

1 Corinthians 5:1-13 AM

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[0 : 00] Our Father, we know that we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from your mouth. And so we ask now that you would feed us, supply us with our needs, help us to receive your truth into the depths of our hearts, that we might be sustained and live forever.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Please sit down. As you're turning to 1 Corinthians 5 on page 954, I just want to say thank you very much to so many of you who've been praying and supporting Bronwyn and myself as Bronwyn has been in Australia by her father's bedside as he died last on Saturday evening in Australia time.

I'm surrounded by family and by prayer and we're very thankful for how it happened. And I'm going to be heading down this week to Australia to be with the family for the funeral and I'll be back by Advent.

I'll be in close touch with the staff and I'm going to leave you in Jordan's capable hands. Thanks, Jordan. Well now, if you're new with us, our practice is usually to work through books of the Bible consecutively on Sundays.

The advantage of that is having to deal with passages that are uncomfortable and awkward and that I might not have chosen to deal with. The disadvantage is that you deal with passages that are uncomfortable and awkward and we may never have chosen to deal with.

[1 : 49] So we come out of chapters 1 to 4 with the challenge of the apostle saying, it's not enough just to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you need to live it out.

And by my count, we now have 10 chapters of practical application of what it means to live it out. And this section, chapters 5 to 7, deals with sexuality primarily and how we think about our bodies. It deals with marriage, divorce, singleness, involvement with prostitution and pornography, adultery, homosexual conduct, greed, idolatry, manipulative business practices and pride.

Is there anyone feeling left out? And today the apostle faces us with incest and church discipline. What was the sermon about today at church?

Well, the preacher had to preach on incest and church discipline. So look at the beginning of the chapter in verses 1 to 2. Paul says, It is actually reported, and the word means it's widely known outside the church, that there is sexual immorality among you.

[3 : 12] Sexual immorality is a very tame translation of the Greek word porneia, which stands for every sexual behaviour outside of marriage. And of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans.

For a man has his father's wife, on goingly, openly, brazenly, unrepentedly. And he says, verse 2, Now, the Corinthians lived in a culture that was just a wash in every form of sexual expression. I would make you blush if I told you some of the things I've discovered in research. And in Corinth, the more important you are, the more important you were, the more exempt you were from any kind of restraint.

And the Greek view was very influential, that the body was just to be used like eating and drinking, sex, no big deal. And weekly, everyone in the city was expected to go to the pagan temple and join with the prostitutes.

One commentator called Corinth Sin City. And as new Christians coming out of this lifestyle, Paul says in chapter 6, verse 11, this is what some of you were doing, they struggled to know what to leave behind.

[4 : 50] How does the death of Christ change us? What does it mean to be a community of contrast in Corinth? And here in verse 1, we learn that there is an established member living in an ongoing, unrepented, incestuous relationship with either his stepmother or his real mother.

We're not sure which. And it may indicate that he was a man of wealth, even a patron and a big donor to the church. And there are not many lines in Corinth, in pagan Corinth, that you shouldn't

cross, but this was one in pagan Corinth outside the church that made Corinthians blush. And in verse 9, the apostle says, I've already written to you about this issue, but they've chosen to ignore what he said because they believe they're spiritually superior to the apostle and because what we do with our bodies, they thought, has no effect on our spiritual lives because we've reached this new level.

So in this chapter, the apostle calls for a drastic form of discipline. And not every issue needs to be handled in this way. Jesus clearly teaches that it needs to be handled first going one to one and then one to two and then one to three.

But the fact that the apostle takes such an extreme stance here means that's already taken place, but without any effect. Now, you know that churches tend to two opposite responses to open sin in their church life.

[6 : 34] Some say, well, it doesn't really matter all that much, does it? I mean, didn't Jesus say we're not meant to judge other people? We need to be open and welcoming and the real value for us is tolerance and love.

At the other extreme, some churches say, the world is very wicked and we need to build ourselves a fortress with high walls and isolate ourselves from the culture around us and be on the hunt in church for anyone who lets the side down.

