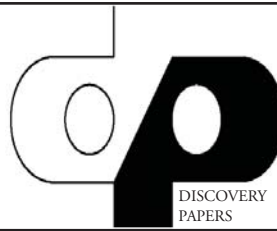


THE IGNORANCE OF ARROGANCE

SERIES: MOVING ON TO MATURITY



Catalog No. 20120122
1 Corinthians 5:1-6:11
4th Message
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January 22, 2012

Good morning and welcome. We're jumping ahead a couple chapters in I Corinthians to chapters 5 and 6. Our title is "The Ignorance of Arrogance." It could just as easily be called "The Arrogance of Ignorance"; the two go hand-in-hand.

As we will see when Steve gets to chapter 4 in a couple of weeks, one of the big problems facing the church in Corinth was not only the divisions among them, but their pride.

Before going any further, I wanted to play a short video clip. Forgive me: it's a TV commercial. But I hope it helps us understand the issue in front of us this morning. The worldview of our culture is impressed on us daily via these 30-second narratives.

[Video: The scene opens with men in the control room of a nuclear power plant. They're sitting at the controls terrified by what is about to happen; a meltdown. A stranger casually walks in eating a donut and drinking his coffee. He observes the situation and confidently gives orders to the other men at the controls. They don't know who he is, but he seems to know what he's talking about so they obey his orders. Once the actions have been taken, they all wait in fear, hoping that they've averted disaster. Suddenly their faces transform into joy and they stand and cheer! They were successful! One of the men hugs the stranger and joyously asks, "Are you new to the team?" To which the stranger responds, "Actually, I'm with a tour group, but I did stay at a Holiday Inn Express last night."]

He's with a tour group, but he did stay at a Holiday Inn Express last night. You may have seen either this commercial or one like it. Of course it's designed to be funny. But the underlying message is this: a little bit of knowledge (i.e. knowing the best hotel to stay at) suddenly makes you knowledgeable about everything.

Something like this conceit was overtaking the Corinthians. As their heads swelled, they began ignoring the true things that Paul had taught them about the gospel. It appears they were even questioning his calling and authority as an apostle. Paul says in chapter 4, "You are already filled, you are already rich, you have become kings without us ..." He goes on to contrast their self-importance with his own lowly position.

But unlike the fiction in the commercial, the Corinthians were wrong. They didn't know what they were talking about. So Paul has to correct them. He has to deal with their ignorance.

If we're not careful, something like this can happen to us. We come to faith in Christ but then fail to stay rooted in the Scriptures and guided by the Spirit. We mix the little truth that we know in with our existing patterns in an attempt to make life work for us. We find things in Paul's letters that we don't like and choose to ignore or reject his inspired authority. "Surely, he couldn't have meant that," we say. And we become convinced that we know a lot more than we actually do, certainly more than Paul.

We're going to cover a lot of ground quickly in these two chapters and we won't be able to discuss everything in detail. In short, the apostle deals with two very practical problems in chapters five and six. He repeatedly asks, "Do you not know ..." to reinforce that the Corinthians aren't as smart as they think they are. They need to correct their thinking and behavior. But as we look at this part of his letter, it's important that we remember what Paul's ultimate concern is. He's not merely an uptight Pharisee trying to enforce a set of religious rules. He wants the church in Corinth to understand and act like who they already are in Christ. He wants us to understand as well.

Problem #1 – Sexual immorality either tolerated or condoned (I Cor. 5:1-13)

Let's look at the first practical problem Paul confronts in I Corinthians 5. We'll start with the first five verses.

1 Corinthians 5:1-5:

¹It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. ²And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?

³Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed

judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. ⁴When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, ⁵hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.

Paul can hardly believe what is happening in Corinth: A kind of sexual immorality that even the pagans did not tolerate. The phrase, “a man has his father’s wife” refers to someone who is having an ongoing sexual relationship with his own step-mother. Not good.

Not only that, but they were proud! They were either indifferent to this sin in their midst or worse, may have been proud because of it. It’s possible they thought they had achieved a kind of liberty in Christ that allowed them to live however they pleased.

Either way, Paul says, this was nothing to be proud about. They should have been filled with grief. They should have disciplined the man who did this by putting him out of their fellowship.

