

Keeping it clean

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[0 : 00] This hymn is about a church under attack, but it reminds us that we may not fear the howling demons, but still we do have to know how to defend ourselves against that attack.

! This gentleman is C.T. Studd, one of the Cambridge Seven, almost the missionary's missionary. He went with Hudson Taylor to China, but that would have been enough for most people, but he went to India and Africa as well.

I didn't know today, actually, until Oddbier and Sarah told me, but he founded Weck, along with his son-in-law, Norman Grubb, who wrote a biography of him.

And, of course, two things everybody knows about C.T. Studd. One is that he played cricket for England, and the other one was this quote.

I've always quoted this little couplet. Some wish to linger near the... Live to win... Sorry, let's get it right. Some wish to live within the sound of church or chapel bell.

[1 : 13] I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell. Now, it's a very challenging thing, but I'm quoting it, actually, in one sense, because of some of the issues it raises, because it tells us, perhaps, a lot about early 20th century Christianity.

Because, actually, hang on a minute, isn't a church supposed to be a rescue shop? And yet, C.T. Studd obviously felt that the church, as it existed in England at his time, wasn't.

And he said, well, I need to go within the yard of hell, and that took him to, as I say, to China, into India, and to Africa. But, let me tell you, you can get to hell just as easily from Brighton.

So it does raise some questions in our minds about what the church, what the nature of the church is. And that's the reason I thought I'd put that passage. I'm not... I mean, the wording of 1 Corinthians 5 is clear enough.

Seems clear enough what he's saying. And yet, it raises all sorts of questions within our minds. And it's really, rather than sort of go through it verse by verse, I want to just address some of the questions that it arises.

[2 : 31] Let's see if I can make this remote to work. Otherwise, I'm going to have to use the keys. I was afraid it might not. No, mad, I'll use the key. Oh, it did that time, yes.

Yeah, so I want to mention a couple of questions that this passage raises in our minds. I want to look at some wrong answers that we might try and give.

Excuse me, I seem to get this cough. I want to then look at some right principles. Now, I don't claim to be able to... Well, come to that in a minute. Look at some right principles. And I want to then just think briefly about what we might do in practice to implement some of these things.

And then, finally, I just want to look at a few more concluding scriptures. And I've called this sermon, giving it a title, keeping it clean. I've called it that because, on the face of it, obviously, the passage is about keeping the church clean.

Not sweeping the floor, but keeping the... Not the building, but the church, the true church clean. But... Oh, thank you.

[3 : 47] There's also another meaning, actually. If you didn't know C.T. C.T. said, play cricket for England. Most of you won't know this. But the phrase keeping it clean in mathematics has a rather different meaning.

And a clean theorem or a clean argument in mathematics is one that's clear. You can see what it's about. There aren't lots of special cases or difficult things to get hold of.

It's clear what the thing means and what you're supposed to do about it. And the trouble is, when we read this passage, it seems clear enough on the face of it.

We're supposed to expel the immoral brother. But then he says, well, what about the... I'm not going to judge the world around.

You've got to associate with the world around, but you must not associate with those who call themselves brothers. And you begin to think then, just hang on a minute. Exactly how are we going to do that?

[4 : 53] And it raises really two questions in our mind. It should do, I think. It certainly did in mine. The first question is, hang on a minute. Isn't a church... Doesn't a church consist entirely of sinners?

And secondly, how do we... Isn't Paul advocating a double standard here of how we treat people within the church and outside the church? And let's look at those briefly.

Isn't the church an assembly consisting entirely of sinners? Well, I'm tempted to say, would everybody, as Jesus did in John 8, would everybody who's a sinner please now leave?

But I won't do that, because there won't be any of us left. That's the point, isn't it? How are we to expel the brother whose court is obviously an open sin here, and yet remembering that we're all sinners?

That really, if all of us coughed up with what we were really like, then we'd probably all be expelled. So how can we do it? Paul's decisiveness in verses 3 to 7 almost seems a bit over the top.

[6 : 06] We know that he himself described himself as the worst of sinners in 1 Timothy 1.15. How can he be so vehement that we need to expel this brother who is living in open sin?

