

Series: Corinthians, a Church in Progress

Sermon #2: A Sacred Church

1 Corinthians 5; Matthew 18:15-17

Dr. Matt Cassidy – March 6, 2022

Good morning, Grace! We have a great time today planned for you. We're going to learn some things out of 1 Corinthians 5. If you want to turn there, you can. We'll be there in just a second.

I wanted to announce something that happened this week. Based on the theme of "I'm just a pastor and you guys are the ..."

Congregation: ... ministers ...

You're the ministers. And so we didn't know what we could do. The pastors didn't know what we could do about helping the people in Ukraine suffering from the evil that they're experiencing at the hands of Russia. So, guess what? The ministers, the members, were contacted, and some of those people who have friends and family in Ukraine—they are formerly from the Ukraine—they knew people that were fleeing to Poland and ran into a church there that they're associated with and that is doing its very best job to help those refugees. And so, because of that contact (and we validated it—it's a good investment), our church—you guys—gave \$15,000 to this church in Poland. Yeah, the pastor would like to thank you. So, here's a recording that he sent to us this week.

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Video Recording of Pastor Wloch in Poland

Pastor in Poland: Hi. We are in Krakow in the south of Poland. My name is Wojtek Wloch. I am a pastor of an evangelical church in Krakow in a national overseas movement. We meet here with Ukrainian pastors today to talk about what we can do, how we can manage this big crisis

the past seven days. More than 600,000 Ukrainian refugees have crossed our border, and we try to find the best way for how we can serve them.

There is a really, really big challenge for us. And we would like to use the best way, all the resources that we have to help them. And we are so thankful for the people like you who be with us, who join us, who help us to help these people. And it's really, really a big challenge for all of us. And I really thank you so much for your generosity, Grace Covenant Church. We really feel that you trust us, you are with us, you help us. And we feel with your help we can do much, much, much more. Thank you very much and God bless you.

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So, we'll continue to look at what we can do from this distance and would love the help from our ministers to do that. Samaritan's Purse, an enormous, beautiful organization, is sending giant planes over there to help as well. But ... let's pray.

Lord, we lift up the violation of innocence that's taking place at the hands of evil. It seems very clear at this point anyway. And we ask that You would protect those people as they run to Poland and other places, so that they might find refuge. And as a God who turns graveyards into gardens and crucifixions into resurrections, we're asking that You would make Your presence known to people, maybe to come to a knowledge of who You are and that Jesus Christ died for them and was raised so that they might have eternity.

I'd ask that You would cause this war to end quickly and famously. I would love for Your name to be praised in the way this violence comes to an end. And I ask that You would bless this church that we're helping and other churches as well, that the Church itself in Europe would show itself to be everything You would ever want her to be, as a refuge as a resource for people's health and well-being. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Introduction: The Accusation

1 Corinthians 5:1-2

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man is sleeping with his father's wife. ² And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

Okay, so here we go. First Corinthians, chapter 5, the first two sentences start like this: “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man is sleeping with his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn for this? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.”

So there. Yeah. I don't know where to start. Let me try to explain, because it's going to get harder from here. The accusation itself, to be clear ... Corinth is a sexually ... sexual immorality is rampant in that culture. That was the way the city was begun in many respects. But even this expression of sexual immorality was a violation of even pagan standards. But not only that, it's present tense. The verb that's being used there in Greek means ... sleeping with this stepmother is present tense, which means that it's continuing to take place.

And then, if that weren't bad enough (and this is what Paul gets especially angry about) is that they're boasting about it. They're bragging about it. And so, for us to grasp and try to understand how a Christian church in Corinth could be doing such things, let me just ... Part one of our learning time together is just to explain the culture and the circumstances so that we might be able to grasp what's happening then. But actually, it's going to help us understand how it happens here and now.

Living Church Problems vs. Dying Church Problems

So, how did it happen then and there, and how come Corinth seems so very close to Austin, Texas? The first aspect that we need to understand is what Tim Keller calls the difference between the living church problems and dying church problems.

