

“When Scandal Hits the Church!”

1 Corinthians 5:1-8

Intro. – Several years ago, I read in *The Reader’s Digest* that Jimmy Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart were working out a business deal. As soon as Bakker was going to be released from prison, the both of them would star their own publication. It would be called “Repent House.”

We’re all well aware of the scandal that surrounded these two TV evangelist. We’re aware of the “black eye” this left in efforts to promote and restore New Testament Christianity. But the scandal of sexual immorality isn’t new. This is the very subject matter of 1 Corinthians 5. The Corinthian Christians were not only struggling with divisions – they were also struggling with morals. Sexual scandal was common in Corinth. History records a Roman who said, “Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of the body, and wives to bear us legitimate children.” Corinth was also the site of the Temple of Aphrodite (where we get our word aphrodisiac) = temple dedicated to the worship of sex. Thus, it was quite common for Christians of Corinth to be tempted and involved in this area.

Now, in our sex-crazed society and like the church in Corinth, the Church today faces a growing increase in sexual immorality within her ranks. Christians actually involving themselves in sexual sin, with no concern for their souls or the fact that such automatically brings scandal to the Lord’s Body.

Illus. – J. Allan Peterson (author) “A call to fidelity is like a solitary voice in today’s sexual wilderness. What was once labeled adultery and carried a stigma of guilt and embarrassment now is an affair – a nice sounding, almost inviting word, wrapped in mystery, fascination and excitement. A relationship, not sin. What was once behind the scenes – a secret closely guarded – is now in the headlines, a TV theme, a best seller, as common as the cold. Marriages are ‘open’; divorces are ‘creative.’”

So what’s a church to do when scandal hits it? How is the matter to be addressed? Is it best to let it be, or does our Lord prescribe a definite plan of action?

Purpose: to better understand God’s plan for dealing with scandal in the Body of Christ

I The Scandal IDENTIFIED (vv 1-2)

- the scandal in the Corinthian Church was 2 fold = much like most if not all scandals in churches today:
- A. The Scandal of Immorality (v 1)
 1. “*It’s actually reported...*” i.e. “It is notorious, common knowledge, so public it can’t be concealed anymore – it has become the “talk of the town!”
 2. Greek goes on and says “*a man has his father’s wife.*”
 - a. indication of a step mother = a man was having illicit union with his step mother.
 - b. not given all detail but this much we know; the son was a member of church... father in this sordid triangle also member of the church – woman not member because she’s not censured.
 - c. even pagans knew better and were amazed by such a practice.
 3. Greek word “immorality” πορνεία (porneia) where we get our word “pornography”
 - a. usage of word came to mean any sexual behavior transgressed God’s law – e.g. premarital, extramarital, unnatural (homosexual) and incestual.
 - b. comprehensive word which includes all violations of the 7th commandment.
 4. The Corinthians Christians were so preoccupied boasting about what “party they were with” they had no time to concern themselves with the scandal of immorality in their very midst.
- B. The Scandal of Indifference (v 2)
 1. As serious as the sexual sin, what also concerned God/Paul was lack concern for what happening.
 2. “*And you are proud!*”
 - a. “you” is emphatic = very ones whose horror should have been most intense were proud of their “tolerance” their “open mindedness”...
 - b. the least Christians should’ve been doing was grieving; instead, they’re gloating! They were proud which blinded them to their indifference to truth and failure to deal with the matter.

3. Divisions and strife are a breeding ground for indifference to morality and truth.
4. Paul goes on to say, instead of being puffed up against each other in party rivalry, they should have been united in common grief and action.
5. Corinthians proving their lack of love for this brother by simply letting him sin without any discipline – will address this matter more in a moment.
6. Rather than mourn or take necessary steps to deal with the situation, Christians at Corinth were indifferent = such is as big if not more a scandal than the sin of immorality!