And the second issue is, Paul does seem to have a sort of double standard here. we've got to treat those who claim to be brothers differently from associations in the world, our associates in the world around.

But actually, how do we do that in practice? I mean, it's not as if our meetings are private. We don't bar the door. If somebody wants to come in, in fact, we rather hope that people would come in who are perhaps like that woman living in some immoral state and want to be free from it.

We would hope that people indeed would come in who are tax collectors and sinners, as the scripture says. Our meetings aren't private. We're not going to ask for a letter of introduction before we admit people to the church, are we?

Are we really to admit these people in the church from the world who are living an immoral life, but exclude somebody who claims to be a brother but has fallen into sin?

[7 : 28] And what about the doubtful cases? And we get plenty of them nowadays, don't we? What about people who perhaps are in a stable relationship but are not married? Somebody where the other partner is not a believer and will not regularise the relationship.

What do we do in that sort of situation? And in fact, the other side of this, as I say, is a bit problematic also. This business of allowing in those from the world.

Remember that Jesus said, it's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I've not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. And to this end, Jesus himself spent quite a lot of time with people of dubious reputation, and it actually caused a lot of adverse comment in the previous verse, the one I just quoted.

It says, The Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belong to their sect complained to his disciples, why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners? We need to be eating to follow our Lord with tax collectors and sinners.

But, of course, in Jesus' case, they couldn't criticise his own conduct. But, of course, it's not so clear cut for us.

[8 : 49] And that's, again, one reason I quoted this verse from C.T. Studd. Within a yard of hell sounds to me like a very dangerous place to stand.

And yet, in a sense, that is where Jesus calls us to take up our stand. So there are some issues when we...

What's that? Somebody's phone. There are some issues when we start to look at these things that, you know, actually puzzle us.

How do we actually make this work in practice? And I'd like to just suggest some wrong answers that we might do. One I've already alluded to.

We might, as a church, forget that we're sinners. That think that we're all right. This is the Pharisee in Luke 8, in that parable we read.

[9 : 58] Of course, it's a story. It's not a real person. But, certainly a realistic person. And, um... The Pharisee is self-deceived.

I don't think he's pretending at all, actually. I think he's simply self-deceived. That God would prefer the tax collector to him was simply inconceivably inconceivable.

Because he thought he was all right. That's what it actually says. To those, um... The parable would suggest to those who are... Hmm? Thanks. Seems I'm going to kick it over.

Those who were, um... Righteous in their own eyes. So, hopefully, if we are born again of the Spirit of God, we're not self-deceived. But we have to make sure that we don't, um...

maintain discipline in the Church in a spirit of self-righteousness. In a spirit of, um... Well, you know, we're okay. You're the bad... You're the black sheep, the bad egg.

[11:02] We're going to throw you out, as it were. And the second wrong... I'll have to sum up this water. The second wrong answer, or wrong attitude we can take, is one of hypocrisy.

Now, hypocrisy is not quite the same as self-righteousness. Hypocrisy means, of course, mask-wearing. And, um...

Its opposite is sincerity, which is what Paul is talking about, talks about in verse 8. Um... It says, Let us keep the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.

So, hypocrisy is pretending righteousness. Even though, perhaps, we know that we're not really righteous, we could still pretend to be better than we are. So we can condemn others.

And, um... Gosh, we see too much of this today, don't we? Priests who claim celibacy, but do not live celibate lives themselves. It was a problem at the Reformation.

[12:18] In different ways, it seems to be a problem now. It's not... Hypocrisy is not practicing what we preach. It's do as I say, don't do as I do.

Um... You know, I think the Catholics have created a... a net for their feet in, um... saying that priests should be really celibate, but it doesn't only apply to Catholics.

Um... Protestants have made similar mistakes. I read a news article about, um... a Plymouth Brethren preacher recently who had been accused of, um...

indecently assaulting a young girl, a teenager. Paul returns to this issue of, um... sexual sin, particularly in chapter 7, so I won't go into it anymore here, but, um...

we can get caught that way. And hypocrisy actually is a sin we all have to deal with. I've done things in the past, and even recently, that I prefer you guys didn't know about, frankly.

