**“The Church in the World:**

**Studies in 1 Corinthians” #5**

**“Loving as God Loves:**

**Church Discipline"**

 1 Cor. 5:1-6:11

--CEFC 5/9/21

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"Am I my brother's keeper?"

That's how Cain responded

 when asked by God about the whereabouts of his brother Abel,

 and it's very clear what Cain meant by that response--

"No, I'm not my brother's keeper.

 He's none of my business--my brother can take care of himself."

And as modern Americans, there is a lot of Cain in all of us.

 We live in perhaps the most individualistic, private society in history.

 Nothing is more dear to us than our personal liberty and our right to privacy.

 "I'm not my brother's keeper, and he's not mine."

 The term "Big Brother" evokes fears of

 eavesdropping and secret surveillance.

 No thanks!

Many people are hesitant to make any sort of judgments

 about somebody else's private affairs—

 especially in matters of sexuality.

 What I do with my own body is a personal matter.

 It's none of your business.

 “Love is love” is now the slogan of choice.

As long as there is mutual consent, then what’s the big deal? /

And it is this attitude that makes Paul's words to the church in Corinth

 in our passage this morning so challenging to us.

The behavior of some of the Christian brothers in their midst

 was very much the church’s business, according to Paul,

 and they were acting as if it wasn't.

There are two cases mentioned here--

 the first involved a man who was engaged in an on-going sexual affair

 with his own step-mother.

We have no other information about their relationship,

 although we can safely assume that only he was a member of the church.

This sort of incestuous alliance was an outrage even by pagan standards of the day--

 The Roman politician Cicero, in one rather melodramatic passage,

 speaks of the marriage of a woman to her son-in-law:

 "Oh! to think of the woman's sin, unbelievable, unheard of in all experience

 save for this single instance! . . .

The madness of [her] passion broke through and laid low every obstacle:

 lust triumphed over modesty, wantonness over scruple; madness over sense."[[1]](#footnote-1)

But the Corinthian Christians seemed unconcerned

 about this sexual escapade of one of their members.

 In fact, Paul says that they were even proud of what was happening!

 Perhaps it was a sign to them of their freedom in Christ from all moral constraints,

 or at least from any restraints on what we do with our bodies.

But for Paul it was a grievous matter that merited serious action--

 the sinning man was to be cast from their midst and treated like an unbeliever.

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And then in chap. 6, Paul mentions a second case.

 Evidently one member of the church had in some way

 cheated or defrauded another member,

 and the offended party had by-passed the church

 and taken the culprit into the Roman courts seeking redress.

One Christian suing another

 before the eyes of the unbelieving world,

 with a pagan judge passing judgment on the matter--

 Paul was appalled!

 He considered it a shameful action--for both parties,

 and he rebukes the church for participating in it.

6:5—"**I say this to shame you.**

 **Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough**

 **to judge a dispute between believers?”**

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Tolerance of sexual permissiveness,

 going to court to settle a grievance--

 sounds very familiar doesn't it!

 Nothing too unusual here.

 What is most unusual to us is Paul's reaction to it.

 And at the core of Paul's reaction in each of these two cases

 is his own conception of the church.

This is the central issue here--

 what does it mean to be a church?

I want us to look first at Paul's central motivating force in this passage,

 and then consider the course of action that ought naturally to flow from it.

 May this word of God challenge us

 as we seek to be the people of God in the family of God.

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What was fundamental to Paul, and what is often missing today,

 is the notion that **the church of Jesus Christ**

 **is to be a distinctive community,**

 **unlike any other in the world.**

The church is not **a social club**--like the Rotary,

 which gathers for social interaction and community service.

 The church is not **a self-help support group**--like AA,

 which exists simply for the well-being of its members

 as they struggle through the trials of life.

The church is not a **political action committee**—like CPAC,

 whose purpose is to leverage power in the public square.

And the church is not **a commercial enterprise**--like MacDonald's,

 which is organized and managed to make a profit.

The church is a **family**, created by God the Father,

 united in God in Son,

 and given birth by God the Spirit.

 The church is a family called by God to display his grace,

 to reflect his character

 and to bring him honor and glory in the world.

The Church is the body of Christ in the world,

 the visible expression of the gospel.

 As human beings, we were originally created to bear God's image,

 to be visible expressions within creation of God's own character.

