

Purifying Fellowship

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[0 : 0 0] a bit of rain on the roof made me feel like i was about to preach back in new zealand it's nice let's pray heavenly father we thank you for your word we thank you that it challenges us that it builds us up and that it teaches us in the way we should go as we live out our faith father i pray that tonight we would have humble hearts as we come to your word and lord we confess it's a it seems like a difficult passage for us but we pray that we would see the grace shining through in it lord and be challenged and built up in jesus name we pray amen if only our church was a little bit more like the new testament church we'd probably have a better impact for the gospel have you ever heard a statement like that before the thought or the wish that we could be a little bit more like the early new testament church is a common one amongst christians i guess the feeling is as we look around us at the churches around us we feel like there's a kind of a disconnection between what we see around us and what we read about in the new testament when we read about all the exciting things that are happening in the book of acts we can kind of feel like maybe we're missing something now by all means it's good to be thinking about these things and i guess measuring ourselves against the scriptures that's a good thing to do but as we've been going through first corinthians over these last few weeks we've seen a church that's not too different from what we see going on around us in the churches in our day and age you see they had major struggles going on and it can kind of bring us back to reality when we tend to romanticize the early new testament church as we've seen so far in the letter it starts out on a positive note we've been told the corinthians have been given everything in christ and yet in the first four chapters of the book we see that there was division in the church as each was aligning themselves with their particular hero in the faith and this caused them to boast in human wisdom and leadership and of course we still see this going on today don't we but tonight we're about to see another issue of affecting the corinthians a major issue look with me at first corinthians chapter 5 verses 1 and 2 as we see the corinthians moral failure it is actually reported that there's sexual immorality among you and of the kind that's not even found among the pagans for a man is living with his father's wife and you are arrogant should you not rather have mourned so that the one who had done this would be removed from among you you see it's a sad day when the sin of the church trumps that of the world but that's exactly what we have going on here in corinth you see paul's heard a report that there's sexual immorality in corinth among the corinthians and so bad was this immorality that paul says it wasn't even found among the pagans corinth itself was a notorious for being a place of rampant sexual immorality but here paul heightens the guilt of the corinthians by saying that such gross behavior wasn't even found amongst the pagans in corinth do you grasp the weight of what paul's saying here i've been trying to think of an illustration that would pack as much punch as that and so hopefully none of you will get offended by this but it would be kind of like saying australians led by their government are behaving worse than hitler paul's are not holding anything back here you see paul's aware of how such behavior brings shame on the name of the lord and so by mentioning the pagans it would have been like rubbing salt in the corinthian wounds well a man was sleeping with his father's wife

probably a stepmother and they were proud it's creepy behavior isn't it the fact that we're told that this man was living with his father's wife shows that the sin far from being just a once-off was actually blatant and ongoing unrepentant sinful behavior but instead of taking this sin seriously the corinthians had become arrogant and there was even a hint of boasting going on so now we see they were not only just boasting about their leaders they were boasting about their immorality well what were they thinking what was going on in their head well this section starting from chapter 5 and going through to the end of chapter 7 deals with many issues but i guess the unifying theme throughout this whole section seems to be the nature of our christian freedom and we'll look at this next week as we deal with paul as paul deals with the corinthians saying all things are lawful for me

well perhaps the corinthians had understood grace and realized that they're saved not by works or by being good but somewhere along the line they seem to have lost the connection between grace and our new freedom freedom not to indulge the old nature but now freedom to love god and to serve him and having a wrong view of their freedom in christ they'd kind of developed this blurry vision where they should have been disgraced and in mourning they were arrogant and they were boastful and if we're not careful then we too can develop blurry vision and be deceived you see we too can have a wrong view of our christian freedom if we're not careful we can become hardened by sin giving it a foothold in our lives and comforting ourselves by the fact that it doesn't depend on us and then those thoughts come in well this will be the last time

