

Church is different from the World

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[0 : 00] Our reading this morning comes from Paul's letter to the Corinthians, chapter 5, beginning from verse 9. 1 Corinthians 5, 9 to 13.

Verse 9. I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral men, not at all meaning the immoral of this world or the greedy and robbers or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.

But rather, I wrote to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of a brother if he is guilty of immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber, not even to eat with such a one.

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

Drive out the wicked person from among you. Amen. May the Lord bless this that reading. May it be to his praise and to his glory.

[1 : 46] Let me turn to this last portion of 1 Corinthians 5. I continue with the idea that this particular portion of Holy Writ, the fifth chapter of 1 Corinthians, has indeed a great message today and of great relevance to contemporary society.

Now what had happened here, as I've said previously, is that Paul, through some of his contacts in Ephesus, had received reports of divisions in the church.

And it is apparent from what he says here that this report also included observations on the practice of immorality and the presence of immorality in the church.

Now listen to what he has to say. First of all, the instruction of the apostle. I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral men, not at all meaning the immoral of this world or the greedy or robbers or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.

And from that verse 9, when he says, I wrote to you in my letter, He's talking about a letter that he had written prior to what is in our Bible as 1 Corinthians.

[3 : 12] So that letter precedes the letter that we now have as 1 Corinthians as we now have it. Now it is the case that in no circumstance does that letter still exist.

But it may have been no more than what he states. In chapters 5 and 6 of this present letter that we are now looking at. I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral men.

This is the content. This is indeed what he's trying to communicate. His burden of his teaching is simply this. That the practice of the church has to be fundamentally different from the policies of the world.

And if we take that on board right at the beginning, we can see the relevance of all of this. Because what has happened in certain areas of Christendom is that the policies of the world have become the doctrines of the church.

And by so doing, they put themselves in a position where they can have no message and no effect on the outside world.

[4 : 37] I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral men. The idea that's carried in this verb in the original Greek is to associate with or have dealings with.

It's only used three times in the New Testament, one of which is in 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, but the other two are in this present chapter. So what he's saying here is that those who are Christian believers should have no dealings with any who are of the faith, but whose lifestyle doesn't match up to it.

Now why was it that the Corinthians didn't observe this teaching that he had written? It is that they misunderstood what he meant. Because he goes on in verse 10 and says this, Not at all meaning the immoral of this world or the greedy and robbers or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.

In other words, they thought that he meant that they weren't to deal with anybody outside the Christian church at all. So he says, You thought that I meant you should go out of the world entirely.

If that was the case, there would be no purpose in having a gospel to preach. Because all you would be preaching to would be those who are inside the community of the faith.

[6 : 27] The task of evangelism would be null and void. It doesn't mean that you're not to have contact with the world or unbelievers.

It means that your lifestyle has to be fundamentally different in order to be an example to unbelievers. He goes on in chapter 10 and he talks about this again.

If anyone of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience.

So as far as the Corinthians are concerned, now he is saying the door is wide open for you to witness to them, for you to associate them, for you to befriend them, for you to get down beside them and understand their problems.

Yes, that door is open. In chapter 1, he talks about his own ministry. Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

[7 : 51] So from that lesson, that particular scripture, we are able to see that the preaching of the cross is a powerful message. It is a message that will challenge you right to the basis of your being.

It's a message that will empower you to be a different person. He expands on his ministry in Romans chapter 15.

He says this, In Christ Jesus then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God, for I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that from Jerusalem and as far round as Eliakum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.

This is what you are to do, Corinthians. You are to get into the world and relate to them. You are to relate to their problems.

You are to love them because they are unloved. You are to show that Jesus Christ came into this world because God so loved it.

[9 : 27] They are not to be a recluse. They are not to withdraw. Let's think secondly of the intention of the apostle. I rather wrote to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of a brother if he is guilty of immorality or greed or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber, not even to associate with such a one.

So again, we see that what he's talking about is associating associating with the world in which they lived. And he's at pains to show that this is what he means.

I rather, I wrote to you not to associate with any brother. So the point, as I've already said, is that those who are in the Christian church, be it in Corinth or Westerhales, is that they are to be different people.

Now why is it that he should give this teaching? Not to associate with anyone who is of the faith and who is a known transgressor or a breaker of God's law.

And as I've already said, what he's intending is that they are to show that they are different people. In chapter 6, he makes the following statement which bears this truth out.

[11 : 06] Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived, neither the immoral nor idolaters nor male prostitutes nor adulterers nor homosexuals nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor revilers nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Now in this particular scripture there are in fact ten categories of people that are mentioned. One of which is covered by the word homosexual.

This has become an embarrassment to certain areas of Christendom so they deviate away from it. It's also become an embarrassment to translators because there are versions of the Bible that instead of having ten categories only have nine.

And yet it's a very fundamental problem. It's right there in our society whether we like it or not. The unrighteous that will not inherit the kingdom of God are the immoral amongst whom are homosexuals.

Does this mean that God hates homosexuals? No it doesn't because it's covered by the great rule. God loves sinners but hates the sin that they perform.

[12 : 45] If you look at the nation of Israel you will find that in all the commandments that they broke the commandment contained in Leviticus 18 against the practice of homosexuals is not one that they broke.

There are laws against it in the Arabian nations of the time. There are laws against it in the Hittite nations of the time. But there is never a record not in any place in the Old Testament that they did not keep that law.