And once that image was marred by sin,

 it has been God's purpose in history,

 beginning with Abraham,

 to fashion a new people for himself,

 a people who would be redeemed by his grace

 and restored by his power.

And the church is to be the demonstration of that saving work in Jesus Christ.

The church is the New Testament expression of that eternal purpose of God--

 We are, as Paul has written already in this letter,

 God's field, God's building,

 God's temple, and God's household--his family.

We are to be a distinctive community in the world.

First, according to Paul,

 we are to be distinctive in our **holiness**.

Christians are called “**the Lord’s people**”, literally, "**saints**,"—that is “holy ones”--

 As those now united by faith to Jesus Christ,

 we are to be holy, set apart from the world to belong to God--

 and as a sanctified people, we are to display God's own moral purity.

"Is there no distinction between the moral standards of the world

 and those of the church?" Paul asks.

 "You Corinthians are proud of an act that even the pagans would condemn!"

Paul is upset, first of all, because of what such an action says about God--

 for if the church, as God's people,

 is to reflect his nature to the world,

 what is the world going to think God is like

 if you tolerate this immoral action in your midst?

 This is an act bordering on blasphemy in Paul's mind.

Now this doesn't mean that the church is only a place for perfect people.

 Not at all.

 The kind of discipline in the church Paul calls for here

 is not a means of purifying the church of all sinners--

 for we are all sinners.

 Paul has lots to say about the sin of the Christians in Corinth

 but he doesn't tell them to dissolve the whole church.

He does call them to ***grieve*** over their sin (5:2)--

 that's the key component.

 A Christian is a sinner who grieves for his sin,

 and in that grief finds the forgiveness of God.

The church is full of sinners--

 but we are redeemed sinners,

 in the ongoing process

 of being restored and conformed to the image of Christ.

 And we are to be repenting sinners—

 and we are called to live that way.

The final words of our passage are so important here--

**6:9--"Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God?**

 **Do not be deceived:**

 **Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers**

 **nor men who have sex with men**

**10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers**

 **will inherit the kingdom of God.**

**11 And that is what some of you were.**

 **But you were washed, you were sanctified,**

 **you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ**

 **and by the Spirit of our God.”**

And such ***were*** some of ***us***--

But ***we*** have been washed,

 ***we*** have been sanctified

 and ***we*** have been justified--

 we have been born again as children of God--

 and as the family of God we are to live that way,

 demonstrating the family likeness.

I think of the words of the 19th century Scottish pastor Alexander Maclaren

 “The Gospel is not a mere message of deliverance, but a canon of conduct;

 it is not a theology to be accepted, but it is ethics to be lived.

 It is not to be believed only, but it is to be taken into life as a guide.”

The gospel, by its very nature, compels us to Christ-like living and service.

And that gospel is to be lived out in the context of a local church.,

 as we continually come before God,

 confessing our sin,

 receiving his forgiveness,

 and seeking his power

 to live in a way that is pleasing to our heavenly Father.

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The church is to be distinctive in holiness--

 and second, **the church is to be distinctive in love**.

What is Paul's concern in all of this?

 It is, first of all, a reverent concern for the honor of God,

 but it is also a loving concern for the health of God's people.

Isn’t this what a family is to be about?—

 A family is a community of loving nurture,

 in which children are to grow to maturity—

 and that takes discipline in the broadest sense of that word.

 It includes teaching, and correcting, and modeling, and even punishing—

 all to the good end of seeing our children become responsible adults.

Even those spankings of our young ones are to be done out of love, never out of anger.

Doesn’t God himself discipline us out of love--

 Earlier we read that passage from Hebrews that quotes the book of Proverbs—

 “**My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline,**

 **and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,**

 **because the Lord disciplines the one he loves,**

 **and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son**.” (Heb. 12:5-6).

 “**God disciplines us for our good,**

 **in order that we may share in his holiness**” (12:10).

I remember overhearing one of my sons commenting on a friend at school—

 “Oh, I don’t think his parents care much about him.

 They let him do whatever he wants.”

Discipline is an expression of love.

Would the church be doing this fellow a favor by tolerating or even endorsing

 his incestuous relationship?

 Of course not!

 Someone who continues if such behavior is in grave spiritual danger.

