

CARING ENOUGH TO CONFRONT

1 Corinthians 4:14–5:5

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Our Scripture today is from 1 Corinthians 4:14 and it will extend into the first five verses of chapter 5, a section that belongs together, even though it's split by a chapter division.

“I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me. For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church. Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a whip, or in love and with a gentle spirit? It 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. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? Even 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. When 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, hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 4:14–5:5).

Obviously, these paragraphs which have been read today are paragraphs which deal with the subject of confrontation. My theme this morning is “Caring Enough to Confront.” I borrowed the

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title from a little book entitled *Caring Enough to Confront*. All of us have people problems. All of us get into sticky situations from time to time which require us to have a specific response to a problem in an interpersonal relationship. The author of the book says we have about five ways of relating to these difficult moments in a personal relationship. Whether it's a husband-wife conflict, or a parent-child conflict or a family conflict or a work conflict. There are sometimes work-related kinds of confrontations that we're involved in. There are sometimes confrontations even in the body of Christ, sticky interpersonal relationships. How do we deal with people problems? We have five options open to us, patterns of response.

One: the response that says, "I'll get him or her!" It's the response that goes something like this: "I win and you lose because I'm right and you're wrong." The attitudes toward the conflict are very simple. Someone is right, totally right. And someone is wrong, completely wrong.

Sometimes this is the case. But this position—"I'll get them!"—is dogmatic, judgmental and often self-righteous. It's saying, "All the truth is on my side." Sometimes that is the case, but many times it is not.

Another way we have of dealing with these sticky interpersonal relationships is "I'll get out! This is so uncomfortable for me that I'll withdraw from it!" This view holds that conflicts are hopeless. That people cannot be changed. And since conflicts are hopeless, therefore, we ought to either overlook the problem or withdraw from the problem. Conflict is to be avoided at all costs, so bail out. Don't get involved in a disagreement or in trying to change anyone's way of relating. Just bail out. What happens if a person does that consistently in their relationships is that they then become unable to successfully work through any problems at all, because every time the going gets tough, rather than staying with a situation to see it through to some kind of conclusion, the tendency is to immediately flee and go somewhere else, where the grass is

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greener. The grass is always greener on the other side, but we find out when we get there, it's turned brown.

Another approach is, "I'll give in." This is the approach that says "I'll yield to be nice, since I need your friendship or I need this relationship." This view also holds that differences are disastrous. But instead of getting out of the relationship, this view simply says that we don't want to deal with any problem between us out in the open. It's better to be nice, to submit, to be passive, if necessary, to be a doormat. There are times indeed when this might be appropriate. But the problem with this point of view is that the more outwardly you become generous and submissive, the more inwardly you can become wound up and tight, so that two things are going in the reverse direction. Exteriorly, you're trying to put up a front. And interiorly, you're getting tighter and tighter and angrier and angrier with the attitude of "I'll give in."

Another way of responding to confrontation is "I'll meet you halfway." "You compromise a little bit and I'll compromise a little bit and we'll meet in the center." This can be good if it's an area that can be compromised without sacrificing a principle. But sometimes, our ways of relating to a problem does not involve compromise as a successful approach

A fifth pattern, and one which we perhaps shrink from quite a bit, is a pattern certainly used here in the Corinthian letter, "I care enough about you to confront you. I love you enough that I will speak to you the truth in love." This is what I heard as a child when I was being disciplined.

"Son, I am spanking you because I love you!" Fine way you have of showing love! Take your love and show it to somebody else! But now that I am a parent, I understand what my parents meant when they said they loved me when they disciplined me. It is because of love that we care to confront and that we dare to confront.

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Conflict is a normal part of life. We can handle it by saying I care enough about you that I will confront you with it.

I recognize that of the five options I've given, at certain times one option may be preferable to another. Jesus appears Himself free to use any number of the options. For example, He was free to use the "I win, you lose," option when He kicked the moneychangers out of the temple. He was right and they were wrong. He was very direct about it.

He also, on occasion, adopted the "I'll get out," strategy. At Nazareth, when they did not believe in Him and wanted to stone Him, He left the place and He did get out.

He was willing to give in. In His interrogation and His trial, He submitted. He was willing to become a doormat to His oppressors.

He was willing to go halfway on the question of taxes.