I'll fire up a quick prayer and I'll be forgiven and then that's it but be careful because before you know it that habit can be formed and before you know it you can have that blurry vision that the corinthians had now be on your guard against the deceitfulness of sin don't let it turn your freedom to serve christ into slavery to your old master now this sin was obviously heinous in paul's eyes but what actually horrifies paul the most is the fact that this sin was tolerated amongst the corinthians and they'd failed to discipline this man and that leads me to my second point and that's the corinthians moral failure look again with me at verse 2 there he says and you are arrogant should you not rather have mourned so that the one who had done this had been removed from among you here it's almost like paul saying guys rather than acting like a bunch of pagans in the smoko room on a monday morning boasting about your sexual exploits and entertaining one another with godlessness shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and put this man out of your fellowship see paul sees the necessity for the corinthians to do something about this matter and it's important to note that he directs his commands to the church as a body the church as a whole you see it's the church as a whole here that paul rebukes for not taking action against such sin the church is responsible for disciplining its members and this is helpful for us to remember especially in our day and age you know we're so used to individualizing the christian life that sometimes we overlook the responsibility of the whole congregation for the right behavior of its members and this is made all the more harder as we live in a society that resists discipline and asserts the rights of the individual to live however they please who are you to tell me how to live is the catch cry of our generation and sadly this attitude has crept into the church and none of us stands alone none of us are an island unto ourselves we need to realize that the way each one of us lives our lives has an effect on our fellow believers later in chapter 12 paul likens the church to a body and he says in verse 26 that if one member suffers then all suffer together with it the church is the body of christ and the reaction of those who follow christ to such behavior should be one of mourning and then action next paul outlines what's to be done in this situation firstly they're instructed in verses 4 and 5 to assemble and then to hand this man over to satan now it all starts sounding a little bit creepy doesn't it but in all simplicity it means what paul's already said in verse 2 this means to be removed from the assembly of believers and to be put out of fellowship with god's people you see paul sees the world outside of the church as the domain of satan and for a believer that's a terrifying place to be especially if you're out there all on your own and we have to remember that in Corinth at the time there wasn't a church on every corner like we have here in Melbourne so for a Christian in Corinth this would have been a frightening prospect again this is a far cry from our day and age where we have many churches and I guess the attitude of some is that if things don't work out here then I'll just go to the church down the road now we live in a church shopping era where people jump from church to church at the drop of a hat and often for the tiniest of reasons but if the thought of being put out of fellowship with our local church isn't a terrifying thought to us then that's an indictment on us now this is a terrible thing and paul outlines further what's to be done in verse 11 and he shows that this isn't just to be a Sunday thing this is to be a complete cut off but he also broadens the scope a little bit and takes it to a bit of an uncomfortable level look at verse 11 he says but now I'm writing to you

that not to associate with anyone who bears the name of a brother or sister who is sexually immoral or greedy or is an idolater reveler drunkard or robber do not even eat with such a one see now it's not even just sexual immorality that's to be judged and taken care of in the church if it was I could kind of just handle that but now Paul's taken it to an uncomfortable level and he's driven Homer's point and I don't know about you but I've detected some of those things that Paul lists there in my own heart I'm sure we'd all agree that sexual immorality especially of the kind we've been talking about isn't to be found amongst us but greediness it's a little bit too close to home for me but Paul's right to point out these things as those who continue living like this without repentance are living like

they don't belong to Christ and Paul commands the Corinthians not to even eat with such a person and in those times eating with a person was a big deal it showed that you accepted them it showed that you shared fellowship it was a culture centred around hospitality so this was the ultimate form of discipline now all of this is leading to

