**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 our 1 Corinthians messages so far, we’ve been talking about how in this letter Paul is dealing with many problems in the church at Corinth. Today we see the most specific issue so far, as Paul deals with a serious sin that was being committed among the members. Once again, it gives us an example of how the gospel principles apply to real-world problems, and it shows what discipline in the church looks like. Also, on a broader level, it shows us the attitude of sincerity and truth we should have in all things, based on what Jesus. It will be so good if the word of God can give each of us an attitude “reset” this week. Let’s pray for that. The message has three parts.

I. Dealing with sin in the church (1-5)

Paul comes right out and says what is that specific and very uncomfortable sin that had arisen in the Corinthian church. 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.”** This was a doubly shocking sin, because not only was immoral, it was a violation of family sanctity—someone slept with his own stepmother. We don’t know any more details of the situation than this, and we don’t need to. Paul says that this is a type of sin that even pagans, meaning godless unbelievers, did not tolerate, even though pagan people were known for sexually immoral lifestyles. Please notice that the sin here is not just an inclination or thought or desire. It is an act carried out, and it is a betrayal of the trust in family relationships.

How could such a sin even happen within the church, among God’s own people, who are supposed to be holy? I don’t really have an answer for that. From what we know about the Corinthian church, it seems likely that they were not properly teaching their members about the need to deny the desires of the sinful nature. Whatever the reason, it was now an undeniable fact is that this sin happened. We also hear about such kinds of sin happening in the church today. Even in the current news there are stories of highly respected Christian leaders falling into these same types of sins.

And so, the question becomes what the church should do in response to such a case of sin among its members. In fact, Paul has more to say about how the church handled this sin than with the sin itself. How had the Corinthian church mishandled this case? 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?”**

How should the church have responded to the uncovering of this sin? First of all, Paul says they should have gone into mourning. The church needed to collectively express grief and lament that such a thing had happened among them. This shows that the church is one body, the body of Christ. When one part falls into sin, the whole body is hurt. Having an indifferent, “you life your life, I’ll live mine” attitude is not consistent with the gospel. The gospel makes us one family in Jesus, and what happens to one member affects everyone. So the church should be very serious about the discovery of sin among its members and very earnest to make it right.

The practical action they should have taken in response to this sin, Paul says, is to put the man out of their fellowship—to disassociate him from the church. This is actually the most severe punishment that the church can enact. The church is not an earthly authority; Jesus didn’t grant the church the right to imprison or execute people. But the church does have spiritual authority. In a minute we will talk about the spiritual nature of this punishment.

Another thing we need to remember is that this passage is about one specific case of church discipline, so these actions doesn’t apply to every single case of sin in the church. We don’t go kicking people out for every little thing. In the gospels, Jesus actually gave more detail about how to deal with different cases of sin in the church. In Matthew 18:15-17 Jesus says, **“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”** According to Jesus, we shouldn’t immediately expose someone’s sin in front of the whole church. First, we try to handle private sin privately, one-on-one, and then, if the person repents, they are forgiven and the issue is settled. Excluding someone from fellowship is the final action to be taken, only when all other means of intervention have failed.

In this case of the Corinthian church, Paul prescribes putting the man out of fellowship because by this time the man’s sin had already become publicly known and he was unrepentant. Actually, Paul is saying that the church should have already taken these actions, but they didn’t. What had the Corinthians done instead? That was the first part of verse 2: “And you are proud!” They had not only tolerated this sin, as Paul said not even Pagans did, but they were proud of doing so.

How in the world could the church be proud of not disciplining such a sin? In our leaders’ group Bible study, we thought that it was because the cultural environment in Corinth was actually quite similar to the world today. To put in in contemporary terms, the Corinthians wanted to be known as a “cool church”; they thought that by tolerating anything and everything, even to the point of celebrating sinful behavior, they could show how progressive and culturally savvy they were. To do this, they twisted the interpretation of the gospel and the meaning of freedom in Jesus. Yes, in Jesus we are free from the law’s condemnation, but that doesn’t mean immorality isn’t still a destructive sin. The root of the Corinthian church’s problem was that they were trying to please the world instead of God.

