

September 28, 2014

Get rid of the old "yeast"

1 Corinthians 5

I can hardly believe the report about the sexual immorality going on among you—something that even pagans don't do. I am told that a man in your church is living in sin with his stepmother. You are so proud of yourselves, but you should be mourning in sorrow and shame. And you should remove this man from your fellowship.

Even though I am not with you in person, I am with you in the Spirit. And as though I were there, I have already passed judgment on this man in the name of the Lord Jesus. You must call a meeting of the church. I will be present with you in spirit, and so will the power of our Lord Jesus. Then you must throw this man out and hand him over to Satan so that his sinful nature will be destroyed and he himself will be saved on the day the Lord returns.

Your boasting about this is terrible. Don't you realize that this sin is like a little yeast that spreads through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old "yeast" by removing this wicked person from among you. Then you will be like a fresh batch of dough made without yeast, which is what you really are. Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for us. So let us celebrate the festival, not with the old bread of wickedness and evil, but with the new bread of sincerity and truth.

When I wrote to you before, I told you not to associate with people who indulge in sexual sin. But I wasn't talking about unbelievers who indulge in sexual sin, or are greedy, or cheat people, or worship idols. You would have to leave this world to avoid people like that. I meant that you are not to associate with anyone who claims to be a believer yet indulges in sexual sin, or is greedy, or worships idols, or is abusive, or is a drunkard, or cheats people. Don't even eat with such people.

It isn't my responsibility to judge outsiders, but it certainly is your responsibility to judge those inside the church who are sinning. God will judge those on the outside; but as the Scriptures say, "You must remove the evil person from among you."

Willie Nelson apparently at one time owned a golf course. He said the great thing about owning a golf course was that he could decide what par for each hole was. He pointed at one hole and said, "See that hole there? It's a par 47. Yesterday I birdied it."

Well, we cannot decide what par for the course is, we cannot decide right from wrong. God decides right from wrong, and when we do not measure up that is called sin.

Paul had been the pastor of the Corinthian Church for about a year and a half – A.D. 50 to 51. Then he moved on to Ephesus. In that time that he was away several situations developed in the Corinthian church that demanded attention. So he wrote this letter while he was in Ephesus about A.D. 55.

Paul had learned of these situations in two ways:

1. From certain people who had visited him in Ephesus.

1 Corinthians 1:11

For some members of Chloe's household have told me about your quarrels, my dear brothers and sisters.

2. From certain Corinthians who had written to Paul about these matters.

1 Corinthians 7:1

Now regarding the questions you asked in your letter.

This provides two main parts of the epistle:

1. The concerns told to Paul by visitors (chapters 1-6)
2. The concerns written to Paul (chapters 7-16)

The concerns told to Paul (Paul deals with in chapters 1-6)

Divisions (Chapter 1-4)

In **chapter 3** Paul indicates that their divisions is evidence of their lack of maturity in Christ .

1 Corinthians 3:1

Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in the Christian life.

In **chapter 4** Paul shows that pride is one of the main causes of division and what the Corinthians needed more than anything else was humility (4:7).

In **Chapter 5** Paul deals with another major problem: **Immorality**. In all their pride of wisdom and spirituality the Corinthians were condoning sin.

Corinth was one of the most degenerate, depraved, immoral, cities of the world at the time. Excavations have discovered 33 taverns behind a colonnade only 100 feet long.

The state of morals in Corinth was notorious for unrestrained self-indulgent immoral behavior even to the pagan world at that time; so much so that "to Corinthianize" was a phrase for ("to play the wanton") being sexually loose and immorally unrestrained; Because of this, there arose dangers to the purity of the Christian Church at Corinth.

God's grace is sufficient to redeem fully and many spiritual churches of devout and dedicated followers of Christ have attained and maintained a high degree of Spirituality in sinful and unfavorable environments. But, unfortunately, the church at Corinth was not one of them. The Corinthian church had a problem separating themselves from the sinful society.

And so in writing to the Corinthians Paul reminded them

1 Corinthians 1:2

I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus.

