**GET RID OF THE OLD YEAST**

**(1 Corinthians 5:1-13)**

***“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.” (v. 7)***

The church is an amazing organism. It is a living, breathing miracle. It exists only by the grace and power of God; sinners from all over the world united in their common trust in our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the hope of the earth, the only source of absolute truth, the one place where one can find grace. It is a high and holy calling to influence the world as a city on a hill. Unfortunately, many times we seem to be influenced by the world more than we influence it. There is a constant spiritual struggle taking place against our sinful nature, the world and the evil one. Due to their spiritual immaturity, the Corinthian church was like one, big dysfunctional family. There were divisions, disgusting sexual practices…some members were even suing each other! But today’s passage offers much hope and practical advice in dealing with sin. It shows us that if we maintain a right attitude towards sin and meet it with proper church discipline, it will not defeat us. With God’s help, we will not only survive, but thrive in this world!

1. **Sin should cause us to grieve, not boast (vs. 1-5)**

Now that Paul had finished addressing the Corinthians’ divisive church atmosphere, he moves on to other issues in the church. Chapter 5 deals with perhaps the most disturbing: a case of incest. 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.”*** Based on the wording, it may have been between a man and his stepmother. Such a relationship was explicitly forbidden by God in Leviticus 18:8. It was even taboo for the pagans of that time as well as today.

How had the Corinthians responded to this audacious sin? Verse 2 says, ***“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?”*** If the Corinthians were living by the Holy Spirit as mature believers, they would have been grieved over this man’s situation. He was spiritually dead. Instead, the church expressed pride. It seems they were emphasizing an understanding, progressive, hyper-tolerant atmosphere in their fellowship. This stemmed from their culture and upbringing, which left them spiritually ignorant and desensitized towards sin. So when the news of the man’s sin reached the church leadership, they responded with, “Don’t worry, there is no condemnation in Christ. You are under grace. You are free to live as you wish. All your actions are made holy in Jesus.” This is a detestable distortion of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. As we know, Jesus didn’t die on the cross so that we could be handed a free license to sin. He died to set us free from our bondage to sin. God’s grace is a marvelous, wonderful gift of forgiveness that came at the highest cost. Therefore, we cannot simply “put up” with sin. It must grieve our souls. To fail to act against sin is sin.

Paul decisively responded to the situation. 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.”*** Based on the authority of Jesus’ holy name, Paul commanded the Corinthians to immediately excommunicate the perpetrator from their fellowship. Was this the right thing to do? Some might argue that Jesus taught us not to pass judgment on others, quoting Matthew 7. But in that context, it is clear Jesus was warning against hypocritical judging of others. Elsewhere, Jesus plainly taught how the church should deal with unrepentant believers. Matthew 18:15-17 read, *“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.”* Such a course of action is perfectly reasonable. Church leaders *must* exercise sound judgment towards God’s flock to preserve and protect the body of Christ. Appropriate church discipline is both necessary and biblical.

Looking carefully at verse 5, we see that the motive behind all this is the good of the sinner. The words ***“hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh”*** sound unreasonably harsh at first. But here ***“the flesh”*** refers to one’s sinful nature. If a church member refuses to repent, they forfeit the privilege of Christian fellowship and are forced to struggle against Satan and their sin problems on their own. But there is still hope. If the guilty party, suffering under the weight of sin, has a self-realization and truly repents, they will be welcomed back. It is the same hope with which the father let his prodigal son run off and learn the error of his ways. When he repented and accepted his father’s love, he was welcomed home. If the church leadership was united in carrying out this decision, with the right heart, it would send a powerful message to everyone about the importance of purity.

