

Series - Be Wise (6 of 22)

Date/s - 30 June 2019

Topic - The Elephant In The Room (1 Corinthians 5:1-13)

Speaker/s - Pastor Ernie Song

Welcome [15 min]

You may want to look up the following websites for *icebreakers* suitable for your cell.

www.thesource4ym.com/games/

www.christianitytoday.com/smallgroups/articles/icebreakersbeyond.html < go to LEAD, click on ICEBREAKERS >

Worship [15 min]

You may select songs like “O Praise The Name (Anástasis)”, “Be Enthroned”, “I Just Want You”, “Here I Bow” or “Worthy Of It All”.

Spiritual Objectives

At the end of the cell discussion, cell members will:

1. Not ignore or tolerate sinful behaviours in themselves or in others
2. Commit to speak the truth in love with the goal towards conviction, repentance and restoration.
3. Adopt the right posture when receiving rebuke or discipline by the church.

Word [45 min]

Preaching from 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, Pastor Ernie used the idiom ‘the elephant in the room’ to refer to an enormous and obvious problem in the church which we choose to ignore because it is uncomfortable to deal with. The young church in Corinth was such a church. Made up of believers from diverse backgrounds, it was rife with sin and immorality. Paul had to address these issues head-on:

- Incest between a man and his mother (v 1)
- Arrogance and unrepentance of this man and factions in the church (vv 2, 6)
- Tolerance of the church towards sin (vv 2, 5, 9-13).

What were Paul's instructions to the church on these matters?

He commanded the church “to deliver him to Satan for the destruction of the flesh so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord” (v 5). This ‘deliverance to Satan’ is similar to a judicial sentence for punishment. The goal of his expulsion or dis-fellowship is not to condemn but to provoke repentance. (See Luke 15:12-20, 1 Timothy 1:20, Exodus 9:12, Joshua 11:20, and Psalm 81:12.)

Addressing the boasting and tolerance towards blatant sin in the church, Paul warned that, “a little leaven leavens the whole lump” (v 6). Using a modern analogy, Ps Ernie compared this to a cancer in the body, where if it is not treated early, will spread to the rest of the body.

What are the implications for RiverLife today?

- a. Tolerance of sin is like cancer in the Body of Christ. Our response must be speaking the truth in love, not tolerating in silence and pretending all is well.
- b. Church discipline is needed. Why?

- i. It vindicates God's holiness.
 - ii. It restores the purity of the church and deters others from sinning.
 - iii. It draws a line between the Church and the world.
 - iv. It conveys Biblical love and seeks to restore the sinner.
- c. Having the right posture in receiving discipline propels us towards the God-designed potential in our relationships with each other.

Using Matthew 18:15-20 as a precept, Ps Ernie laid out the RiverLife protocol in addressing members who are unrepentant in their sin and behaviour.

1. Private conversation
2. Discussion in the presence of a few witnesses
3. Public confrontation
4. Treat as a pagan (by expulsion or dis-fellowship)

Ps Ernie ended the sermon with an encouraging note by quoting Robert Mulholland in his book, *Invitation To A Journey*:

"Everything that God has done, is doing and ever will do in our lives to conform us to the image of Christ (which is the image of our wholeness) is not so that we may someday be set in a display case in heaven as trophies of grace. All of God's work to conform us to the image of Christ has as its sole purpose that we might become what God created us to be in relationship with God and with others."

Discussion Questions

1. **Read 1 Corinthians 5:1-13. Try to go back in time and put yourself in the context of the Corinthian church with the things that were going on in this passage. As a member in this church and seeing all that is happening around you, what goes through your mind?** [15 min]

Leader's Notes: A recap question. Leader to encourage the cell to share honestly how each will likely do as a member in the Corinthian church without giving politically correct answers. Allow candid responses from everyone but do not comment or let anyone else comment on one another's answer. You want the cell to feel at ease sharing from the heart without being 'judged' at the start of the discussion, so that when the more difficult questions follow, they will not hold back.

Just listen and take note of the response from each member as they share. Some of the responses to look out for are: Will they leave the Corinthian church immediately to join another church somewhere else? Will they ignore the sins because they are not directly involved? Will they just leave the problems to the church leadership to sort out? Will they become proud that they are not as sinful as the others? Will they blame the converted pagans for infiltrating their church? Will they look at themselves and acknowledge they are just as prone to sin? Will they confront those whom they know are sinning?

As a summary, if we tolerate sin in our midst, the church becomes dysfunctional. Therefore, sins within the church must be dealt with and RiverLifers must have the right posture when the church/leaders/fellow RiverLifers admonishes them.