But His continual style seems to be more in the nature of confronting in love. An expression and example of that is the woman who was involved in adultery. He says to her, with warm and understandable care, "Neither do I condemn you." But He says to her, with clear and unmistakable confrontation, "Go, and sin no more" (John 8:11). When we find Paul here, in 1 Corinthians 4 and 5, we have him dealing on the fifth level—the "I care enough about you, I care enough about the church of Jesus Christ, to confront a problem. I will not run from it. I will not hide in the sand about it. I will not ignore it, hoping it will go away. But it's gotten to the point in which it must be dealt with." I think when you look at Corinthians, you realize that Paul has kind of been heading up to the serious situation in chapter 5. Everything, to this point in the letter, has built very diplomatically toward that. He has been addressing them in love. Saying, "You've got all these divisions among you. That not ought to be so. You're proud about all your divisions, but how can you be so puffed up? How can you be so arrogant when this serious problem is

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occurring right in your own congregation? You have not dealt with the situation of the man who has an incestuous relationship in the church, you are tolerating that and saying that's a good thing."

How do we confront in love? First Corinthians 4:14–20 gives us a marvelous example, a pattern for how we can confront in love, when we disagree on a matter and feel that confrontation is the style that the Lord wants us to take.

I. Verses 14 and 15 relate to us that, when confronting in love, we must convey to the person we are confronting a great sense of worth and warmth.

Paul says to these people, "I'm not writing this to shame you but to warn you. My dear children." He's not writing to put them down. He's not calling them "rotten reprobates." But, "my dear children." He's not tearing apart their self-esteem. He is also endearing himself to them by reminding them that He is their father.

It's so important that, when we give correction, it is from a standpoint of warmth and esteem.

Even when correcting children. It is not a matter of hauling off and hitting the kid when the child does something wrong, and saying, "You dumb kid! Do better." That only will breed a response that, if not dealt with, only leads to anger and hatred. It's a way of provoking children to wrath.

Part of confrontation—any confrontation—that we engage in is assuring the group or the person confronted, at the start, that there is love and esteem. The correction is being given not to tear the person down, not to win an argument, but to really salvage a relationship and restore fellowship and result in healing. That's the whole purpose of the confrontation. When any discipline is given that is not given, first of all, with a spirit of love and warmth and tenderness, it only breeds the exact opposite of what would be a proper result.

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I think, for example, of the time of my years in school. I was only disciplined by a teacher one time. It was in the sixth grade. I was sitting in class one day and the teacher had given specific orders that there was to be no talking in class. The guy next to me was talking, trying to get my attention. I finally turned to him and said, “The teacher said, ‘don’t talk.’” The teacher, at that point, saw me talking. Didn’t know what I was saying, and she flicked my ear. I was mortified that I had been corrected by the teacher and I was angry with her because she hadn’t taken the time to understand what had really happened. She had simply corrected without expressing warmth and love, instead of trying to find out what was going on.

There is such a thing as simply getting teed-off. That’s not a way to confront. Just giving someone a piece of your mind. If you give a piece of your mind to someone, you will not get the whole of it back, for a piece of it will have been given away.

When we find that we have tried to confront without expressing warmth and love, the Holy Spirit is probably saying to us, “Double back and come back and express that love and warmth.”

My first year of teaching in college, I was rather insecure. The basic reason was that I was only one day ahead of the students in terms of the material I knew. Even though I had all the years of schooling in back of me, in terms of practical expression, I was about twenty-four hours ahead. I had a rather large class, I think there were around a hundred and fifty students. It was seven thirty in the morning. It was tough getting people’s attention at times. I remember one day in class I was frustrated with a couple of kids who had not come to school to get an education. It was kind of trying my soul to the limits. I had made some remark of “I’d appreciate there not being any distractions in class,” because it hindered me from keeping my thoughts on my lecture and the other students as well. The talking went on. Finally, I got really ticked off and called them out by name and said, “Would you stand up and get out of this class. You don’t want an

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education, anyway. So just pick up your books and leave.” Everybody got real quiet. I thought, “Who gives you the right to humiliate people like that just because you’re lecturing in class?” I had expressed no warmth or love toward them at all. They were in my way, get out! The Lord dealt with me, “You make things right with them and the class.” That’s a lesson I learned, and I still think I’m learning it.

But I’m saying to you, when you confront on an interpersonal level and you do not express care and warmth and love, your confrontation is no good at all. It will not work. It will not produce any desired result.