A hyper-tolerant, progressive-minded culture is all too familiar today, especially as it relates to sexual immorality. Because people have lost the concept of Jesus being Lord over their marriages and sexuality, many disturbing trends are developing. Adultery and premarital sex are glorified in movies and television. Pornography is encouraged as a necessity. Homosexual lifestyles are celebrated, along with choosing one’s own gender identity. Many churches have quietly conceded to these trends as a way of blending in with the culture. Such strategies may seem harmless and even gracious at first, but they cause irreparable damage. Sexual sins put people in bondage. They destroy families. In the church setting, they cut off believers from Christ and the Holy Spirit. They lead souls to eternal destruction. This is why church discipline is essential today. Not only must we be willing to receive it from others when needed, we must not be afraid to give it, even when it could hurt others’ feelings. What is more important: tolerance or truth? Being accepted by the world or being accepted by God? As a community of faith, we must not distort the grace of God. We must be grieved over sin and deal with it appropriately, with God’s love and hope.

1. **Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed (vs. 6-8)**

Now look at verse 6. ***“Your boasting is not good.  Don’t you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough?”*** Paul now turns his attention back to the church leadership. Their prideful attitude in tolerating sexual immorality was already producing devastating consequences on the whole community. Paul relates their attitude to yeast. Yeast is a microorganism. Though it cannot be seen with the naked eye, it has a powerful influence within a lump of dough. When mixed with sugar and heated, it releases CO2 that causes the bread to rise and become extra delicious. In the Bible, yeast is often used as an analogy for sin because of its rapidly spreading influence and devastating impact. The Corinthian church was called by God to be a beacon of truth for Greece. They were supposed to influence unbelievers to accept Christ as Lord over all aspects of their lives. Instead, they were being influenced *by the world*, and were in some ways worse.

Paul’s solution is clear. Let’s read verse 7 all 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.”*** Paul furthers his analogy by reminding his hearers of the Passover Festival. During the week of Passover, the Israelites were to get rid of all yeast from their homes and eat only unleavened bread (Dt 16:3-4). This symbolized purification from sin and served to remind them of when they left Egypt in haste during God’s deliverance.

In the same way, Christians should deal with sin quickly and uncompromisingly, before it has a chance to spread. We also celebrate the true spirit of Passover, as Paul says, ***“For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.”*** Jesus is the truest fulfillment of the Passover lamb. He came to this earth to die on the cross in our place, the most painful and shameful death imaginable. This showed that sin is most serious in God’s sight and that he does not withhold his wrath from it. At the same time, Jesus’ death also revealed the amazing love and grace of God, for his blood atoned for our sins once-and-for-all. Like the Israelites, we have put our faith in this God-provided, sin-atoning blood by spreading it on the doorframes of our hearts. When God sees this blood, his wrath passes over us and we can live as God’s chosen people. Jesus’ blood is the foundation of our salvation and sanctification. It gives us real power to say “No!” to sin and “Yes!” to God, so that we may be a new unleavened batch—as we really are! In Christ, we can count ourselves dead to sin but alive to God. Amen!

Look at 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 that our entire lives are meant to be lived as one big worship festival to Christ! Since he has set us free from sin forever, we live in a continual celebration-mode out of sincere gratitude. But the rules of the Festival remind us that worshiping Christ acceptably means getting rid of all sin and unrepentant pride from our hearts. Disobeying God’s will for us to live a new life and gratifying our sinful desires is rebellion against God and grieves the Holy Spirit. It leads to spiritual stagnation and death. Our former way of life was characterized by this old bread leavened with malice and wickedness. We proudly followed our own way, worshiped idols, envied and attacked others and did many other vulgar and detestable things. But now we must feed on the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. To the world, such bread looks dull and tasteless. Purity and repentance are not glamorous or fun. The road is difficult. But it is the path of truth and freedom and love. Feeding on Jesus and his word brings lasting change into our lives. It leads us to be conformed to his glorious image (Ro 8:29) as new creations. I know that I would rather live in God’s truth than enjoy a lie for a short time. As followers of Christ, we must let go of our past sinful habits and value system. What is the “old yeast” that you need to get rid of? Let’s listen to Paul’s godly advice and ***“Get rid of the old yeast”***!

