

SIN IN THE CAMP

1 Corinthians 5

Introduction

Perhaps one of the most difficult subjects to deal with is the subject of discipline. The discipline of children always raises a lot of debate about what is right, or what is the best approach. But when it comes to church discipline, the subject becomes almost unmanageable – a powder keg. So I am stepping into a minefield here today, but I believe that if we stay close to the Scriptures, we will not go too far wrong.

So, with that in mind, let us look into the Word of God to see what is said about sin and how we deal with it when it shows itself in the body of Christ.

Discuss the divisions in this chapter – NIV paragraphs

1. Dealing with Sin in the Body
2. The problem Sin causes
3. Association with sinners
4. Conclusion

We begin with ...

Dealing with Deliberate Sin vv. 1-5

The first thing we need to look at is what Paul really tells us about this situation. There are five apparent facts which stand out in these verses:

1. The person in question was a believer or at least professed to be a believer and was part of the church fellowship.
2. The issue in question was clearly sin. It was not some debatable issue – this was sin.
3. It was ongoing – verb is present active infinitive – a present action. This was not a one-time lapse in judgment. There was apparently an unwillingness to change.
4. It was known – common knowledge – it was not hidden, it was out in the community.
5. It was accepted by the church – pride over their tolerance.

Paul immediately instructs the readers in Corinth as to how they should have responded to this situation. The right response involved two aspects: grief and separation.

1. You should have been filled with grief – sorrow over the sin of this individual and the impact that sin was having on him and on the body of believers. Rather than pride over their tolerance and acceptance there should have been grief.
2. You should have put this person out of your fellowship. How could you have allowed such a heinous thing to continue without taking any action.

In vv. 3-5 he gives some specific instructions as to what to do. These instructions involve both judgment and discipline.

Judgment – Are we not told that we are not to judge others? *Discuss the difference between setting ourselves up as judges in areas we have no authority to judge and dealing with those areas that God has clearly defined as sin.* We are not competent to judge other's motives or service (1 Cor. 4). Nor do we have the right to judge others for actions we may consider wrong, but where there is no clear Scriptural teaching (eg. Meat offered to idols, the use of alcohol, attending certain kinds of events, etc.). There may be situations or activities that make me feel very uncomfortable, but that should not be used to judge others.

However, as we look at this passage, it also becomes clear that God has made us responsible to judge those things that He Himself has declared to be sin! We are not taking on the judge's robe and gavel when we declare that "immorality is sin." Not at all. God has already done that. God has spoken. When we act to discipline a brother or sister who is practicing sin, all we are doing is agreeing with God in the judgment He has already pronounced.

So Paul says you need to judge this man and discipline him by publicly putting him out of your fellowship and turning him over to Satan, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. But note that the ultimate goal of any discipline, even though it may be painful, is the salvation of the spirit. The purpose of any discipline, whether in the family or the family of God, should not be punishment, but rather correction. The goal of discipline is not condemnation, but rather restoration. Even putting someone out of the fellowship of the church is not intended to say to that

person that we are through with you. It is intended to provide the pain that is necessary to bring about a change, to lead to repentance, in order that the person might be restored to fellowship with the church and with God.

That is Paul's advice about dealing with open and deliberate sin within the body of Christ. But now he goes on to give the rationale for this response, by speaking about...

The Problem with Sin vv. 6-8

Read vv. 6-8 – Sin is likened to leaven -> yeast – make the comparison. Go through verses quickly and briefly.

Another comparison that we could perhaps make, without doing injustice to the text, is that sin is like a cancer. It needs to be removed quickly and completely or it grows and spreads until it destroys the whole body. No one would say, well it's just a small thing, we won't worry about it. It doesn't matter. No, it has to be dealt with, and sometimes it's painful, but it must be removed.

Association with Sinners vv. 9-11

This section is a clarification of something he had written to them earlier. But it definitely fits the context of this discussion on discipline and judging because it also expands on the scope of our judgment. Such judgment for sin extends only to those who are, or at least claim to be a part of the family of God. We are not to judge those who are outside the body of Christ.

So, what is Paul talking about here? Excommunication? I don't know for sure, but what he does say is ... v. 11 – read it. Believers who will not repent and leave their life of sin are to be avoided in terms of fellowship. What that really involves, I suppose could be debated, but the fact is that true fellowship can only occur between believers who are walking with the Lord (not perfection but walking close to Him).

1 John 1:5-7 – “This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as

he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”

Light cannot have fellowship with darkness, and if we want to have fellowship with God and with other believers we need to be walking in the light by maintaining a life of holiness and purity.

Conclusion

So, what is the final word on this? *Read vv. 12-13.* God will judge the unbeliever and deal with him. We are to deal with sin within in the body. When there is sin in the camp (unconfessed, ongoing deliberate sin) everyone suffers. It affects the whole body.

A final comment - the challenge to judge ourselves—examine our own lives—and deal with the sin that God reveals to us so that such judgment and discipline is not necessary.

As the Psalmist said - *“Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”* (Ps 139:23-24 ESV)