Paul does this with the Corinthians, real warmth and love. “I love you, you’re my dear children in the faith, I am your father, I’ve not written to shame you, but to warn you.”

II. The second kind of way of confronting in love that Paul gives to us is demonstrating the change we seek through our own behavior.

In verses 16 and 17, Paul says, “I urge you to imitate me.” And further, “Timothy is going to come to remind you of my way of life in Christ, the way of life which I teach in every church, every place.” In other words, if you want a person to change and you perceive in your spirit that what they’re doing is clearly wrong, and you know from the Lord that it’s wrong and you’re seeking a change, then the best way to bring about that change, after assuring them of warmth and love, is to be able to look in your own life and see whether or not in your own life you’re modeling the change that you want from the other person.

This has to do with raising children, doesn’t it? It’s not asking kids to be something that we’re not. Teenagers, how about modeling in confrontation with your parents the behavior that you would like them to have toward you? Is it a problem with you that you’re feeling your parents

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don't trust you enough? Then, rather than complaining about that, set out to establish that you are trustworthy and dependable.

A seminary student went to Howard Hendricks one time at Dallas Theological Seminary (Howard Hendricks is a real specialist in child and man and wife relationships). He was a single student and he said to Hendricks that he had made out a list of all the qualities he wanted in a wife. He wanted to know if Dr. Hendricks would look over the list for him. Dr. Hendricks said that sure, he'd look over the list. The student handed him a four-page single-spaced list of all the qualifications he wanted in a wife. Hendricks gave it back to him later and said, "The list is fine but I'll tell you what you're going to have to do before you ever get a girl like this. You have to look at your own life and make out a list of qualifications that you have that are as long. 'People will follow, not what you say, but what you do,' is the old truism."

III. Verses 19 and 20 say, as a way of confronting in love, that we also can speak the truth in love.

Paul was indicating that there are a lot of puffed up people in Corinth. He does not hesitate to call a shot a shot, a spade a spade. He is saying there are arrogant people at Corinth—the word literally is "puffed up ones"—who are walking around, priding themselves on their knowledge, but have not really begun the most simple, elemental knowledge of the lifestyle of Christ. Paul is not afraid to call reality reality. But he speaks the truth in love. He does not gloss over what's wrong.

I once worked with a man, in my student days, in a position that required a lot of bodily labor. This man had great body odor. People were afraid to tell him, "People don't like to come near you." And I didn't want to do that. I didn't want to hurt his feelings. He was a great guy, and the last thing in the world I wanted to do, or anybody wanted to do, was hurt his feelings. So nobody

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would tell him. The result was that people stayed away, about a 15-foot circle, and out from there. I thought nobody loved him enough to tell him the truth. I didn't love him enough to tell him the truth.

The part of speaking the truth in love is not being reticent of coming in on sensitive situations. We know we have the mind of the Lord, and we have the proper spirit in our hearts, of coming into a situation and saying, "This is what needs to be done."

IV. A fourth thing Paul does in confrontation is he preserves liberty of choice (verse 21).

"What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a whip or in love and a gentle spirit." You Corinthians have time to get this right before I come. How would you prefer that I come? He lets them have freedom to say to him, "We agree with you Paul. We're going to do what is right."

Preserving liberty. The Corinthians are asked to make their own decision with the consequences being spelled out.

Paul's confrontations with the Corinthians come because they have not confronted an immoral member in their midst. In fact, the Corinthians themselves had written Paul a letter with a series of questions. The questions begin in chapter 7 and extend on through Corinthians. But, interestingly enough, they had not asked him any questions about how to deal with this situation, which meant, in a sense, that they were off into theological areas and other areas of practical concern, but weren't dealing with the real problem area in their midst, and were simply not caring enough to confront it.

He now calls the whole church to confront a situation that has been neglected. Verses 1–5 bring us to another topic: confronting open sin in the church body. I believe deeply that the Scripture substantiates, supports, this position. That the circle of confession should be limited to the circle of sin. If I have, for example, sinned against God, then the circle of my confession should be

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limited to myself and God. If I have sinned against another person, then the circle of my confession should be limited to the person or persons against whom I have sinned. If my sin becomes a matter of public knowledge known to all and has not been dealt with, then my confession should go out to that circle. It is inappropriate and, in fact, embarrassing. I've seen, in a congregation, someone standing up in a meeting and saying, "I confess...such and such." And it was a very private matter. It just wasn't appropriate. That was the kind of thing that could have been dealt with in a private setting. It didn't need to come to the whole body. It just didn't help the situation at all. If the whole congregation, everybody, is aware of it, then it must be pursued and dealt with.

