

BAGGAGE HANDLING**1 Corinthians 5****(Read 1 Corinthians 5)**

INTRO: Terry Wardle often says *“I got stuff. You got stuff. We all got stuff.”* His message there is that everyone has baggage. Everyone! And most everyone’s baggage needs to be dealt with or it can be very destructive.

In my pre-marital counseling one of the assignments I give the couple is to name at least five unwritten rules their family of origin has. Almost without fail they look at each other and claim their families do not have unwritten rules. But they do. In my family had lots. You never sat in Daddy’s chair. You always ate what was in front of you. You always went to church. We never sang at the dinner table. I mean not solos, we might break out in a chorus, all ten of us, but never just one of us humming a tune – not at the table. Mother always did the laundry and did the cooking. Daddy always fixed the cars, worked in the garden and milked the cow. None of this was written down, but everybody knew the rules. So when I married Kathy in 1980 I realized that she also had rules and they also had never been written down and often they were different than my rules, and sometimes it caused issues.

Does anyone want to share unwritten rules you family had? (give a moment and see if Zoom wants to share) This is called baggage, and we all have it and we all bring it to the table whether we are getting married or sitting down to a Church Board meeting or doing strategic planning at work. We all got stuff. And it needs to be dealt with – and it’s healthy to deal with it straight on.

If you haven’t figured it out by now, the Church in Corinth had baggage too. Here in the passage I just read Paul really steps up his addressing that baggage As I’ve pointed out numerous times in this series entitled **BEING THE CHURCH IN CHALLENGING TIMES**, the Corinthian church was in a city renowned for its shocking sinfulness. It was a port city, but it wasn’t just situated on one body of water, instead it was on an isthmus between two seas. Because of this, it’s almost like the bawdy licentiousness that stereotypically characterizes a seaport was multiplied in Corinth. In other words, the sexual sin that ports are known for was exponentially greater even in a culture that was already sexually loose. Corinth was full of fertility temples and their temple prostitutes. Greco-Roman sexual mores were enough to make any Hebrew warm under the collar with what one writer of the day described with, *“Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of the body, but wives to bear us legitimate children.”* For the average Corinthian, sex, which was as often as not homosexual sex, was little more than a bodily function, especially enjoyed by men and certainly by rich men.

This was the culture the young Corinthian church existed in. Paul was not naïve to this, even though he could certainly be a hot under the collar Hebrew. He knew what these people encountered day in and day out and he was no shrinking violet and he knew he had to deal with this baggage and with firmness.

And the issue he address right away is a sexual sin – it was a sin that would even make a Corinthian pagan blush – a man was having a sexual relationship with his father’s wife. This was even wrong in the eyes of the anything goes Corinthian culture – and Paul was horrified that Christians were allowing it, if not condoning it. What kind of witness is this?

Paul tells them to deal with it and deal with it once and for all. Put the man out of the church and pray for him to repent and come back better than new. But DEAL with it!

Needless to say there is a word for us here . . .

What kind of baggage handlers are we?

- Often we are like the Corinthians. If not condoning sin and strife in our midst, we at the very least ignore it. Some would say we even bury our heads in the sand. But in the same way that in a relationship like a marriage, or even in raising children – ignoring baggage comes out in destructive ways. Ignoring sin or conflict or any kind of issue will not end well.
- The opposite of ignoring is equally destructive because being too harsh is just as bad. This really dates me, but I know many of you are old enough to remember the American Tourister luggage advertisements back in the ‘70s and ‘80s. Watch this. (Play the video)
- Too often we handle our baggage in the church like an 800 pound gorilla. The first person I ever baptized was an 86 year old on his deathbed. In the 1920s his father had been excommunicated from a BIC church

for the sin of owning a radio. The man, who's name was Al, spent the next 65 years angry and bitter at the church for the way his father had been treated. In October of 1986 he realized his need for the forgiveness of Jesus to be able to forgive the ones who had so abused his family and he was able to enter eternity two months later with his baggage cared for.