So Paul tells the church what they have to do now to make this right. In fact, there were spiritual actions that Paul himself had already taken. Look at verse 3. **“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.”** To Paul, this sin was too serious for him to delay taking action, even though he could not be with the Corinthians in person. So, through prayer, he passed a judgment on the man who had sinned this way—not a judgment of final condemnation, but a judgment of spiritual separation to carry out discipline. We believe this judgment had a real effect because we believe in the power of prayer and the authority that Jesus gives his servants.

The Corinthian church leaders still had to do their part as well. Look at verses 4 and 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.”** When the church assembled for the purpose of dealing with this matter, the power of Jesus himself would be with them. “Handing the man over to Satan” sounds scary, and indeed it is severe. From the context we see that this is the spiritual meaning of the act already described, of putting the man out of fellowship. In the church, there is an invisible but very real spiritual protection. Outside of that, outside of the sphere of grace, outside where Satan rules, this man could feel the true bitterness and consequences of his sin.

Though it was severe, the goal of this discipline was unquestionably redemptive. Verse 5 says it’s “for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.” Here, “destruction of the flesh” means that this man could die inwardly to this type of sinful desire after tasting the bitter fruit it produced. Then his soul could experience true salvation, salvation of a type he apparently didn’t have before.

The discipline Paul prescribes here is a model of what God himself does when people are very far gone in sin—he gives them over to it so they may see its consequences and repent. You can read more detail on that in Romans Chapter 1. When this man sincerely repented of his sin, he could be welcomed back into the fellowship like the prodigal son. We pray that such sin may happen very rarely in the churches of Jesus. But we also need to pray that our church and all churches may have the courage to deal clearly with serious sin when it does occur among us.

II. Keep the Passover festival in your hearts (6-8).

After dealing with the specifics of this case of sin, Paul discusses the bigger spiritual problem that their lack of discipline was causing. **“Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough?”** He compares the influence of sin in the church to yeast. Though yeast is small in size and invisible when mixed into dough, even a small quantity of it has a powerful effect, making the whole batch of dough puff up and rise. The discipline prescribed for man who had sinned was a way of getting rid of the yeast of his bad influence, and was for the good of the whole church. As we said, the sin was now publicly known. If it wasn’t dealt with clearly and also publicly, then other people might feel enabled to sin in the same way. The failure to rebuke sin can easily be seen as implicit approval of it. If the church failed to address its problem, in the long run it would lose all its authority to rebuke sin and lose its good influence in the world. I hope this hasn’t happened in the churches today. On the other hand, if the church dealt decisively with this public sin, the members would be warned of the consequences of sin and all the church could grow in holiness. By dealing decisively with sin in the church when it is discovered, we are throwing out the yeast before it can spread through the whole dough.

There is also a personal aspect to getting rid of yeast, which each of us can apply to ourselves. Look at verse 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.”** As you may know, the biblical significance of yeast goes all the way back to the Passover in the Old Testament. In the Exodus, on Passover night the Israelites in Egypt had to bake bread without yeast, because God was going to get them out of Egypt in a hurry, and they didn’t have time to sit around and wait for their bread to rise. They needed travel food, not fluffy, delicate French pastries. Ever since then, and still today, when Jewish people celebrate the Passover each year, they remove all yeast from their homes and eat flat bread made without yeast to commemorate their deliverance from slavery in Egypt.

So when Paul uses yeast to represent hidden sinful influence, by telling the Corinthians to get rid of their yeast he is prescribing personal repentance. It’s like cleaning house, spiritually speaking. Paul specifically calls this yeast “old yeast” because it represents our old sinful life before we knew Jesus. Look at verse 7 again. **“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.”** If we get rid of the yeast of our sin, we will be like a new unleavened batch of bread—that is, bread made without yeast. If yeast represents sin, then unleavened bread represents the purity and humility of the genuine Christian life. Do you have any yeast you need to get rid of?

Actually, this is not something we can do on our own. Paul is careful here to point out that believers already are a new batch, because Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. It is Jesus’ death on the cross, and nothing we can do, that makes us new on the inside. But we still have something to do after that. Based on what Jesus has done, we should listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit who convicts us of sin, and clean house. Whenever we do that, we can have a spiritually fresh start. By such earnest repentance, we work out the salvation that Jesus has accomplished for us. This is the best way that we Christians can observe the Passover, not necessarily with external ceremonies, but inwardly, through remembering Jesus with repentance.