 I don't care if he has walked the aisle, prayed a prayer,

 been baptized and joined the church five times over--

 if there is no concern for holiness in his life,

 no concern to live in a way pleasing to God,

 he ought to have no assurances that he is truly a Christian at all.

 How can a person be born again into the family of God

 if they display nothing of the family likeness?

 And the church does him a dangerous disservice

 by not making that point very clear to him.

Paul's motivation here reflects that--

 the purpose of this discipline is, in v. 5, that the man may be saved.

In other words, the discipline is ***remedial***--it is for his own good.

 It is an action of the church performed out of love

 to show him just how serious his situation truly is.

And in chap. 6 we have the same motivation--

 the church is to be a community of love,

 not one of greedy deals and contentious litigation.

 And the responsibility of the church is to help feuding members

 become reconciled with one another.

After all, isn't that what the gospel is all about--

 God reconciling sinners to himself--

 we, who were his enemies, have now become his sons and daughters

 by his work of grace in the cross of his Son Jesus Christ.

Doesn't that gospel, which reconciled us with God, not also have the power

 to reconcile us with one another?

1Cor. 6:7—"**The very fact that you have lawsuits among you**

 **means you have been completely defeated already.**

 **Why not rather be wronged?**

 **Why not rather be cheated?**

 **Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong,**

 **and you do this to your brothers and sisters.”**

 This is a denial of the gospel.

Love for one's Christian brothers and sisters in the family of God

 is to be, according to Jesus,

 the single most significant defining feature of his true followers.

How can we say we are a community of love, the followers of Jesus Christ,

 when the world sees us swindling one another

 and going to court against one another?

This ought not to be, Paul says.

The Apostle is calling these people to live in step with the gospel—

 to be that community of grace and truth to which we are called.

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And there is one more aspect of Paul's conception of the church

 that stands out in this passage--

The church is to be a distinctive community in holiness, in love, and **in spiritual life**.

This one may be perhaps the most difficult one for us to grasp.

It is what is implied in Paul's words in 5:4,5--

"**When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit,**

 **and the power of our Lord Jesus is present,**

 **hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh,**

 **so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.."**

Admittedly, this is a difficult passage,

 and there are a number of views on exactly what it means,

 but the phrase I want to focus on is the one in which Paul speaks of

 "**handing this man over to Satan**."

I don't think he is pronouncing a death sentence on the man--

 nor is he sending him to hell.

 Rather, it's Paul's way of speaking of casting this man

 outside the fellowship of the church.

 Such an act puts him back into the world--

 the world is Satan's domain;

 for Satan is "**the god of this world**" (2 Cor 4:4).

 And that is a dangerous place to be--

 Paul has already suggested that those outside the church,

 those who don't believe, "**are perishing.**" (1:18)

Perhaps, too, Paul is anticipating the Passover metaphor here[[2]](#footnote-2)--

 On that last night in Egypt before the Exodus,

 the people of Israel were protected

 when the angel of death passed through the land

because the blood of the Passover lamb was sprinkled on the doorposts of their homes.

The church is the household of God,

 and in that house, covered by the blood of Jesus Christ, is life,

 but outside that house

 one is unprotected and exposed to great peril.

And this act of casting the unrepentant sinner out of the safety of the church

 was meant to wake him up to the real danger he was in.

 It was “**for the destruction of his flesh**”—

 which I take to mean that this drastic action was meant to result

 in the breaking down of his carnal lusts and spiritual rebellion,

 with the purpose of ultimately leading to his repentance and return to the Lord.

This is not unlike what some parents have had to do with their rebellious teenagers who persist in destructive behavior--

 There comes a time when the parents may have to shut the door

 and change the locks--

 not out of anger or revenge, but out of love.

And this threat of casting this man out of the church fellowship

 only means something if the church is a place of real life--

 a place of the work of the Spirit--

 a place where the life of Christ is evident and available

 for all who believe.

 To turn one's back on the church of Jesus Christ

 is to forfeit one's hope for the future.

The church is the body of Christ in the world—

 it is that sphere in which the Spirit of God lives

 and shares his life and love with all who find shelter there.

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The church of Jesus Christ is to be a distinctive community in the world—

 a gospel community, a community of grace and truth—

 both of God’s grace and God’s truth—

 the grace of God’s mercy and forgiveness,

 and the truth of God’s holiness and moral purity.

