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Sex, Holiness, and Worship

I Corinthians 5-6 | Week Four

Overview

The goal of the Fellowship is to create connections leading to authentic community, and provide biblical perspective on becoming a Christian scholar. Therefore, be sure to take time to hear from each other (15 minutes), review the lesson (30 minutes) and to pray for personal concerns and campus outreach efforts (15 minutes). Encourage participants to read the chapter in advance, using it for personal devotionals, reflecting on the Memory Verse and journaling insights from your Quiet Time. Try to connect with others outside of the Fellowship this week. In this way your spiritual and relational goals for the group can be met. Having leaders rotate discussion will allow each to share their perspective.

Where We Are Now

In the previous session 1 Corinthians 4 addressed servanthood and stewardship, underscoring the virtue of humility, the need to imitate godly mentors, and an admonition to live as faithful stewards. Our goal is to please God above all, not other people. This attitude can guard against pride and arrogance that may develop if we seek the praise of others over the praise of God.

This Week

In our reading this week the Apostle Paul addresses serious issues about sexual immorality within the Corinthian church, how to handle such situations both as a church and individually, and also discusses how Christians should handle problems they encounter with one another. We are also told to worship with “sincerity and truth,” not with “malice and evil” driving our lives (verse 8).

The Big Idea

True Christian holiness must guide our lives, otherwise we could fall into sexual immorality, strong disunity within church, lawsuits among Christians, and the need to discipline severe sin to the point of having to expel some people from the church. Negative behavior on the part of Christians does not honor God, respect his holiness, or prepares us for worshipping with one another.

Memory Verse | Cor. 6:18-20

Get Started

Open up the session by asking someone to pray. This will help break the ice and get everyone in the practice of listening to each other.

Don't Forget

Before you start calling on people to read Scripture or pray, make sure the individual you are calling on is comfortable with the task. You never want to put someone on the spot!

All provided Scripture quotations are in the English Standard Version.

Looking at the Text

Ask someone to read 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 - *It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. 2 And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. 3 For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. 4 When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.*

1. Why do you think Paul reacts so strongly to the sexual immorality taking place in the Corinthian church?

He's shocked by the fact that professing Christians are behaving worse than pagans. Christians ought to know better, but the Corinthian church seems to think it is above moral standards.

2. In verse two Paul mentions arrogance again (see 1 Corinthians 4:18-19). How do you think arrogance played a role in the sexual immorality of the Corinthian church? Think about your own life and academic pursuits. How might arrogance on your part lead to deeper sins?

The Corinthian church had a twisted understanding of Christian morality. As a result, they were actually proud of their immoral behavior. Their arrogance caused them to not only continue in their immoral behavior, but to ignore it when they saw fellow professing Christians immersed in serious sin. Arrogance in our own lives can move us to think that we are better than others or somehow above common standards of morality, even Christian standards of holiness. If we think like this, we can begin to think that we can get away with even more serious sins. Academically, this might cause us to minimize the seriousness of behavior such as cheating on a test, plagiarizing content for a paper, or making up results for a lab report.

3. Paul is a shepherd at heart and needs to correct the sin, setting a tone of holiness. You may notice a leader in the group who is experiencing a struggle with sin. This is serious and should be handled with humility and insight from a mature believer. You can approach that person as a friend in a spirit of gentleness (Gal 6:1) with a heart to restore them. If your suggestion is rejected you may want to take another with you (Matt 18: 16). If a participant is in sin it is different. You may take a similar course, but a leader would need to be removed from position until true repentance takes place.

Ask someone to read verses 6-8 - *Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 7 Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. 8 Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

4. Leaven makes bread puff up, rise, and expand. Why do you think Paul uses this illustration in relation to the sexual immorality present in the Corinthian church? How might the illustration apply to you in your academic pursuits?

Paul is saying that if sins of sexual immorality in the church are left unchecked, they can expand and lead to even more problems for the church. Academically, if we ignore a particular sin, maybe even making excuses for it, the sin can grow and negatively impact other areas of our life.

Think About It

Illustrate It

Recall an incident when a prominent Christian leader was exposed due to some sort of sexual sin. How did the media react? In what ways did such news harm Christianity as a whole? Discuss an example with the group or invite others to do so.

Tie It Together

Holiness is sometimes viewed by the world as thinking that you are somehow better than other people. But true Christian holiness means that we are set apart and devoted to God, seeking to live morally and spiritually upright lives. It does not mean that we are to look down on other people or see ourselves as better than them. We realize that we were in need of being washed and sanctified by God and that it is only through His power that we can live rightly.

