

## **Outline**

This sermon examines what it means to be outside of the fellowship of the church, by which we do not mean the building, but the people of God.

When people are saved, God the Father delivers them from Satan's dominion of darkness and places them in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus (Colossians 1:13).

When people commit grievous sin and refuse to repent, believers must place them outside -- outside where Satan has the power to destroy their flesh (1 Corinthians 5:5).

The purpose is to break them so they will repent and return to the place of safety and protection -- inside the fellowship of the church, and this is exactly what happened to this individual (2 Corinthians 2:6-11).

When this present crisis is over, there will likely be many people who do not return to the assemblies where they once worshipped. But to stay away is to place oneself outside the ark, in the place of extreme danger.

Are you suffering today? Not all suffering is due to sin, but some suffering clearly is because "whom the Lord loves, he chastens" (Hebrews 12:5-8).

Whenever we are in difficulty, we should begin by asking our Father why things are happening as they are.

## **The Full Message**

"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! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. 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. 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." (1 Corinthians 5:1-5)

I want to reflect with you a bit about this passage of Scripture. It's a striking passage of Scripture. As we think about the importance of the church, I want to underscore a couple of things that are here. People mock the idea that you can worship God as we're gathered together electronically, and I want to say if your heart is in the worship, you are together with all the believers who are worshiping together at this time whether you are under one roof or not.

What evidence do I have for that? Well, look at the passage we just read, 1 Corinthians 5:3. He says in verse 3, and Paul is writing, he's not physically present with them but he says to them, "For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit," absent in body, present in spirit, and he reiterates it in the next verse, he says in verse 4, "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit." Think about it for a moment. If you are joining together with me today in the worship of God, you and I are together, our spirits are together. There is no far and near. It doesn't make any difference whether we're under one roof or not, our spirits are together. Indeed, whenever the church on earth worships and when is that? When two or three gather together in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, there he is in their midst. And so when we gather to worship here on earth, even though our bodies may be distant from each other as Paul's was from the churches in Corinth, he was present with them. I'm present with you. You're present with me. We're present with the Lord. That is a beautiful truth.

Now I'm not in any way minimizing the beauty of coming together, hopefully at the end of this month, under one roof and worshipping the Lord according to the precepts of his word. I look forward to that. (There is nothing like looking in your faces instead of looking in my face and occasionally looking up at Sandy, though I love to look at Sandy.) But it's hard for me to preach to a camera without a congregation.

I like to have your faces in front of me because I like to read what's going on when you're listening. That's how I know without ever looking directly in your eyes, I can tell whether people have gotten the point or not and if I perceive that people have not gotten the point, then I'm going to give the point again in a slightly different way. So I do look forward to being there physically with you, that is a great joyful thing that will give me great liberty in preaching, but I have to stress here and now this Lord's day, May 17, the truth is that we are together because we may be absent physically but we are together in spirit just as St. Paul said.

Now there's something else here and this is the crux of the matter, the crux of the matter is that outside of the church is a place of terrible danger, outside of the church is a place of terrible danger. What do I mean by the church? I'm not referring to the building in which the church meets. If you look at the New Testament carefully, you discover that the church of the first century did not have buildings of their own. People gathered together in people's homes. You know, that solves a lot of problems.

Today, if a church owns property, it is *de facto* a corporation. Even if it is not *de jure* a corporation, it is *de facto* a corporation. The point I'm making is this: the early church, the ancient church did not have to worry about such things as that because people gathered in each other's homes. Sometimes it was a large gathering. Sometimes it would be a group of many congregations in one city going outside of the city and worshiping the Lord together in the hills, but the point is that the church must never be confused with the building. The building is a relatively modern phenomenon. Well, I say that relatively modern, once Constantine made Christianity legal in the 4th century and then made it the established religion of the Roman Empire, then people had buildings that they called churches but the church of the New Testament is what? It's the people of God.

So, when I say to be outside the church is to be in a dangerous place, I'm referring to no longer being part of a local assembly of God's people. Why do we call it a dangerous place? Well, we're going to look at verse 5 in some depth in a moment where he speaks about putting the person out of the church, turning the person over to Satan but along those lines I want to direct your attention to the first chapter of Colossians for a moment, Colossians 1 which is a beautiful if we analyze it, a beautiful hymn about the Lord Jesus Christ. Colossians 1 and listen to these words in the middle of this beautiful hymn that is contained within Paul's first letter to the church at Colossae and I'm giving reference here to verse 13. Colossians 1:13, in many ways the high point of this hymn.

