

Hard Church
February 1, 2015

When one of our nieces was in elementary school, she came home one day and told her mother she did not want to go back to school. She said she did not know what the teacher was teaching. You see when she started school she already knew her colors, numbers, and letters. She knew how to write her name and was already reading some. So she knew the things the teacher started out teaching the class. Then the teacher caught up to her and started teaching things she had not learned yet. So it was harder, not as much fun, and she did not want to go back.

Living life together as the church is sometimes like that. As long as church is fun and inspiring, I like it. As long as people get along, I like it. As long as no one expects anything of me, I like church. As long as they teach things I already believe, I like it. As long as everyone is nice to me, I like it. As long as no one confronts me about my sinful habits and activities, I like it.

Unfortunately, church is not like that. It isn't that good because we come into the church from a broken world. We come into the church full of sin. We don't change overnight when we become Christians. Christian change, called repentance, is a process where we learn to grow out of sin. And while that process is taking place, we keep sinning. We sin against God and each other, even in the church.

So church isn't always fun and inspiring. Church people don't always get along. Church people do have expectations of each other. Church leaders teach you new things, hard things you don't want to hear. Church people are not always nice to each other. And church people sometimes have to confront sin in each other.

This last goes against current American culture. The culture in which we live has the attitude of, "You do your thing and I'll do mine." "To each his own." "This is just the way I roll." "I'm okay, you're okay." "Truth is whatever you want it to be." "I'll define right and wrong for myself." "Let's just live and let live." In-other-words, don't put expectations on others or confront them about the way they are living.

And this attitude comes with sinners into the church. There are voices in our culture today who would like churches to just go along with the flow of culture. They want the church to blend in, even if we have to modify our theology. Let me give you an example. When Piers Morgan had his interview show on CNN, he repeatedly confronted Christians with this very thing. He would ask them, "Don't you think it is time to amend the Bible to fit with culture?" Some churches are doing exactly that.

This creates a problem for us who believe the Bible is the literal word of God. We are commanded to amend our lives instead of the Word of God. We are to take a hard line against false teaching and immorality in our lives and the life of the church. And that makes church hard.

This morning we're going to look, briefly, at one of the passages where we are commanded to make a hard choice for God. Let's see what Jesus has to say to us in 1 Corinthians, chapter five.

1 Corinthians 5:9-13 (NIV) I have written 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. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. Expel the wicked man from among you.

The context of this passage is a church member who is living in a sinful sexual relationship. Now, Jesus' goal in this command is not to punish anyone. His goal is that the man will realize his dangerous situation and turn back to the Lord for forgiveness. In order to get his attention to how bad his situation is, the church is commanded to confront him, and if he refuses to listen, then to expel him from the church.

This is called church discipline. And most American churches are not doing this. It is counter-cultural. It is hard. It makes everyone uncomfortable. Discipline is always hard, for both the one giving it and the one receiving it.

Children often need to be disciplined. If you love your children, you discipline them when they ignore your rules. You know they have to learn to choose to do what you know is best for them. Even knowing this, it is still hard to discipline your children. That is one reason so many parents fail to do so.

As the church of Jesus we must sometimes discipline each other. It is a hard thing to do. It is supposed to be done with the love of Jesus, but it is still hard to do. It makes everyone uncomfortable. We run the risk that you will get angry, offended, may leave, and never come back. And we don't want that.

What we want is that you will once again humble yourself before God. You have chosen sin over God. You need to turn that around. That is what we hope and pray you will do. We would rather not be in the position of having to do this. But Jesus gives this hard responsibility to His church.

Some of you may inwardly be resisting doing what Jesus commands us to do in this passage. It would be easy to look the other way on such sins in each other. But let me remind you of something else Jesus said.

Luke 14:26 (NIV) "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple.

This is not to be taken literally. Jesus does not mean that you cannot be saved unless you literally hate your family. He is using a Hebrew form of contrast in which He makes an exaggerated statement to give more force to the point He wants to make. The point Jesus is making is that your allegiance to Him must be greater than your devotion to family.

Most of us know that. And it is easy to read these words of Jesus and say, "Okay, I'll put Jesus first," thinking that you will never have to actually choose Jesus over family. But if one of your family members is a church member and is the one who has chosen to sin, you may find yourself in just such a situation.

I have had to confront such sins rarely in our church. And it was hard to do every time. In none of those times did it involve a member of my family. If it had, I would still have been under Jesus' command to confront the person.

Again, it would be easier to say, "Live and let live." But if we fail to obey what Jesus commands us to do, then WE sin too. We become accomplices to the other person's sin.

I know, this is tough. Jesus expects a lot of us. He expects us to make our relationships with each other a priority. He expects us to humble ourselves before God. He expects us to keep repenting of our own sin. He expects us to help each other learn obedience to Him. He expects us to contend for the truth of the Gospel. Jesus calls us to a hard life. **Salvation is free, but living it in the church is not easy.** Jesus doesn't make church easy. He makes church hard.

There were times that Jesus chose God over family. He chose God over vocation. He chose God over self-will. He chose God over safety. He chose God over self-preservation. He made the hard choices that led to the cross. He chose God every time. He calls us to make hard choices for God too.

As we move into this new year of greater devotion to Jesus, greater obedience, we will have to work hard at doing church right. Will you make the tough choices required in your life?

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God loves you. That's good news.

God wants you to end up in heaven. That's good news.

God made a way for you to get to heaven. That's good news.

Jesus died in your place, paying the penalty for your sins. That's good news.

But we are sinners. And the penalty for sin is death and hell. That's the bad news.

However,... the best news is that, by faith in Jesus, we can be forgiven of our sins and escape hell for heaven.

By faith in Jesus I mean to believe that Jesus died in your place, to pay for your sins, to receive Him, then, as your personal savior or rescuer, and to turn your life over to Him as the Lord, boss, master of your life. Do this and God will forgive you of sin. That indeed is GOOD news!