Paul's major command in verse 13b as he sums up what he's been getting at by quoting from the book of Deuteronomy and he commands the Corinthians like God did to Israel to drive out the wicked person from among you he is stressing the need for God's people to be holy now right about now you might be feeling a little bit worn out by all this talk of sin and judging especially when we see the sin in our own lives but we need to remember that here Paul's not advocating some sort of witch hunt if that was the case there'd be no one in our churches because let's face it we're all sinners no we've already established that this is for those who call themselves Christians but who are living in blatant rebellion to God and not even batting an eyelid at it and we're about to see that Paul though has some good reasons for ordering such judgment and you might be surprised to learn that all of these flow from an attitude of grace that's a relief firstly this action is to be taken for the benefit of the sinner and we don't normally think of it in that way do we but look with me at verse 5 he says you're to 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 see the ultimate goal of this discipline springs from grace and the hope that in judging this man by handing him over to Satan he may be ultimately saved now this can fly in the face of what our society thinks is the most loving thing to do our society would say the most loving thing to do for this man would be just to tolerate him and rather than judging him try and see the good in him and affirm him we know from our own experience don't we that discipline is a good thing that's done out of love and yet the thought of the church disciplining someone is met with resistance even amongst Christians no but this discipline is for the man's own good the way this man's currently living calls into question whether or not he's really a Christian and I guess the hope is that while this man is out of fellowship and the protection of God's people he may come to his senses put to death the flesh with its evil desires and ultimately be saved this is good for us to remember as this action would never be pleasant at the time and of course it's always the last resort secondly this action is necessarily sorry this action is necessary as the health of the church depends on it look with me at verse 6 it says your boasting is not a good thing do not know that a little bit of yeast leavens the whole batch of dough here Paul points out that failure in this area actually spells for disaster spells disaster for the whole church and here Paul uses an illustration from everyday Jewish life to prove his point in the same way a little bit of yeast can spread through the whole batch of dough a little bit of sin when tolerated has the potential to spread throughout the whole church so for the sake of the church sin must be dealt with and the imagery comes from the Jewish Passover for seven days prior to the Passover a Jewish household would search out and remove every scrap of yeast from the house this was to symbolize their complete break with their old way of life in Egypt and so Paul pitches the church in verse 7 as a new batch of unleavened bread which is a symbol of our separation from the world therefore any yeast that may be contaminating must be cleaned out a sin must be dealt with early before it can contaminate the whole church and I guess nowhere is this seen more graphically in the scriptures than in the early church you remember in Acts chapters 1 through to 4 we see the church on a roll people were being converted all the believers were of one heart and mind we're told even selling their possessions and giving freely as those needs were arising and then that beautiful picture is broken as Ananias and Sapphira put on a front and lie

[15 : 08] by seeking their own glory and the Lord seeking to set an example and to keep the young church healthy puts Ananias and Sapphira to death see when sin is tolerated the church's impact for the gospel is hindered so God did something about it and showed right from the start that sin can't be tolerated in the church but Paul's not finished yet and he gives us another reason as to why we're to deal with sin in the church and he does so again by using another Passover illustration and it has to do with the most dominant ingredient of the Passover and that's the Passover lamb see the lamb needed to be sacrificed in order for God's wrath to be appeased and for God's judgment to pass over Israel and this is what Paul's alluding to here in verses 7 and 8 he says for our pascal lamb Christ has been sacrificed therefore let us celebrate the festival not with the old yeast the yeast of malice and evil but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth see this is the ultimate reason for the church to be dealing with sin because Christ has been sacrificed for us not so that we can stay in Egypt or the world

I should say but so that we can celebrate the festival of being set free from our old way of life and live in the reality of our new life when Paul addresses the Corinthians at the start of the letter in chapter 1 he says that the Corinthians have been sanctified in Christ Jesus which means they've been set apart from the world for Christ they've been given God's grace they've been enriched in every way they're not lacking any spiritual gift they have the promise that God will strengthen them to the end and that they may be blameless in Christ they have the promise of God being faithful and of having fellowship with him and his son and so coupled with our passage tonight it's almost like Paul's saying guys if that's the case if that's the situation you have all this in Christ if you've been freed from sin why do you tolerate it amongst yourselves cut it out get rid of it Paul says see it doesn't make sense for us as Christians to be set free from the world and then to live like we still belong to it no we've been sanctified we've been set apart and now we represent Christ to this lost world and sin when it's tolerated amongst us will only hinder that witness that's why Paul mentions the outsider twice in this passage we've already heard how Paul mentions the pagans in chapter 5 verse 1 he brings up outsiders again in chapter 6 where we see that far from judging and disciplining sin within their own midst they couldn't even judge trivial cases amongst themselves and so they were hauling one another off to court in plain view of unbelievers Paul knows that such behaviour hinders our witness to this world we have a responsibility as the body of Christ to represent Christ to this world and all too often you hear the horror stories the youth pastor getting his girlfriend pregnant the church worker caught embezzling money or similar stories and all too often it's only when they're caught that we see any signs of repentance which causes me to wonder is that true repentance or are they reacting to just being caught and having their shame exposed now I'm saying these things with myself in mind

