

Hard Knocks (5): Keeping the Main Thing Main

(2 Corinthians 2:5-11)

I. Introduction

- A. College president welcomed Freshman class with Stephen Covey line—
1. **Point:** You'll succeed in your studies only if you're focused on study
 - a. There was a time in college that my main thing was tennis team
 - b. Then Lynn arrived on the scene & I had a whole new main thing!
 2. One teacher wouldn't give excused absences for tennis matches
 - a. I complained to him, "*So Tuck, what are you here for anyway?*"
 - b. It's a pretty good rule of life, "*Keep the main thing the main thing*"
- B. Paul was clear about what is the main thing in Christianity (**1 Tim 1:15**)
1. Not just the cross, but the forgiveness found there (**1 Tim 1:16**)
 2. We make two mistakes in keeping our main thing as the main thing
 - a. **First**, we treat sin like it's "*no big deal; everybody does it*"
 - 1) If main point of Christianity is forgiveness of sin, sin matters!
 - 2) The way it works— grace is no big deal if sin is no big deal.
 - b. **Second**, we are harsh and condemning when dealing with sinners
 - 1) Some are so focused sin that they have no use for sinners
 - 2) Forgiveness is the main thing; we must give as well as receive
- C. Today our "*Hard Knock*" is dealing with sin and forgiveness in church

II. Our Test Case: Corinth and the Sinful Brother (**2 Cor 2:5-11**)

- A. **First**, let's take a quick look at the background in 1 Corinthians
1. Paul blasts the church for their acceptance of sin (**1 Cor 5:1-2a**)
 - a. Problem isn't here was sin in the church— *not exactly a news flash*
"If we start accepting the divorced, the church will be full of sinners"
 - b. The problem here was the church's tolerance and open-mindedness
 - 1) They were proud of the fact that they didn't make a deal of it
"Isn't it great that we're so progressive we can accept this?"
 - 2) But it is a big deal if you keep the main thing the main thing!
 - c. Paul's responds in holy horror! He must repent, or he must go

2. Hey, it's a free world! No one is forcing you to be a Christian
 - a. If you are one, someone should help you live as one— *the church*
 - 1) We're all sinners; no one is saying anyone can/must be perfect
 - 2) It's the body's job to call its members to take sin seriously
 - b. Paul expects them to disfellowship this rebel brother. *Two reasons:*
 - 1) **First**, it may force him to face his sin and repent (**1 Cor 5:5**)
 - 2) **Second**, it was necessary to protect the church (**1 Cor 5:6-7a**)
 3. We're not to judge those out there but in here! (**1 Cor 5:12-13**)
- B. All of that is background; we run into this guy again in **2 Corinthians**
1. As president says, "*Two Corinthians.*" Really, "*Four Corinthians*"
 - a. Paul refers to previous letter that he wrote earlier (**1 Cor 5:9**)
 - b. Writes **1 Corinthians** to deal with problems & answer questions
 - c. He wrote another letter so scorching that he was sorry he sent it
 - d. But the church repents, so he wrote **2 Cor** to reaffirm relationship
 2. There's been a lot going on between Paul and the Corinthian church
 - a. To a degree, the whole church repented (*they had a lot of issues*)
 - b. Not only that, the brother in the incestuous affair has repented
 - c. Church disfellowshipped him, and it had the impact Paul intended
 3. The problem now is that the church is reluctant to forgive (**2:6-7a**)
 - a. Remember that the man was not the only one guilty of sin
 - b. They had been too open-minded to make an issue of sin
 - 1) Now they were too closed-minded to forgive and accept him
 - 2) A great theologian said, "*You got to know when hold 'em*"
 - 3) Now was time to forgive and make him feel welcome (**2:7b-8**)
 - c. We must take sin seriously; we must take forgiveness seriously too
- C. Satan tries to tear down God's church by using one of two plans
1. "**Plan A**" is to convince that sin was really no big deal
 - a. Remember, main thing is that Jesus came to save sinners
 - b. If we're so broadminded we accept anything, *we don't need saving*
 - c. And if sin doesn't matter, then the cross doesn't matter either!

