

'Tough Love'

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 August 2026

Preacher: Ricky Njoto

[0:00] And please turn your Bibles back to 1 Corinthians 5 as we continue our series through the first letter to the Corinthians.

! Andrew gave these passage the title of Tough Love.! I was tempted of changing it to Tough Sermon because it has been a tough sermon to write.

And this is the kind of passage that people don't like, isn't it? A couple of months ago, someone knocked on my door asking for a donation towards a charity organization.

I said, sure. So I gave some money. And he said, what do you do? And I said, I'm a pastor of that church just across the road. And he said, oh, nice. I'm not religious myself.

But for some reason, a lot of people that have been giving to our organization have been Christians. I like that Christianity encourages people to be charitable.

[1:03] That is what people like, isn't it? That's what we like about our religion. And if you were to ask people, random people on the street, what they liked about Christianity, you might get the same answers.

Charity, our teaching about love, acceptance of all humans as image bearers of God, Jesus' teaching about not judging.

And so when they read Bible passages like this, people don't like this. Because our passage this morning speaks about holiness.

And holiness can be offensive in today's culture, which values personal autonomy and freedom. For a lot of people, the expectation of holy living is not loving or tolerant.

People don't like it. Perhaps some of us here this morning might not be comfortable with it either.

But as we study this passage today, we will see that holiness is expected in Christian living.

[2:15] And holiness and love actually go hand in hand. Holiness and freedom actually go hand in hand. We read in verse 1 to 2.

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 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? Here Paul presents another problem that was in the Corinthian church.

And this problem has many different layers. First layer, there is a man who is sleeping with his father's wife. Notice that it doesn't say his mother.

So it's likely to be his stepmother. Regardless, this is still sexual immorality. Unholiness. Second layer, this is a public kind of immorality.

[3:21] It's reported or literally it's been heard. People talk about it. This is not private sin. Third, it's a kind of immorality that even pagans don't tolerate.

Even pagans. People who, Paul says, don't have the spirit. People who, during that time, were fine with visiting prostitutes and raping slaves and having sexual orgies.

Even they did not tolerate this immorality. And so the Corinthians' tolerance of this sin is terrible for their witness. And fourth layer, the sin is ongoing.

There is sexual immorality. A man is sleeping with his father's wife. Not that he has done it in the past. He's still doing it. A literal translation says, a man is having his father's wife.

He's having an ongoing sexual relationship with her. Despite people knowing about it and talking about it, the sexual immorality continues.

[4:40] This is an unrepentant, defiant public sin that brings unholiness into the church and that bears bad witness for people outside the church.

And yet, fifth layer of the problem, the church is not doing anything about it. Instead of lamenting, they are proud, literally puffed up.

We have encountered that word many times in this letter. They're puffed up. Why? In the next chapter, Paul addresses some of the things that the Corinthians say.

I have the right to do anything, they say. Perhaps they think grace, God's grace, has made them so free that they are now beyond any moral restrictions.

They think they have attained a greater spiritual understanding that even the pagans don't have, that they are free to do whatever they want because Christ has set them free.

[5:42] That's what we often say, right? Christ has set them free. But Paul tells them, no. You need to mourn and excommunicate the sexually immoral man.

And then in verse 3 to 5, Paul explains what that means. He says, And so, As an apostle, Paul has the authority to pass judgment towards a member of the church.

And so, when the church is assembled and Jesus' power is present because when two or three gather in his name, he is there. Hand this man over there to remove this man from their fellowship. It's a public sin, and so it requires a public pronouncement of judgment. Now, the language that Paul uses in verse 5 can be confusing.

Hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh so that his spirit may be saved when Jesus comes? Salvation through handing this man over to Satan and not Jesus?

[7:32] What does that even mean? Well, we need to understand Paul's theology that to be inside the church is to be under the protection and lordship of Jesus.

Outside the church is the world where, Paul says in Ephesians 2, Satan rules as the prince of the air. So, handing him over to Satan simply means removing the man from church fellowship and putting him back out into the world whose lifestyle he has chosen.

But notice the purpose. Paul doesn't want the man to be excommunicated forever. He says the excommunication is for the destruction of the flesh.

Again, from other writings of Paul, like Galatians 5, we know that the flesh means the sinful flesh with all its sinful desires.

And so the reason for the excommunication here is so that the man would realize the seriousness of his immorality, that he's not safe under the protection of Jesus in the church so that he might destroy his sinful desires, that is, so that he might repent.