He complimented them

1 Corinthians 1:5

God has enriched your church in every way—with all of your eloquent words and all of your knowledge.

And He commended them

1 Corinthians 1:7

You have every spiritual gift you need...

But Paul also expressed some serious concern for them. He was distressed by the divisions among them, and by their inability to understand spiritual concepts. He tells them that Christ must have all their loyalty and devotion.

1 Corinthians 1:30-31

God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin. Therefore, as the Scriptures say, "If you want to boast, boast only about the LORD.

Christ cannot be an add-on to your life, your religion can't be just one thing you do. Your loyalty and devotion to Christ must be your life, your devotion to Him must be total. It wasn't like that in Corinth.

Maybe someone else in despair would have abandoned a church like that or condemn it. But not Paul- he preached Christ to them.

At Corinth, a place that someone called "the cesspool of the ancient world," Paul was able to win a number of people to Christ. He started the church and was their pastor for 18 months before he went on to Ephesus, leaving behind one of the largest congregations of the Early Church. But in the few years that had passed since Paul left Corinth, the church members had not developed well spiritually.

Paul had written an earlier letter to the Corinthians

(5:9) When I wrote to you before, I told you not to associate with people who indulge in sexual sin.

Paul had written to them before. Apparently that letter has been lost, it is referred to by scholars as "the previous letter" or "the lost letter." But he had written to them before about not associating with those who indulge in sexual sin. But even though Paul had written to them about sin, he received information that the situation in Corinth was getting worse.

1 Corinthians 5:1-2

I can hardly believe the report about the sexual immorality going on among you—something that even pagans don't do. I am told that a man in your church is living in sin with his stepmother. You are so proud of yourselves, but you should be mourning in sorrow and shame. And you should remove this man from your fellowship.

The church had degenerated to the level of public scandal (notice, that when there is sin in the church how quickly and wide spread the news gets out. And notice that the sin in the church was so bad that unbelievers were hearing about it and even they disapproved – though they do tend to judge us more strictly, and perhaps should).

Word got out about the sexual immorality that existed in the church; of something that not only is forbidden in Scripture (Lev. 18:7-8 & Deut. 22:30), but was not even practiced among unbelievers. A man in the church was having (not happened once, but ongoing) sexual relations with his stepmother (sin of incest and adultery, if the father was still alive) and the church was condoning it, tolerating it, with an attitude of pride and conceit rather than having an attitude of mourning in sorrow and shame.

This is important to note that Paul's complaint was not merely that the sin was taking place, but the church was tolerating it, rather than dealing with it. We are not talking about something that happened once and then there was repentance. We are not saying that people in the church do not sin. We are talking about an ongoing sin that was being considered acceptable.

This is why 1Corinthians is so relevant to the church today. The morality of the city of Corinth is the morality of Long Island. And the Corinthian church's accepting of sin is in the church of Long Island.

How do we go about deciding what is right and wrong? We either look out at society and accept what society accepts; or we look inside ourselves and decided for ourselves what is right and wrong to us. What we need to do is not look out or in, but up... to God and what He says is right and wrong. A new faith in Christ should produce a new morality, but it doesn't always do that.

Even Christians, today, base their decision on what is morally acceptable by looking to society or to their own feelings and thoughts, rather than to what God says is right and wrong. No wonder the church has no power, no wonder the church is of no significance to our culture and society. We have knowledge and gifts but it is not producing a higher type of spiritual life in the church. Like the church in Corinth, the church of today is either unaware or indifferent to the seriousness of its spiritual decline.

The salvation offered freely in Christ Jesus is a revolutionary force. New faith should produce new power and it does. This is an inward power for spiritual progress. But when I say spiritual progress we think of more Bible reading, more praying, attending church, and Bible studies. We need to do these things, but make sure God is in it. Do you know that you can do those things and not be closely connected to God? Do you know you can do all those things and still have ongoing sin in your life?

These verses are not just about removing someone who is in gross sin it is about all of us removing the sin that is in our life.

