## THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY 1 CORINTHIANS 5-6

When the Roman Empire was defeated by the Goths and Vandals, it wasn't conquered by swords and spears. Rome's downfall was its inability to control its own selfishness. Greco-Roman culture was full of sexualized religion, unbridled vice, and calloused consciences. Rome was defeated by depravity. Rather than be overcome from without, Rome fell from within.

And when, in Romans 1, the Apostle Paul wrote of Rome's moral bankruptcy he was looking out his window at Corinth, the "sin city" of his day. Corinth was the city that forgot how to blush!... Its Church was like a tiny boat afloat on a vast sea of immorality.

And tragically, the Gospel Ship had sprung a leak. The evil of Corinth had infiltrated the church at Corinth.

And here in 1 Corinthians 5-7 Paul tries to patch the leaks! The Apostle Paul deals with the subjects of sex and marriage within the Christian community.

He begins with a shocking problem, verse 1, "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles - that a man has his father's wife!"

A young man in the church was shacking up with his step-mom. Church members guilty of incest - blatant immorality. This was something you'd see on Jerry Springer, not at church. And Paul was appalled...

The NKJ translates the first words in verse 1, "It is actually reported." Commentator Alan Redpath renders it, "It is commonly reported..." or "It is everywhere noised abroad..." In short, "This is the talk of the town!"

And Paul mourns over this - not even the perverted pagans tolerated this kind of immorality. He doesn't just rebuke the perpetrators, he asks the Church, "Doesn't anybody see how this is undermining your witness?"

Verse 2, "And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you." Worse than the sin, was the Corinthian church's attitude toward the sin. They were not only tolerating an awful immorality, they were proud of their tolerance. You can hear their boast, "The Bible says, 'Judge not.' Far be it from us to tell someone else what's right and wrong. We teach grace!" It sounds like a 21st Century rationalization.

I like how Peterson paraphrases verses 2-3, "One of your men is sleeping with his stepmother, and you're so above it all that it doesn't even faze you! Shouldn't this break your hearts? Shouldn't it bring you to your knees in tears? Shouldn't this person and his conduct be confronted and dealt with?" They were proud, when they should've been mourning. The word translated "mourned" in verse 2, was used for grieving the dead.

They should've viewed this as a loss... of purity... of witness... Instead, they were patting themselves on the back, when they should've been falling on their knees.

Verse 3 tells us, "For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed." Notice, Paul isn't fearful of judging... without speaking to this fellow personally - or hearing his heart - or even listening to his rationalizations... Paul calls the man on the carpet.

Chapter 4 warned us about making superficial judgments of another man's ministry. But this particular judgment had nothing to do with motives or ministry - it's about morality. This couple was engaged in sin.

The OT Law was clear about sexual prohibitions. Leviticus 18:8 plainly forbids incest. It isn't an issue about culture or personal preference. This is not a gray matter. God is clear here about His will... Thus, Paul is dogmatic. Where the Bible already judges a sin; then our condemnation of it, is not ours but God's judgment.

Hey, Paul isn't afraid to take a stand where God takes a stand, and to speak up where God has clearly spoken. Today's church should follow Paul's example. We weaken our witness when we tolerate immorality. Church discipline still needs to be taken seriously.

For Paul commands the Church, "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." Remember, this isn't a struggling believer trying to straighten out his life and get victory over sin. We help the person who wants to overcome.

Rather, this was a Christian who has deliberately ignored God's commandments and is living in open defiance. That type of attitude shouldn't be tolerated!

In Matthew 18 Jesus said if someone sins, a brother should go to him and seek to restore him. If he doesn't listen; then come back with two or three believers. We can assume the Corinthians had taken these steps...

For Jesus goes on to say if the brother refuses to hear the two or three, he should be brought before the whole church - and if that fails to convince him to repent, he gets the boot. You've heard of the right hand of fellowship, there's also the left foot of disfellowship.

But notice the goal at each stage of the discipline process... is to bring the brother to repentance.

Even when he's kicked out of God's family, it's said he's being "delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh." The idea is let him taste the full consequences of his rebellion - without the safety net of the Christian community. Hopefully, that'll convince him or her of the error of their ways. The point of it all is repentance! When a person is part of a church certain protections are inherent. He or she is surrounded by support, and encouragement, and resources. To a degree the church is sheltering him from the magnitude of his sin.

Paul's advice is to turn this guy out into the storm. His problem is his flesh - his "I know best..." "I can do it on my own..." attitude - so let him do it himself!