2. The instructions Paul gave to the church regarding the man who sinned appear to be harsh and unloving. The language he used is some of the strongest in the New Testament: 'hand him over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh' (v 5); 'cleanse out [this man]' (v 7); 'not even to eat with such a one' (v 11); and 'purge the evil person' (v 13). How can we pass judgment like this on others? Didn't Jesus tell us not to judge so that we would not be judged (Matt 7:1)? Isn't the most loving thing to do is to keep warning them to repent but to maintain the relationship? Aren't we supposed to 'love the sinner, hate the sin'? Discuss. [15 min]

Leader's Notes: A reflect and relate question. Some responses from Q1 may overlap into this question, so leader, don't jump in too quickly to correct anyone's answer if it doesn't 'sound right.' There is much to discuss here as many of us have misinterpreted the "do not judge lest you be judged" scripture in Matthew 7:1, and supported the "love the sinner, hate the sin" line of thinking even though it is not in the Bible. The language used in Matthew 7:1 (krino) implicates condemnation; not just judging.

Some cell members may be surprised to discover that Jesus is not saying that we cannot judge others. Read the context in Matthew 7:1-6 and draw a key conclusion about what Jesus really means. This article by Kevin DeYoung shares important insights on this commonly misused verse:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-devyoung/judgmental-but-not-like-that/>

"God loves the sinner but hates the sin" may have some value in it but the phrase is not entirely true or Biblical. In fact, it has not widely resulted in the conviction of 'sinners', but instead has turned Christians into 'haters' in the eyes of hearers. Pastor David Platt throws some light on this overused cliché:

<https://sbcvoices.com/god-hates-the-sin-and-hates-the-sinner-and-loves-the-sinner-david-platt/>

Like in the metaphor of cancer treatment, it is often difficult to confront sin and the sinner without the sinner feeling personally affronted or attacked. Our contemporary culture and to a large extent, even within the church, Christians are very tolerant towards sinful behaviour. We must recognize the harmful effects of sin on the individual, Christian fellowship and the Church, and how this pains the heart of God. Therefore, RiverLifers cannot be tolerant towards sinful behaviours, attitudes or actions of our fellow brothers and sisters whether in church, in cell or in the world.

3. In his sermon, Ps Ernie said, "If you truly love someone, you will not become tolerant when they sin. If you don't confront them with the goal towards repentance, this shows that you don't really love them." How can this practically happen in your cell? Can we start by sharing some behaviours we observe in the cell that may not be healthy? [15 min]

Leader's Notes: A response question. As a cell, we want to be one that reaches out to the lost but at the same time holds the saved to high standards. It is therefore unloving to a brother or sister who is engaged in sinful patterns of behaviour to ignore them, to tolerate them, or even to laugh at them.

There are some patterns of thinking we need to change if we are going to be a healthy body of Christ. Some examples of destructive thinking may be: "I can't be bothered to speak up or confront in love when a brother or sister sins," and "I must defend myself and attack first when I am admonished by a brother, a sister or the church."

Instead, we need to have these renewed mindsets: "I must have a pure and open heart to see where I have gone wrong when I am being rebuked," and "When I receive admonishments from my leaders, I see it as an opportunity for me to grow, not an opportunity to hide or rebel."

Keep these Biblical principles in mind when we approach sin in the cell. Sin is to be grieved over, not glossed over, and addressed, not ignored. Pray that we will see sin as God sees it. And not primarily the sin we see in others, but the sin we see in ourselves as well. Discipline is to be redemptive, not punitive. Whenever we practise church discipline, the goal is always to help bring a fallen brother or sister to conviction, repentance, and eventually restoration.

Some practical ways to speak truth in love is found on The Gospel Coalition in this thoughtful series called The Ministry of Rebuke:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/the-ministry-of-rebuke-1/>

If you feel your cell is ready (there's enough relational capital with each other), ask them to share some of the behaviours within the cell that they feel they need to change. Some examples include late-coming, prioritizing of children or one's life priority over the cell, not willing to take on responsibilities in the cell (Eg. Worship, provide supper, etc), etc. Do ask your cell not to mention names or single out anyone, but to share in a way that encourages change.

Works [10 min]

Let's pray:

1. Every RiverLifer will not compromise on sin, whether it is in us or in others.

Announcements

1. Joining The Family

Sat, 27 Jul | 10am-1pm | Faith Chapel

This course is a pre-requisite for Associate Membership.

Sign up at online at bit.ly/rlcjoiningthefamily by Sun, 21 Jul. For more information, please contact Karen Koh at 65114139, or email her at karenkoh@riverlife.org.sg.

2. We Belong

RiverLife Conference

23- 24 Aug 2019

Sign up online at www.riverlife.org.sg/webelong by Sun, 4 Aug

Church Vision:

"A radiant disciple-making church catalysing Kingdom transformation in our communities and the nations."

Mission:

We exist to make disciples who behold Christ and reveal Him.