So, the living church comes with its own set of problems. Reaching people outside the church who have no church experience whatsoever, who are just coming off or from an anti-church background—that's going to be a mixed group of people. They're going to come from various political lines and philosophies, and so you're going to have some messy political speech about that. If the church is doing its job, it's crossing ethnic boundaries. And because of that we have ethnic preferences and cultural clashes that take place. That's one of the problems that a living church would have. Sometimes when you're reaching out to people you're going against socioeconomic strata. And so, we have different values about what the purpose of money is or preferences in that way.

But the point is, when people come in off the street, not inside the Christian church—they have no experience—they don't know how to act, they don't know how to talk. They're just learning, and while they are, it can get messy. Those are living church problems.

Now in a dying church there are problems too. Generally, a lot of times, the members of dying churches are probably from the same political party. That makes it easy. Often times the members are of the same ethnic group. *So look, we all get along and like the same food.* Generally speaking, it's also people with the same income levels, so they vacation similarly.

So, while there doesn't seem to be a lot of problems, the bigger problem is this. If you think the same and you act the same and you vote the same and you're Christians, you're not really a church; you're just a dying Christian country club. You're just waiting for people. It's a string of funerals. That's all that's happening there.

So, the first part of it is, what kind of church do you want to be a part of and what kind of problems are you going to have? I want us to be a living church with living church problems. And this is one of those living church problems. And with Corinth there's going to be a lot of things, and it's going to be ugly.

The Culture in Corinth

Corinth is this strategic city that's located geographically so that there's a lot of tourists, there are a lot of people coming in and leaving from all over the world. People there are just drunk on ambition. They are clawing their way to the top. They'll do whatever it takes to get there. They're consumed with status and wealth and fame. It's an honor/shame culture. It's kind of an Eastern view of that. That sounds a little bit like Austin, sure.

Then the idea that it's a very sensual culture. Again, people from all over, nobody has any rules about sexual boundaries. And as a matter of fact, three chapters, 5, 6, and 7, are dedicated to sexual ethics because they don't understand even the anthropology of sex. And so, they're violating those rules and regulations that are found in the Bible—we do that in Austin as well.

And they're status-obsessed. They love famous people or wealthy people or want to be known by them or be like them, whatever it might be. And if you're thinking, *That's not here*, I've got to tell you, I've been in this auditorium when we had a governor or a celebrity of some kind in film, or a professional athlete. *Oh my, let's just see how this happens*. Sure enough, they're flocking around that person, literally getting their autograph in church. Really? Leave them alone.

But when I was thinking about this, I thought, *Okay, let's just use an example*. I've got to use someone that's gone and deceased, or it wouldn't be fair and word would get out. So, if Elizabeth Taylor went here and she was a member here—Elizabeth Taylor—how long would it be before, you or me, that would just kind of come out in a conversation in the neighborhood or in the grocery line or somewhere at work or where you hang out.

Oh yeah, I was a Bible study with Liz Taylor---

Liz? Oh, you call her Liz?

Well yeah, I was in a Bible study with her—

You're a guy, what are you doing in a women's Bible study?

You're missing the point. She goes to our church, okay?

Wait a minute, isn't she cheating on her fourth husband with another woman's husband?

Yeah, but it's Elizabeth Taylor and she goes to our church.

So that's what is happening, and I don't think that's far from what could happen right now, honestly.

And then you have that shame/honor culture, identity thing, and you add those together and boom, that's how you end up bragging about someone who is sleeping with their stepmother. *You're asking people in your church to go confront Elizabeth Taylor and shame her in front of others? Oh, we wouldn't do that.*

And so, in summary, because of the culture and the honor/shame and the sexual ethics having almost no boundaries and this famous person committing this despicable sin, Paul is outraged. But he's doubly outraged, and frankly, not just about the sin itself, but about the fact that the Corinthian church is bragging about it. He's going to spend more time talking about that. And the reason is that Paul is more concerned—this is Paul's concern. Paul's concern is with the holiness of the bride of Jesus Christ, not upsetting the person of influence. He's focused on the integrity of Jesus Christ's church. And he couldn't care less about these other things. And he's wondering, *Why don't you mourn for this? And mourn like you're going to a funeral weeping? Why aren't you crying like at a funeral towards this important person and doing what you can to make things right?*

Paul's Response

And so, this is the context of the most important passage in the Bible talking about church discipline. That's the subject—church discipline. And the key factors here are, one, that there's this treasured member of the church; and the other factor is this lifestyle of sin; those two things. And he addresses those.

