

Take-Aways for Small Group Leaders to Consider

In this study guide I (the writer this week) intentionally avoid 5:9-13 as I assume Jim is going to talk about this in his sermon. This might not be the case, but either way, hopefully this guide will help you lead your groups into a deeper understanding of God's Word and its application to our lives and our church community.

Things to Stress

- The holiness of the church cannot be compromised; thus, certain measures are put into place (i.e. church discipline) to keep the church holy and pure.
- When an individual commits a sin, they not only do damage to themselves but to the entire body of Christ.
- Thus, Paul's concern is not merely sin of individuals but the health & integrity of the church body as a whole.

Under ANALYZE THE TEXT

2. Richard B. Hays states, "Perhaps the most puzzling part of the passage is found in verse 5: 'Hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit [literally, 'the spirit'] might be saved in the day of the Lord.' ... There are three major problems to be resolved in interpreting Paul's command:

What does it mean to 'hand this man over to Satan?'

The best explanation of the 'handing over to Satan' is suggested by the Passover metaphor (vv.6-8). By excluding the incestuous man from the community, the church places him outside the sphere of God's redemptive protection. He is no longer inside the house whose doorposts are covered by the blood of Jesus. He is therefore hung out to dry in the realm of Satan, exposed to the destructive powers of the world... Probably Paul did not expect the community to perform a ceremony explicitly cursing the man; rather, delivering him to Satan is a vivid metaphor for the effect of expulsion from the church.

Does 'flesh' refer to the literal physical body or the 'sinful nature' (NIV) of the man?

It is more likely that Paul actually does conceive of the community's disciple as leading somehow to repentance and restoration of the sinner. In that case, 'the flesh' would refer – as in 1 Cor. 3:3; Rom. 7:5, 18, 25; 8:3-8; Gal. 5:13, 19-24 – to the rebellious human nature opposed to God. The meaning of the 'destruction of the flesh,' then, must be interpreted in light of what Paul declares in Gal. 5:24: 'Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.'

Is the purpose of the action remedial, hoping to induce the man's repentance?

Paul hopes that the community's censure and expulsion of the incestuous man will lead to this result: his fleshy passions and desires will be put to death. Thus, the eschatological fate of this man, after undergoing discipline and repentance, will be salvation. Even if 2 Cor. 2:5-11 refers to a case different from that of the incestuous man, it demonstrates Paul's belief that stern community discipline can lead to transformation and reintegration into the life of the community: 'This punishment by the majority is enough for such a person; so now instead you should forgive and console him, so that he may not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.' (Cf. 2 Cor. 7:10: Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation.)"¹

3. Paul doesn't want the church at Corinth to withdraw from all contact with their pagan neighbors. Paul does not even object to eating with sinners in the world; instead, his concern in this passage is the discipline and symbolic integrity of Christ's bride, the church, which shows an alternative society in a world full of idolatry and misconduct. Ultimately, God will judge the outsiders. The church's responsibility is to exercise discipline over its own members.

¹ Hays, Richard B., Interpretations: First Corinthians, 85-86.

SUMMARY AND REVIEW

1. Take 5 minutes to discuss last week's sermon, "The Question of Church Discipline."

INTRO TO THE TEXT:

Paul urges the believers at Corinth to preserve the purity of the church, of which all believers are a part. Paul makes explicit that this same purity is *not* regarding the world outside the church. The implications of the passage show how pure the church should be *and* how the church relates to the world.

READ 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

ANALYZE THE TEXT

1. Paul criticizes the believers at Corinth for their sexual immorality in 1 Corinthians 5:1. He states that even pagans abhor such acts. What does this tell us about the "moral code" among those without Christ?
2. Paul judges the individual (from 1 Cor. 5:1) by "delivering him over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved [...]" (1 Cor. 5:5). What could this delivery possibly mean?
3. Why do you think Paul encourages the believers to disassociate themselves with the "immoral brothers" within the church (1 Cor. 5:11)? Is this incompatible with Christian charity and forgiveness? Also see metaphor in 1 Cor. 5:6-8, cf. 1 Tim. 1:20.

A FEW THINGS TO CONSIDER:

Notice the implications of Paul's distinction when he specifies what kind of immoral person he is in mind in 1 Corinthians 5:9-10. He writes, "*I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world.*" Paul effectively says, "*If I did mean for you to not associate with unbelievers, that'd mean you need to separate yourself from the whole world. Obviously, I am not asking that!*" The last clause (underlined) in this passage indicates that believers in the church are supposed to be conversing, interacting, and associating with people outside the church, even the most heinous. (see 1 Cor. 9:20-22 for more about this).

Paul's primary concern in this passage is not the sin of individuals but the purity and integrity of the church. Christ died for his bride, the church, in order to sanctify her and keep her holy (Eph. 5:25ff). The community of believers must act in order to preserve the purity and unity of the church (cf. 1 Cor. 1:2). Paul sees no incompatibility between loving one's brother and sister with the charity of Christ (1 Cor. 4:14) and maintaining discipline and purity (1 Cor. 5:2).

Maintaining the purity of the church is the practice of "church discipline", which is not practiced in the typical contemporary American church. This may have several reasons such as our lack of taking the purity of the church seriously but also the possible apparent incompatibility between church discipline and forgiveness and grace. Notice that when Paul speaks of purity and discipline, it is within the context of the local church, not the world. To the world, the church is to preach a gospel of grace. To the church who has accepted that gospel, Paul encourages the church to protect and maintain that gospel. The conclusion of the matter is this: acceptance into the community of faith is a free gift of love rooted in the gospel; once this gift is accepted, Paul expects the partakers of this gift to grow in holiness, purity, and ultimately Christ-likeness.

APPLY

1. When a believer or one who claims to be aligned and committed to the church (either universal or local) sins in a noticeable manner, how are you supposed to react? (Hint: 1 Cor. 5:6-8; Matt. 18:15-18)
2. Briefly recount how long you have been following Christ. What are some areas in your life that you have seen Christ redeem and sanctify? (i.e. Were you once filled with anger and disgust and now have joy? Once burning with lust and now have satisfaction in Christ?)
3. Note an area in your life that is still in need of Christ's renewal. How have you intentionally attempted to apply Christ's renewal to this area? Do you have other believers holding you accountable? Are you seeking wisdom from the Scriptures? Have you asked your directors and/or pastors at FPC to offer wisdom or resources to help you grow?