Let him learn the hard way how much he needs to humble himself and submit to God's way. The Church does a person a disservice when we keep a rebellious person from reaping the full brunt of what they sow.

It's interesting, later in Paul's second letter, 2 Corinthians 2:8 he encourages the church to receive this man again into their fellowship. "I urge you to reaffirm your love to him." Apparently, the Corinthians obeyed Paul and kick him out, and it produced the desired effect! The season of separation from the church caused the incestuous man to repent. Church discipline isn't easy, but it's necessary - and it works.

In verse 6 Paul addresses their initial attitude, "Your glorying is not good." And how the modern church needs to take this to heart! Today's world is tolerant of everything except intolerance. Just because the world loses its moral bearings - and gets mushy about what's right and wrong - doesn't mean the Church should.

Remember, we cannot be for God, and we cannot love people, if we're not against sin - for it harms both.

Paul warns, "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" Sin is like yeast. It works beneath the surface to permeate and infiltrate the whole lump. It infects the bread from the inside out. It's like a cancer - if allowed to spread, sin can destroy the whole body - but if caught early, it can be cut out.

When it comes to bad attitudes and blatant sin at church it needs to be dealt with sooner rather than later. Tolerance or apathy is lethal. If stubborn sins aren't cut out they can metastasize and grow stronger.

This is why Paul says in verse 7, "Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened." "Purge out the old leaven..." In other words, get rid of the infecting behavior.

"For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

Notice Paul calls Jesus "Our Passover." When the Hebrews exited Egypt, and slavery - the day before, God told them to not inject yeast into their bread. They were leaving the next day, and there would not be time for the bread to rise. The unleavened bread and their obedience was symbolic of their faith in God's promise.

That was just one of many symbols in the Passover Seder that spoke of Jesus. He's also our sacrificial lamb, our hidden matzo, our cup of redemption... As the Hebrews celebrated Passover with unleavened bread, we Christians should celebrate our freedom with sincere devotion and the avoidance of deliberate sin.

In verse 9 Paul continues, "I wrote to you in my epistle..." What epistle does he mean? We're not sure.

We call the letter we're reading, "First Corinthians," but there must have been a letter prior to this one.

Some Bible scholars suggest, for multiple reasons, that 2 Corinthians 6:14 - 7:1 is the missing letter. Other Bible scholars conclude this previous letter was a correspondence that's now been lost. It's all an interesting discussion, but it doesn't change what Paul is saying... He had written to this church before...

"I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner - not even to eat with such a person."

Apparently, the Corinthians had gotten it backwards. They turned up their noses at their heathen neighbors, while ignoring the hypocrisy in their own ranks.

Rest assured, when the church views the people God wants to reach as the enemy we become worthless to God. When we come out of the world, we're not suppose to shut the door behind us. We need to turn around in compassion and lend a helping hand.

Do unbelievers see us a club for the clean-cuts or a hospital for the messed ups? We're saints not snobs!

I've heard a sad statistic. That by the time a person has been a Christian for two years they've basically lost all meaningful relationships with unbelievers. How quickly our lives revolve around the church and other Christians. We end up with no friendships with non-Christians, and no opportunities to share the Gospel.

Hey, I believe in the importance of Christian fellowship, but connecting to a church doesn't mean disconnecting from the world. Often we become so worried and fearful of the world infecting us with evil (and our kids), that we don't cultivate opportunities where we can effect the world for good. It's easier to hang out with Christians in a sterile, temptation-free church bubble, than it is to rub shoulders with the lost - especially on their own turf. That's more risky...

In fact, that's like Jesus leaving the halls of heaven and coming to earth - or like the guy who took a risk and dared to tell you about Jesus. Maybe it's time for some of us to stop playing it so safe - and take a risk!

Remember, our enemy is not the sinner who doesn't know Jesus. He or she can't change even if they wanted - they lack the power. Our enemy is the person who claims to know Jesus, yet stubbornly holds on to his sin with no desire to change. Paul says the church needs to shun, not the heathen, but the hypocrite.

Verse 12, "For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person."

This is why I get weary of pastors always railing at and condemning the ungodly pointing out the evil in the world. What do you expect? Why are we surprised when sinners sin, and the lost act lost? Our place isn't to judge lost people, but to love them and reach them.

If the church wants to judge someone - we should start with ourselves. Clean up the church, and we'll be a more winsome and effective witness. Then when God judges the world, there'll be fewer folks to judge!