And some of you have been in churches on both like that. But both of these responses are unbiblical and self-righteous and we must find a more excellent way.

And what the apostle does here, what motivates him, is nothing but love. Love for the name of Christ, love for the individual concerned, love for the whole congregation and even love for the city of Corinth.

And I need to say this, that the apostle knows that he is writing to sexual and moral failures like all of us. And there's deep grief and pain in this passage as well as strong grace and joy.

[7 : 49] And so I say here near the start that it doesn't matter how you've sinned or what you're struggling with, Christ is at the centre of our life together with his redeeming power.

The danger for us is to think this has little to do with us. But if the underlying cause is pride, which it is, I think we need to listen very carefully.

See, we get all muddled up when we talk about sin. All of us sin all the time. Everyone, even after we trust Christ and the Holy Spirit begins to grow us like Christ, we are struggling daily to place our trust more deeply on Jesus and to pray that the Holy Spirit would grow us to be like Jesus.

And as we struggle daily to do that, to die to ourselves, we know that sin is no longer the core of who I am, but I still sin. It's why the old prayer book wonderfully calls us miserable sinners.

It's not that we're the worst sinners ever. It's that when we sin, it grieves us. So whenever we are conscious of sin in our lives, we turn to Christ in repentance.

[9 : 04] We ask for his forgiveness and his strength and his grace to put these things to death. We daily take up our cross to follow Jesus, but we know that we'll never be without sin until we go to be with Christ in glory.

We are not justified by our performance. We're not saved by our performance.

So I'm deeply conscious, speaking to a large group, that we may have had a good week or a bad week. You may have been abiding with Jesus like never before. You may just have hardly even thought about Jesus.

This is true for everyone in Christ. God looks at us clothed in all the righteousness of Jesus, since Jesus has taken all our sins away, past, present and future.

It's what we've been singing about in the hymns. But salvation is not just for the final day when we'll be delivered from the presence of sin. In this life, salvation means gradually being delivered from the power of sin, since we've been saved from the penalty of sin.

[10 : 13] So the Christian life is a day-by-day trying to grab a hold of my forgiveness and justification and righteousness in Jesus Christ, and learning to live in the light of that and applying that both to good and bad, day-by-day, hour-by-hour.

But that is not what is going on in Corinth. The apostle knows that he is writing to a group like us, full of failure, but this is open, brazen, unrepented sin.

The man who is in this situation is saying, Christ has died to save me from sin, but I'm free to dive back into sin. It's nonsensical.

Christ has died to save me from the sharks. I'm going to dive back and swim with the sharks. I can pray, hallowed be thy name, and pursue what is clearly unholy.

I know, Jesus, you came from heaven to be crucified for my sin, but I'm okay with sin now. It's no big deal. And the gospel of Christ crucified offers grace to all who fall, every one of us this morning, but grace without repentance is cheap grace.

[11:30] I'm sure many of you are familiar with the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. I think he was quoted last week in one of our sermons. And he has a very famous quote about cheap grace, which I'm going to read.

He says, It's a very clever thought.

Cheap grace is not the kind of forgiveness of sin that frees us from the toils of sin. Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. It's the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession.

And there are some circumstances that call for church discipline, but it has to come out of love and it has to be conducted in grace because it is meant to lead to restoration, reconciliation, repentance and restitution.

And what the apostle is calling on the Corinthians here to do is to show love primarily in three directions. Firstly, he wants them to demonstrate love toward the individual concerned.

[12:57] You get something of the flavor of this from verse two. Paul states in anguish, if you look down at verse two, he says, You are arrogant. Ought you not rather to mourn?

And the word mourn is a very strong word for grief. It's grief when you lose someone, a dear person who's close to you. What he's saying is that what's at stake here is the eternal standing of this man in Christ Jesus.

By allowing him to go on as he is, you are contributing to him being lost eternally. But here, right at the beginning of the passage, this is the note of grief.