And the first one is this person of notoriety, and Paul doesn't care about notoriety. There's no favoritism. It doesn't matter whether the person is wealthy or famous or your friends. As a matter of fact, if they're your real friend you'd do something about this. This is what love means.

And then in the context of this kind of sin—this is important to know—I mentioned this was continual sin, but it's more descriptive to look at the older Testament describing this sort of activity. They call it—it's a picture of highhanded sin. So, when the older Testament talks about this kind, it's talking about raising your fist to God, saying, *You tell me not to do this, but I'm going to do this*, and maybe even extend a finger towards God.

Some of you with Catholic backgrounds, this is what a mortal sin is as opposed to a venial sin (I think, if I remember that right). But Paul is saying, *Look, you need to treat sin the*

*way sin is treating you. When you guys are being playful with these things, it's disastrous. Sin is ruthless and it's out to destroy you. So you need to be ruthless and out to destroy sin in your own life and in the congregation. And just to be clear, everyone in the church was a sinner—wait, everyone in the church is a sinner. But it's not the sin that he's talking about; it's this highhanded, unrepentant, continual sin. And repentance is not just acknowledging the sin; it's acknowledging it and saying, *I will change my ways. I will do what I need to for life change.**

And so, this person has no intention of repenting, no intention of changing. And so, Paul says, *Remove them from your midst. They need to stay away.*

Why Bother with Church Discipline?

Now in the second part, what I'm looking at now is how did it happen and what do we do about it. And when we look at this, you're going to find that this is not an easy thing to do. There's pain and there's anguish in the people that care enough to do something about it. There's a bounty of misunderstanding and accusations that will be pointed toward the people in leadership and the people trying to get something done right here. Generally speaking, especially nowadays, the person that's the offender plays the victim and gets the word out that *I'm getting picked on and they're being mean to me.*

And so, with all of that, why do it? I mean, why even bother doing what Paul is commanding us to do? Just, you know, leave them to themselves and shrug your shoulders and say, Yeah, but it's none of my business. In the rest of the passage, Paul's going to give us four (actually four plus one) reasons why we should lean into all the pain and anguish and the misunderstandings to get this church right.

1. For the Sake of the Sinning Brother/Sister

1 Corinthians 5:4-5

When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

The first reason to do it is for the sake of the sinning brother or sister. Look what he says in verses 4 and 5: “Now when you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present as well, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.”

Boom! I don't think you could write a harder sentence right there. “Remove him from the church and turn him over to Satan ...” First, know this: that the goal is not punishment; it's not retribution. The goal is to restore them and to protect the people in the church. And Paul's goal is that this person would wake up and the church would wake up about the violence of sin on a person's soul and on a church's life. Hopefully, by doing that, it's putting them out to a place where he's living with the consequences of his choice, and he's realizing that it's not worth it. *I need to get back to that church.* This is the very purpose of true friendships. Not friendships for golf and that sort of thing. We're talking about real, deep, personal, purposeful, God-fearing friendships. It's cruel to be silent while your brother or sister is destroying their life. The purpose of true friendship is not to shrug your shoulders and not to say *It's none of my business* or *It's not that bad.*

Nothing can be more cruel than the leniency which abandons others to their sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe reprimand which calls another Christian in one's community back from the path of sin.

--- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a lot on friendship. Here's what he said in summary. "Nothing can be more cruel than the leniency which abandons others to their sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe reprimand which calls another Christian in one's community back from the path of sin."

"Nothing could be more compassionate than a severe reprimand ..." So, whether it's like, *Oh, your zipper's down. Oh, thank you so much. That would have cost me ... to ... If you don't get hold of your raging anger, you're going to absolutely embitter your children. And if you can't control that, you need to go to Celebrate Recovery or find a group of people that can help you overcome this.*

So, Paul is making it very clear that this is what a true definition of love is and this is what holiness is. It's the hatred towards sin and its effect.