- We need to care with baggage the way Paul did. With firmness and an eye to restoration and reconciliation. Paul tells them to not even eat with the sinful person – not just because of fear of contamination, but because absence makes the heart grow fonder. The one sinning will hopefully realize what he is missing and want to come back into proper fellowship. Paul's approach is firm, but it's loving. The practice of shunning is where this practice has gone off the rails. In fact, it is what caused my friend Al to fester in bitterness for decades. It was not healthy baggage handling.
- But speaking of baggage . . .

What sin are we tolerating?

- The Corinthians were the subject of scandalous reports. Paul's language implies that the news coming across the sea to where he was in Athens smelled to high heaven. He was appalled that it was a sin that *even pagans do not tolerate*. That's bad!
- When the world looks at you and says "That's bad!" You need to examine what's going on. Now, mind you, it's not always alarming when those outside the church disapprove of what we believe, do, and say. As a matter of fact, on a regular basis they disagree with us. Our culture is moving further and further away from Biblical truth. BUT, we must continue to stand for Biblical truth. We cannot tolerate sin in our midst. It's calling to help fellow sinners out of sin and into holiness.
- Some of the arrogance that Paul dealt with in our passage last week, chapter 4, was the incredible arrogance of the Corinthians. It seems that perhaps they weren't just tolerating this man's sin . . .
 - A quick aside here – the man was obviously a Corinthian Christian. The woman he was sinning with was probably his late father's pagan widow. His father was likely a pagan too. This is why the sin of the man is dealt with and the woman is seemingly ignored.

Now back to the man's sin – it was probably being tolerated because they were touting a sick interpretation of Christian freedom. An "*I can do anything because I've covered by the saving blood of Christ.*" concept of freedom. Paul's response is, "Yes, God's grace is greater than all our sin. But we are to leave sin and not go back and wallow in it." To think we can is pure arrogance and wishful thinking. We are called to holiness not sin.

- Paul even tells the Corinthians that to allow this sin in their midst is as permeating as working yeast into dough – it doesn't just stay in one place – it moves throughout the entire batch. Sin is infectious.
- So let me ask again – what kinds of sin are we tolerating? An obvious one is the one Paul is dealing with here. Not incest – at least I'm hoping that's not an issue here – but it could be and has been an issue. But I'm talking about sexual sin. Premarital and extramarital sex. I'm talking about adultery – anytime we look at pornography we are sinning against our spouses or future spouses, or for sure, the Lord. We will spend more time on the struggle we have with sexual sin and what it takes for godly sexual relationships as move into Chapter 6 and 7 and that will not be until next month. Stay tuned.
- Another sin that we tolerate is the sin of gossip and course talk. What we tolerate as far as politics is concerned is sin. This sin has permeated the church. The anger and resentment stirred up by the presidential campaign and other political battles has oozed into our lives like an overflowing sewer – this has no place in the church. And what is the church? The church is us! And we need to be the sweetness of Jesus in the stench of these hateful times. Let's not be characterized by the candidate we support, but by the Lord we serve.
- Sin should grieve us the way it did Paul. And listen to Paul when he says to . . .

Deal with it together

- Paul tells the Corinthians in verse 3, my paraphrase – "*I'm not with you, but if I were, here is what I would do.*" And then he tells him to cut the guy loose to wallow in his sin and pray he comes to his senses. But in the next verses he says this, *So when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit*

may be saved on the day of the Lord. 1 Corinthians 5:4-5. Dealing with sin and dealing with church discipline is not a unilateral job. It's not something for the pastor to do on his own or the deacons. I've had people come to me with an order that sounds something like "*Go talk to so and so, they need the fear of the Lord put into them!*" like it's my job. And it is. To a certain extent. Like it's my job to talk about the kinds of sin we tolerate and even get pretty worked up about it. But it's every Christ Follower's commission to deal with sin together. And, that means we need to get straight ourselves, right? RIGHT!

Conclusion: It's like this Church, we are all baggage handlers. Together we need to know our baggage for what it is and then sort it out and deal with it together. Let it not be said of Ashland Brethren in Christ Church that we are tolerating anything that is grieving the heart of the one whose title figures, Christ, figures so prominently in our name. Christ means "Anointed One". And he's anointed us to do his baggage handling for the Kingdom. Amen.