And all discipline should be administered through tears. And the apostle's instruction is clear. Just whiz down. Verse two, let him be removed from among you.

Verse nine, do not associate with this person. And verse five, most clearly, he says, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of his flesh so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

[14:06] Nothing vindictive, nothing vengeful about this. It is the expression of the purpose of love. He's calling them not to exclude this man because he's become a bother to them, but so that he would come to his senses and ultimately be saved.

So handing him over to Satan is moving the person back out into the world, to Satan's realm, Satan's sphere, something that has to happen in the whole community. But the purpose is redemptive.

If you move him out of your fellowship, it's so that what is fleshly and carnal in him might be destroyed so that he might be saved eternally because there is a day coming, a day of the Lord, a day of judgment.

And if you do not act toward him now in discipline, when he faces Christ on that day of judgment, it will be too late. So all discipline is for the purpose of redemption.

When they put the man out and remove him from fellowship, it will protect the man from deceiving himself that everything's just fine. It will protect the church from ongoing contamination of unrepentant sin.

[15:16] And they'll be able to pray together for his restoration and repentance. And you may be interested to know that that is exactly what happened. So when we come to 2 Corinthians, Paul worries that the Corinthians have been overly harsh in the way they've administered this discipline.

And in chapter 2, he says, no, no, turn to him and forgive him and comfort him or he'll be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I beg you, reaffirm your love for him.

Interesting, isn't it? In my own experience, this kind of discipline only comes around occasionally and it works occasionally.

But when it is administered, it needs to be done out of love for the individual. That's Paul's first point. Secondly, it shows love for the whole church.

The apostle's not fixated on sex. This is a common criticism of Christians. In fact, if you think about it for a moment, it's taken him four long chapters even to arrive at this issue.

[16:23] And in those four chapters, he's been dealing with pride and selfishness. And even here, as we saw in verse 2, the underlying issue behind their sexual tolerance is pride.

And the apostle is not even fixated on the individual. His focus is on the church and the church's response. And so from verse 2 onward, he doesn't address the individual or the sin, but he speaks to the whole church because the trouble is not this one member, but the pride of the church.

And their lack of love in tolerating what will steal this man's eternal life. And Paul sees this as a crisis for the church and for the gospel.

Their failure to deal with open, unrepented sexual immorality in their midst is not just a low view of sin. What is at stake is the life of the church itself.

Do you remember Paul preparing the Corinthians for this in chapter 3 in verses 16 and 17?

Remember he said, Do you not know that you are God's temple?

[17:29] God's spirit dwells in you. If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy and you are that temple.

What that means is that we are members of one another. This is very hard for us raised in an individualistic culture to understand.

Where there's flagrant and persistent sin, we cannot say that's just their problem. In fact, none of us sins to ourselves. But left alone, open, unrepented sin not dealt with acts like yeast, like leaven infecting the body.

So in verse 6 he says, Your boasting is not good. 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.

There's a good mission statement for a church. We should be the new lump. So in the Old Testament book of Exodus, God rescued his people from bitter slavery.

[18:42] And the final plague that he sent was the angel of death who passed over each house. And God commanded his people, Israel, to be ready to go, to dress in their travelling gear and to clean out all the leaven from in their homes.

Then to take a lamb, sacrifice it, and to put the blood of the lamb on the doorposts. And each house marked by the blood of the lamb would be passed over.

What is spreading in Corinth, like leaven, is their pride and boasting. So with lovely understatement, Paul would have made a great Brit.

Paul says, your boasting is not good. And when he says, cleanse out the old leaven, he's not talking about the individual anymore. He's saying, all of us need to do this.

He's talking to them as a community. That we all have to examine ourselves and see where pride and our own attitudes and our own sins are starting to control us and to continue to bring our sin out into the open before the Lord Jesus so that he might confess us, so that he might cleanse us.

[19:56] It's what we do as Anglicans. And where does the power to do this come from? Verse 7, the end of verse 7. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed for us.

Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

So the gospel is not meant to be about tolerance, but about transformation. And any cleansing that happens to us comes from the lamb of God, the Passover lamb of God, who is sacrificed for us.

And he has rescued us from a slavery much greater than Egypt, but the slavery to sin, and brought us into a new people. And the new people, verse 8, are to be marked by joy and purity.

Isn't that amazing? Let's celebrate the festival. Here he's in the middle of a discipline chapter. And the picture of the church life here is not a funeral, but a festival.

[21:02] Because purity and joy belong together. And the ongoing cleansing by the death of Jesus Christ leads to a growing sense of relief and joy and likeness to Jesus, and the celebration of what is new amongst us.

The old level, 11, sorry, the old 11 is what is evil and it leads to malice. The new level is truth that leads to sincerity.

And that little word is a beautiful word. It means open to the rays of the sun. It's a picture of allowing ourselves into the light and warmth of the grace and forgiveness of God's goodness.

So this act of discipline will show love both to the individual and to the church. And finally, it will show love to unbelievers who are around the church.

Now we don't have time for this, but the last paragraph in chapter 5, together with the last paragraph of chapter 9, are perhaps the two most important sections in the New Testament about

how we as a church community should relate to the culture around about us.

[22 : 17] And here Paul urges us to immerse ourselves as deeply as we can with our friends and our neighbours who do not know Christ, but without being judgmental.

And in chapter 9, he says you should serve them as much as you can, genuinely identifying with them, with sympathetic understanding, coming beside them, praying that the Lord would give you a gospel opportunity to win them to Christ.

And sometime we ought to come back and look at these two things together. But the Corinthians deliberately misread his earlier letter where he said, don't associate with the immoral.

They misread it as though their job was to bring discipline to those outside the Christian community, whereas they were tolerating sin inside the community.

You understand? They were judgmental about the world around and indulgent about the sins within. It just, we get this the wrong way around all the time. Paul says, our job is not to impose our morals or our ethics on our society, but to live in such a way that others will see our good works and glorify our heavenly Father.

[23 : 36] He says, it's God who's going to judge those outside the church. We are to judge those inside the church, which doesn't mean being judgmental, but he's going back to when a known brother or sister is living in open and explicit evil.

Our job is not to be a holy ghetto with high walls around us, to have a holier-than-thou attitude, but to immerse ourselves in our city and to shine as lights of Jesus Christ as those who've come into the sunshine of his grace.

There are times when we will need to break association with those who call themselves Christians. There are two reasons for doing this in the New Testament. One is for deviant doctrine and the other is for behaviour that is contrary to Scripture ongoingly.

Always remember, always remembering that God's grace is for us all and God pardons and absolves all those who truly repent and unfaintedly believe his holy gospel.

So, you still with me? how should we respond to this chapter like this? I think as Canadians, we are deeply convinced that the state has no place in the bedrooms of the nations and we tend to apply this to God as well.

[25 : 06] And in our next two passages, we're going to see that the cross of Jesus has intensely practical implications for us in this area. Your body, he says, does not belong to you but to Christ.

You were bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body. But this chapter, I think, in this chapter, the death of Jesus moves us in two directions and I finish with this very simply.

Firstly, it moves us to love, to love Jesus who gave himself for us so completely and in his name to love those outside the church with the same love of Christ, to love each other in this community by continually joining together to bring our sins to the sunlight of his grace and even to love those who are defying Christ, who call themselves Christian, to tell them, to love them enough to tell them the truth and to pray for their restoration.

That's the first direction, to love and the second direction is to joy. Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed for us, so then let us celebrate the festival and this word means music and food and dancing and thankfulness, which is what we're about to do today without perhaps the dancing.

Here is the feast of Holy Communion, the joyful feast given to us by the Passover lamb on the night of the Passover as he gave his life for us to draw us into that love and grace and that light and that glory and that life forevermore.

[26 : 45] Thank you.