Matthew 18:15

If your brother sins, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.

Now Jesus talks about this. If you're thinking He doesn't, He does. In Matthew 18—if you have Bibles or phones, you can go over there—He just writes a list of what to do with someone that you deeply love and truly love—not superficially—that's stuck in stubborn, painful sin. This is what he says to do in Matthew 18. He says to start here. "If your brother sins, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother."

It's very clear. If your brother sins, don't tell everyone else, don't let everyone else know, don't consult a lot of other people for that help. You might need one other person to help you, but he says to go to that person and tell them to stop and help them to get better.

Again, here's this theme: it's about restoration. Just you and him just for the sake of making it easy for him to come back, so that they don't have to be embarrassed and let all these people know. You're trying to keep it quiet. You're containing the shame. And if he repents, you've won your brother.

Matthew 18:16

But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

If he doesn't, you go to the next level. It says, "But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses."

So, in the context of our church, I guess it would be to maybe have a conversation with some people in your home group or your service team, or people that know this person, and take two or three with you and say, *Okay, let's make sure ... are we understanding this right? Are you regularly participating in this highhanded sin? And it's like, it's none of your business, sort of—yes it is. Well, then, the three of us are going to tell you that you have to stop that.* It's assuming (I'm using Paul's vocabulary) that your home group is mourning, grieving, like as to a funeral, over your conduct and can't live with it and can't let you live with it. And if they repent, you won your brother back. But if you don't, he says you have to do this next.

Matthew 18:17a

If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.

"If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church."

See the highhanded sin? *I don't care what you think. You don't understand me or my household. Just leave me alone.*

Matthew 18:17b

And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

He says, *Okay*. “Tell the church” means to bring it to the leadership of the church. And in our church, this would be the elders, the leaders of the church. And at that point, if they repent, you’ve won your brother. But if you haven’t, then the final step here is, “If he refuses to listen even to the church, let them be as a Gentile or a tax collector.” In other words, he needs to leave the church membership. He’s out of the church. In some cases, he continues to come on Sunday morning, big church events. But he can’t be part of that home group, he can’t be part of the family, he can’t be in a communion event. He’s out there.

1 Corinthians 5:5

You are to deliver this man to Satan for destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

And the purpose of this goes back to 1 Corinthians 5. Remember how Paul said it. “You are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” You’re supposed to get him out of the church so that he can do whatever he wants. This idea of just letting him go is a form of the wrath of God. In Romans 1 it talks about the wrath of God, and it says that God just gave them over to their passions. He just let them be. And what Paul is talking about here is just letting him out of the church and he can do whatever he wants. Because that’s the nature of hell.

C. S. Lewis writes that the very definition of hell is God saying that you can “enjoy forever the horrible freedom that you have demanded.” So, go.

The idea of being out of the church and delivered to Satan, that means that the church provides a spiritual protection over our souls. And sometimes that means circumstantially and physically. It can also mean supernaturally or, like I said, spiritually. And being in the protective custody of the church, the body of Jesus Christ, keeps us from various evils that we don’t even

know about. But when you are kicked out, when we ask people to leave, their spiral down is accelerated.

So, we're doing this for the sake of the sinner, to help them understand the cost of their choices, and not to be able to have fellowship and continue to live this way.

2. For the Sake of Other Believers

1 Corinthians 5:6-8

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? ⁷ Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸ Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

The second thing he says is to do it for the sake of other believers. In verses 6 through 8 he says, *There's your boasting.* "Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened." I'll explain. "For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

So, Paul, in his understanding of holiness, goes all the way back to the older Testament. He goes back to the Passover. Let me remind you of that. The Passover is when Israel—not yet a nation—actually, the Passover is their birthday, they become a nation—and that starts with the tenth plague, and that's the promise from God through Moses that the firstborn male, even animals, will die this night ... unless ... unless you were to take an innocent and without-blemish lamb, and slaughter that lamb, and then paint the doorposts outside your house, and everybody stays in. So when judgment comes, it sees the blood of that innocent lamb and then passes over you. That's why it's called Passover.

