

1 Corinthians 5

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[0 : 0 0] Corinthians 5, we'll be taking a look at that relatively straightforward and yet oh-so-challenging text. Two big events on campus this week. The first was Sex Week. I probably don't need to say much about that one.

It's, I guess, a bit self-explanatory. If you don't know what it is, it's a celebration of all things having to do with sex. And I do mean all things.

The second event that happened on campus this past week was a religious gathering of a different sort. It's called CT6, or Coming Together 6, an interfaith student leadership conference that had students from more than 100 universities in North America on campus this week.

This conference is a perfect illustration for what has become the highest religious ideal of our generation, tolerance. And regardless of the virtue of any individual session at this conference, the conference itself has an ethos of uncompromised tolerance.

By design, our generation's commitment to tolerance on the subject of religion equalizes in value yoga, Shabbat, Jum'ulach prayers, Christian intercession, etc.

[1 : 35] Prayer is prayer. Tolerance also equalizes sexual preference. God made you one way. He made somebody else a different way. He made that one a little confused, so let's change the gender.

[illegible]

For a man has his father's wife. Chloe's people, if you remember back to chapter 1, verse 11, brought Paul a report. One of the items in that report, presumably, is an instance of sexual sin, one that he's dealt with actually in the past, if we read ahead to verse 9.

We don't have the details to pinpoint the nature of this sin. We don't know if the man and his father's wife are biologically related. The verse doesn't say.

But Paul does want us to know two things. First, he uses a word here, sexual immorality. The word is porneia. It's where we get pornography. It used to have a more specific meaning in classical times, but by the time Paul is writing this, it's a general word for all kinds of sexual immorality or fornication.

[3 : 27] So whatever this guy and his father's wife are doing, it ain't right. The second thing Paul wants us to know is that it is so bad that even the pagan world around the church in Corinth thinks it's bad.

And that's saying something. I mean, there's a little bit of competitiveness in me. I want to know how bad our civilization is compared to theirs. Well, let me give you some of the data. In Roman Corinth, there were temples, multiple temples, where you would go to the temple, and part of the worship service was having a prostitute.

That's how you communed with the goddess or the god. Premarital and extramarital sex for men was actually expected, so long as it wasn't with a married woman.

So there's actually a double standard according to gender. Homosexuality with its connection to educational structures, perfectly normal. Corinth is also thought to be the point of origin of the Bacchic mystery cults, which I don't necessarily want to describe because this is being recorded.

But if you're curious, I can tell you about them later. So when Paul talks about the pagan world finding this sexual transaction in the church bad, it's bad.

[4 : 50] I mean, this is beyond Leviticus 18 incest. This is, in everybody's mind, a bad thing, except for the Corinthian Christians. So, point number one, sin needs to be removed.

When I first read through this text, I thought, 1 Corinthians 5, this is going to be about fornication. How wonderfully timely for sex week. But then I read it again, and with the end of verse 1, Paul is done talking about the man committing the sexual sin.

He actually, he's done. One verse about the guy, 12 verses addressing the intolerability of the church's tolerance of sin. So let's keep going.

Verses 2 through the beginning of 5. And you are arrogant. Ought you not rather to mourn? Ought you not rather to mourn?

So let him who has done this be removed from you. For though absent in body, I am in present in spirit. And as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing.

[5 : 57] When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus, and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of flesh.

The emphasis here, removal of sin. Corinthian church, you ought to mourn this sin. And then get rid of it. And this was, this was their problem.

I mean, we've already seen this in the first four chapters, right? The Corinthians have traded in the wisdom of God, because it looks like foolishness to have a Savior who died on a cross.

They have traded that in for the wisdom of man. They have, out of a desire to look cool, and be accepted by everybody, out of a desire to get attention and put on the best show, they have accepted and even institutionalized horrible sin.

And the name of tolerance they have tolerated. It's like when your little brother, I mean, I don't know if you have a little, I have a little brother who always wanted to be part of the grown-up conversation.

[7 : 07] And so when there was joking around, he would joke around, and then he would take it one step too far, because he was young, and he didn't really have a sense of the social parameters of the situation. And so everybody's laughing, and then he makes that one uncomfortable statement, and the laughing stops.

Well, in Corinth, the laughing stopped. It's time to get rid of the sin. And so Paul tells them, hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh.

Now, the word flesh here can mean the whole person. So this could be total condemnation. But frequently in Pauline literature, the word flesh here also just means the sinful nature, part of the person.