[13:18] And I expect you have done similar things that you prefer I didn't know about. And that makes it very difficult for me to address you on moral issues.

I remember one old preacher years ago who said, if I stand and point the finger at you, there are three pointing back at me, and... there's some truth in that. And yet, Paul tells us that we must take a stand, we must expel open sin, from amongst us.

And actually, there is, um... a subtlety here, because... we have to make sure that what we call hypocrisy actually is hypocrisy, because failure to keep a moral code does not necessarily imply a lack of respect for that code.

And Paul writes a very similar thing. In Romans, he says, we know that the law is spiritual, but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do, for what I want to do, I do not, but what I hate, I do.

And if I do what I do... if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. So, hypocrisy, we can still say that, yes, we agree that the law is good, even if we acknowledge that we've failed to keep it.

[14:40] still, any moral stand in the church has always got to be on the basis of one sinner to another. And the third approach, the third mistaken approach we can take is simply licentiousness.

Allowing anything, licensing anything. I don't think it's particularly an approach we'd take in our church, but there seem to be people who are quite happy to claim to be brothers, but are quite happy to license gay marriage, for instance.

And this is to deny the reality of sin. It's the old Gnostic heresy that troubled the church from the beginning and still does.

It argues like this, we know that only spiritual things are important, and so we can live with and even rejoice in irregular behavior, and particularly when it comes to sex.

And that's a popular view today, and it was a popular view among the Corinthians, as we've read. So they're proud, they're parading their Christian freedom that they can live with this, because it didn't really matter.

[15:54] Paul says, no, no, it does matter. God is too holy to look on sin. And Paul knows that that way lies spiritual suicide. We are material beings.

Our bodies matter. Jesus was a material being when he was on earth. Of course, the Gnostics had to somehow deny that.

It was part of the Gnostic heresy. It was to deny that Jesus came in the flesh. And that's why John talks about that. But, yeah, we are physical beings. We sin, not in our spirits, that we do do that, but we sin in our bodies.

And so it does matter. Our spirits and our beings, in fact, are intimately related, as we see in verse 6 and 7, where, well, in verse 5, Paul says, the sinful nature may be destroyed and the spirit saved. Because one can interact with the other. Jesus really died in the body. Our pastoral lamb is sacrificed, he said, but Jesus really died in the body.

[17 : 04] And so the body matters. And so we can't license irregular behavior. And the fourth mistake we can make is covering up in the name of Christian unity.

This, I suspect, is more common nowadays than licentiousness. We sweep it under the carpet. Now, in 1 Peter 4, Peter tells us that love covers a multitude of sins.

Later on in this book, in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul tells us that love keeps no record of wrongs. But covering is not the same as covering up.

Covering is dealing with. Saying, yes, I've got sufficient resources to deal with that problem.

Covering up is hiding it. And even truly godly men can be caught out here.

And we've heard an example recently, or at least, I don't know the details of this, but it's suggested that Wallace Ben, the Bishop of Lewis, may have kept quiet over an issue of abuse.

[18 : 08] Not himself, of course, nobody's suggesting that at all. But kept quiet about one of his people under his charge. Now, I don't know the ins and outs of this at all.

I don't know whether it's true or not. But you could see the temptation, couldn't you? You don't want to bring, you know, it's a sin, we think this person has committed a crime.

Do we bring it to the notice of the civil authorities? We hope that he's, you know, turned away from it, but we can't be sure do we continue to risk it.

You can see the temptation and we don't want to bring the church into disrepute. It might be done from the best motives to keep the church from ridicule and to protect those believers who really are struggling with their sinful nature.

But in fact, we can't risk this. we might be found out. And if we're found out, a hostile world is just looking for ways to attack the church and it's got all the resources of investigative journalism to help it.

[19 : 18] And if we're found out, then the gospel is really damaged. Far more than if we'd acted decisively. And of course, the world itself is in all sorts of trouble over just these sort of issues.

BBC is very good at calling the kettle black perhaps. But still, the church should know better. And of course, what's even worse is that we might not get found out.