II The Scandal FACED (vv 3-8)

- having identified the scandal (in this case immorality) and shown the proper attitude (remorse), Paul now gives the proper action, the *how to* when scandal hits the church:
 - A. Discipline is Necessary for the Offender (vv 3-5)
 1. Surest proof of no love (when parent &/or a church situation) is to do nothing...
 - Illus. – favorite teacher – one was Mrs. Holt (Harding School, Sciotoville, OH) OH history...
 2. Real love demands discipline (Hebrews 12:5-13)
 3. V 3 – absent in body but present in spirit = passed judgment *just as if I were present*.
 - a. nothing mystical... often say *with you in spirit* though miles apart... i.e. our hearts and minds are united on important/essential matters.
 - b. “judge” (κεκρικα) kekrika = “determined or came to conclusion” = decided what ought to be done in the situation.
 - c. this was a clear cut case = no reason to hesitate and not do what ought to be done!
 4. Paul uses dual legal formulas (vv 4-5) 1) “*in the name of the Lord*” 2) “*in the power of the Lord*”
 5. Verdict given in v 5 = “*hand over to Satan, so that the sinful flesh may be destroyed...*”
 - a. what we would call church discipline – released from the “spiritual strength/protection”
 - b. no one is to be destroyed, but fleshly appetites, carnal affections and lust to be destroyed.
 6. Object of discipline clearly stated “*and his spirit may be saved...*”
 - a. main objective in disciplining the offender = RESTORE!
 - b. if discipline ever done in anger, pride, revenge or prejudice = wrong and will backfire...
 - c. as severe as this discipline may appear, in reality it is merciful, designed to RESTORE...
 - B. Discipline is Necessary for the Church (vv 6-8)
 1. Paul is NOT expecting “absolute purity” but he is saying under God’s inspiration = need holiness
 2. Illus. – John White his book *Healing the Wounded*: “Unless someone in the church decides to go lovingly to the person involved in the scandal with the object of establishing the truth, effecting righteousness and seeking to bring about reconciliation, every single member in the church who is aware of the situation is sinning, every moment – is in fact a participator in the sin of the sinner in one way or another. The church is sinning by avoiding corrective church discipline.”
 3. “*Get rid of the old yeast...*”
 - a. Illus. – President of large corp. asked credit agency the financial reliability of another company. He received the following: “Note good for any amount.” That message resulted in a huge loss for his company. Why? The correspondence should have read, “Not good for any amount.” Addition of one letter resulted in a great loss.
 - b. point is clear – a single sin, indulged or allowed in church will act like leaven – it will corrupt the whole body unless it is removed.
 4. The “why” behind doing this = because X has been sacrificed = need to properly respond grace...!
 5. V 8 – “celebrate the feast” = direct reference to the Lord’s Supper:
 - a. as long as well cling to old habits/sins we’ll not properly celebrate joy/victory of Gospel!
 - b. sincerity and truth are *essential* for local church to accomplish the Lord’s purpose!
 - c. people long to find a local church where sin taken seriously and forgiveness realized fully...

- d. people long for authentic worship/fellowship – church where they are consistently brought into the very presence of God... church where such worship naturally results in fellowship with one another that is authentic and based on “the truth!”

Conclusion: I remember Pam well. Pam was a member of a church where I was serving. Bright young lady, whose parents, brothers and sister were also actively involved. Pam was living with a man named Mike. Everyone in the church knew it and most everyone in the community was aware of it as well. Pam had some children from a previous marriage. She knew better..., but continued to live without the blessing of God. Finally, it was brought up at an elders’ meeting. The elders and myself went to talk to this couple. They were most receptive and welcoming... Long story short, Pam’s mother, Doris was the only one who flipped out. Mike became a Christian and they were immediately married and both got involved in the church and were growing in the Lord.

I use this to summarize this passage. To ignore sin and the fallen in the local church is to foster more scandal – the scandal of indifference. Discipline is essential, but it must never be vengeful or vindictive. It must always be done to RESTORE and it must always be done in love!

RESTORE the authority of Christ that has long been ignored by so many!
RESTORE the purity of Christ’s Church!
RESTORE the individual sinner!