

GET RID OF THE OLD YEAST

1 Corinthians 5:1-13

Key Verse: 5:7

“Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.”

In today’s passage, Paul tells the Corinthian church to expel a sinful man from their community. It was a radical solution to a serious problem. We learn that we have to look at sin as God sees it. We must hate sin and mourn over it, not celebrate it, as some people do in our society. Most of all, we should recognize the serious nature of unrepentant sin among us as it can destroy our Christian community. May the Lord help us to humbly accept his word of truth as we study this passage!

I. YOU SHOULD HAVE GONE INTO MOURNING (1-5)

Look at verse 1. *It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father’s wife.* At that time, Corinth was a large metropolitan city in Greece. It was notorious for its immorality. The city’s sexual immorality was so widely known that the Greek verb “to Corinthianize” came to mean “to practice sexual immorality” (NIV Study Bible). Even then, what was happening in the church of Corinth was shocking. The tabloid in the city, the Corinthian Enquirer, reported that there was sex scandal in the church. They printed a photo of this man arriving at the church, holding hands with a woman whom the reporter identified as his stepmother. Even the non-Christians were surprised. It was something they didn’t even tolerate. With mocking smiles on their faces, they all joked about the salacious news around their office water cooler. The church was becoming the embarrassing butt of a joke.

Let us make one thing clear about the nature of this man’s sin. He was sleeping with his father’s wife. In other words, his sin was ongoing. It didn’t happen one time because he was drunk with wine. It was happening now. And he showed no sign of remorse, let alone repentance. We should note this in order to understand why Paul commanded them to take a very drastic measure to deal with the problem. We know well that not everyone in church is free of sins and sinful desires. Actually church is like a public bathhouse. All kinds of people stained with dirty sins come to church so that they may be cleansed by the atoning blood of Jesus. It is not a holy club where only holy people are admitted. Paul knew this. Then why was he so dismayed by what was being reported in Corinth?

Look at verse 2. *And you are proud! Shouldn’t you rather have gone into mourning and have put out of your fellowship the man who has been doing this?* Paul was shocked by the casual attitude of the church toward the sin problem. They didn’t seem to realize the seriousness of the sin among them. Cancer was starting in their body, but they ignored the dangerous disease. Soon it would spread to kill the entire body. Why did the Corinthians act this way? Paul says that they were proud (2,6). In what

sense were they proud? Perhaps they were proud of being tolerant or not judgmental. Perhaps they said to each other, “We are not like the Pharisees who condemned the woman who were caught in the act of adultery. No, we respect individual freedom!” In our society today, some liberal people are proud of tolerating all kinds of sins. No doubt the Corinthian believers were influenced by the rampant culture of immorality they lived in. They had been called to be a holy people--salt and light of the world. Without realizing it, they were becoming a part of the culture.

Such spiritual pride was serious. But St. Paul rebuked them for something else. He said, “Shouldn’t you rather have gone into mourning”? They were proud before God in the sense that they were not filled with grief when the serious problem surfaced. They did not cry out to God for help. They did not beat their chest. They did not pray. They did not rebuke the man. So Paul rebuked the church and told them to put out of their fellowship the man who had been actively sinning.

Paul’s heart was broken when the news came to him. Look at verses 3-5. *For my part, even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. As one who is present with you in this way, I have already passed judgment in the name of our Lord Jesus on the one who has been doing this. So when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.*

Paul was not with them physically; but he was with them in spirit. He took the problem as his own. He was not a spectator. His mind was on it and he prayed to the Lord about it. He was their shepherd and he saw a disease spreading among his sheep. He could not just sit around and let the disease destroy his precious sheep. He said he had already passed judgment on the man who committed the sin. He did so “in the name of our Lord Jesus” (3b). He told the church to have a public assembly in the name of the Lord Jesus and expel the man (3). A radical spiritual surgery was needed to protect the community (2b,11b,13).

Paul told them to “hand this man over to Satan”? Why did he say this instead of telling them simply to kick him out? Of course, expelling man from the Christian community meant that he would be in the outside world where the prince of darkness ruled. Still Paul said, “hand this man over to Satan.” Paul himself did the same thing to two men in order to teach them not to blaspheme (1Ti 1:18-20). It sounds harsh but we have to remember that God’s punishment is redemptive. Let us read verses 4-5: *So when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.* Paul told them to excommunicate the man so that his spirit might be saved on the day of the Lord. The purpose of such drastic action would be to help the man spiritually, not to condemn him, so that the sinful nature might be destroyed and his spirit may be saved. We should not judge one another, as judgment belongs to God, but we should deal with sin problem among us. It is a life and death matter for the person. It also concerns the survival of our spiritual community. A

small cancer cell in the body, if left untreated, will spread to the entire body, killing the person. This is the point Paul addresses now.

