*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

January 20 - 25

*First Corinthians Chapters Five and Six*

**Monday, January 20 1 Corinthians 5:1-8**

*“A man is living in sin with his stepmother”*

A horrible state of affairs in the Corinthian church has captured Paul’s attention: a man in the congregation is committing the sexual sin of incest with his stepmother. This kind of sexual relationship was forbidden in Jewish law and widely condemned in the Greco-Roman world. The church’s reaction to this affair was as bad or worse than the affair itself. Instead of grieving over sin in their midst, they were actually smug over their newfound “enlightened” tolerance as Christians. Paul tells them that they must remove this man from the congregation. That no mention is made of removing the woman suggests she was not a church member.

In his writings, Paul consistently contrasted the flesh (the old, sinful nature) and the spirit (the new, Christ-like nature). To “hand him over to Satan” is a remedial step intended to show the man the depth of his sin and, hopefully, lead to his confession and repentance, thus “destroying his flesh.” God requires his church to take moral purity seriously, for serious sin can infect the whole congregation.

*May we take sin seriously, Lord, that our church may be healthy. Amen.*

**Tuesday, January 21 1 Corinthians 5:9-13**

*“When I wrote you before . . .”*

Paul now clarifies an apparent misunderstanding, or possibly even a deliberate misrepresentation, of Paul’s previous letter. When Paul had told them not to associate with flagrantly immoral people, he was referring to professing Christians, not affirmed unbelievers. To drive home this point, Paul generalizes and lists several serious sins in addition to sexual immorality. These include those who seize others’ property by force, who worship false gods, who oppose and mock God’s people, and whose lifestyle is consistently characterized by drunkenness.

Not only must the Corinthians remove from their fellowship people who repeatedly refuse to repent of such sins, they must not even associate with them in intimate social gatherings outside the church. The logic of this command is that the church’s jurisdiction is restricted to its own membership. God will take care of unbelievers’ sins; indeed, their fate will be bad enough that Christians ought not add to the negative consequences of their sin but seek instead to lead them to Christ.

*Our security against sin, Lord, lies in our being shocked by it. Amen.*

**Wednesday, January 22 Matthew 18:15-18**

*“If another believer sins against you . . .”*

When there is a fault between Christians, Jesus holds the believer sinned against responsible to initiate action for restoration. His asking for a spirit of forgiveness stands in contrast to retaliation. The goal is to win and reinstate the erring Christian into fellowship. This discipline is taught by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 5, and the restoration in 2 Corinthians 2. Paul’s approach is to confront the person, to call for repentance, and to extend forgiveness.

Jesus outlines a clear three-step procedure to reinstate the erring. First, go to him alone and discuss the fault. This preserves confidentiality and avoids public embarrassment. Second, if he will not hear you, take other believers and try again. This adds witnesses to the conversation and provides protection for the sinner against unreasonable demands by the sinned against. Third, if the offender will not hear the several persons in step two, then take the issue to the congregation. If the offender will not hear the church, then he is to be excommunicated, for he is deliberately choosing to remain in his sin.

*Help us, Lord, to deal lovingly with the reality of sin in the church. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

January 20 - 25

*First Corinthians Chapters Five and Six*

**Thursday, January 23 1 Corinthians 6:1-6**

*“If any of you has a dispute with another . . .”*

Paul’s main point is that if disputes between believers require intervention, it should occur within the Christian community. Most common Greek litigation involved property and business disputes. If this is what was going on at Corinth, then the disputants were among the minority of well-to-do believers in the congregation, since the majority of people didn’t own land or businesses. Drawing on Daniel 7:22, Paul reminds the Corinthians that they will help Jesus exercise judgment over the non-Christian world (both people and angels). Surely, therefore, they must be competent to handle earthly disputes in their own midst.

For Paul, even the least competent Christian is preferable to a non-Christian as judge between believers’ disputes. In contrast with 4:14, Paul is prepared to shame the Corinthians over this matter. Their litigation angers him even more than their factions in chapter 4, because it fundamentally compromises their witness before a watching world quick to ridicule and reject the church on such occasions.

*How we treat one another in the church, Lord, is a witness to the world. Amen.*

**Friday, January 24 1 Corinthians 6:7-11**

*“Why not just accept the injustice?”*

Whether inside or outside the church, the attitude of demanding one’s rights remains diametrically opposed to Christ’s teaching (Matthew 5:39-42) and example (1 Peter 2:23). If two Christians cannot resolve their disagreements short of both secular litigation and Christian arbitration, something is fundamentally amiss. Better to suffer wrong – God will one day vindicate all injustices – than to alienate a fellow believer by requiring redress.

The fraud and injustice that trigger lawsuits leads Paul naturally to think about those who practice wrongdoing more generally. So he warns against being sucked into similar types of behavior. By using nouns that become labels for individuals only after persistent sin in particular areas, Paul makes plain that temporary lapses are not a cause for a person to question his or her salvation. While these types of behavior characterized the pre-Christian lives of many of the Corinthians, they have now given up such practices. Therefore, they ought to be able to give up suing each other also.

*Demanding my rights, Lord, should never take precedence over love. Amen.*

**Saturday, January 25 1 Corinthians 6:12-20**

*“Honor God with your body”*

The practical application of “honor God with your body” had as large a relevance then as it does now. While the Puritans may have lived as though there were no such thing as sex, our generation, like the Corinthians, acts as though there is nothing but sex. As did the Corinthians, our society has a hard time making the moral distinction between “fast food” and “fast sex.” If food and sex are both bodily appetites, goes the argument, why can’t I satisfy them as I see fit?

Paul makes a clear distinction between how the appetite for food and the need for sex are to be met. Ultimately both the stomach and the food that satisfies it will cease to exist. Sexual intercourse, however, involves an intimate union between two persons – “two become one.” Since believers have been united with Christ, for them to unite themselves with a prostitute, or anyone else outside of marriage between a man and a woman, is to live in disobedience to the direct commands of God. While our stomachs were made for food, our bodies were not made for sexual immorality.

*I commit, Lord, to honoring you with my body. Amen.*