[8:56] And when he does repent, his spirit his spirit will be saved when Jesus comes. People often think of judgment like this as intolerant, unloving, ungracious.

But actually, this is love. According to the Bible, this is love. If they love this man, they must not let him continue in the act of immorality that will destroy himself and destroy the reputation of the church for the sake of witnessing.

If they love him, they should care about the salvation of his spirit more than his ego in the present. I think in this matter, churches today can make two different mistakes.

Some churches might be more like the Corinthians. They might be proud of their freedom and love and tolerance to the point that they allow immorality to continue and poison the church.

There are some churches who allow their members to have ongoing sex outside of marriage, unrepentant, even when it's already been made public. Or perhaps they allow other ongoing sins like, later on, Paul lists some other immoralities like greed and slander.

[10:33] Greed and slander. These are the things that are very easy for churches to just brush over. Churches can allow unrepentant immoralities, again, unrepentant immoralities to continue in the name of freedom tolerance and grace.

But that's not grace at all. In fact, here, Paul calls that pride because it makes people think that they are beyond any criticisms and rebuke.

Some other churches might be the opposite. They might be proud of their strict holiness and self-righteousness. They criticize left and right, they excommunicate left and right, but not with the hope of people's repentance, not with the hope of receiving people back.

They criticize, judge, and excommunicate only for the sake of maintaining their own holy look and reputation. That's holiness without love.

And that's also pride. Which one are we? Hopefully, neither. We need to be careful not to fall into either one of these.

[12:03] holiness. The church needs both holiness and love. They go hand in hand. In fact, it is because of love that we maintain holiness.

And Paul continues here in verse 6. Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough?

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. 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.

Again, this is a bit difficult to understand, but Paul uses the illustration of yeast and bread here for two reasons. First, he wants to show that immorality spreads like yeast.

I've got two young kids. I can't tell you how many times they copy each other in the way they do wrong things. Not the good things they copy, the bad things they copy each other.

[13:21] Immorality spreads like yeast. Even a little bit of yeast in a big amount of dough spreads to penetrate the entire dough. They might think, the Corinthians might think, oh, it's only one man doing this.

No, that one man is like a little yeast. It's a little until it spreads. So, expelling this man from the fellowship is loving not only towards him for his repentance, but also towards the community, so that the community stays holy.

second, Paul uses the yeast and bread here because he wants to highlight the place of the gospel in holiness.

This is important. Holiness is not a requirement for salvation. It's the working out of salvation.

our Old Testament passage in Exodus shows the Israelites being slaves in Egypt. God is about to free them by bringing death to the Egyptians.

[14:35] And the Israelites are told to sacrifice a lamb and smear its blood on their doorposts as a sign so that death passes over them. And every year after that, they're told to remember that event by celebrating the Passover, that they are freed.

Despite their, regardless of their actions or immoralities, they're freed just because of God's grace. Now, every year, the Passover is followed by the festival of the unleavened bread, like Priti has helpfully highlighted for us.

Now, here, Paul is using that as an illustration. He's using the Passover lamb to refer to Christ, he's the Passover lamb, and the festival of the unleavened bread to refer to holy living.

So, Paul's point is this, guys, just like the Israelites in the Old Testament, never stop with the Passover, but continue with the festival of the unleavened bread.

So, Christian life is like that. The sacrifice of Christ is the most important event in history. Yes, it gives us freedom from sin, it gives us freedom from death, but we don't stop there.

[16:04] Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed, Paul says, therefore, therefore, we don't stop there. there is the therefore, let's keep the festival that comes after that, and that is holy living.

Holy living is not a requirement for salvation, but it is the expected result of salvation. salvation.

Again, there are two mistakes that Christians often fall into here.

Some Christians might cling onto their freedom in Christ so tightly that they forget about holiness. They might think, in Jesus we are free.

All these demands of holiness, they're shackles, aren't they? Why do we want to be shackled under the shackles of holiness? But actually, in the Bible, holiness is not the shackle, sin is the shackle.

That we always need to sin, that's the shackle, that's the slavery. We are freed from that, which means that freedom must look like the opposite, holiness.

[17:30] When Christ, our Passover Lamb, died, He died to free us from sin and death. Why would we want to return to our old lives of sin that leads to death?

That's like wanting to go back to slavery. Holiness is gospel freedom. So it's not right to cling to freedom at the expense of holiness.