Now let’s be clear—

 the church is not to withdraw from the world,

 as if in some cocoon,

 insulated from all contact with possible impurities.

We sometimes think that's what Paul meant,

 but that's not it at all--

5:9--**"I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people--**

 **not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral,**

 **or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters.**

 **In that case you would have to leave this world.**

That's an interesting commentary

 on the kind of world these Corinthians were living in--

 not unlike our own, I suppose.

 They were to be engaged in that world--

 but they were not be shaped by that world.

 Their way of thinking and their way of life

 was to be distinctively different.

And ironically, only by being distinct from the world

 would they have anything to offer the world.

 In that sense, the church is to be **against** the world,

 **for** the world.

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Hence, the need for ***church discipline***--

 5:11--**"But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone**

 **who claims to be a brother or sister**

 **but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer,**

 **a drunkard or a swindler.**

 **Do not even eat with such people."**

We mustn't confuse ourselves, or the world, about what it means to be a Christian.

 Those who claim to be believers

 but who show no evidence of the regenerating work of the Spirit in their lives,

 those who repudiate the standards of Christian community,

 those who have no concern for holiness, or love, or spiritual life--

 they ought not to be identified as members of the church of Jesus Christ.

There is great harm to the church’s gospel witness to the world when that happens.

So, Paul says, we should avoid any association with such a person

 that would indicate their membership in the body of Christ.

 “**Do not even eat with such people**”--

 Most significantly, that would mean prohibiting their participation

 in the Lord’s Supper,

 which is the church’s family meal.

 They would no longer be allowed to share in communion—

 hence, they would be **ex-communicated**.

This final act of the church doesn’t send a person to hell,

 it simply means that the church can no longer affirm that person as a Christian—

 as a fellow brother or sister in Christ.

 God alone knows their heart—and the final judgment is his alone.

 But this act of discipline declares that

 any profession of faith that person proclaims is no longer credible—

 It has been denied by their actions.

 And it would be damaging to reputation of Christ and the gospel

 to affirm that person’s right to bear the name of Jesus.

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If the church is to be a distinctive community,

 there is a need for church discipline.

And this need for church discipline is **an *urgent* need**, Paul says--

Look at the illustration he gives beginning in 5:6--

 "**Don't you know that a little leaven leavens the whole batch of dough?**

 **Get rid of the old leaven so that you may be a new unleavened batch --**

 **as you really are."**

Paul is probably referring here to a piece of Jewish folk wisdom,

 similar to our "A bad apple spoils the whole barrel."[[3]](#footnote-3)

What is in view is not "yeast" (as in some translations),

 which was not plentiful in the ancient world,

 and which in any case is fresh and wholesome.

 Paul is talking here about "leaven."[[4]](#footnote-4)

Have you even made sourdough bread?

 I am not a culinary expert,

 but I have made Amish Friendship Bread

 (I like it because it’s made with lots of sugar!)

 Amish Friendship Bread is made with leaven.

The leaven is that little bit of dough that you save each week,

 which you then add to next week's dough,

 which then ferments the new batch to give the bread its lightness

 as the fermenting air bubbles percolate in the dough.

The Jews regularly ate leavened bread--

 and although the Old Testament never puts it in these terms,

 the annual Jewish Feast of Unleavened Bread,

 as well as being a religious celebration, was also a health provision.

Because of the fermentation process,

 which week after week increased the dangers of contamination and infection,

 the Israelites were commanded once a year to purge their homes

 of all leaven (Exod. 12:14-20). During the Feast they would bake only unleavened bread,

 and after the Feast, they would add some yeast to the first new batch,

 and then start up the process again for the next year.

So in the New Testament, leaven became a symbol of the process

 by which evil spreads insidiously in a community

 until the whole body has been infected by it (cf. Mark 8:15).

This is what happens when sin is allowed to fester and ferment in a church--

 it ends up affecting everyone.

What happens privately between two consenting adults is not a harmless affair--

 it has a broader impact on many others.

I have told this to couples I have known who were living together outside of marriage.

 Their actions were shaping the attitudes of children and teenagers

 about what is appropriate and acceptable behavior.

Their leaven can infect the whole loaf.

No man is an island--

 We all inhale the second-hand smoke.

 We are not autonomous individuals,

 wholly insulated, and only responsible for the ways our choices

 impact our own lives.