We might get away with it. But then what spiritual damage is being done secretly among the people of God if we haven't expelled a brother who has committed a grave sin and certainly is not clearly turned away from it.

How many lives and how many souls will be needlessly destroyed? So those are the wrong answers we might give to the issue of sin in the church and how we deal with it.

And they're well, they're wrong answers and they're not really answers at all. How might we try and think about this? So I'd just like to think about some principles here.

[20 : 38] Now the first thing is what Paul states very clearly in this passage that the church must remain a moral community.

If the church is not a moral community there is no gospel. Jesus came to save his people from their sins. The church has to maintain as best it can the moral life within because it has to be a light of the world to the world.

So the church has to demonstrate as best it can even and perfectly the correct way to live. The church is not and should not be a monastery.

Now some Christians have thought well the best thing to do is to turn aside from the world altogether. Shut yourself away from it. Not let it in.

Of course the problem with that is you take your own sin right there in with you. And anyway it's not really what we want to do and I don't want to say that all monasteries are necessarily evil and of course in the Middle Ages a lot of them did were very immersed in their communities around but the idea that the church that somehow you can keep sin out by shutting yourself away from the world is

not workable and is certainly not what Paul is advocating here.

[22 : 05] And the third principle I'd like to say is that the church is under martial law. Hebrews 12 tells us that we've come to the heavenly Jerusalem the holy city and in Revelation 21 we read in the holy city the gates are always open but no impure thing can enter that's Revelation 21 25 to 27 but the difficulty is that we're not actually in the freedom of heaven at the moment we're not actually in the holy city at least in its final form at the moment and evil things are always trying to get in and so we're under martial law we have to keep the gate in the final heavenly Jerusalem we won't have to keep the gate it will always be open and yet nothing impure will enter it it won't want to it will exclude itself but now impurities evil things sins are always trying to get in and we have to guard we have to hold the gate against them there has to be refuge against the world because we're always going to be out there in the world as Paul says and we need somewhere to come we do need in a sense somewhere to come and shut ourselves in away from the world and say yeah there is a better way of doing it here and so in that sense the church shuts itself off from the world because it's a place where we try and do things right and it's a place where we can retreat when we're rather battered from the outside world otherwise in times of battle if there's no fortress in times of battle where are the refugees going to flee to and the fourth principle that I'd like to suggest to you is that sin is like chocolate yes

I'm not saying chocolate is sinful in itself but it's a good illustration of sin chocolate I was typing this sermon and I was thinking what's a good illustration of the way that sin Paul talks about the yeast spreading through the loaf but maybe most of us are not bread cooks bread bakers what's another illustration I thought I know it's like chocolate I only had to think of chocolate and suddenly I heard that Toblerone bar down in the kitchen calling to me in the holy city in the final form we will all realise that sin is junk and we won't be interested we won't want it but the trouble is in the church we need to keep these things out not because we find them distasteful but because we find sin far too attractive it's just like chocolate if you keep it in the cupboard it will get eaten so in the holy city there's only wrath against anything impure but in the church that wrath is tempered by compassion we exclude the open sinner not because we're too holy to look on sin but because as sinners ourselves it's too dangerous to risk it and the aim here is not destruction but redemption revelation talks only about the destruction of Babylon the false the harlot the false city but in the church we're interested in redemption and Paul says that doesn't it he says

I've already passed judgment on the one who did this just as if I were present when you're assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit and the power of our Lord Jesus is present hand this man over to Satan that sounds pretty drastic but why is he doing that he says so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord there is hope still for this particular sinner and the hope is that the shock of being excluded of the church saying look this is really wrong we really can't tolerate it we'll actually bring people back to repentance and there's the story that Chris read this morning I hadn't read that myself in the end but how relevant that is this person who the church had to act in the end had to act in discipline and he went off in a huff but those years later that discipline had borne fruit and he'd through other people as well but he'd come back and wanted to come back and said yes you were right all along and yeah the aim is not destruction in this case but repentance there is still time there is still room for repentance and so if there are those living in open sin we need to point it out that the sinful nature will be burnt so that their soul might survive yeah so it's one thing to be a sinner it's another to tolerate and even advocate open sin but we still need to watch out for the dangers of hypocrisy so does