Paul’s tone of disbelief here reminds me of the tragic Italian cruise ship accident this week. You may have heard about it. Apparently one part of the story that has gripped Italy was the recorded exchange between the captain of the cruise ship and a coast guard captain. In leaving the ship early, the cruise ship captain tried to say that he had acted heroically. The coast guard captain was having none of it. He was beside himself. He could not fathom that this captain had left the sinking boat while there were others still on board. In his mind, there was absolutely nothing about which to be proud.

So too with Paul: grief, not pride, was in order. The same kind of grief caused Isaiah to despair when confronted with the reality of God’s holiness: “Woe is me, for I am ruined!” (Is. 6:5) If the Corinthians really understood God’s holiness, that would have been their response as well.

So Paul must exercise his authority even though he is not physically with them. But he wants them to understand that in a very real sense he is present with them with the Lord Jesus when they gather for worship.

Verse 5 is difficult to understand. What does “hand this man over to Satan” mean? I think Paul is saying that they should treat the offender as an unbeliever. They must not allow him to continue to enjoy the benefits of their fellowship. He is to be returned to the world, which is Satan’s

sphere of influence.

It is important to note that the purpose of this punishment is redemptive. The loss of fellowship is to reveal completely the futility of fleshly living, that is, living in a way that’s oriented against God. This futility is meant to bring the offender to his senses. The hope is that he will once again seek to live in a way that is oriented towards God.

1 Corinthians 5:6-8:

⁶Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? ⁷Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.

Paul now addresses the larger issue facing the entire church: in spite of their boasting, they are ignorant of the most basic Christian principals. They don’t realize that the sin in their midst infects the entire church. Paul likens this to a little yeast, which works its way through an entire batch of dough.

The picture here is from the very first Passover when the Israelites were commanded to eat unleavened bread. There was no time to wait for the leaven to ferment the batch and cause it to rise. So they ate in haste with the meat from the lamb whose blood was on their doorposts. They did this so that the angel of death would pass over them.

This is why Paul speaks of the sacrifice of Christ, our Passover Lamb. He is the reality behind the Passover feast. He has been sacrificed in our place, his blood on the cross so that death might pass over us. Therefore, the Corinthians, and all Christians, are to live in such a way that we keep (i.e. celebrate) the Festival. We live in such a way that recognizes we are in fact a new batch, without the leaven of sin contaminating us. This is what it means to be mature in Christ. The Corinthians don’t understand this because of their arrogance.

Paul’s picture of how yeast contaminates bread may be clear enough. But let me offer another illustration.

My son has two clown fish. Keeping a salt water aquarium going is tricky. You have to keep all the chemicals in the water in their proper balance. One of your enemies is ammonia. One day, the ammonia test showed that it was

present at 0.25 parts per million. I didn't think this was a big deal but googled the issue anyways just to be sure. The answer I found startled me: The only acceptable amount of ammonia in an aquarium is zero. The reason is that any amount of ammonia starts to cause problems, which can quickly snowball into a full-blown catastrophe. Before you know it, your fish could be listing to starboard, like the Italian cruise ship. So it is with sin. Any trace of it has the potential to snowball into catastrophe. A number of us can testify to this fact.

In the next verses, Paul has to clear up a misunderstanding from a previous letter he had written to them.

1 Corinthians 5:9-13

⁹I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—¹⁰not 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. ¹¹But 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.

¹²What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? ¹³God will judge those outside. “Expel the wicked man from among you.”

Have you ever had someone deliberately misconstrue your words so that they could either ignore what you said or try to discredit you altogether? (Actually, that's pretty much the definition of political discourse in our country today.) It's possible some of that was going on here with Paul's instructions from this previous letter. We can imagine the arrogant in Corinth claiming that Paul had lost touch with reality. In that city, it simply was not possible to separate yourself from those who partook of the sins Paul described.

But that is not what Paul meant. What he meant was not to have close fellowship with those who claimed to be brothers in Christ, yet whose lives were characterized by ongoing sinful behavior. Paul is not saying that anyone who sins for any reason is to be excluded from fellowship. If so, we'd have a lot of very small churches with one person each. He is talking about those who continue on in their former lifestyle as if the sacrifice of Jesus was of no consequence to them. Don't even eat with them, he says.

So what does chapter 5 mean for us today? Three observations:

First, as Paul says in verses 12 and 13, we deal with sinful behavior outside the church differently than within it. Our calling as Christ's ambassadors is not to withdraw from the people of the world but to engage them where they are. We don't deliver a message of judgment and condemnation. God is the one who will ultimately judge their decisions and actions.

