

with purity

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- [0 : 0 0] Adam Sandler's 1995 movie, Billy Madison, pretty much echoes the church at Corinth. I don't know if you've seen the movie. It's nearly 20 years old.
- Billy Madison is a spoiled rich kid who never grew up. He's a 28-year-old man, behaves like a child. His father, a fairly wealthy hotelier, loves him, but he's constantly embarrassed by his son's antics and lifestyle choices.
- It's cringeworthy, pretty much describes Billy Madison's selfish, immature behaviour and the movie, generally. But that's the picture of Corinth that we've been getting over the last few weeks.
- Immature, you need to grow up. It's what we saw in chapter 3. You're babes. You're just near, mere infants in Jesus. Chapter 6, verse 12. Paul quotes back to them twice.
- One of their favourite sayings. Most likely, it's a saying that was in Corinth, the city itself, that the church used themselves. It goes, everything is permissible for me.
- [1 : 0 7] Literally, it is everything for me is allowable. And the words for me are the centre of the sentence that everything else builds around.
- Their attitude was fundamentally self-centred. We saw that from chapter 3, didn't we? Mere babies in Jesus.
- Everything revolving around them. Immaturity. The problem with this church, though, is that they rated themselves really highly. They actually thought themselves as spiritual giants, as wise and mature and knowledgeable and spiritual.
- And so, as we move into these middle sections of 1 Corinthians, it's easy to miss something that is so important. Ten times in 1 Corinthians, and only once outside of 1 Corinthians, Paul uses a very simple question.
- They are all in the same grammatical form. They all have the same tone. The first is in chapter 5, verse 6. The last of them in chapter 9, verse 24. And the question is this.
- [2 : 1 7] Do you not know? And it's a rebuke. It's like, this is so basic, you should know this already.
- Grow up, Corinthian church. You should know this. And of the ten occurrences in 1 Corinthians, seven of them are here in these two chapters.
- This should be basic knowledge stuff for this church. You see, their assessment of themselves was so off.
- While they were the church in Corinth, too much of the city of Corinth was in the church. And there are three broad issues that Paul wants them to go back to basics on and to learn stuff on in these two chapters.
- And the Christian's perspective on each of these things has to be controlled by the cross of Christ and not by the prevailing view of the culture. And the first issue he picks up is sin and church discipline at the beginning of chapter 5.

[3 : 24] You see, here again, they've been controlled by their statement, everything is permissible for me and not the cross. Paul sees discipline here within the church as indispensable to the health of the church.

That's because he wants us to take sin seriously. In verse 1, we can see that he's having a go at a guy who has a sexual relationship with his stepmother, something that even their culture considered taboo.

In fact, in the Roman Empire, it was an illegal sexual activity. It seems from verse 2, however, that the church at Corinth were proud of it. Now, we need to understand that a little bit.

To be proud of an illegal relationship would be like a group of people boasting about their drug lab on Facebook. It doesn't make a whole lot of sense.

The authorities would be down on you like a ton of bricks real quick. So it's probably better to understand it as the church being proud of who this particular person was, proud of who he is in society.

[4 : 35] They're proud of, remember, we've seen already, they're proud of things like status and influence and the gifted speakers and the knowledgeable and the celebrities and the powerful and the rich. And so they're proud of this particular individual because he encapsulates the things that they admire.

And at the same time, they're overlooking his sin. Focusing instead of all the good things that this person's done, the social status he has and the prestige that he's brought to them.

Glossing over the sin because they value who he is and what he brings to them. Instead, they should have been filled with grief. They should have come clean. They should have dealt with the sin transparently in an appropriate way.

Two things to bear in mind about discipline here. First, it's not just sexual immorality that he's having a shot at because if you go down to verse 11, he throws in a bunch of other sins there.

The greedy, the idolaters, the slanderers, the drunks, the swindlers. So it's not just sexual immorality he's picking on. Secondly, disciplinary action is for those inside the church, not those outside the church.

[5 : 45] That's his point in verses 9 to the first half of verse 13. You see, to hold the non-Christian accountable for Christian standards would be like someone trying to hold me accountable for not adhering to the clearly defined rules of the Knitters Guild of New South Wales.

Church discipline is for those within the church.