2. “**Plan B**” is to keep us condemning and unaccepting of sinners
 - a. The man repented, but they weren’t willing to take him back
 - b. The church looked at this guy like the girl in old country song—
*God may forgive you, but I won’t; Yes, Jesus loves you but I don’t
 They don’t have to live with you, neither do I;
 You say that you’re born again, well, so am I
 God may forgive you, but I won’t, I won’t even try*
3. Ever been there? Hurt so bad forgiveness isn’t in your vocabulary?
 - a. How badly and often do we have hurt God? Want forgiveness?
 - b. **Satan’s Scheme**: Get us to sin or keep us from forgiving (**2:10-11**)

III. Conclusion

- A. Lou Holtz put his finger on a problem we sometimes face in the church
“If you burn your neighbor’s house down, it doesn’t make yours look any better”
 1. Put in our terms, “*We don’t look better by pointing to sins of others*”
 - a. Why were the Pharisees so critical and condemning of others?
 - b. They thought that it made them look so much better in comparison
 2. Remember the Pharisee’s prayer in Jesus parable? (**Luke 18:11**)
 - a. He stresses his holiness by contrasting himself with tax collector
 - 1) He must be holy because of all the holy things that he does
 - 2) He’s even thankful that he’s not like that wicked tax collector
 - b. He’s burning down someone else’s house to make his look better!
- B. Church must decide which path it will take— **respectability** or **holiness**
 1. If our emphasis is on **respectability**, we will stress **appearances**
 - a. We’ll hide our struggles and put on “holy mask” while at church
 - 1) We’ll act holy while we are around others and hide our flaws
 - 2) We’ll keep all the rules on our holy list... or look like we are
 - b. I remember discussing the mixed-bathing rule on the camp board
 - 1) Someone insisted, “*Well, most churches teach this is sinful*”
 - 2) It’s was a proper and respectable to have this policy in place
 - 3) Someone condemned another camp with a different policy
 - c. I wondered, “*So where did kids learn a one-and-half with a twist?*”

2. If we keep the main thing the main thing, we will stress **forgiveness**
 - a. We've been forgiven by God, so we try to live as forgiven people
 - 1) Doesn't mean we pretend we have it all together— we don't
 - 2) It means we'll try to live lives to please God-- and help others
 - b. We WANT others to be forgiven; we do what we can support them
 - 1) What if WE fall into sin? We will repent and seek to do better
 - 2) What if OTHERS sin? We're there to help... and to forgive
 - c. If we keep the main thing the main thing, we'll stress forgiveness

IV. Conclusion

- A. When I was a kid, I gathered eggs summers on my uncle's chicken farm
 1. Part of that was "*walking the wire*," collecting eggs not laid on wire
 - a. Hens were to lay eggs in roosts, sometimes they didn't get memo
 - 1) That's not you gathered on wire; also picked up dead chickens
 - 2) Any chicken with open wound was pecked to death by others
 - b. Chicken house is dangerous place if you're a wounded chicken
 2. Sometimes church is a dangerous place for damaged Christians
 - a. Particularly if we work so hard to pretend we aren't damaged!
 - b. We can put on a Christian façade along with our Sunday clothes
 - 1) You can't let others get too close for fear they will see damage
 - 2) You have no patience with strugglers if you hide your struggles
- B. If we take off our masks and admit flaws, forgiveness becomes crucial
 1. A church focused on forgiveness is a safe place to struggle with sin
 - a. We aren't playing at respectability; we desperately seeking grace
 - b. That means our arms are wide open to receive others who need it
 - c. That church is a fellowship of the forgiven seeking to pass it on
 2. It's the kind of church our invitation song talks about--
 - a. I know, this song is one we usually sing before eating communion
 - b. But there's a line here that describes the kind of church we're to be

No one is a stranger here, everyone belongs;
Finding our forgiveness here, we in turn forgive all wrongs