In Chapter 6 Paul deals with another problem in the Corinthian Church. He writes, "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? The Corinthian church had become so dysfunctional that believers were settling their grievances in the pagan courts.

And again, Paul was appalled by the horrible testimony this created. Who wants to join a group of folks so fractured they can't settle their own disputes?

Paul rebukes them in verse 2, "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?" In Luke 19 Jesus promised the faithful servant, "Because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities." When the Lord returns to Earth to set up His Kingdom, apparently those who served Him faithfully now will reign with Him then.

So here's Paul's logic, if one day we'll rule cities, why can't we solve the petty problems among ourselves right now? Why drag a brother before the pagan court?

Verse 3, "Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?" This is a verse that always boggles my brain. Who knows the full extent of what it means?

Psalm 8 tells us, man was created a little lower than the angels, that one day he'll be exalted above them...

Hebrews 1:14 refers to angels as "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation." Apparently, one day I'm going to give my guardian angel a report card? "Yo Gabe, where were you on Highway 78 when I had that fender bender?"

Exactly how, I don't know - but somehow we're going to judge angels. That's a heavy responsibility. Which obviously means, that in the here and now, we should at least be able to settle our own differences...

Paul continues, "If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!" Isn't there one fair-minded fellow who can settle a dispute?

Instead of keeping matters in-house, the church at Corinth had paraded their contentions and arguments before Judge Judy - the world! And the world was mocking. Paul says it would be better to avoid court and be cheated a few dollars; than go before a secular judge, and say to the world that Christians can't settle their own disputes. Paul would rather a church member be cheated, than the cause of Christ to be stained.

Verse 7, "Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated?" Better to take a personal loss, than to disgrace the name of Christ by going before a pagan court. We should be willing to suffer personally, before we let the cause of Christ suffer publicly.

"No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren!" It was a shame what was occurring in Corinth. In most families, the unwritten rule is not to air your dirty laundry in public.

The worse thing to do in a marriage is to hash over your spouse's problems in a public setting... Don't chat up your husband's faults at the next ladies brunch.

The problem in Corinth was not that the Christians couldn't get along. As long as Christians are subject to their flesh, quarrels will occur. But we should be discreet, and settle our disputes in-house. The church should moderate its own conflicts - not the civil courts.

Paul writes in verse 9, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators..." And here, Paul lists a series of lifestyles that will keep you out of heaven...

First on his list is "fornicators." The Greek word is "pornos" - from which we get the term pornography.

In Greek this was a sweeping term referring to all forms of illicit sexual activity: prostitution, adultery, living together before marriage, hooking up, friends with benefits, incest, pedophilia, threesomes, etc., etc.

"Pornos" included everything from seeing a pretty girl and thinking a lustful thought to grotesque bestiality.

And sadly, today the internet has made both available at the click of a mouse. Paul is warning, keep clicking that mouse - if you continually and persistently indulge in these perversions you'll rot out your soul. You'll get into a rut from which you may never escape.

Understand, Paul isn't saying that a person who is tempted and fails in a moment of weakness, can't inherit the kingdom of God - that would contradict a host of other Scriptures. Jesus provides forgiveness.

But what he is saying is that a real relationship with God will protect us from an uninterrupted lifestyle of sexual sin. There's victory in Jesus. We can overcome.

Paul continues, "Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites..." A literal translation of the end of verse 9 reads, "nor effeminate, nor abusers." He's referring to both the passive and active participants in a homosexual act.

Again, this doesn't mean a person who struggles with homosexual thoughts and tendencies can't be a Christian. Not so... Even if a person stumbles and falls to temptation, there is still forgiveness in Jesus' name.

But what it does mean is that the man or woman who accepts homosexual relationships as a legitimate form of sexual expression, and practices these behaviors, is void of repentance - and it's the unrepentant person who Paul says will not inherit the kingdom of God.

His list continues in verse 10, "nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God." Again, what applies to homosexuals goes for thieves, for greedy people, for alcoholics... Paul is saying if any person engages in the uninterrupted, unrepentant practice of sin; it's evidence that there's something wrong in their relationship with God. Though that person might say they're a Christian, the evidence speaks otherwise.

And notice again the weightiness of Paul's words. These folks "will (not) inherit the kingdom of God." These people won't be walking the halls of heaven!

Yet notice the first six words in verse 11. Paul's dire warning is followed by perhaps the most hopeful words in the Bible. Paul writes, "And such were some of you."