In 1 and 2 Corinthians, one of the things you'll find out, as you keep going in the Corinthian letter, is how much like California Corinth was. One of the real problems of their society was that they lived in a sex-saturated society, and we are living in the same kind of society. Someone has, in fact, suggested that 1 and 2 Corinthians be renamed 1 and 2 Californians. But in the Corinthian church, there is a problem of incest. A man had his father's wife. That is all we're told. We're not given any details. We don't know if his father was still living. The situation is well known among the Corinthians, both in the church and in the world. So we're spared the details. But what is abhorrent is that, in a city with such loose morals as Corinth—which had a far more active prostitution level than here, prostitution was something very open and allowable under the law—there could be a sin so shocking that even the pagans would say, "We at least don't do that!" It was happening in the church, and the church was unperturbed by it.

So how are open sins confronted in a church body? Verses 1 and 2 tell us there must be a right attitude. The wrong attitude of the Corinthians was being puffed up, being arrogant or proud. Puffed up with knowledge. Paul means that there were some in the Corinthian church that were

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puffed up with the idea of radical grace, which is to say, “Sin all you like”—in order to give God the glory and the honor that salvation is of grace—“so, if you want to know God’s grace, then sin some more.” The more you sin, the more God has the chance to display His grace. There may be people like that in this congregation. There are people like that in the church world today. The more probable viewpoint is that there were some in the church, many in the church, most of the church, that held that what a man does in his own home was his own business and the church didn’t mess with it. He comes to church, doesn’t he? He pays his tithes, doesn’t he? He agrees with the fundamentals of the faith, doesn’t he? So why bother the guy? He may have a meaningful relationship going. I don’t think we ought to get involved with the man’s business in his own home. So we’ll let it go. He comes here, he’s a card-carrying member. Every once in a while, he prays in another language, maybe gives an interpretation. He’s a good brother. He shows up at the love feast. He’s kind of a nice guy. Interpersonal relationships are sticky, and if we start messing with this guy’s family life, we’re going to open a can of worms. So let’s let it go. Maybe the brother will go to another church! Let’s not get involved.

The church must be careful. Two attitudes are forbidden the church. One is the attitude of permissiveness that simply says, “What a man or woman does is their own affair and not the business of the church.” So, therefore, anything goes. That’s one side.

The other side is Pharisaism, which looks around for who’s doing wrong, so we can find and expose it. It’s a self-righteous kind of a complex.

The proper response that should be held toward sin, that affects the body, is grief—surprisingly. Not anger. Not, “How dare you do a thing like this!” Not that kind of thing. But grief. Paul says, in verse 2 “Shouldn’t you rather have been filled with grief?” Grief. It’s a word here that’s so strong. The word “grief” here is actually used elsewhere in the New Testament of the emotion

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that is expressed at the time of death—a heaving from the inside of sorrow over what has happened. And indeed, anyone who on a practical level has seen what sin does to individuals, if they're really walking in the Spirit of Christ, cannot help but feel as Christ and grieve. It is when we lose our sensitivity to the ravages of sin on the human personality that we begin to be unlike Christ.

Someone has said that our one security against sin lies in our being shocked at it. And the Corinthians had ceased to be shocked at sin. It's like putting a frog in a pan of water and gradually heating it up. By the time it gets so hot, it has heated so gradually that the frog can't jump out. When we cease to take a serious view of sin, we're in a serious and perilous condition. And the Corinthian church had not grieved in this matter. Rather, they were puffed up, patting themselves on the back, saying what a great church they were, and not grieving.

Paul says, in Galatians 6:1, “Brothers if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Watch yourself for you may be tempted.” With that proper emotional response with dealing with sin in the body there must be right action (verses 3–5).

Actually, these verses are indicating the last in a three-step stage that the Lord prescribes for sin when it appears in Christian community. The first two steps are given in Matthew 18. That when a brother has sinned against you or when they wrong a brother or sister, the first step is to go to that person on an individual basis, with a spirit of warmth and love and directness, confronting in love, saying, “My brother or sister, I have this upon my heart to share with you. Not coming with a spirit of judgment, but coming with a spirit of entreaty. Maybe the facts are wrong. Maybe it's just simply gossip that you heard. Or maybe it's something that you don't have direct knowledge of, but it's a matter which the Lord is saying on an individual level to deal with.”