(v6) Your boasting about this is terrible. Don't you realize that this sin is like a little yeast that spreads through the whole batch of dough?

I don't know how it works but one bad apple can infect the whole bunch (Jackson 5).

Paul uses yeast or leaven to illustrate a truth that he has been teaching. What is leaven?

When bread was to be baked, a small piece of dough would be broken off and put to the side. This small piece would sit there for several days until it began to ferment and turn sour. Once it had turned sour, this piece of "leaven" would be placed into a sack of flour from which the next batch of bread would be made. It was this kind of process that caused the bread to rise when it was baked.

Just as a little pinch of leaven causes the entire lump of dough to be affected, so also, a little sin allowed to remain will cause the entire church to be influenced by that sin.

Sin always has a negative influence. It is like gangrene. If it is allowed to remain in the church or in our lives, it will spread to the entire body and can ultimately cause death.

Only a little leaven is required to begin the process of fermentation. It quickly mingles with and spreads and sin is the same way. It has a tendency to grow and multiply itself until it has infected the entire environment or every area of one's life. What should you do?

Paul gives this command

(v7a) Get rid of the old "yeast"

In preparation for Passover each Jewish family was commanded to get rid of all the leaven in their house. Leaven, as we have seen, was symbolic of sin. It is called "old yeast" because it is what remains in us from our old nature, before Christ, that is still working in us. The Corinthian church was reluctant to deal with the glaring sin in their church because they all had this old yeast in them.

The phrase "Get rid of" here used by Paul is a strong word in the Greek language. It means "cleanse thoroughly, purify, eliminate." Each one of us must apply this purging process in ourselves. Sin must be removed from the church, so if there is sin in your life then you must remove that sin. There is a reason for this:

(v7b) Then you will be like a fresh batch of dough made without yeast, which is what you really are.

You must realize your spiritual potential in Christ and be what He declares you to be. Christ loves you the way you are, but love you too much to keep you there. Look at what Paul says, you will be a fresh batch of dough without yeast, “which is what you really are.” In other words, you don’t live a holy life so that you CAN be holy; you live a holy life because you ARE holy. Live like a fresh or new batch of dough. New means that you are to be different, your life is to be different from your life without Christ – because...

(v7c) Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for us.

Each year, a Passover lamb had to be sacrificed and the Jews would eat unleavened bread and they would remember what God had done for them.

Now the image has changed. We do not look to a once-a-year sacrifice. We do not remove the leaven from our tables once a year. Our Passover is a continuing Passover. Christ died with respect to sin once and for all. He is the ultimate Passover Lamb. He died on the cross and the wrath of God passed over us and rested upon Him. That sacrifice needs never to be repeated.

Every day is a Passover for us. Therefore we do not remove leaven once a year. Instead we are to keep the leaven of sin away every day.

(v8) So let us celebrate the festival, not with the old bread of wickedness and evil, but with the new bread of sincerity and truth.

Sincerity means pure, unmixed; Truth means reality – keep it real.

(vv 9-12) When I wrote to you before, I told you not to associate with people who indulge in sexual sin. But I wasn't talking about unbelievers who indulge in sexual sin, or are greedy, or cheat people, or worship idols. You would have to leave this world to avoid people like that. I meant that you are not to associate with anyone who claims to be a believer yet indulges in sexual sin, or is greedy, or worships idols, or is abusive, or is a drunkard, or cheats people. Don't even eat with such people.

It isn't my responsibility to judge outsiders, but it certainly is your responsibility to judge those inside the church who are sinning.

There are people who claim to be believers yet indulge in sexual sin, are greedy, worship idols i.e. are devoted to things that usurp the place of God, or are abusive, drunkards, cheat people... do you do any of these things?

It isn't my responsibility to judge outsiders, but it certainly is your responsibility to judge those inside the church who are sinning.

Judge yourself. God says these things are sin; Get rid of them! Be broken by sin with sorrow and shame, so we can celebrate with sincerity and truth. This chapter is not about punishment, it is about redemption. (v5) sinful nature destroyed and be saved.