"He [that is, God the Father] has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins."

What is St. Paul saying to the Christians at Colossae in this beautiful, beautiful hymn that he's written? What he's saying to them is this: salvation

means that we have been taken out of one kingdom and put into another kingdom. We have been delivered from the power of darkness. The power of darkness. This world that we live in is under the control and authority of wicked evil spirits. Now they don't have absolute authority, of course. The Bible plainly teaches that Satan and all the evil principalities and powers are underneath the control of an absolutely sovereign God and that Satan and the principalities and powers cannot do anything without God's sovereign decree. But notwithstanding that great truth, there is the reality that the world in which we live is a world where the majority of people, including political leaders, including religious leaders, including economic leaders, the majority of the world's people are in the kingdom of Satan, the kingdom of darkness, and we're told in Colossians 1:13 that with salvation God the Father delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of his love.

What is he saying? He's saying that when a person becomes a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, that person is lifted up out of one kingdom and placed in another kingdom. In other words, until a person has been born again, that person is under the domain and control and authority of Satan who is the prince of the power of the air. That person is subject to all of those things and that is not a good thing to be subject to, that is not a good kingdom of which to be part. It is a place of danger and torment because you need to understand something, Satan hates you and he has a terrible plan for your life, kind of a parody on Bill Bright's *Four Spiritual Laws*. Satan hates you and he has a terrible plan for your life. What Job never understood in all of his suffering that's recorded in those 42 chapters, he never understood the prologue and the epilogue and that is that Satan under the authority of a sovereign God, Satan delighted in tormenting and torturing Job. So all of the misery of this world is due to the sin of our first parents and it is amplified and exaggerated and intensified by the prince of the power of the air and those evil spirits that are in league with him. So think of it again in Colossians 1:13. It means that we have been lifted up out of Satan's domain and control and put down in another domain and that is the domain of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

So now we go back to 1 Corinthians 5 and verse 5. 1 Corinthians 5:5. Think about it now. He has stressed to them that though he is absent from them physically, he is present with them with his Spirit and together with them, he is telling them by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ himself to deliver in verse 5 such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that his spirit may

be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Now what does this involve? This is involving a man who was living in an adulterous relationship with his stepmother. A man was living in an adulterous relationship with his stepmother and St. Paul says that such a thing was not even tolerated among the pagans.

Now, when you out-pagan the pagans, you've really done something. So this man is living in a notorious, incestuous, wicked, sexual relationship with his stepmother and then St. Paul takes the Corinthians to task and he says, "What's wrong with you? You're puffed up, you're proud, you're patting yourselves on the back and saying, 'We're wonderful. We're a great church. We're so tolerant and loving of everyone.'" And what St. Paul is saying to the church in Corinth is this, "It isn't tolerance that you're practicing, it's intolerance. You are harming the soul of this man. You are, in effect, sending him to hell thinking that all is well, all is at peace." When the church mutes her voice and fails to say that certain things that the Bible says are sin are sin, the church isn't being kind and gentle and tolerant, the church is being hateful and despising those who are in great need of the Gospel, the Gospel of grace. Listen to this passage of Scripture. Paul doesn't desire to see this man hurt, Paul desires to see this man set free, and we'll see in a few minutes exactly that's the case, that this man was set free by this action of the church.

Now, notice what he says: deliver him to Satan for the destruction of his flesh. What does that mean? It means that when the body of believers puts a person out of the church, I'm not talking about somebody escorting somebody to the doors of the building, I'm talking about they declare that person is no longer a part of a gathering of believers, that person is put out. What happens when that person is put out of the local fellowship of believers, what happens to that person? That person goes from the domain of Christ back to the domain of Satan. That's what it is. So this man is to be put out of the fellowship because they were to be hateful and intolerant? No, but because they loved the man and they wanted to see him set free. So what St. Paul is saying to the church in Corinth is, "Remove him from the kingdom of Jesus and put him back into the kingdom of Satan."

Now you're going to say to me, "Do you mean the church has that kind of power?" And I'm going to tell you, "Yes, the church does have that kind of power."