Part of that Passover meal ritual begins with taking all the leaven out of the house. And leaven—it starts here—represents sin. Leaven is our word for yeast. And so, the idea is, if you don't know, leaven is like mold; it's a chemical reaction that takes place. If you just put a little

bit of yeast in the corner of this loaf of dough, it spreads and infects the entire loaf. That's why the whole loaf rises.

And so, now yeast is taking on this metaphor, this picture of what sin looks like. And Moses is saying and God is saying, *Look, you're going to be a new nation tomorrow morning after the Passover. Let's just reboot. Let's start all over again. Let's leave all the sin behind us and we will be unleavened bread eaters. We will be without sin. We're going to be set apart, sacred, a whole new sacred nation for a purpose.*

Figuratively, if you could look at it like this. When you pull out a brick of cheese out of the refrigerator and it's got mold around the edges, some of you would throw the whole thing away. I would just cut off the mold. It's infectious, but if you don't cut off the mold, the whole cheese is lost. And so, that's kind of the metaphor he's talking about. *Are you allowing a highhanded sin by some celebrity—or it doesn't matter—unrepented, highhanded sin in your church—you don't think that's going to spread throughout the entire congregation? I think you're mistaken. It's going to contaminate the whole church. People are going to look around and say, "Wait a minute. How come that person's getting away with this? If Elizabeth Taylor can do it, I can do it."*

Or, other believers in the church are going to say, *Look, if we're not going to care for each other and let this continue, I'm out. I'm going to find somewhere else to go, or I'll just start my own church or something.*

Application: Tough Love

This is what we're calling in our culture "tough love." And boy, there's no better name for this type of love. It is tough and it is loving. It is tough on the person instituting it; it is tough on the person experiencing it; it's tough on the people who are innocent bystanders as part of it. But it's how you show true love.

And if you know people who have had to institute tough love in their family or you've done that, then you get it. If you don't, it's very easy to watch from the outside and kind of judge and think, *That's not real love.* I'm going to try to tell you to postpone that judgment. Because when you've been there, it's the hardest thing you'll ever do in your life. And it is loving. It's just tough loving.

And it's hard in a household. It's just as difficult sometimes in a church. It goes like this. A common story is that a teenager or a young adult is living at home and they're starting to be in continuous, destructive behavior. Usually drugs are involved. And it's highhanded --- *I'm not going to stop doing this*. And then usually they have questionable friends coming over and joining them. And the next thing you know—this is the descent into darkness—the next thing you know, there are holes in the sheetrock, there are things missing, they're stealing from their own family.

And then somewhere along the line, one of the other siblings will say, *Mom, Dad, if you don't do something about this, he's going to destroy his life. Or I'm going to leave. Either way, we can't keep this*. And for the sake of the teen that's in rebellion and for the protection of the innocent siblings, the mother and the father mourn like they're going to their son's funeral. Because it's going to be hard to say these words: *You need to leave the house. You can't even live in the garage. Not even on the front porch. Move out. And it's not because we hate you. It's not because we're punishing you. We're trying to protect the family and we're trying to help you understand the true nature of what you're doing. And when you leave this roofline under the umbrella of our family, you're going to find out it's hard out there. It's difficult*.

Hopefully, this would lead to repentance. If you don't do tough love, the prodigal son never returns. If dad just keeps on sending checks, then he's enabling that behavior. It's a co-dependent relationship. It's not right, it's not healthy, it's not loving. And so, the loving thing to do is to make them leave. Tough love is devastating for a home. It is painful in a church. And so, when you see that sort of thing happening, pray for the people involved, because they're having a hard time. And it's terribly messy.

But it's this to be sure, it's for the sake of the brother. It's for the sake of the other brothers and sisters as well.