Paul help us to tread this moral minefield and I think just like in practice now as we draw to a close to look at three cases here one is when the world agrees with us which it does sometimes and this was the case apparently in this sin this brother was committing in chapter in chapter 5 verse 1 a man has his father's wife they said even the pagans wouldn't tolerate that now exactly what this means is not clear it doesn't suggest that it's actually his mother perhaps his father had taken some young trophy wife and the son had inherited him with the estate or something like that I don't know but certainly an unsavoury relationship the world would say that was wrong the pagans would say that was wrong the world will say it's wrong to have sex with children and we agree with them we're certainly not going to tolerate it yeah so hot tissues at the moment are paedophilia sexual harassment sexualisation of children binge drinking and obesity though it's interesting the world has changed the name of those we used to call that gluttony but yeah binge drinking and obesity

doesn't sound quite as bad perhaps gluttony is a deadly sin binge drinking and obesity is a medical problem anyway we agree they're bad things at least the world's paranoid about these in fact and for that reason alone the church needs to be squeaky clean as Paul was saying in Corinthians we need to maintain a careful guard if we have lots of standards than the world does then what's the gospel for but what we do have is a resource that the world doesn't have we have the power of Jesus to root it out and notice actually Paul tells us not to ask for that power he tells us to use it he says when the power of our Lord Jesus is present hand this man over to Satan and I'm sure they did do it with prayer and probably fasting as well but he doesn't sort of say stand around he doesn't say pray that the Lord Jesus will do something to this man he says no Jesus is here in his power the power that his authority in the church and he wants you to use it and so we remember we do have that resource and that power and indeed

[30 : 53] Jesus tells us he said unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven we have to do at least as well as the world does we've got no gospel at all but then what do we do when the world doesn't agree with us and that's a much bigger area things can get even trickier then when we want to insist that sexual relations should be within heterosexual marriage we want to insist that a child has a right to a mother and father doesn't seem an unreasonable thing to insist on really does it a politician got in all sorts of trouble a few weeks ago by just insisting on that that a child has a right to a mother and father because people didn't want to live with the implications of fact of course and it's silly to get homophobic about this especially in Brighton after all there are far more heterosexual couples who are living indulging in sex outside marriage than gay couples let's not forget that much damage has been done by harassment of gays and Paul tells us to beware of such judgments in verse 11 he says

God will judge but of course we have to interact with such people indeed we want to interact with such people but the church has to be a refuge from the world and so we do need to guard against the world standards even as we live in the world we do need to make very clear that it is our position that marriage is between a man and a woman that it's our position that a child at least ideally should have a mother and a father of course that idea is not always met cannot always be met but that is the best and that's what we should be aiming for the church has to be a refuge from the world and it has to be clear on its moral stands sometimes evangelicals can be a bit shaky particularly nowadays we've reacted against the legalism among earlier evangelicalism and rightly so I think but again you can go too far can't you we need to be clear on our moral stand and thirdly what about living in the world of course the world does have double standards

I mean it clearly does it claims to be pro-family yet will not live with the implications of that instead it advocates personal freedom to such a degree as to deny any moral strictures and then they get paranoid about some other issues no they won't condemn gluttony and yet they worry about obesity and binge drinking there are double standards in the world we shouldn't have them in the church and we should try and maintain them now remember Paul says we can't judge the world God judges the world but we do that doesn't mean we can't stand up for moral standards Psalm 36 verses 1 to 4 says an oracle is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked there is no fear of God before his eyes for in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin the words of his mouth are wicked and deceitful he has ceased to be wise and do good even on his bed he plots evil he commits himself to a sinful course and does not reject what is wrong Psalm 36 and that's the psalm of David David made many mistakes in his life as we will sure everybody here knows and yet he was able to detect his sin sometimes with a bit of help but in the end he was the world is not able to detect its sin why not because it has no fear of God that's how you do it that's really how you find out if things are wrong when you come to fear God and to know that God has moral demands and so we need to demonstrate them to the world we need to be salt and light because that's what the church is there for in a sense is to demonstrate a better way to live we need to avoid individual moral judgments but that doesn't stop us from warning the world that it's on a fatal trajectory we certainly need to do that and our society