"Are you kidding me? Do you mean to say that the church, the gathered people of God have the authority to put someone out of the kingdom of Jesus and put that person in the domain and kingdom of Satan?"

That's what the text says. He's saying, "Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh." Kick him out of the boat, in effect. If you can think of Noah's ark, the people, the eight people on that ark were saved and protected because they were in the place of safety, but to have left that place of safety was to drown with the world. When this man is put out of the fellowship of the local church and this is a gathering of the believers as a whole, this isn't somebody at the top saying, "I don't like this man. Let's get him out of here." This is the believers as a whole agreeing together with St. Paul to deliver this person to Satan. Why? For the destruction of the flesh. What does that mean? It means that once that man is kicked out of the boat, once that man is outside of the kingdom of Christ and back in the domain of Satan, he is in a place where he is going to suffer terribly.

"Do you mean to tell me, Bob, that in the 21st century people can be physically afflicted because of the power of Satan over them?" And the answer to that is, "Yes, because the Bible says so."

And so this man was put out of the boat, this man was put out of the fellowship of the church, not a physical building but dis-fellowshipped, excommunicated, no longer part of the communion of the church, and he was done that to so that his flesh would be destroyed, so that his spirit would be saved on the day of Jesus Christ.

Now if we turn over to 2 Corinthians, we see how true this is and how this worked out. 2 Corinthians 2 is the sequel to 1 Corinthians here and listen to what he says there. In 2 Corinthians 2, he says in verse 6, 2 Corinthians 2:6, "This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man." So what's happened? The man has been, because God Almighty has given authority to the local church to wield church discipline against those who choose not to repent of their sins, and in wielding that discipline, and that man is excommunicated, that is, he is no longer in the communion of the church, dis-fellowshipped, no longer in the fellowship of the church, he's outside the boat, he's now in a place where Satan can tear him from limb-to-limb and revel in it and enjoy it.

Never forget that Satan and the demons of hell are terribly sadistic. They love to inflict pain on people. Are you in pain now? Pray to God and ask his help and deliverance because there's healing, including physical healing, in the suffering and passion of the Lord Jesus Christ. God will hear your prayer if you repent.

It's interesting that in the book of James when James tells people if they're sick and afflicted, let them call for the elders of the church and let the elders anoint that person with oil in the name of the Lord and the prayer of faith will heal the sick, and if he's committed sins, they will be forgiven him wherefore confess your sins one to another in order that you would be healed. I'm not saying that every disease, every financial trouble, every trouble in a relationship is due to an individual's human sin, I'm simply saying that it is often the case that when we are suffering we need first to ask God for wisdom. "Why is this happening to me?" This isn't the kind of whiny thing that say, "This shouldn't be happening to me," it's a humble thing that says, "Lord, please show me what You're wanting to show me during this time through this affliction." Because God has promised to send healing, sometimes that healing is relief from all human suffering as the Lord takes us home to be with him, but we should always ask God first when we're in pain, when we're in suffering, "Lord, are You saying something to me?" Because, again, the prayer of faith will heal the sick and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.

So again in 2 Corinthians 2 we talk about a punishment here, verse 6, "This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man." What is he saying? He's saying that this man that was put out of the ark, this man that was dis-fellowshipped, excommunicated, turned over to the power of Satan, was removed from the kingdom of the Lord Jesus and put into the kingdom of darkness again. This man has learned his lesson. The pain and suffering this man has gone through have broken him to the point that he is remorseful and repentant. He sees his sin. He acknowledges it and this is what he says, "so that," verse 7, "on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow." What's he saying? He's saying this and never forget it, he's saying that a moment, the moment anyone who has been disciplined by the church comes and says, "I was wrong. You were right. Please forgive me. Please welcome me back." The church should then and there without delay receive that person back in.

Let me add a parenthesis, I'm not talking about a church leader. There needs to be a time of testing in the case of a church leader who falls into grievous sin.

I'm talking about ordinary people in the church. I don't care what you've done, name whatever sin you want to name. The only reason for church discipline is the refusal to repent. Let me say it again: the only reason for church discipline, we're talking about for regular people in the local church, the only reason is that person's refusal to repent, and you can follow Matthew 18 and the Lord Jesus' instructions in that regard. But the moment the person says, "I'm sorry. I've sinned. Please receive me back." At that moment, then and there without delay that person should be received.