And yet, how often do we look down our nose in a judgmental attitude to those outside the church and the decaying moral standards of the society in which we live and go tut, tut, tut, tut, tut.

And at the same time, playing light and loose with our own sinful attitudes. Now, Paul doesn't give a manual here for how we should deal with all discipline issues, but he does give us some reasons why he says this is really important, both for the individual who sinned and for the church body as a whole.

In the refrain in verse 13, Paul is drawing upon an Old Testament image of the people of Israel in Deuteronomy. While Israel was in the wilderness, those that were clean and part of the people of God were physically located within the boundaries of Israel's camp.

[7 : 19] Those who had committed a wrongdoing, a sin, or declared to be unclean were sent outside the camp, some of them for a short period of time, some of them permanently. And Paul uses this image here to call the church to put the offender outside the camp.

Hand him over to Satan is what he says. Now, that sounds pretty grim, being handed over to Satan. I won't even assume to imagine what that exactly means completely.

I fully understand that. It seems to me that at the very least, this person needs to be handed over and judged by the worldly authorities for his criminal activity.

Don't protect someone like this. Hand them over and let the courts do their work on this person. And in that situation, the person will find no mercy, no kindness, no grace.

They will be punished for it. But what is clear is the end point that Paul wants for this person. He wants them to be saved in the end.

[8 : 28] He hopes they will realise their sin, repent of their attitude and their actions, and ultimately have their salvation assured.

That's what he wants. That's the end goal here. And so how we deal with any sort of discipline in the church must always be guided by the end goal.

And that is ultimately restoration. And so that means that whatever discipline we partake in, it will never be unloving, it will never be vindictive, it will never be vengeful, and it will never ultimately, God willing, from our perspective, be permanent.

God is the judge, the final judge. The discipline is ultimately meant to be for the good of this individual here who sinned, but also for the good of the church.

Verse 6, Paul's worried about sin working its way through the whole congregation, like yeast works through dough. And again, he draws on another Old Testament image, this time from Exodus chapter 12.

[9 : 34] At the time of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Breads, the Israelites were supposed to get rid of all yeast that was in their house, get rid of all yeast out of the house, because it was a sign of uncleanness.

And if they were found to have yeast in their house, they were cut off from Israel, and the only way to come back to be part of the people of God was through the blood of the Passover lamb that was sacrificed.

And it was a ceremony that they carried out year after year after year to remind them how they were rescued from sin, who they now are in God, and how they were to live.

And Christians, unlike those who practice the festival of unleavened bread, for the Christian, life is an ongoing festival of unleavened bread.

Not just a once a year thing of cleaning out the yeast, it is an ongoing process for us. Because Jesus fulfilled the promise of the festival, we don't need annual sacrifices to deal with our sin, because Jesus was sacrificed once for all.

[10 : 45] And notice, it says there, that because of Jesus, we are the unleavened bread. We have been made pure through Jesus' death on the cross.

And Paul calls us here in this verse to behave as we are. You are the unleavened bread. So get rid of all the leaven. Clear it out.

Those in Christ, those bought with the blood of the Passover lamb, he says, live out who you are with sincerity and truth. And so what he says here is, in this whole section, is take sin seriously.

Avoid it and deal with it. Both those things. Deal with sin. Don't sweep it under the carpet. Don't call it by other names. Don't make it less. Don't excuse it.

Deal with it. It is essential, both for the person who's perpetrating and for the church. And we need to do it gently. We need to do it lovingly.

[11 : 49] But we also need to do it firmly. That's his first point. The great irony in Corinth is that they've actually got it doubly wrong. They're tolerating what is clearly an illegal sexual relationship in the church.

And in chapter six, they're taking each other to court over trivial matters. This issue should have been dealt with the courts, and these issues shouldn't be dealt with the courts.

They've got it doubly wrong. And so the second issue he picks up here is handling disputes. Again, they aren't being controlled by... Sorry, they're being controlled by the Corinthian mandate of everything is permissible for me.

That's the attitude, rather than the cross. Now, I guess it's not hard to imagine we live in an age of litigation, same as it was in Corinth. The public courts in Corinth were a spectacle.

If you were rich, you wouldn't hesitate to take even the most minor grievance to court. And Paul here is talking about minor grievances. The word he uses in verse one means pragmatic dispute, a small matter.