Illustrate It

How Problems Grow: One way a problem can grow is if we ignore it. If the "check engine" light comes on in our car and we don't do anything about it, chances are high that eventually our vehicle will develop some bigger (and more expensive) problems. Similarly, if a

Ask someone to read verses 9-13 - *I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— 10 not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? 13 God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”*

5. What steps can we take to associate with non-Christians in a way that does not result in compromising our faith or coming across as though we approve of certain sins?

We can seek to cultivate genuine holiness in our lives that is not forced or arrogant, but sincere, gracious, and built on a firm foundation of grace and dependence. We can offer good reasons for why we disagree with certain behavior and not participate in it. Creative alternatives of interaction can involve having them tell you their story and the events and relationship that influence them.

Ask someone to read 1 Corinthians 6:1-7 - *When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? 2 Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? 3 Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! 4 So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? 5 I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, 6 but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? 7 To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?*

6. Why is it better for Christians to resolve their differences without having to turn to the courts for a solution?

Christians should want to set an example to others about how to get along with one another and resolve differences on the basis of Christian principles rather than having to turn to courts. In addition, whenever Christians are set against Christians in court, this makes Christianity look bad.

Ask someone to read verses 8-11 - *But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers! 9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

7. Verse 11 mentions some powerful concepts, such as being washed, sanctified, and justified. What do these terms mean?

Being washed has to do with the process of becoming “new” in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). Washing makes things clean, as in washing away our sins. To sanctify something is to make it holy, such as by setting it apart. When it comes to

spiritual problem develops and we don't do anything about it, the problem is not likely to go away on its own. Academic problems can grow, too. We need to do something about the problem or it will grow, likely causing other difficulties along the way.

Tips for a Better Discussion

Some people may not be comfortable discussing issues such as sexual immorality. Maybe they were once involved in sexual sins themselves or maybe they still are. Your goal is not to corner anyone, but to seek to understand, together, the seriousness of sexual immorality and its impact on individual lives, the church, and our relationship to God.

Four Questions About Freedom

Remarking on 1 Corinthians 6:12-13, the *Expositor's Bible Commentary* reads: "... as the Christian evaluates his right to do 'all things,' he should face four questions: (1) Is the thing contemplated beneficial? (2) Will

sin, we shouldn't behave like the rest of the world, but instead should be set apart. To be justified is to be declared right before God and with God because of Christ.

Ask someone to read verses 12-17 - *"All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything. 13 "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14 And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. 15 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 prostitute? Never! 16 Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." 17 But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.*

8. While it's true that Christ offers us freedom (Galatians 5:1), this does not mean that we are free to do whatever we want without having to face consequences. How might unchecked freedom cause problems in an academic setting?

Skipping lectures, not taking the time to diligently pursue our studies, and cheating are just a few examples of how freedom can lead to problems. All of these things could cause serious harm to our career and to our relationship with God.

Ask someone to read verses 18-20 - *Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. 19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, 20 for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*

9. Does the understanding that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and that we belong to God impact your views of sexual immorality? How so?

This knowledge should cause us to think carefully about how we treat our bodies, especially in relation to sexual sins. We are not our own, but belong to God.

Wrapping Up

10. What can you do, practically, that will help you grow in Christian holiness?

Take your faith seriously. Spend time in prayer and in reading the Bible. Fellowship with other Christians regularly. Discuss issues that concern you or that you aren't sure how to approach from a Christian perspective. This group can be a source of support for your personal growth and a voice of wisdom in the complicated life of a Christian grad student. However, it begins with you pursuing your own spiritual formation. Together you can seek to live virtuously before a watching world.

the practice in question overpower and dominate him and will the result affect others? (3) Will the practices support the truth that the body is "for the Lord" who created it and intended it to be used for his glory? Also, (4) will it support the truth that 'the Lord is for the body'—that is, the Lord has redeemed the body?"

As your discussion comes to a close pray for each other to become faithful, humble, stewards

A student leader was part of a team to guide the grad fellowship, but the others were unaware of the sexual battle he faced daily. In true honesty and humility he looked to his mentor for help. He stepped aside from leadership while receiving help. Most others were never aware of the struggle and he was able to resume a key role with continued accountability. Today he counts that mentor as "close as his father" having walked him through that challenge.