Now, other Christians might be the opposite. They cling to holiness, but they forget about gospel freedom. They see holiness not as gospel freedom, but as law to win God's heart.

They think that God accepts them only when they do holy things. that's not right. Our acceptance in front of God has been secured by Jesus.

They think that if they fail, God rejects them, but that's not right. We have been accepted by God only on the basis of Christ crucified, not our own holiness.

[18:46] But our holiness is the working out of it. God is going to to what Paul says in verse 7. Get rid of the old yeast so that you may be a new unleavened batch as you really are.

You already are a new unleavened batch. You already are holy, so be holy. the holy status is already given to us for free in Jesus' death on the cross.

And so therefore we live holy. now, Paul continues to expand on what living out holiness in the unholy world looks like.

In verse 9 to 13, last verses, 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. 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.

[20 : 11] Do not even eat with such people. 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. So what does living holy in this unholy world look like?

Well, this is what it does not look like. It does not look like withdrawing from this unholy world.

Christians are called to live in this unholy world, be witnesses in this unholy world, serve people in this unholy world, and pray for this unholy world.

And we are not to judge the people of this world. People outside the church will not follow the demands for holiness from Christ, of course not.

They don't even recognize Christ as king. They don't fall under his kingship. We can't judge them according to our standard because God will do that later when Christ comes.

[21 : 36] one of my hobbies is music. So by day I'm a pastor, by night I play a bass guitar in a rock band.

Surprise, surprise. Because of this, I regularly meet people who live sexually immoral lives, who use immoral words, who break their own bodies with all kinds of immoral addictions.

they know that I'm a church minister and so sometimes it gets interesting. For example, after they use ten swear words in five sentences, sometimes they look at me and jokingly say, oh, sorry Father, and then they make the sign of the cross mockingly.

I'm bothered by that, but I remind myself of this, that I cannot judge them. I can disagree with them, and I do. I can even say that I think their lives are sinful, if they ask me, but I cannot judge them.

That is, I can't forbid them from doing immoralities, I can't discipline them, and ultimately I can't pass final judgments on them by saying, you're going to go to hell.

[23 : 00] No, I can't do that. That's not my job. that's God's job. Only God can do that, and He will. My job is to love them, pray for them, and bear witness of the cross of Christ to them.

But with those inside the church, those who claim to be a brother or sister, that is, those who claim to be a Christian, Paul says that we ought to judge.

That is, we ought to discern, we ought to rebuke and discipline if someone claims that they follow Jesus but they continue in their worldly living. And sometimes we even need to cut off fellowship as a form of discipline, like Paul wants them to do to the sexually immoral man, again, for the sake of repentance.

So that they don't think that they are safe. Sometimes I do wonder if Christians tend to reverse this pattern.

We tend to judge people outside of the church, we criticize them and we break fellowship with them, but we tend to tolerate Christians inside who sin unrepentantly.

[24 : 29] That's not right. let God judge those outside. But we need to be serious about sin inside the church.

Now, what does that judgment inside the church look like in practice for us? Well, it depends on the situation. It takes wisdom.

Is the sin private or public? public. The sin in this passage is public and unrepentant. And so the discipline is public and harsh.

But if you become aware privately that a Christian brother or sister is caught in sin, the most immediate cause of action is private rebuke with love.

just talk to them. Remind them of what Christ has done. Remind them of the gospel and what that means for Christian living with the purpose of getting them to repent and be restored.

[25 : 35] But if the matter is serious or they refuse to repent, you should, of course, bring it to a pastor rather than trying to conduct church discipline by yourself.

And in cases involving abuse or criminal conduct, the appropriate safeguarding and civil processes must also happen.

The details differ, but the principles are the same. Sin is serious. Holiness matters.

But we do things with love. We rebuke and judge because we love them so that there is repentance and restoration.

But as we strive towards holiness, it's good to always remember the gospel that Christ, the Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

[26 : 38] It is finished. There's nothing more that we can do to win God's acceptance. nothing. Nothing. God has already accepted us based on his holiness and not ours.

Death has already passed over us because Jesus has already died for us. And for that, let's thank God in a prayer.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for what you have done in Jesus.

We thank you that his sacrifice has set us free. Free from judgment, free from sin, free from death.

And so help us to have the power of your spirit to leave that freedom out through holy living.

so that when people outside of the church see us, they might see something good and something different. They too might be enticed to follow Christ.

[27 : 48] In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen. Amen.