[13 : 01] In verse two, he calls them trivial cases. In verses three and four, he uses a word which means the small things of life. Trivia. Instead of sorting it out amongst each other, verse six, he says, one brother goes to law against another and this, and here's the real sting, in front of unbelievers.

Here's a church, one person backs their car into another person's car in the car park, and they hop out and they say, we'll see you in court. And they've just walked out of corporate worship, where sitting in the front row is a bloke with his stepmother.

That's all right. Paul says in verse seven, the very fact that you have lawsuits among you means that you've been completely defeated already.

In other words, you've absolutely failed in what you've called to be, being called to be as the people of God. Your relationships are all topsy-turvy.

And Paul goes on to speak here to both the person being wronged and the person doing the wrong. He says, first of all, to the one who's being wronged, and I think these are the hardest words in this passage for us to hear.

[14 : 22] He says in verse seven, why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Basically, he said, someone might have done you wrong in a business deal, or they haven't paid back a loan, or they're trot on your foot and not apologised.

He said, you might be legally entitled to go to court, you might have been aggrieved, but surely the honour of the Lord Jesus and his church in the eyes of the world is far more important.

Why not say, I'd rather be wronged and cheated a thousand times than to see the name of Jesus disgraced because of the activity of Christian people.

My friends, there's no better visual aid of the innocent Christ who died for sinners than an innocent party who's being wronged, letting it go gracefully.

It's at the very heart of what it means to be different as Christians. I heard a wonderful testimony of this recently. A young graduate working in their first job at a TV station made a major blunder that cost the network an awful lot of money.

[15 : 38] And she feared, naturally, that she was about to lose her job over this, but nothing ever happened to her great surprise. And after some time on the grapevine around the network, it turns out that her boss, her immediate supervisor, went to his bosses and took the blame for it.

While she perpetrated it in this mistake, he said he clearly didn't take enough care in her development and overseeing her. And don't punish her for it.

It's my responsibility. Now, he himself didn't get the sack. He thought he might. But his bosses were pretty unhappy with him.

The graduate, having found out what had happened, went to her boss and asked him, why did you do that? And it took several attempts for her to extract the answer from him, but this was his answer.

I'm a Christian. I follow the Lord Jesus who died on a cross and absorbed all of my deep failings, faults and sin so that I can be forgiven. Because of what Jesus has done for me, I want to live a life in such a way where I absorb more pain on people than inflict it.

[17 : 10] There is someone shaped by the cross. And that graduate said to him, so what church do you go to? She wanted to be part of a church where people live like that.

Paul's next word here is to the person doing the wrong. Verse 8 and 9.

Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong and you do this to your brothers. Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? He says, you might make a few bucks out of your brother's expense, but if things don't change, it will cost you your eternity.

There is no way that I could smooth over that. There's no way I could say it lesser. Make it sound easier.

You continue this sort of behaviour and it will cost you your eternity. That's pretty serious. And the exclusion list from the kingdom doesn't stop at sexual immorality. It's there in verse 9, but it's...

[18 : 17] Look at verse 10. You've got more socially acceptable white-collar kind of stuff. Thieves, drunks, slanderers and swindlers. Running people down.

Slandering their name. In verse 11 he says, and this is what some of you were. He's saying here, this is the life that you used to have. This is the people you used to be.

But now it's different. Verse 11. But you were washed. You were sanctified. You were set apart by God through Christ on the cross to be different. You were justified. That is, you were put right.

You were made righteous by Christ on the cross in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God. You have to be shaped by the cross. When you start following Jesus, the old life is meant to be left behind.

And so as a church family, let us resolve to live as who we are in Jesus. Let's resolve that we won't be wronged. Sorry, let us resolve we'd rather be wronged than to dispute with one another.

[19 : 25] Let's make sure as a church family that we never let things get to the point where the need to win outweighs the ultimate prize itself. The third issue that Paul picks up here is at the end of chapter 6 and it's sex.

Again, they're being shaped by the everything is permissible, for me, motto and attitude of Corinth and not the cross. What Paul has already said in the two previous issues is countercultural, designed for a life of purity, integrity before God and before people.

And this section from Paul is revolutionary. Christianity has given the world a revolutionary view of sex.

In the same way that our Christian hope and understanding of the future radically transforms our relationships now, as we've seen in the first two sections, so it radically revolutionises our view of sex.