I think is decadent in the literal sense in the sense that it has abandoned any almost abandoned any values of a society as a whole in the name of individual freedom that's what decadence is we care nothing but our own pleasures and what happens decadence if unchecked results in social disintegration and chaos plenty of historical examples of that but there are two aspects to this first we are not to withdraw from the world as I said closed monasteries and vows of poverty are not

really a good idea we have to operate within its culture and its commerce and its laws if we interact with the world and secondly we're to be salt and light now we've lost the meaning of that slightly of course salt pre-fridges salt was used to maintain meat also do with osmotic pressure and stuff like that if you want to go into the chemistry but that's what it was used for you would salt meat to stop it going off but to do that the salt has to come in contact with the meat it's no good having a bag of salt over here and a dead pig over here that doesn't produce salted pork you have to put the meat in contact with the salt or the salt in contact with the meat in order for it to work and if we're to be salt and light in the world we have to be in contact with it so finally if sin is like chocolate

[37 : 45] I'd like to suggest to you that the world is like an office party in fact the office party is perhaps the prime illustration of the world think of the world as an office party what happens an office party well basically binge drinking and flirting that's what it's all about and what are we to do with that if we're invited to our office party do we go do we not go what do we do and of course there are various things you could say of course the Puritan idea would have been to try to ban office parties that never really worked I'm not sure it's even a good idea anyway really but it certainly doesn't work it's certainly not going to happen anyway not in the 21st century we can't judge the world says Paul and then there might be the advice we would have got from early mid 20th century evangelicalism

I don't know what C.T. Stead's own position on these things would be but the sort of church that separated from the world in the wrong sense that said shun worldliness touch no unclean thing no smoking no drinking no dancing and I remember godly men godly Christians who would give just such advice I remember being told not to get in by a Christian teacher at school not to get involved with the performance of HMS Pinafore actually advice that I ignored I have to say but yeah there was a view that it's too dangerous to touch the world well in one sense of course that's right the world is indeed dangerous yet we have to touch it we're not supposed to withdraw from the world so what are you going to do you're going to go to the office party and you're going to stick to the orange juice or perhaps you're going to have just one or two glasses of wine but you're not going to get drunk and you're going to go and talk to the girls from the back office and you're going to or perhaps you're going to sit down with a new and rather attractive manager of the opposite sex and have a conversation with them and you're going to enjoy it you're going to enjoy their company won't work if you don't and Paul actually says if an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you feel inclined to go he doesn't say you must go he says if you feel inclined to go then go if you want to go but you have to do all this without sin and demonstrating that it is possible to talk to an attractive young man or lady person of the opposite sex without sin and we all struggle with that don't we men particularly but we all struggle with it and as I said for the missionary stud within a yard of hell meant the poverty written cities of

India or the jungles of Africa but you can get to hell just as easily from the Grand Hotel in Brighton or the Dorchester on Park Lane in fact nowhere has better transport connections than the Abyss there's no departure lounge straight through security no delays at all you can get there very easily Jesus said that didn't he said broad is the way that leads to destruction there's a very pleasant motorway that takes you straight there no traffic jams at all but we need to be showing the narrow way and we need to live provide a refuge from the world and indeed we need to encourage one another when we do go to the office party we might need to say when you come back well did you really have too much to drink then but certainly we need to encourage people not to do it without sin so let me just conclude if I can find the remote control which I seem to have lost let me just conclude just by reading a few more scriptures but in your hearts set apart

Christ as Lord always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have but do this with gentleness and respect keeping a clear conscience so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander from Peter 3 15-16 James 5 19-20 my brothers if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back remember this whoever turns a sinner from the error of his ways will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins and finally 1 Peter 4-8 above all love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins we are all sinners but if we love one another we can find a way through that so let's conclude our worship together by singing again and this is a more sort of reflective song it's a prayer 817

I think we know it as O Jesus Christ grow thou in me but the words have been updated here so it says O Jesus Christ within me grow 817 sing this a a a a a a a a!

[44:14]