To me, these are the most grace-soaked lines in all the Scripture. Apparently, the Corinthian church consisted of former fornicators, ex-adulterers, previous idolaters, recovering homosexuals, and sodomites, and thieves, and covetous, and drunkards, and revilers, and extortionists. Christians in Corinth didn't come from good, moral upbringings. These were not former Boy Scouts or Brownies. They had been a wild bunch.

But notice the operative word "were." That was all in their past now. In Christ, they had become a "new creation." Later Paul writes, "old things are passed away, behold all things have become new." That's the Gospel. Jesus turns hellions into heirs of heaven.

This is why the Gospel is such a miracle... the thief, the alcoholic, the homosexual, the sex addict doesn't have to stay that way! "And such were some of you..."

Paul writes, "But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." I love this...

You were filthy, but you've been "washed..." You were worthless, but you've been set apart or "sanctified..." You were guilty, but now you've been "justified..." He cleanses us - elevates us - forgives us.

Jesus has the power to change the core of a person!

And once we're changed, verse 12 spells out the Christian's moral code... the Christian Ethic.

Jews have the Ten Commandments. Islam has Five Laws. Christianity also has a code of conduct by which all Christians, in all cultures, at all times should live, and it's shocking, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." Talk about a loose, permissive standard, "All things are lawful..."

The person who accuses Christianity of being strict, and repressive, and legalistic hasn't read 1 Corinthians 6:12. Christianity has no taboos. Anything goes. How can you get any freer than "All things are lawful..."

Yet read the rest of the sentence, "...but all things are not helpful." The Christian is free from Law - the dos and don'ts. God has made it simpler for us. Here's Christianity... rather than God assigning us rules, His Spirit comes to rule over us. He changes us from the inside out. Though our nature is to buck God and look out for ourselves, God's Spirit supplies us a new disposition, one that loves God and loves our neighbor.

The issue by which the Christian judges a deed is no longer "Is it lawful?" but "Is it helpful?" "Will this activity deepen my love for Christ, and benefit my brother?" Our decision-making filter is no longer law, but love.

Laws are like a leash on a wild dog. They choke the dog from doing what he wants. Whereas, Christianity doesn't rely on laws and leashes. We've been transformed from an animal into a child of God. It's now our nature to love others and glorify God. The goal for us now is to get our behavior in line with our nature.

So Paul writes, "All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." Here's the Christian concern when it comes to conduct. Since Christ died to make me free, my priority should be to stay free. Thus, anything that threatens to take away my freedom - and impose its bondage - is a sin to me.

In other words, if I'm not free to put it down; then I'm not free to pick it up. Again, here is the Christian ethic according to Paul... I'm free to participate if it's helpful, and if it doesn't rob me of my freedom.

Take alcohol for example. You're free to drink a glass of wine, as long as you're free to stop after one glass. Some folks have a physiological propensity that makes them addictive to alcohol. I've heard it's as high as one out of every eight people. Well, if that's the case with you; then it's a sin for you to take the first sip. If you can't stop at one, you're not free to have one.

This is the only rule for a Christian... Do what you want as long as you don't fumble away your faith, or cause your neighbor's faith to stumble. The Christian isn't governed by Law, we're governed by love!

Verse 13, "Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them." I'm certain, not smoking a cigarette, and not eating lots of red meat, and fatty foods has some health benefits. Abstinence keeps your lungs clear, and arteries open, but Paul is saying that in the long run we're all dead.

The dead guy who was healthy before he got hit by a truck, and the dead guy who was sick for three years before his body gave out, are both equally dead.

The ancient world was full of dietary and ascetic restrictions that supposedly made you better than other people. But here, Paul tells the Corinthians that neither feasting or fasting - kosher or non-kosher - cholesterol or no-cholesterol - gluten or gluten-free will impact your status with God or your eternal destiny. God ultimately destroys both stomach and food. How we manage our physical appetites don't make us righteous before God.

But the Corinthians had mistakenly applied the same logic to sex. "I've got a hunger drive, a thirst drive, a sleep drive, a sex drive - so since it's not a sin to eat anything I want, or drink anything I want, or sleep anytime I want - it must not matter to God if I have sex whenever and with whomever I want." That was faulty thinking, but that was the Corinthian's thinking!

And in the remainder of the chapter Paul offers a correction. He writes, "Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power." In other words, the Lord isn't as interested in what you put in your body, as He is what you do with your body. You can take care of your body and live to be 100, or eat potato chips and drop dead at 40. That isn't God's chief concern. God will resurrect and perfect your body one day anyway. What matters most to God is that you use your body for His glory.