They did. There are two examples in the Old Testament of homosexuality but none of them are covered by Hebrew people.

They're outsiders. So what is all this about? He goes on in chapter 6 after he's listed these ten categories to say but such were some of you but you are washed.

You are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. So what's being said here is that of all these different categories the sexually immoral, the homosexuals, the adulterers, the thieves, the robbers, the whole lot, God is able to change.

[14 : 20] You don't have to stay in the gutter. And why he's going on about this here is that all these sins he enumerates that I've talked about already in 1 Corinthians 6 were all in the society of Corinth.

there was a great temple that stood on a hill in Corinth. It employed 1,000 sacred priestesses who in fact were prostitutes.

And the danger that was humming to Corinth was that the practices that were there in the world were going to invade the practices of the church.

So this is the great principle that he is now coming to terms with. He is saying this is the reason you have to be different.

You're not to be like the pagan society in which you surround you. You're to stand out a significantly different people.

[15 : 39] In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says this You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Based on a saying in Leviticus which tells us I am holy you must be holy.

He goes on in the same sermon which is the Sermon on the Mount and he says I tell you unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees you will never enter the kingdom of God.

So here is a truth that applies to all of us particularly so in the way that Christendom has absorbed the policies of the world.

The dictates of the government have become the doctrines of the church. So Paul is at stake to make clear this must never happen.

[16 : 56] Indeed he makes clear he's applied it to his own life. Philippians 3 verse 13 Brothers and sisters I do not consider that I have made it my own but one thing I do forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

The grace of God transformed Paul from being an associate to murder to being a minister of Christ.

The grace of God transformed the Corinthians out of the degradation of their sin to being beautiful people in Christ Jesus.

Let's go on finally to the judgment. Verses 12 and 13. What have I to do with judging outsiders?

Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside drive out the wicked person from among you?

[18 : 22] The last sentence is enclosed in inverted commas which tells us it's a quotation and it's a quotation from the book of Deuteronomy.

Drive out the wicked person from among you. In this statement Paul is quoting from the Greek version of the Old Testament which the early church used.

And so in Deuteronomy 17 verse 7 you read this so you shall purge the evil from the midst of you.

And the context of that particular statement is that it applies to a man or a woman who has deliberately committed a transgression and broken the covenant which God had made with his people.

So the last verse in which we have the last verse of this chapter gives the conclusion as to what you are to do.

[19 : 29] Drive out the wicked person from among you. Is that harsh? Listen to what Deuteronomy has to say. This is Deuteronomy 17.

If there is found among you with any of your towns which the Lord your God gives you a man or woman who does evil in the sight of the Lord in transgressing or breaking his covenant and has gone and served other gods and worshipped them or the sun or the moon or any of the host of heaven which I have forbidden.

In other words, this is a deliberate sin. It's not something that's done through negligence or thoughtlessness. It's absolutely deliberate.

And so the sentence of the law is this. You shall bring forth to your gates that man or woman who has done this evil thing and you shall stone that man or woman to death with stones.

In other words, what we could note here is that in the law Genesis to Deuteronomy there is no offering you can bring to get forgiveness for a deliberate sin.

[21 : 01] Now the epistle to the Hebrews is taken up with these ideas, the ideas of Genesis to Deuteronomy and in Hebrews 10 verses 26 to 27 it says this, For if we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins but a fearful prospect of judgment and a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries and his justification for saying that is stated in the next verse that the man who violated the law of Moses died without mercy.

If we sin deliberately what's he talking about? sin. In the previous verse he talks about those who have given up the attendance at God's house and have done it deliberately.

And he applies it here. If we sin deliberately there remains no more sacrifice for sin.

sin. So it's against this background that the apostle is now teaching how the Corinthians are to live, how they are to act, how they are to witness in the world, what they are to say, who they are to identify with, and indeed who they are not to identify with.

In fact, it's like this. the apostle in 1 Corinthians 5 regards the presence of sexual immorality in the church as equal to the sin of apostasy.

[23 : 08] It's deliberate. It brings the whole witness of the church into a place of disrepute, and you don't need me to emphasize that.

That's part of your news headlines right now. So, for this reason, it has to be removed. And it can be removed very simply by the persons concerned seeking God for repentance.

Jesus himself spoke about that approach. If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.

If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. What a wonderful statement that is. A statement of hope, a statement of grace, mercy.

But supposing that were not the case, and the people who have committed the offense, as indeed some do, deny that they have committed any offense, then he says, drive out the wicked person from among you.

[24 : 37] How do we apply that? Simply this. Where this has occurred, it's not the fact that people will say sorry isn't enough.

It's action that's needed. And the action that's needed is to prevent the church, either here or elsewhere, falling into this problem and this pit that Satan has created to nullify the witness of the church of God.

It's an important chapter. It may not apply here, but it does apply to the whole of Christendom. And if I had the power, I would say to people in other churches who have this problem, the time has come from this pulpit to repent and seek the Lord.

Because what is at stake is the credibility of the church's witness. 1 Corinthians 5 speaks to that very problem.

1 Corinthians 5 is relevant in our contemporary society. And while it may not apply to us, we can take it on board and pray it through so that God's message of the gospel will continue to flow as a river of grace from here and from every pulpit where Christ is honoured.

[26 : 25] Amen.