome
 - Two teenagers active in the church engaged in immorality; premarital sex
 - The result was a pregnancy, which meant the sin was brought to light both to teenagers' parents and to church leadership
 - The leadership called the couple to account before the body
 - They were instructed to speak publicly before the entire church, confessing and repenting of their sin
 - The teens were truly repentant, and so they agreed to submit to the church leadership and make the public confession
 - The result was profound
 - The church body was stunned but immediately after the news, they embraced the teens, wept with them, committed to helping them get through the experience
 - The church loved on those teens and they chose to put the baby up for adoption
 - More importantly, the Lord was glorified
 - The teens were transparently restored in fellowship
 - The body was reminded of the need to remain chaste and pure until marriage
 - And the entire church witnessed the wisdom of God's word lived out
- If we ignore sin among our members or excuse it or approve it, then the church body is guilty of an offense worse than the sin we have approved
 - Paul explains the danger of tolerating sin in the body in vs. 6-8

[1Cor. 5:6](#) Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?

[1Cor. 5:7](#) Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.

[1Cor. 5:8](#) Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

- Notice again that Paul says this church is boasting
 - I doubt that Paul means this church is walking around bragging about a man sleeping with his stepmother
 - The church was celebrating this immoral relationship in the sense that they accepted it, perhaps thinking that grace makes such things possible
 - But when we approve someone else's sin – even if simply by not acting to correct it – then we are condemned by our approval

[Rom. 14:22](#) The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.

- There is a sin of approving sin, that is, to seem to give our approval to bad behavior
 - But it's important to note this sin only applies to the fellowship of believers
 - We are not called to criticize or attempt to discipline unbelievers
 - Sinners sin, that's what sinners do
 - We don't solve the problem of a sinner through disciplining the behavior
 - We address that problem by preaching the Gospel so that they might become a new person in Christ
 - But we must be careful about turning a blind eye to sin in the body
- Paul says such behavior is a form of arrogance and it leads to bigger problems in the body
 - He uses a familiar biblical metaphor to explain the danger: a little sin leavens the whole lump of dough

- The metaphor draws a comparison to yeast causing dough to rise
- We put only a comparably small amount of yeast in a large lump of dough
- And that small ingredient causes the entire lump of dough to change
- Likewise, if we allow a single person to live within the body of Christ with obvious, unrepentant sin, the entire body of Christ is polluted by their influence
 - The rest of the body is likely to look upon that person and their sin and draw wrong conclusions
 - We might assume that the behavior is permissible
 - We might assume that Christ or at least the church leaders don't care about our behavior
 - We might assume that sin doesn't necessarily carry consequences
 - We might assume that our personal behavior and choices don't matter to our faith
 - We might assume that salvation by grace through faith means we have nothing to worry about when we sin
 - All of these assumptions are terribly wrong, and a church that thinks this way is a church headed for disaster
 - If not now, certainly in their judgment day
- So when we allow sin to persist in our midst, we are potentially doing injury to our own day of judgment
 - You might have overlooked others' sin in the past thinking that it was their problem
 - Perhaps you assumed that only they stood to suffer for their mistakes
 - But what if I told you that if you allow that sin to persist unchecked, it has the potential to rob you of eternal reward?

- The power of sin is in its ability to reproduce itself, to spread to all men, Paul says in Romans
- Is that a chance you are willing to take? Are you willing to suffer eternal loss of your reward so that a brother or sister may continue in sin?
- So the solution is to cut out the cancer before it kills the entire body
 - Paul extends his metaphor by ordering the church to cut out the leaven so the lump becomes new
 - Paul's referring to the Jewish feast of unleavened bread
 - Interestingly, Paul is speaking to a Greek church that lacked a background in Jewish feasts
 - So he must have explained the spiritual meaning of the Exodus and the feast commemorating the Israelites flight from Egypt
 - A flight from slavery is exactly the picture Paul has for this church now
 - They are in bondage to arrogance and the sin it produces in the body
 - They need to cut those chains
 - Just as Israel was set free from their chains in Egypt and ran from Pharaoh
 - So the church should cut themselves free of the sin of this individual (and all like him) so that they might walk without sin as a people
 - Paul says we must not celebrate and approve sin, we must celebrate sincerity and truth
 - Let's hold up values of honesty and transparency
 - Not busybodiness but healthy concern for others
 - Let's reward sincerity and confession and repentance
 - Don't condone selfishness, immorality, rebellion, arrogance and unholiness
 - Let's all seek for a good reward on the day of the Lord