And because it's here juxtaposed with the spirit, I think we're right to say that the precise definition of flesh here is the sinful nature. So why contrast it with the spirit?

Let's keep reading. 5b through 8. So that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. Your boasting is not good.

[8 : 20] Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump. As you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

Let us therefore celebrate the festival. Not with the old leaven, that is the leaven of sin. The leaven of malice and evil. But with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

So it's not just handing over this guy to Satan for the destruction of his flesh. Paul gives two reasons here why that act is important. First, it's a matter of protecting ourselves.

When confronted with the absolute holiness of God, the Holy One of Israel, as Isaiah frequently calls him, we realize our impurity as a group of people.

We're bad. We must pick up our swords and fight against this.

[9 : 19] We as a church must not tolerate sin. The danger of tolerating sin is that it poisons the whole church. Paul uses a leavening metaphor here to demonstrate the danger of the pervasiveness of unchecked and unjudged sin in a church body.

Sin in our church is inevitable. Sin in our church is inevitable. But just accepting it, not repenting for it, and institutionalizing it is not acceptable.

Second, the hope of submitting his flesh to Satan is the salvation of the man's spirit. That is, there is hope for the redemption and restoration, which is won by the destruction of another's flesh, the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

Our Passover lamb was indeed sacrificed. And because he was sacrificed, we have hope in the salvation of our spirits.

Sin in our church is inevitable. But because of Christ, we can repent and then, in most bittersweet fashion, keep the feast.

[10 : 26] We can celebrate that salvation is won. So it's for protecting the whole church and it's for saving the sinner. Paul doesn't stop.

He adds actually a few comments here in 9 through 13, lest we misunderstand our ecclesial role in judging sin. So let's read the rest. I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people.

Not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world or the greedy and swindlers or idolaters, since then you would actually have to go out of the world. But now I'm writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler.

Not even to eat with such a one. For what do I have to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside.

Purge the evil person from among you. Paul actually puts a restriction on the Christian response to sin. Obedience and holiness, purity, and the purging of sin, these are the prerogative of the church for the church.

[11 : 45] Our job as Christians in this body is to push each other toward holiness, even when it means being intolerant of each other's sin. There's a gentle way of doing this, for sure.

There's a loving way of doing this, which we're going to see later in this letter. But Paul's concern here is not the way of doing it. It's the problem of the probability that we're not doing it.

Ironically, we are, and I say this, you know, knowing my own heart, we are more likely to judge the sins of the world than we are the sins of our friends in the church.

Paul's word to us is, stop doing that. We cannot hold the world to a Christian standard of holiness. For them, our word must be the gospel. Let me put this as clear as I can.

In your classroom, in your workplace, wherever you encounter the sin of the world, if you judge that sin according to the law or to some sense of Christian morality, it is wrong, and it will do great damage.

[13 : 01] You cannot understand the law as an unbelieving sinner until you understand the gospel. So your response must be the gospel of grace.

So let me conclude here. I want to apply this quite specifically, and I do realize I'm applying this in the midst of a university that's celebrating sex week and coming together six.

It's important for our church to take a stand against churches which are, in our era, institutionalizing sin, particularly sexual sin.

The toleration institutionalized in religious groups like the Episcopal Church and others, where priests across the country are getting kicked out because they've had the gall to suggest that homosexuality is a sin and maybe should be a reason why not to promote somebody to bishop.

This is the toleration of our generation. This toleration is not a virtue. Palm, I think, makes our choices very clear. We can either look on them as fellow Christians, fellow believers, which means we must take a stand against sin, or we can look on them as a church that has lost the gospel and does not share our understanding of it and who are not Orthodox Christians.

[14 : 31] But those are your choices. There's no... They're Christians. We just disagree on this sex thing. Second, we must take this opportunity to consider our own family.

And this is probably the more important application. How do we tolerate sin? How do we ignore it? How do we promote it? How do we embrace it?

Are we bothered by it? Are we angry about it? This is a call to get mad. There is no better time to get mad about the sin that we have tolerated in our church family.

And there is no better time to repent. There's no better time to confront sin, and there is no better time to be sorry for it. Because the salvation of you, your brother, your sister, and the health of our church may actually depend on it.

Let me pray. Great God in heaven, we are grateful to you for saving us through your son, our Lord. Impress upon us the reality that only through him, through his sacrifice, can we be saved.

[15 : 46] And because we have been saved, grant that we may become more like him in holiness. We may become more like him in holiness as we come to celebrate the feast.

I pray these things in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.