Verse 15 tells us, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot?Certainly not!" Again, God cares about what we do with our body. So when you use your body to sexually outside of heterosexual marriage, you become a harlot. In essence, you sell your soul... if not for money - you do it for a night of pleasure, or for the acceptance of another person, or for some other advancement...

What you do with your body creates entanglements of which you're unaware. Paul writes, "Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For "the two," He says, "shall become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him."

Here's what we don't realize - unlike eating, and drinking, and sleeping sex carries with it deep spiritual connotations. Sex isn't just another bodily function. It's a spiritual act as well as a physical act. It symbolizes eternal relationships - even our relationship with God.

I like to think of sex as a super glue. It creates an unbreakable bond. Pull an item apart after it's been super glued and it doesn't separate as easily as it joined. There's ripping and tearing - not just at the point where the two parties touch - but the tear goes deeper and broader. And this is what happens with sex. It doesn't just interlock

two bodies - realize it or not, but the sex act fuses together two souls - even two spirits. And when they separate there's an emotional tearing.

A man once wrote a letter to Ann Landers, "Dear Ann, I've been sleeping with three women for several months. Until a few days ago, none of them knew the others existed. Things were fine. By chance, two of them met, compared notes, and found me out. Now they're furious. What should I do? P.S. Please don't give me any of your moral junk. Signed, Trapped."

Ann replied, "Dear Trapped, The one major thing that separates human beings from animals is a God-given sense of morality. Since you don't have a sense of morality, I strongly suggest you consult a veterinarian."

Tragically, today's society mistakenly sees human sexuality as little more than an animal instinct - but the sex act carries with it profound spiritual implications.

When you become a Christian your body is no longer your own. It's the property of Jesus - literally, the Body of Christ. His Spirit dwells in your spirit. Verse 17 says, "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him."

That means if you engage in any form of sex outside the boundaries of heterosexual marriage you are prostituting Jesus' body. You're selling out fidelity to Jesus, for the cheap thrill of a moment's pleasure.

When a believer logs onto to a porno site he's logged the body of Christ onto that website... For a believer to climb into bed with another person's spouse you've pulled the sheets over the body of Christ... For a believer to walk into a strip club, it's the body of Christ you have just escorted into that strip club...

Participate in sex outside of marriage, and you're not just risking emotional rejection, or an STD, or an unwanted pregnancy... More importantly you are violating the spiritual bond between you and Christ.

Since you're one spiritually with Jesus, to be illicitly joined to someone else is to betray Him? Thus Paul writes to believers, verse 18, "Flee sexual immorality."

A teenager once asked his grandfather, "Gramps, your generation didn't have all these venereal diseases. What did you wear to have safe sex?" Old gramps answered, "Son, we wore a wedding ring!"

For "Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body." To a degree everybody's core identity is tied to their sexuality. Gender is part of it, but it runs even deeper. Our capacity to reproduce is tied to our sexuality. That's not true of any other bodily function...

What I put in my stomach sustains me, but it has nothing to do with me multiplying my likeness. That's why watching me eat has no bearing on my identity or personhood. But if you saw me naked I would blush. Instinctively, humans realize that's a far greater deal.

This is why every time you're intimate with someone you give away part of who you are. You break off a little piece of yourself that you can never get back. As Paul puts it, you share your spirit. And when you give yourself away with no guarantee of a forever return - it only cheapens your value. This is one reason why Paul says sexual sin is a "sin against your own body."

Allow yourself to be used as someone else's plaything or pacifier, rather than be valued as a person, and it will ultimately devastate your self-worth... Illicit sex may produce enjoyment and excitement, but it doesn't provide enrichment. And that's why God created sex, to enrich the love of a marital couple.

This is why, sex outside of marriage is like robbing your own bank account - what you've saved up, your own treasure gets stolen from you. It's gone for good.

Whereas, sex in marriage is like making a deposit into your account - there's safety and security - and the deposit becomes a long term investment that compounds interest and yields rewarding dividends.

Verse 19 sums it up, "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?"

In the OT the Temple was God's house - and it had a single purpose... the service and worship of God.

Likewise your body is the home of the Holy Spirit. It belongs to Him. It was purchased by the blood of Jesus. And it too has one purpose. You're NOT free to use it as you please. It's for the service and worship of the Almighty! Which is how Paul finishes Chapter 6, "For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."