1. **A correct use of church discipline (vs. 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.”*** Apparently, the Corinthians misinterpreted Paul’s teaching from a previous letter. When he instructed them not to associate with sexually immoral people, some took this to mean they should isolate themselves completely from the unbelieving world. As we know, this is not the example Christ set for us and would conflict with our calling. Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners, showing them God’s love. His prayer to the Father on our behalf in John 17 includes the words, *“My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it” (Jn 17:15-16).* Jesus’ master plan is for us to be *in* the world but not *of* the world. He wants us to be influencers, not influenced.

So Paul clarifies his instruction 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.”*** It is those *who claim to be a brother or sister* and yet live in sin who we are to avoid. Obviously, Paul does not mean that any and every sin is reason to excommunicate a believer. Then the church would be empty! Rather, Paul is referring to anyone who claims to be a child of God and yet lives a blatantly sinful lifestyle without remorse. Examples of such “old yeast” include those living in sexually immoral relationships, those who openly worship anyone or anything other than God, those who talk about and attack their fellow believers behind their backs, those who envy others and try to cheat them, those who endorse heavy drinking and a partying lifestyle, and the like. Such hypocrites dishonor the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. They give a false testimony about him to the world. Though we cannot stop such people, we can choose not to associate with them as our own testimony that God has called us to be different. Of course, this does not mean we stop reaching out to the unbelieving world or inviting them to worship or study the Bible with us. Our calling is to serve them, witness to them and evangelize them until they meet Christ personally. But anyone who wants to grow as a leader in the church must conform to the pattern Jesus sets for us in the Bible.

Paul concludes the matter 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.’”*** It would make no sense for Christian leaders to try and impose scriptural standards upon unbelievers. If they are outside the church, they are outside the church’s jurisdiction and will ultimately be judged by God. But God has given church leaders the authority to exercise proper church discipline over those inside the church as a necessity. The goal is not for the leadership to lord this authority over others, but to seek mutual edification and accountability.

With this in mind, Paul gave the clear command: ***“Expel the wicked person from among you.”*** This sounds like God’s words throughout the book of Deuteronomy. Every time a sin worthy of capital punishment is mentioned, God gives the sobering command, *“You must purge the evil from among you” (Deut 13:5; 17:7; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21,24; 24:7).* Just as we are to ***“Get rid of the old yeast”***, we must ***“Expel the wicked person”*** from our fellowship if they refuse to repent. The church of Jesus Christ is too sacred and too precious for us to treat it like another human institution. It must be kept pure in the true gospel, for it is from there that it derives its life-giving power. As fellow believers in God’s church, we must pray for all leaders to have the Spirit’s discernment to carry out spiritual discipline in a godly manner.

So what do you think? Can such discipline really have a positive impact on a church community? Can excommunication really benefit the guilty party in the end? Yes, they can! In 2 Corinthians, we find that the Corinthians took Paul’s words to heart. Godly sorrow over their sins led them to true repentance and resolved many of the church’s serious issues (2 Co 7:10). Paul even writes these words in 2 Corinthians 2:6-8 regarding a specific church member: *“The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him.”* This either refers to the man in today’s passage or else a shockingly similar situation. We can thus see that church discipline, when prayerfully administered, turns out for the best for everyone involved! Most importantly, the sacred gospel is preserved and God is glorified in our midst.

Through today’s passage, we learned that being a part of the body of Christ is an amazing privilege. It is much more than human friendship; it is a calling to a holy lifestyle as believers in our Lord Jesus. It is a life of joy and peace, like those celebrating a festival. But we must be careful not to ruin it with sin. Jesus has called us to be positive spiritual influencers in this world. We are to stand out, not blend in! So we must get rid of the old yeast and treasure our personal and collective purity. I pray that God may help us to continually mature as a community, to love and protect one another as we grow together in Jesus’ image.