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I know, by my own personal knowledge and experience in this church, that this happens to a considerable degree. I'm glad that in this church we have been able to address most matters on a one on one level, and have not ever had to use level number three. Some matters have come to level number two. I think that if we talk seriously about really living for the Lord and maintaining integrity in the body of Christ, then one of the things that we ought to be concerned about in the body of Christ is caring about one another deeply enough to confront each other in love. It's the last thing in the world I want to do. I hate it with a passion. I will walk away from a conflict, if I can. Because my nature is not that way. But the Lord has been teaching me, in recent months, that part of the vocation He's called me to, as pastor of this church, is not to run from sticky situations and problems and conflicts, but to stand in the gap. Not with any feelings of self-righteousness, but to recognize we are people and we deal with practical problems and, from time to time, there are great failures and sins that occur in our lives. We need to know, at that point, that there's a friend and somebody who loves us enough to pray with us and hear our confession, or to confront us—and we see God do a work of healing. I think the body is healthy when they take this admonition of Matthew 18 seriously and confront one another. When you know something is wrong in a brother or sister, don't go to someone else and say, "Do you know what's going on in their life?" Go to that person directly. Don't go through a third party. There is a tremendous healing power that comes in our relationships as we literally live out what the Lord has told us to do.

Sometimes a matter will not be solved on a one-on-one level, and it will need to be dealt with on a small group level, another person or persons will be called in as witnesses. And again, to effect a change.

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There is an ultimate action noted in Matthew 18, where if after an individual and small group contact the person and there has not been repentance, then if the person refuses to repent, bring the matter the whole church, the whole body of people. And if that person refuses to repent, let him be to you a sinner or a tax collector, that is, a person you have no dealings with. That's the point at which the Corinthian church has arrived here in 1 Corinthian 5:1–5. Here is a situation so aggravated that it's not solvable on the one-on-one bases, and no longer on the small group level. It has come to the whole church and the whole church must deal with it. Therefore, in that situation, Paul has very specific actions prescribed. "When 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, hand this man over to Satan so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and the spirit saved on the day of the Lord." Hand this man over to Satan. The ultimate action is to treat the person as a non-Christian. To say to that person, "There has been no evidence of Christ in your life. Therefore, we must put you out from us as a person who does not belong to Christ. We will, therefore, not break bread with you. We will not admit you." It's not so much talking about physical expulsion, but spiritual expulsion: "You cannot participate. You do not belong. You do not act or behave or respond like a Christian. You are delivered over to Satan."

What is this mysterious "handing over to Satan for destruction of the flesh," destruction of the sinful nature? What does that involve? Some people have thought that this was a formula that was used in excommunication in the apostolic church. It may very well have been. Some have considered it to be that the church would gather together and pray and would say, "Lord, remove all Your protection over this person's body. Let illness ravage their body so that, out of physical suffering and illness, they may come to their senses. Nothing else has worked." Maybe allowing them to come under Satan's sway of sickness and premature death will bring this person to a

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place of responsiveness. That may possibly be it, although the language of the text would seem to rule that out. Paul does not say, “Deliver this person for the destruction of his *soma*,” which would be the word, if he meant physical illness. But deliver for the destruction of the flesh.

“Flesh,” in Scripture, most often means the human nature that stands apart from God. The whole instinctive way of relating to life that’s human rather than godly. The way of the flesh.

What Paul appears to be saying here is, “Hand this man over. Put him back in the relationships from which he came. The realm where Satan dominated, rather than Christ. Let him live in that terrible world of alienation from God, where the flesh instincts of life take over rather than the spirit instincts.” Maybe, then, in that atmosphere, he’ll become so disillusioned, once having a taste of that life, all his desires will be so totally unfulfilled on the flesh level, that the right purpose will eventuate that his spirit will be saved on the day of the Lord, the day of Christ. So in discipline, ultimately, there comes out a right purpose. In this condition of abandonment by the body of Christ, the judged person is to begin to sense the utter futility of the flesh-dominated life, and thereby repent, having his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.