3. For the Sake of Christ

1 Corinthians 5:7-8

For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸ Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

It's also for the sake of Christ. We do this sort of thing for the sake of Christ. We read this before, but it says, "For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

And he's saying this: *you need to treat sin like sin treated Jesus Christ. You guys are boasting about the very thing that cost Jesus His life, this painful execution. And you're kind of celebrating that. You should be treating sin the way sin treated Jesus Christ. You need to be angry at that.*

4. For the Sake of the Outside World

The last reason, he says, is for the sake of the outside world. It's a little bit long, but let me explain. The way the world even knows what Jesus is like—I don't think they read their Bibles—is they look at the Church. And they watch the Church and say, Well, if I'm attracted to the Church, I'll be attracted to Jesus. If I'm not attracted to the Church ...

1 Corinthians 5:9-13

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—¹⁰ not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. ¹¹ But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.

¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? ¹³ God judges those outside. ‘Purge the evil person from among you.’

So, here’s what Paul says about outsiders looking in: “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy or swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world itself.”

In verse 11: “But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.”

And then he clarifies. “For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. ‘Purge the evil from those who are among you.’”

These five sentences could be a seminar on how we’re supposed to live as Christians in the culture. And as clear as they are, it’s as though we do the exact opposite of what’s being said in these sentences. One of the things he says is that you’re supposed to stay in the culture. He jokingly says, *If you could even try to not be around people that were immoral and his whole list of immorality, you’d have to leave the planet. I don’t want you to leave the planet.* There’s no such thing as an isolated Christian group over here just waiting for Jesus to come back. That’s not even remotely biblical.

And then, furthermore, he says that you shouldn’t even judge those people that are outside the church. I mean, come on! They are acting and they have the same values that I had and that you had before you knew about what was revealed in the Bible. Good grief, we have the answer key. No wonder we know.

And not only do we know what's right and wrong, we have the Spirit of God that gives us insight and the power to overcome sin. So, we don't judge the people outside the church. That's not even fair. But judge the people inside the church, and if necessary, put them in time out until they learn they can't live that way and say they're part of this family. Because the Church is supposed to look different than the world. They're supposed to be the cheese without the mold on it, the unleavened bread that's not sinful. This Corinthian church—if this church is proud of their sin or their famous person that's famously sinning, the culture outside of the church says, *Well, they're no better than me or us. As a matter of fact, they're worse than us. I mean, I'd kick Elizabeth Taylor off our bridge team. I mean, you can't just go sleeping with other people's husbands. Right?*

So, Paul is saying that they're a terrible witness to the world in the way they don't practice church restoration or church discipline. Those are the four reasons.

Conclusion: Jesus Is in the Midst of It

Four plus one. I told you there's another one. This one ... Hmmm. Why go through the pain, the anguish of the process, the misunderstandings, the accusations to be involved in church restoration? Why do that? Just look the other way. Just shrug your shoulders.

Matthew 18:20

For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.

Here's why you do it. That's where Jesus is. He's in the mess. That's where Jesus' presence is obvious. He says so. In Matthew 18, after he lists the four or five steps you go through to get to that place and you're wondering, *Why should I do this? I'm exhausted already. I can't believe what I'm getting into*—he says this: “For where two or three are gathered in my name to do these things, there am I among you.” *I'm asking you to do this, no, I'm telling you to do this. And I know how difficult it is in a family. I know how torturous it is to do it in friendships, the real true friendships. I know how exhausting and painful it can be in a church. But if you do that, I'll be there.*

You want to be with Jesus? This is where it happens, in real friendships. He says, *I'm there in that heartbreak. I've been heartbroken. I've been there in false repentances.* And Jesus is with us when that happens. When we get accused of being the bully because they're playing the victim, Jesus says, *I'm there in that. I've been accused falsely of things.*

Part of this, by the way, is that it's expensive. That's why it's great to be at a church when someone--particularly in domestic violence--this church picks up expenses, sometimes legal, sometimes a social worker, sometimes rent and food. We're going to try to make this thing happen. *I know what it's like to pick up someone else's expenses when it's not my fault.* Jesus says, *I'm there.* That's what it's like. You want to be with Jesus? You want to be here then. You want to do Matthew 18 and you want to be 1 Corinthians 5, because He says this: *it's all worth it. You're going to know I'm with you.*

Grace, do you want to be a church where Jesus is? I do. And that's why we do this. Not because it's easy. But it's commanded and His presence is made obvious to us. The grieving and the loss, like at a funeral, are supposed to weigh us down, and we're not supposed to say, *Just leave them alone.* We've got a new tough love.