 Our actions will inevitably affect other people.

 That's what makes church discipline so urgent.

 Serious, unrepentant sin is a disease that must be dealt with.

But through the gospel of God's grace,

 we can be forgiven and be washed clean.

 We have been given a fresh batch of dough, Paul says, continuing the metaphor--

 **"For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.”**

 As Passover Lamb, Christ has born our sin, he has died in our place.

 **“Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread**

 **leavened with malice and wickedness,**

 **but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."**

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But if church discipline is such an urgent task,

 and if the stakes for the well-being of the church in the world are so high,

 why is church discipline--

 this dealing with sinful behavior in the midst of the fellowship,

 why is church discipline so rarely seen in churches today?

Part of our hesitance, I'm sure, is a result of the cultural climate in which we live.

We live in an intensely private and individualistic culture.

 Our basic philosophy is "live and let live."

 And the most often quoted verse from the Bible is no longer John 3:16

 but Matt. 7:1--

 "**Do not judge lest you be judged**."

 which we misinterpret to mean, "I won't judge you if you won't judge me."

But this saying of Jesus actually means,

 "Do not harbor private judgments against your neighbor

 so that you may not be judged ultimately by God."

Here Jesus warns us against hypocritical self-righteousness,

 but he doesn't in any way preclude the church's corporate responsibility

 for disciplining members who flagrantly violate God's righteous standards.

Sure, we are not to be censorious and judgmental,

 but that doesn't mean we are not to make serious moral judgments--

 in fact, we have a duty to do so.

Jesus says as much—

 In Mt. 18 he says,

 If you brother or sister sins, go to them and seek to draw them back.

We have a responsibility, Paul says in Gal. 6:1,

 to restore a brother or sister caught in a sin.

"Tolerance" can be a euphemism for indifference and a lack of moral courage.[[5]](#footnote-5)

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But even having said that,

 even recognizing the duty of discipline--

 we must still admit that it is not without its difficulties.

 Some would even say it is fraught with **dangers**.

One of the biggest dangers of discipline

 is the threat of **division** that it can cause within the church.

For we can come at this issue with **different attitudes**--

 Some of us have **gifts of mercy**--

 and your sole concern is for the person involved--

 How can we be gracious and gentle,

 guiding that person back into the way?

 Others of us have **prophetic gifts-**-

 your concern is for truth and righteousness.

 It's not the individual that matters

 so much as the community and its standards.

These two perspectives--both of which can come from the Holy Spirit--

 they are bound to collide when it comes to discipline.

And don't we as parents sometimes have to deal with these differences

 in dealing with our children at home?

 Mom, for example, may have as her chief concern

 that they not exasperate the child,

 so she counsels mercy and patience.

 Whereas Dad may think that the situation has gone on too long already,

 and now is the time for some definitive action.

 I'm sure most of you parents have struggled with this very thing.

 I know Susan and I have.

And how a church finally comes down in a particular situation

 can be very divisive,

 with different people coming at it with different attitudes.

 But as with children at home,

 despite the difficulty, something has to be done.

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Another potential for division comes from the fact that we come at church discipline

 with **different standards**.

 The case that Paul gives us here--an incestual sexual relationship-- is pretty clear cut.

 But it's not always that way.

Some moral questions, as we'll see later in this letter,

 Paul leaves to the individual conscience of the believer.

We will need wisdom to know which is which,

 and when something is serious enough to merit a private correction,

 much less, church action.

 We will need discernment to know what are essentials and what are non-essentials,

 what kinds of moral transgression call for public rebuke

 and which can be kept private.

 We can easily become either "legalists" or "libertines." /

And a third potential for division in this area of discipline

 comes from the fact that we can use **different methods** depending on the state of the person involved.

A key passage in this regard is 1 Thess. 5:14--

 **"Live in peace with each other.**

 **And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive,**

 **encourage the disheartened,**

 **help the weak, be patient with everyone."**

Is the wayward brother or sister ***idle and disruptive***, in need of warning or rebuke,

 or are they ***disheartened***, in need of encouragement,

 or are they **weak**, in need of help and loving support?

Is the person truly repentant?

 How much time does it take to really know?

 When do we rightly run out of patience?

Our discipline needs to fit the situation, and the person--

 and we may differ on that. /

There are no easy, pat answers to all of this--

 there is no formula telling us exactly what to do in every case.