Why? He says in verse 7 again, you need to forgive and comfort him, "lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow." In other words, the church is here to comfort people who mourn, the church is here to welcome people who weep, the church is here to be gracious and tenderhearted and forgiving and welcoming to everyone on the basis of repentance and faith, and when that man professes to repent and believe, welcome him back. Put your arms around him, in this modern time, be sure that you're socially distancing. Anyhow, put your arms around him, welcome him, love him, accept him back.

Why? He says in verse 8, "Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him. For to this end," verse 9, "I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things." Now verse 10, "Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ."

Think about it again, when we gather together, even if we're not physically together, we're in the presence of Christ and we act in Christ's name, we act with Christ's authority and when we do, we both shut the doors for those who refuse to repent of their sins and we open the doors wide to everyone, whomever that person may be, regardless of what that person may have done, to welcome that person into the fold of the church once again.

Now, listen to what he says, verse 11, "lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices." Do you see something here that's rather profound? Church discipline is designed, not so that we can go around



like Sister Bertha Better Than You in that old Ray Stevens' song, not so that we can pat ourselves on the back and say, "Oh, we're just such holy people."

No, it's designed to be a fellowship of mutual love and affection. Listen, I preached a sermon decades ago in which I said the church should be called Sinners Anonymous because the church is for people who struggle with sin and fail and fall into sin, but it's not for people who say, "It's none of your business. I'm going to continue doing what I want to do because I want to do it and you don't have any right to tell me not to do it." What would Paul say to that man who was living in incest with his father's wife? It is the business of the church and therefore if you refuse to repent, we are escorting you out of the church where you will then go into the domain of Satan. Well, the man did and the man experienced it and so then the man comes back and Paul says, "Welcome him."

Now think about this for a moment. We're living in a very strange time because most people have gotten in the habit of watching church on television, listening to church on the radio or on a broadcast, and most people do not have the privilege that we once had of gathering together in a group. So what do I see on the horizon? Something very serious, something very ominous, that when the church does have permission from the health authorities, again remember the law of God in Leviticus and Deuteronomy? When the health authorities say we don't need to quarantine the way we were quarantining, this is something I foresee, I foresee there are a lot of people who having gotten in the habit of being lazy and self-indulgent on the Lord's day will just continue to do it, and they will listen for a while and then in the course of time they won't even do that. What happens to people like that? What would St. Paul say? What they're doing in effect is jumping out of the ark into the drowning surging waters. What in effect they're doing is leaving the kingdom of Christ for the kingdom of darkness and Satan.

Do you understand that? Do you understand how precious it is to be part of a local assembly of believers, to worship together, to serve God together? That's the place of health. That's the place of strength. That's the place of encouragement. That's the place of nurture through a lot of means, and what happens to those who don't come back?

They're left in the domain of darkness, in a place of pain and suffering, and will never be able quite to figure out why is all of this hellish torment happening to me?

"Preacher, you done left preaching and gone to meddling."

Well, I love you. I do. I care about your welfare and to be out of the church and to stay out of the church, not talking again about the building, is to be in the place of no protection, total vulnerability to sadistic tormentors who are just waiting like rabid dogs to tear somebody apart. In the walking that Sandy and I do every day, she does 10 miles and I try to keep up with her, I came across a neighbor who has a pet wolf. Wow. Okay. Well, what is it like outside of the fellowship of a local church? It's to be in a place of ravenous wolves that are ready to rip you and tear you to shreds without any hope, without any mercy.

So my appeal is this, first and foremost the most important thing is do you know the Lord Jesus Christ? Because if you know the Lord Jesus Christ, you have a protector, but sadly many people believe they know the Lord Jesus Christ and have nothing but contempt for the bride of Christ, the local church. So the question is: if you have nothing but contempt for the bride of Christ, the local church, how is it that you believe that you have been born again? How is that you believe that you know the Lord Jesus? And lastly, why would you want to be excommunicated? Do you see what's happening? You're excommunicating yourself if you continue to be absent from the fellowship of a body of believers. That's so, so critical. May God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit impress on your heart what I'm so inadequately trying to say, the church, the body of believers, the fellowship of the saints, listen, it's where Christ is and outside of there is a place of darkness and terror and heartache and hopelessness and despair. Oh, may God help you to understand that truth.