All discipline, from a Christian sense, struggles toward the theme of reconciliation and redemption. Christian discipline, as I understand it, is not punitive. It’s not saying, “You’ve done crime, therefore, be sentenced and serve out your term.” But all discipline is redemptive. It’s restorative. Even the action of putting someone out of the fellowship of grace, outside of the body and into the dominion of Satan, is an act that is meant, as a last resort, to restore that person to fellowship. Kindness hasn’t worked. Love hasn’t worked. A one-on-one relationship hasn’t worked. So the very last result is repudiating that person as a Christian. Saying, “We cannot bear witness that you are a believer. You are back under the control of Satan.” Saying that publicly

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and saying that meaningfully, saying it concretely may then act as a stimulus to bring that person to faith and restoration.

You say, “This sounds rather harsh.” Either we take the faith seriously or we don’t. The Lord cares enough about us that He wants to maintain order in our lives and He certainly wants order in His church, because the church—us—has been called collectively to be a witness of God in the world. How can we be a witness collectively if we do not maintain a spirit of discipline and striving to be like Christ in our midst? Not that we’re bunch of prigs walking around, in a self-righteous sense, with a magnifying glass saying, “What’s wrong with you?” That would defeat the whole purpose of Christ and the rule of love. But, from time to time, there is what I might call “satanic activity” in the body of Christ. Activity which would plant a person, or even a group of persons, in some kind of lifestyle or doctrine which is unacceptable to Jesus Christ and, therefore, unacceptable to His body. The body will either cave in to that kind of spirit and that kind of influence and say, “They’re good people and we don’t want to make a fuss.” Or it will, in the name of Christ, be strong and resist the one who is evil.

All I can say is that I thank the Lord that we have not had to ever act on this dramatic level in this church. I would not be surprised if someday we didn’t.

Satan has three ways of attacking the church. One way is to attempt to pick off the leadership in discouragement, depression, isolation, any way possible, to pick off and isolate the leadership. This is illustrated by the Book of Acts. Peter’s thrown in jail after preaching sermons where five thousand people believed. Where is God? What doesn’t He come through? That would be the temptation.

If that doesn’t work, then Satan is next going to try division in the body. Sowing discord between brothers and sisters.

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If that doesn't work, then Satan will attempt outright persecution or, in some cases, seduction of the whole group of people.

I know that the Lord is really doing something in this church fellowship and that the Lord is preparing to do some things, because I, in the last few weeks, have felt so much under the gun on a personal level. Now I'm beginning to come through the night of that kind of attack, and so I'm looking around at what's next. I know the scriptural pattern. I say, "If we throw a lot of light on where Satan is going to work, he doesn't have a chance to work at all." It's great to be able to look at the Scriptures and see that God loves us enough to confront us. He called us. He told us something we really didn't enjoy hearing: "You're not ready to meet Me on your own effort." He said, "Unless you come to the cross and accept My life for yours, you'll never have a relationship with Me." But He did confront us in love and He won us through His love and He keeps us through His love. We praise the Lord for that.

Closing Prayer

How sad it is, Lord, to bear witness to individuals who once knew You and walked with You and who, through personal choices, slipped away from You. Not even necessarily through any great moral wrong such as here in Corinth. But slip away, in a spirit of apathy, because the cares of the world have grown very strong. Lord, I pray for each one of us, that You'd help us be more sensitive to ourselves in the areas where we let ourselves go, in the areas that would be unacceptable to You and that You would help us develop more a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood in our church family. So that, when one of our brothers or sisters are hurting and begin to drop away from You, there would be a greater aliveness in us to what is happening. A greater concern, a greater sense of responsibility, both in prayer and in caring enough to really love and establish fellowship. Lord, we are Your people, the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.

CARING ENOUGH TO CONFRONT

1 Corinthians 4:14–5:5

We do pray that Your Spirit would possess and indwell this church. Our lives, personally. And that, to a greater degree, day by day, Your character, the character of Jesus Christ express itself in our lifestyle. How we act and how we talk. There are those, Lord, in this congregation, who are facing matters in their own personal life that involve direct confrontation in love with someone. They've been struggling to get a handle on it, to know how to approach it. Your Word today will have special meaning for them. For others, it will simply be the kind of word stored up to be used at a later day. But for others, if you will, life and death are real. I pray that now, as they go to face the challenge which You have called them to face, that they will go with the conviction that Your Spirit is with them. Not a spirit of timidity and fear, but a spirit of love and boldness and peace. That You will work everything out for Your honor and Your glory and Your name to be praised. Thank You, Lord, for pruning us from time to time, so that we might bear greater fruit for You. In Jesus' name. Amen.