 We need wisdom and good judgment

 that is sober, sound and sensible--

 guided by much prayer.

Church discipline is difficult,

 filled with the potential to cause great division.

But it also difficult because of **its potential abuse**--

 with certain individuals assuming a power that is not theirs,

 or acting in a way that is irresponsible or malicious.

That's why it's important that we look closely at what Paul says here.

First, **who** is to do this kind of discipline?--

 In the final stage, it is the whole church--

 5:4--"**when you are assembled,**" he says.

But it begins well before that.

 I think of what Jesus taught in Matt. 18--

 When you see someone engaged in sinful activity—

 if, in their words or deeds, they are acting in ways

 that are clearly wrong for a follower of Christ,

 the first level of response is a **private rebuke**.

 Don't go to the church meeting,

 don't go gossiping about what you have discovered--

 go to the person personally, "**just between the two of you**," Jesus says,

 and seek a response.

Then if that doesn't work,

 there is a second step, Jesus says--

 a **plural rebuke**.

 If he will not listen, take one or two others along,

 so that the matter may be established by two or three witnesses.

 That helps to make it clear that this is not just a matter of my opinion—

 others agree with me in this.

And only if that fails does it need to become a public matter for the church--

 and even then, the church may become involved

 first through the actions of its leaders, the Elders,

 before coming, in the last instance, to the assembled body of believers

 in a meeting of the church membership.

No one person becomes the moral policeman for the whole church--

 we are involved in each other's lives--

 we are our brothers' keepers—

 we are in this together--

 and the final **agent** of discipline is the whole church.

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But **by what authority** can the church act in this way?

 "Who made you a boss over me?" someone may well ask,

 and it's a good question.

And Paul answers it right here—1 Cor. 5:3,4--

“**I have already passed judgment in the name of our Lord Jesus**

 **on the one who has been doing this.**

 **So when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit,**

 **and the power of our Lord Jesus is present**, . . .”

We must act “**in the name of our Lord Jesus.”**

 It is the Lord present in his church who is the governing authority in these matters.

 It is he who has given the church the power to act in this way.

I think Paul's expression here is simply a reflection of the teaching of Jesus--

 in that same passage in Matt. 18:20--

**"For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."**

It is because of his authority present in the church that Jesus says,

**"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven,**

 **and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."**

As amazing as that may sound,

 the Lord Jesus has given to the church the authority

 to make binding moral judgments.

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But finally, one may ask,

 **whom** are we to judge?

 Over whom does the church have authority?

Paul makes it very clear that it is ***not*** over those outside the church in the world--

5:12--"**What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church?**

 **Are you not to judge those inside?**

 **God will judge those outside."**

The church has no civil authority--

 we may have a responsibility to speak prophetically to society,

 bearing witness to the righteous standards of God.

 But the church's ***authority*** is only over its own members.

In Paul's day it was easy to know who belonged to the church and who didn't--

 ***baptism*** was the distinguishing mark as to who was in and who was out.

But in our day this clarity has become clouded considerably.

First, because of the indiscriminate baptism of infants and children,

 there are now a large number of ***baptized non-Christians***.

 Just having been baptized is not necessarily a distinguishing mark

 of any real spiritual commitment at all.

Second, partly because of that,

 baptism has been so downplayed in many Christian circles

 that there also a large number of ***unbaptized Christians***--

 those who have been born again by faith,

 but have not been instructed properly to seal that faith publicly

 in water baptism.

And a third factor in our day that confuses all this

 is that there are such ***a large number of churches in a single communit****y* that have no connection with one another.

 So Christians often float around, hopping from church to church--

 with little accountability and little commitment.

 Now it's not unusual for people to go to one church for the youth program

 and to another church for the music

 and to another church for biblical teaching.

These are "lone-ranger" Christians,

 smorgasbord Christians,

 consumer Christians.

To whom are they accountable?

 Who has pastoral responsibility for that kind of person?

 Where do they fit?

It's in this context that we have developed, out of necessity,

 **the formal act of church membership**.

 It is the formal recognition of affiliation, commitment, and responsibility.

 And it is an essential part of the process of church discipline--

 for church membership helps us to know

 who is "in the church" and who is "outside."

I as a parent am hesitant to discipline someone from the neighborhood

 who is not my own child.