This does not mean we cannot speak God's truth into the lives of unbelievers or speak prophetically to our culture. But we recognize that what we say will not be received on the same basis as among our brothers and sisters. Our expectations for the behavior of those who don't know Christ are different than for those who do.

Second, within the church, we do have a common basis on which to judge one another's lives. The foundation we build on is Christ. Paul says in chapter 3 that each man must be careful how he builds on it. Someone who claims to be a brother or sister in Christ but who is unrepentant about ongoing and persistent sin in their lives will ultimately be treated as an unbeliever. We see that here in Corinth.

It is important to recognize that this removal from fellowship is not the starting point for dealing with sin in the Christian community. It goes without saying that we all stumble in many different ways. And many of us will struggle with the same sin for long, long periods of time.

A healthy church deals with sin on a regular basis by not allowing it to fester and contaminate the body. We confess and we forgive. We confront in private when appropriate and go back a second or third time if necessary. We hold each other accountable and we're honest and transparent about our failures. We pray, we study the Scriptures, we listen, and we ask for the wisdom and humility of the Spirit.

Again, we must remember that the purpose of the disciplinary action described in chapter 5 is redemption. Such cases of public discipline have been rare here at PBC. But in at least a couple of the cases there was repentance and the restoration of fellowship. And the joy at that restoration was indescribable.

Third, it is worth asking ourselves if we haven't become arrogant in some way that we are blinded to. Do we think we know it all when we really know very little? We might read chapter five and conclude that since there is nothing like that being tolerated here, we can move safely on to the next chapter. But are there other sins we have gotten

comfortable with, either individually or collectively, over which we should be grieving? Paul didn't limit his list to sexual immorality. He also includes greed, idolatry, slander, drunkenness, and dishonesty.

What about materialism? How does the incredible wealth generated here in the Valley shape and mold us? Do our own financial goals and pressures blind us to the needs of even those who are closest to us? At what point would we fit Paul's definition of greedy?

Some of you will be familiar with the following words by C.S. Lewis, from *Mere Christianity*:

“Charity – giving to the poor – is an essential part of Christian morality. . . . I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. . . . If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charities expenditure excludes them. . . . Particular cases of distress among your own relatives, friends, neighbours or employees, which God, as it were, forces upon your notice, may demand much more: even to the crippling and endangering of your own position.

“Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief...?”

There is much more that could be said here. We need to set aside our pride and ask ourselves to what extent we should be grieving over the sin we have accommodated in our lives. For Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. We are to live in such a way that demonstrates we understand who he has already made us to be: a new batch, without yeast, sincere and truthful.

I can add very little to what has been said about Tim Tebow, the pro football player. But let me make this observation: In his sphere, the NFL, he appears to be both genuine and new; new in a way that is like Christ.

The Lord is not as impressed with the things of the world as we are. So we can rightly say that by being genuine and new in Christ, each one of us can make the same kind of impression in our own spheres as Tim Tebow makes in his. For all we know, the eternal significance of our faithful obedience will be even greater.

Problem #2 – Lawsuits within the church (I Cor. 6:1-11)

Let's move on now to the second practical issue where

Paul needs to correct the ignorance of the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 6:1-6

¹If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? ²Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? ³Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! ⁴Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! ⁵I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? ⁶But instead, one brother goes to law against another—and this in front of unbelievers!

At first glance, this appears to be completely unrelated to the previous issue. But if we look closer, it is another example of how believers are to judge matters within the church.

Again, Paul's tone is almost one of disbelief. How can brothers in Christ drag one another before the ungodly for judgment? We don't know the nature of the dispute, but if it involved property, those involved were likely to have been prominent within the church, maybe even leaders.

I realize what follows here is a trivial example and I hope you will excuse a second football reference. But many think one of the keys to the 49ers' success this year is the discipline they exercise in resolving their conflicts. All problems are handled internally, amongst each other. They recognize that they can't achieve their goals if they are tearing one another down in public.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said here. The Corinthians are ignorant of the ultimate purpose and mission of the church. They have lost sight of who they are and what the goal is. Their focus is on all the wrong things.

Paul responds with a series of questions he hopes will show the folly of their arrogance. “Don't you know that the saints will judge the world?” This is a little confusing because Paul has just said at the end of chapter five that it is not our business to judge those outside the church. But the difficulty is resolved when we understand the timing of events. God is the one who ultimately judges the world. But somehow, in the future, there will be a place for the church to be instruments of his justice.