And Paul here quotes another one of these Corinthian sayings, another one of their mottos, in verse 13. Food for the body and the body for food, but God will destroy them both.

[20 : 40] Now, they're not just talking about food here. Here's the logic. Here's the logic of how they're thinking. If your stomach is rumbling, you eat some food. And so, if you're feeling aroused, you have sex.

Sex is just another bodily appetite. The little addition at the end of this saying, but God will destroy them both, is a view that arises out of the Greek understanding of the divide between the spiritual world and the physical world.

This is Greek philosophy stuff. They viewed the physical world as temporary and not that important. And what you do with your body, therefore, doesn't matter a whole much, really.

So, it's really ultimately what you do with your soul that matters the most. Body not important, soul matters. And so, for some, it led to a cheap view of sex.

For instance, at upper class banquets, you know, dinner parties in Corinth, instead of an after dinner mint with coffee, you are offered after dinner sex with coffee.

[21 : 49] Prostitutes were brought in by the host of the dinner party as part of the entertainment. And it was completely normal.

No one would blink an eye at it. Mind you, the same Greek philosophical position also led some people to conclude that because the physical was so unimportant and so down the line that it was, in fact, wrong to indulge it in any way.

And so, for them, sex, rather than being something that you indulge in, wasn't something that was actually bad and dirty and defiling. And so, you don't do sex at all. And so, you see that at the beginning of chapter 7 where it says, it is good for a man not to touch a woman.

And Chris will deal with chapter 7 next week. So, come back for that one. The key to understanding Paul's revolutionary view of sex is in verse 16. Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body?

For it is said, the two will become one flesh. Now, when we read that, we automatically think that one flesh means physical union.

[23 : 13] And if that was the case, if it was just physical body, physical union, then his argument would be, don't you know that when you have physical union with someone, you have physical union with someone?

Now, that wouldn't be worth saying. I'm surprised they even wrote it. So, he's not just talking about physical union here. The term flesh, more often than not, in the Bible, doesn't just mean physical tissue.

It means more than that, and it certainly means more than that here. And if it didn't, if it was just physical tissue, then when Paul says it would be wrong to have sex because it is the only sin that would be committed against your body, he, in fact, would be wrong at that point if it was just physical tissue because suicide would be sin against the body and drug addiction would be sin against the body as well.

You see, one flesh here is more than physical tissue. It means embodied personhood. To becoming one flesh is another way of saying that personal transformation is going on in the sex act.

And that's quite astounding. This is revolutionary. Paul is not devaluing sex here. He's, in fact, doing the very opposite.

[24 : 44] He's sending it sky high. Greek philosophy never knew of any of this sort of an idea. The two becoming one flesh is another way of saying that personal transformation is going on.

He sees the sexual act as one of self-commitment which deeply involves the entire person. Not just body parts.

Sex is the full giving of one's entire self to another. It is a matter of self-giving and self-disclosure.

So God did not invent sex for self-gratification or even for self-expression. God didn't even make sex as a dirty but necessary bodily function for reproduction.

He rejects, in other words, both views. Paul says here that sex was designed by God as a way to do radical self-donation.

[25 : 50] Sex is God's invented way for us to give ourselves to someone else so deeply that it results in personal transformation and completion.

To put it another way, God says you must never give, you must never get physically naked and vulnerable with someone without becoming vulnerable in your entire life.

all of life. You must not become physically vulnerable and hold on to your independence. You must become legally, economically, socially, emotionally, in every way committed.

You must give up your independence. Physical oneness is, in fact, to be a confirmation of whole-of-life oneness.

And if you do that, if whole-body giving is done in the context of whole-of-life giving, it will result in deep soul connection and nurture and in deep personal transformation.

[27 : 05] Now, let me be frank here. I've been involved in this one flesh thing for about 15 years with my wife. Let's clarify that. And as a result, Natalie's mind and heart is so present with me that when I get into any situation in a split second, I not only have my instinctive way to act and to think and to speak, but I also know what Natalie would say and how she would act and how she thinks.

Now, don't say I'm in all affection. What I'm saying there is, it's not that I've lost who I am, but I've been radically supplemented.

Natalie has been shaping me over 15 years and I've been shaping her over 15 years. We have given each other to ourselves in all of life.