And I want you to know, from kind of inside the church, this is the single hardest thing that the leadership is involved in any given month, and particularly the elders, when it gets to that level of highhanded sin and the accusations are flying. And everybody else gets to gossip, but the people in leadership don't. Because we're going to follow the Bible. And we have found this: that the reason our elders are older, if you compare to some other churches, is because of this application. Because sometimes, unless you're in counseling, you have to understand tough love and the power of it and the goodness of it. It's an application of a simple bumper sticker. Young parents write books on parenting. Old parents write books on prayer. When you get to a certain age, after teenagers, you start realizing that life isn't cause and effect and there are no simple answers and things don't always work out, even if you play by the rules.

And so, this is what wears elders down. This is what breaks them. This is what hurts them the deepest, an expression of this. But do you know what? We'll do this, because this is where Jesus is. When two or three or you are doing this in agreement, I'll be there.

Grace, what we do here is simple. We're trying to provide a safe place for everyone to become like Christ in all of life—a safe place without bullies where everyone can become like Christ in all of life. We see this in other venues. If you went to a martial arts gym, one with full

contact, the job description of the gym owner is to make sure that it's safe, that it's a safe place to practice. It happens once a quarter that some big bully muscle head comes in and starts busting people up. And then the owner will come over and say, *Stop doing that. This needs to be a safe place.* And he doesn't learn and has another conversation. And this time the owner will usually come over and say, *You know what? I think you've just earned a free lesson.* It usually just lasts about three minutes. And the guy gets his clock cleaned and humiliated in front of the rest of the guys. And then he just says, *Here's what we're trying to do here. I just want to provide a safe place where people can learn how to choke their friends unconscious ... in a gentle way.*

It's not a great analogy, but you understand. It's a fourth-grade teacher on a playground. If she doesn't take care of the bully, the other kids are going to just leave the school. That's how it works. You treat sin the way sin treats you. It is ruthless and it's out to kill you. So, treat it ruthlessly like it's out to kill you.

And so, the application is straightforward. We're trying to provide a safe place where everyone who wants to is safe to become like Christ in all of life. Do you want to do that? If you do, we'd love for you to consider joining our church. And not just joining the church and not just attending the big events, but getting involved in the relationships in our small groups and in our adult classes or the youth group, so that you end up having relationships that are so intertwined that when you go off the rails (and we all go off the rails), then you have people saying, *You can only go so far before I'm going to stop in and talk to you one on one. And if that doesn't work, it will be three on one. And if that doesn't work, we'll get some leadership involved. But we're only going to let you shake your hand at God for so long. Because it's destroying your life. It's destroying the community. And it is grieving the soul of God. And we can't let you do that.*

Don't you want to be in that kind of relationship, where your friends are your bumper guards? And we have places to help you, like Celebrate Recovery or groups of people that are overcoming habitual sin. The invitation is to join a good, healthy church and get involved deeply in a good, healthy church. There's one I have in mind. It's got "Grace" written right on the side of the building. Come and join us. Get connected. Go the next step. Make a deep friend. Let's pray.

Lord, I am grateful that, though there's a lot of bad endings on some of the stories at this church, we have some stories where people repented and they came around. I'm glad, Lord, that

we would be courageous enough to do these things that we're commanded to do, and not to just skip over a chapter or red letters that clearly stated.

Lord, I'd ask that You would help us understand the need for community, a community that will protect us from ourselves and from our passions and our being part of this world and not living with a transformed mind, just jumping on.

Lord, I'd ask that You would help us hate sin the way sin hates us, and that we would love the purity of the bride, the Church, and we'd do our part to make her holy, at least the one on this hill.

Lord, I'd ask that we would be a lighthouse to people that are afraid of the dark, and that we'd be a means of showing that there's a different way and it is radically different. It's fun. It's exciting, and it's safe. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.