Furthermore, Paul says, “Don't you know that we will judge angels?” To paraphrase theologian Tom Wright, our

immediate response is: “No Paul, we don’t. Could we get a little more info on this?” In all likelihood, Paul is talking about the judgment of fallen angels, since those who did not rebel with Satan require no judgment.

These two questions provide a glimpse of what Steve was talking about last week: “Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard ... all that God has prepared for those who love him.” And also what Paul said when writing to Timothy: “... if we endure, we shall also reign with him.” An amazing future awaits the people of God beyond anything we can imagine, but in a very real sense, we are to begin living as if this future has already started.

For Paul, it had. That’s why he asks if there isn’t anyone capable of handling what amounts to trivial matters between brothers. If not, it is to their shame.

1 Corinthians 6:7-8:

⁷The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? ⁸Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers.

The lawsuit Paul is talking about would have been handled before the public, in the open marketplace. And the impression the church was leaving among the pagans was that they were no different than anyone else. There was nothing unique or special about them. Paul’s words are devastating: the Corinthians were “completely defeated already.” Instead, they should be demonstrating Christ-like forbearance and integrity to the world around them.

Paul concludes this section with one more challenge to the arrogance of his spiritual children.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11:

⁹Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders ¹⁰nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹And that is what some of you were. 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.

Paul has reminded the Corinthians of the incredible role the church plays and will play in God’s new creation. He now reminds them what kind of person won’t participate in

that. It is a warning. We don’t have all the details but they had apparently convinced themselves that being spiritual was divorced from their day-to-day ethical behavior. Don’t be deceived, Paul says. Those whose lives are consistently characterized by the wicked behavior he mentions here will not inherit the kingdom of God.

So what about us? How do we respond to this section?

First, we ask ourselves, are we ignorant of what it means to be God’s people? Do we know that we will be instruments of his future reign? Do we realize that how we live today is preparing us for that time? Or are we completely absorbed in the trivial and insignificant things of this world? When you wake up each morning, what are your priorities?

Second, what matters are we trying to resolve in the courts that should be handled within the church? Are you able to turn to someone here at PBC for wisdom, counsel, and reconciliation with another brother or sister?

There may be any number of conflicts within our body that require some intervention by other saints. Certainly that is one of the important functions of elders and pastors here: to come alongside and help resolve differences. But know this: one of the places where resolution starts is before us this morning:

“Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?”

“Don’t you know that the saints will judge the world?”

What about our marriages? To whom will we go to resolve the inevitable difficulties within them? Certainly it is possible to do what appears from a human perspective to be irreparable damage. And it is also true that sometimes an unbelieving spouse will abandon a marriage. There’s not time this morning to go into great depth on this subject.

But before a marriage ever gets to a crisis point, each one of us needs to ask this: am I buying into the cultural lie that the single most important thing in the world is my personal happiness now? Shouldn’t we instead be asking ourselves, “Why not rather be wronged?” If you are the one doing wrong, why are you doing it to your own spouse, a brother or sister in Christ?

“Don’t you know that we will judge angels?”

Conclusion

NOTES

¹C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (HarperCollins, New York, 1952).

In conclusion, one last set of questions from where we began that I'm quite sure you didn't expect when you came to church this morning: Are you living as if you stayed at a Holiday Inn Express last night? ... just part of the tour group making it up as you go along? Has your pride somehow brought you to a place where you think you have all the answers? Do you not know what you don't know?

I, as much as anyone, need to ask myself these questions. When Paul says, "don't you know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God?" I need to listen. It's a very real warning. How we live matters to God very much. A life with no evidence of the Spirit present naturally causes someone to question how real your faith might be.

But thankfully, it's also not a demand to just try harder. It's not an attempt to earn God's favor. That's not possible. Instead, it's a call to remember who we already are as God's people. When speaking about the wicked, Paul follows with a hopeful reminder: "Such were some of you." Past tense. "But," he says, "you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

We're not the wicked any longer. The work of Jesus on the cross and the indwelling Holy Spirit in our lives enable us to move forward in the world as God's people, his living temple. Great, unimaginable things await us at the last. But the journey has already begun or can begin now.

We celebrate the Festival, as a new, yeast-free batch, for that is what we are. Christ our Passover has been sacrificed.

Chapter 6 of this letter will end with one more "don't you know ..." question, a call to flee sexual immorality. The words should be familiar to all of us because they are engraved here at the front of the auditorium. Paul Taylor spoke on them not too long ago.

"... Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

May we live in such a way that demonstrates we really believe this is true.

Amen.

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