 So church membership defines who is really in the family

 and whom the leaders of the church have responsibility for.

That's why simply attending a church without becoming a member is not healthy.

I have grown in my conviction that under normal circumstances

 every Christian believer ought to be a church member

 in the local church in which he or she is currently involved.

That is a formal way of putting yourself ***under***, and of participating ***in***,

 the authority structure of that church--

 for that is an authority that is given by God for our good,

 and to bypass that authority structure is to bypass a blessing of God.

It’s like growing up as a child with no family—

 no nurturing, loving, disciplining parental care.

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You see, this all gets back to what it means to be a church.

In Paul's mind a church was to be a distinctive community in the world.

 It was to be different from the world--

 and it must mean something to be a member of a church.

Being a member of a church is not a way you spend some of your discretionary time,

 a leisure time activity,

 something to be put on your resumé under the heading of "hobbies."

 Being a member of a church must be a part of your very identity as a person,

 as a child of God.

To be called into a relationship with God through the gospel of Jesus Christ

 is to be called into a new community,

 a family of believers in which that relationship with God is to be

 shaped, and nurtured, and deepened, and experienced, and lived out.

And that new family of God takes concrete, visible expression in a local church--

 like this one.

The church is God’s temple in the world,

 it is his way of making himself known.

The British missionary to India, Lesslie Newbigin,

 in his book *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, writes this:

“How is it possible that the gospel should be credible,

 that people should come to believe

 that the power which has the last word in human affairs

 is represented by a man hanging on a cross?

I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel,

 is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.

 I am, of course, not denying the importance of the many activities

 by which we seek to challenge public life with the gospel–

 evangelistic campaigns, distribution of Bibles and Christian literature,

 conferences, and even books such as this one.

But I am saying that these are all secondary,

 and that they have power to accomplish their purpose

 only as they are rooted in and lead back to a believing community.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

God calls us to be his people in the world--

 a church that is truly distinctive in holiness,

 in love,

 and in the life of God's Spirit—

 the very embodiment of the gospel in the world.

 God calls us to be a community of grace and truth

 built on the cornerstone of Jesus Christ

 for ministry and mission to the glory of God.

By God’s grace, may we answer that call.

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**Prayer**--

Matt. 5:13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

 14 "You are the light of the world.

 let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds

 and praise your Father in heaven.

Closing Song: Let It Be Said of Us

Benediction:

Eph. 3:20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more

 than all we ask or imagine,

 according to his power that is at work within us,

 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations,

 for ever and ever! Amen.

**“The Church in the World:**

**Studies in 1 Corinthians” No. 5**

**May 9, 2021**

**"Church Discipline"**

 **1 Cor. 5:1-6:11**

 The Corinthian Christians lived in a corrupt and contentious society, and it appears that their church was no different. For Paul this was nothing but shameful.

 This morning we consider the conception of the church that led Paul to give the instructions found in this passage about the need to exercise discipline within the body of Christ.

**I. The Church is to be a distinctive community in the world--**

 **•in Holiness--**

 **•in Love--**

 **•in Life--**

**II. Hence, the need for church discipline--**

 **•An Urgent Need**

 **•A Difficult Task**

**Sermon Response:**

**"Church Discipline"**

**1 Cor. 5:1-6:11**

**•**It is interesting that Paul spends little time talking about the sins and the sinners, and far more time talking about the church and its attitudes. Why is that significant? What is Paul's central concern in this passage?

**•**What is the ultimate purpose of this action of discipline according to 5:5? How ought this to affect our attitude toward this process? Cf. Matt. 18:15-18; 2 Thess 3:14, 15.

**•**How does our concern for our own "rights" and "our pursuit of property" affect the way we deal with other people? What is Paul's attitude toward those things in 6:6-8?

**•**Does it cause you grief when the reputation of the church suffers in the eyes of the world because of fights and immoral actions? Come before the Lord with an attitude of mourning (5:2; cf. Ezra 10:6; Matt. 5 :4), seeking his grace and power to overcome our failure.

**•**Read 6:9-11. Consider what you were before you became a believer, and what you are now in Christ. Let what you are now in Christ encourage you to live out that new identity.

1. *Cluentio* 5:14-6:15. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Cf. Hayes. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. cf. Gal. 5:9 "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. On this, see Fee. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. So Hayes. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*(Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)