II. SO THAT YOU MAY BE A NEW UNLEAVENED BATCH (6-8)

Look at verse 6. *Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough?* Again what is the connection between pride and their inaction in dealing with the sin problem? What was their boasting? Instead of crying out to God in prayer for the man and the church, they boasted about their permissive attitude. Perhaps they said: "What's the big deal! There are worse things going on in the world. Two people love each other. Leave the two lovebirds alone!" How did Paul rebuke them? He told them a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough. A small sin can have a bad influence on the whole congregation. This was no trivial matter.

Let us read verse 7 together. *"Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed."* The old yeast symbolizes the bad influence. Jesus warned his disciples, "Be careful. Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod" (Mk 8:15). The yeast of the Pharisees was their pride, hypocrisy and self-righteousness. The yeast of Herod was his immorality. Paul told the Corinthians to get rid of the old yeast so that they might be a new unleavened batch, or the new batch without yeast. Before they were saved by the blood of Jesus, they used to live in their pride and immorality. But they were set free from their slavery to sin when Jesus Christ, the Passover lamb, sacrificed himself on the cross, paying the price of their sins. Paul continues in verse 8. *Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.* This verse reminds us of the grace of God that brought his people Israel out of their slavery in Egypt. They had lived as slaves among the ungodly people of Egypt. On the night of exodus when the angel of death passed over their houses whose doorposts were smeared with the blood of the Passover lamb, God told them to eat the bread without yeast. That's how they began a journey of faith toward the Promised Land. They were to be a holy people. Similarly, Christians in Corinth were set free from their sins by Jesus who shed his blood on the cross as the Passover lamb. The old had gone and the new had come. They were a new creation! They should no longer live in their old ways of life in malice and wickedness. Instead, they were to live with sincerity and truth.

Paul reminds us that Christ, the Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed (7). We really are a new unleavened batch, not because what we have done, but because what Christ has done for us. When we realize this, we can no longer live in our old ways. We must live with sincerity and truth as the new batch without yeast. We must be a good influence to each other in our community as well as to the outside world. Why does Paul talk about sincerity and truth as he addresses the yeast, that is, our Christian influence? He says: "... let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." It is because telling

truth to one another is so fundamental in establishing a healthy community. A Christian community cannot be healthy if members harbor malice and wickedness.

A ship captain was recording his daily log. He wrote down, “First mate drunk today.” It was a true statement. Noticing this, the first mate pleaded with the captain to amend the statement, because it was his first time he was drunk on duty. But the captain refused it, saying it was a true statement. A few days later when the first mate was in charge of the ship, he wrote in the log, “Captain sober today.” The point of this story is that we should tell each other the whole truth. It is a basic step to build trust for each other to become a healthy community.

III. DO NOT COMPROMISE (9-13)

Look at verses 9-10. *“I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world.”* In an earlier letter, Paul had written to them not to associate with sexually immoral people. The believers in the church of Corinth took this to mean not to be with immoral people outside the church. Paul knew this was not possible, because the Christians did not live in a bubble. They were in the world, though they should not be of the world (Jn 17:14-15). Paul says in verse 11: *“But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.”* Paul had urged the believers to be a good influence on the outside world by living a holy life. But their lax attitude toward the sin within the church showed that they had to clean their own house first before they could be salt and light to the outside world. He told them in verses 12-13: *What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. “Expel the wicked person from among you.”*

We know that we should not judge others so that we may not be judged. We should leave judgment to God. He will judge the wicked in his time and in his way. But Paul says that we should judge those inside the church. For the fourth time in this chapter, he told the Corinthian believers to expel the wicked man from among them. Again this would be an act of love for the man in the hope that he would repent his sin and turn to God, and also an act of love for their community to remove a cancer cell that, if left alone, would destroy it. God’s judgment for his people is redemptive. His purpose is to save. Likewise, we should not judge each other with a vengeful spirit. But we should be clear about how to deal with sin in the church community. This does not mean that we should go through the painful process of removing our members who commit any and every sin. If we were to kick out people who violate speed limit on highways or get parking tickets, none of us would remain in the church. No. In this chapter, Paul was dealing with an ongoing, unrepentant sin in the church because he was concerned with the spiritual health of the church. We learn that we should be very clear on sins that can destroy our community. God wants us to become a healthy Christian community in which we love the Lord and love one another as we serve the Lord together.

We live in a sinful culture. Everything seems to be permitted in the name of freedom and human rights. But we must remember how Jesus gave his life on the cross to save us from our sins and to give us eternal life in the kingdom of God. We must struggle to grow in knowing Jesus and maturing in the holiness of God. We must hate sin, and offer our bodies as living sacrifices. And as we learned from this passage, we have to have a clear attitude toward sins that can destroy our community. We should mourn for each other in prayer if we find one of us living in sin. May the Lord help us to be a healthy Christian community as we pray for one another!