In all of life. And because Natalie is someone who loves and knows and serves the Lord Jesus and desires to keep growing in that, her supplement to me is cross-shaped supplement.

She's being transformed in the image of Jesus, I'm being transformed in the image of Jesus, and that supplements each other and shapes each other. I think that's partly why Paul says, if you're a Christian, marry a Christian in 1 Corinthians 7.

[28 : 35] The question is, who's shaping you? In our society, it's normal to give your body without giving yourself.

Have sex and to hold on to your independence. Keep your individual control. And Paul says that when you do, you are destroying a beautiful person-shaping commitment.

You're destroying deep soul nurture and personal transformation. I think the total load of emotional issues associated with sex in this world would be just incalculable because of the abuse of this thing that God has given as a good gift.

When you give your body without giving your whole self, you are in fact destroying your commitment mechanism. The Corinthians had not thought through the implications of everything is permissible for me.

Casual sex, as it turns out, is not so casual. It is, for the Christian, an act of desecration. Verse 19, do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God?

[29 : 54] You are not your own. You were bought at a price. You see, at the cross, Jesus paid the price for our redemption. He paid the price to set us free from our slavery to sin and to death and immorality.

And the Corinthians thought this means, whoopee, everything is permissible for me. I can do whatever I like and Jesus will just forgive me. And Paul corrects that error. You're not free.

You're not free for yourself. You're not free for, you are free purely for Christ because you've been bought by Christ. And in actual fact, the word that he says in verse 16, how could you unite yourself to a prostitute, is the exact same word where he says you've been united to Christ.

How could you possibly say that you follow Christ, you're united with Christ, one body with him in spirit and then go and take that body and unite it to someone who's not in Christ.

And that's why he says in verse 18, flee sexual immorality. He doesn't want us to negotiate with it.

[31 : 06] He wants us to flee it. Flee the old life. Flee. The word here to flee is porneia. The Greek word porneia means any kind of sex outside of marriage, whether you are married or not.

And he's saying have nothing to do with sexual activity outside the covenant of marriage because it's the only sin you commit against your body.

He's saying and the effects of it will be deep and they'll be painful and they will be enduring. He says maybe you've experienced it, you've carried the damage, maybe you've been damaged by someone else and a passage like this can open up those old wounds.

I'm very mindful of that. But these wounds can heal. Remember verse 11? That's what some of you were but you were washed. That is you might feel dirty but you're not in Jesus.

You've been washed clean. You were sanctified. That is you've been made a saint. Your purity has been restored in Jesus no matter what you were. Friends, what we've been seeing through this series is that genuine maturity is not so much seen in what you know but in how you live out what you know.

[32 : 20] That's Christian maturity. and Paul wants us to grow up. He wants us to take our sin seriously. What we've seen here is that God will never let us keep our relationship with him in a box marked Sunday or marked religion or just for the soul.

He's interested in every day of the week and he's interested in your whole life and he's interested as it turns out in every part of your body. True spirituality and maturity is not just seen in how fervently we sing at church or how eloquent our prayers or how big our Christian library is.

True maturity is seen in the details of our lives as we, according to Romans chapter 12, offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

God. And that means at home, it means at school, uni, it means on Facebook, on the phone, at the club, in our retirement village, in our bedrooms. True maturity is seen in a life of purity.

And that will require us not just to avoid sin, to flee from sexual immorality, but strive to honour God in all that we do to make sure the yeast doesn't permeate the dough, to cut it back.

[33 : 44] So I think it's really good for us right now just to take a moment. We're going to enter into the Lord's Supper again, remember Christ crucified on the cross as we do this and just reaffirm our commitment to follow him for the cross to shape our lives.

His priorities become our priorities. So that's what this does. It takes us back to the cross. It'll take us to remember it's all that we have in Christ and reaffirm our commitment to take up our cross and to follow him.

I was really delighted, can I say this week, last Sunday Debbie stood up here and said, we're going to have communion this week and if you're out of fellowship with someone you need to sort it out in the course of the week.

I was absolutely delighted to hear at least one person took that seriously and went and sought out a relationship with another person throughout the course of this week.

And I want to say well done to that. Good on you. May you know complete freedom and forgiveness and restoration of that relationship as we come and we join in this together. Thank you. Thank you.