I need to be reminded of these things myself every day if these things are happening in your life or my life then it's time to do something about it now perhaps as hard as you try you're still drawn to that website that you know you shouldn't be perhaps as hard as you try you keep overstepping those boundaries that you and your girlfriend or boyfriend have made perhaps you're having trouble with money perhaps it's many different things don't let it continue until it becomes an unstoppable force in your life and don't try and justify it to yourself because after a while we can become so used to it that like the Corinthians we end up accepting it and have that blurry vision and we can be deceived now if you feel like you're on that slippery slope down then you need to come clean and swallow your pride talk to someone about it as we've seen tonight we're all in this together if one part of the body suffers we all suffer now the greatest freedom I've ever known aside from my initial salvation in Christ was when after years of struggling

I came clean about the sin that entangled my life for years I was plagued with guilt and Satan used it to hold me back in my Christian life and accusing me but when I got it out and actually came clean and talked to someone about it amazing freedom don't wait if you wait it could be too late and we have a festival to enjoy the Christian life's a struggle sure but it's also a celebration Christ has been sacrificed for us we're his church and we've been set apart to represent him to this unbelieving world and we can only do that if our overall characteristic is Christ-like I'm convinced that when the world when the church becomes like the world we have no impact let's be dealing with the yeast in our own lives and also in the church which can be so hard to do especially when we see the sin in our own lives but we need to be doing this so that we live in the reality that's already ours in

[20 : 45] Christ and be reaching this unbelieving world and if you're here tonight and you haven't yet placed your faith in Christ then I hope that at the very least you've understood how serious sin and rebellion is before God God sent his son to die and to be sacrificed in order to open a way for us to be forgiven so don't shun that because that's your only hope what I've been saying tonight doesn't necessarily concern you yet you just need to get yourself right with God by believing in Jesus first but this discipline that Paul speaks about here is for those who thumb their nose at Christ and who live in open rebellion to him while claiming to be Christians and in that case the warning is clear repent or the church will have to do something about it you may be here tonight feeling threatened because as I said earlier you may fail time and time again as a Christian and no matter how hard you fight and claw your way along those hits just keep coming

I want to tell you to take heart because this discipline that we've been speaking about isn't prescribed for you the fact that you're in the battle shows that you are Christ's now if you're here tonight and you're struggling then you don't have to go at it alone we are the body of Christ and if you need to speak with someone about that after the service maybe have someone pray with you

then we'll be having people up the front I'll be up the front also pray with you or maybe you'd like to come up and pray in support of each other as in the body of Christ we stand together let's pray heavenly father we thank you that in Christ we've been given everything we thank you that in Christ we've been given your grace we thank you that in Christ we've been strengthened in every way and that we have fellowship with you and your son father we thank you that we've been sanctified as our Passover lamb has been sacrificed father we thank you that we've been set apart to represent you to this world what a privilege lord father please may we be dealing with sin in our own lives and also in the church body may we support one another father as we know that if one member suffers all suffer father we know that in and of ourselves we're weak so we ask that you would continue to shape and mold us into your likeness the likeness of your son by strengthening us by your holy spirit may we never bring shame on your name lord but may we live to the praise of your glory in Jesus name we pray amen