Paul describes this inward observance further 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.”** Look at the words Paul uses to describe the old yeast and new unleavened bread here. The old yeast is “malice and wickedness.” This really struck me. “Wickedness” can mean any kind of nasty behavior, but “malice” specifically means thinking ill of other people and wanting bad things to happen to them. The Corinthian Christians’ divisions showed that in their hearts they were harboring bad desires for each other. When we want to hold on to our pride, it’s always at someone else’s expense. Maybe the Corinthians were secretly hoping that the brothers and sisters in the other factions would fail or fall into sin so they could be proven right.

Have you ever secretly wished someone else would fail so your position could be improved relative to them? I am ashamed to say that I have. I realized that malice toward others is one of the types of yeast we need to get out of our heart most urgently. It’s so easy to harbor malice in our hearts and not even realize it because outwardly we seem to be nice to people. We have to pray to grow until we can have genuine good desire for all our brothers and sisters, even if they seem very different from us.

In contrast to the old yeast of malice and wickedness, the unleavened heart attitude is described as “sincerity and truth.” What a contrast! I think we all desire to deal with each other in sincerity and truth, not having to wear a false face. Genuine Christian fellowship is so wonderful because people who have repented are not puffed up, not trying to show how they are better than someone else; rather, they share grace and struggles purely. In fact, it is not easy at all to achieve such a level of fellowship. It can only happen through repentance, because only repentance makes us humble enough to love others sincerely. But when we keep the festival of Jesus in our hearts, then our fellowship will also be like a holy festival, not just with eating and drinking, but with sincerity and truth.

III. Sin outside the church (9-13)

While Paul is on the topic of dealing with sin and immorality, he makes it a point to clarify something he wrote in an earlier letter he had sent, a letter which has been lost and is not part of the Bible. Look at verses 9 and 10. **“I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral** people**— 10 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.”** Paul doesn’t want anyone to misunderstand—when he is talking about disciplining unrepentant sinners by disassociating them, he is talking about what we do inside the church. He doesn’t mean that we have to avoid contact with sinful people in the world. As he says, if we tried to do that we would have to leave the world! On the contrary, we are called to make relationships with sinful people in the world, in order to lead them to Jesus. Remember that Jesus had fellowship with tax collectors and public sinners. In the same way, we welcome and invite all kinds of sinners into our fellowship. We welcome them and try to help them see Jesus. When they meet Jesus, then they will gladly repent of everything that’s broken in their lives.

For those who call themselves Christians, however, it is another matter. Look at 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.”** When people claim to be in Jesus, their life needs to display a difference from people who are dead in sin. If there is no such difference, Paul says, they are not even a true brother or sister in Christ; they are just claiming to be one. As we have seen, turning a blind eye to sin in the church amounts to an endorsement of sin and is a terrible influence on the whole body of Christ.

So we do need to make a distinction in how we deal with fellow Christians versus non-Christians. In verses 12 and 13a Paul says, “What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside.” Though it can be good for Christians to speak out about wickedness in our society, we should know that we will never be able to make the unbelieving world conform to God’s standard. In general, it is more important to build up ourselves and the church as a holy example. We saw in today’s passage how Jesus gave the church authority to do just that.

Thank God for showing us an example for dealing with difficult realities of sin in the church. When we are clear with sin in the church, in the short term it is painful. But it is the best medicine. The command to expel the immoral brother made the Corinthians very sorrowful, and the man who was expelled had a difficult time. But we know from the book of 2 Corinthians that the man who was handed over to Satan finally repented his sin and was changed by the grace of God. In that letter Paul instructed the church to accept and embrace the man who repented.

We also saw from the key verse that God made us new bread in Jesus without yeast. I realized that our real goal in repentance is to live up to what Jesus has already made us to be. I was trying to visualize myself being so simple and pure like a piece of flatbread, kind of tough to chew but very nutritious, not like a big puffy pastry tastes sweet at first but is full of hot air. Let’s pray for a fellowship where we are all fresh unleavened bread in Jesus. “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.”