

Series: 1 Corinthians

Title: LET US KEEP THE FEAST

Text: 1 Cor 5: 1-13

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In 1 Corinthians 4, the Spirit of God used Paul to warn us about judging our brethren in quick, harsh, unjust judgment. Now, in chapter 5, we are taught this: “there is a time for the church to judge our brethren that we might keep the worship of Christ from all distraction.” Our subject is “Let Us Keep the Feast.”

A RARE EXCEPTION

Understand that this was a rare case—“It is reported commonly *that there is* fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father’s wife.” (1 Cor 5: 1)

“It is reported commonly” means this was common knowledge among all at Corinth—folks talked about it within and without the church. This was flagrant, rebellious sin—fornication which even the Gentiles did not allow. Not only was it fornication, it was incestuous fornication.

Understand, we are not dealing here with the kind of sin that we speak of when believers acknowledge that sin is mixed with all we do. Believers do fall into these kinds of grievous sins but it is not the course of our life.

Believers have an old sinful nature and a new holy nature. Our old nature is corrupt and sinful; our new nature is created of God by Christ in you so it is holy and righteous. “And if Christ *be* in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of righteousness.” (Rom 8: 10) So sin is mixed with all we do constantly.

Yet, the sin we are speaking of in our text was sin with no care that it was giving the world reason to speak evil of Christ, no care that it drew the focus away from Christ, no care that it was causing division among brethren. This believer sinned with total disregard to Christ and his brethren, with no repentance and no intention of repenting. He was causing serious disruption in the public worship of Christ.

So this sin and the way it had to be dealt with is the exception. This is rare. We are not going around looking for sin and reasons to judge one another.

YE ARE PUFFED

In addition, Paul reproves the rest of the church because they too were at fault—“And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.” (1 Cor 5: 2)

Rather than this brother breaking their hearts by his sin, they were puffed up. Rather than pouring out their contrite hearts to God that God might take this old man of flesh away from them, they were puffed up in pride. By letting this brother go unchecked, without rebuke, without correction—they condoned his sin.

Pride puffs us up in many ways but let me give you two ways pride puffs up.

One, it is puffed up pride to use God’s grace as an excuse to sin. I am fearful that some think we are saying, that since we are saved by grace, not by our works, it does not matter if we live in sin. Some young believer might say, “Isn’t it great that Christ has purged our sins, so that we can sin and it does not matter?”

Brethren, are such things true? God forbid! The grace of God never teaches believers to sin nor does God’s grace make believers want to sin.

Romans 6: 1: What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? 2: God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?...15 What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid.

Two, pride puffs up in self-righteousness. Others might say, “I wouldn’t commit such a wicked sin as that. Stand over there, come not near me, I am holier than thou.” Remember, the scripture, “Consider thyself, lest thou also be overtaken in a fault.” The most horrible sin of all is self-righteousness. God said such are a putrid “smoke in my nose.” (Is 65: 5; Gal 6: 1)

DELIVER SUCH A ONE

The Holy Ghost declares through the apostle Paul what should be done in their case—“ For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, *concerning* him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power

of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” (1 Cor 5: 3-5)

This is a difficult passage. Some say that Paul was speaking of exercising his apostolic power which Christ gave to him, which men do not have today. No doubt Paul did have gifts as an apostle.

This “deliverance to Satan for the destruction of the flesh” seems to be the same thing that God did to Paul to humble him. Paul said that God gave “a messenger of Satan to buffet me.” (2 Cor 12: 7) This was to mortify the fleshly nature of this brother.

But the purpose was not that this brother might be destroyed himself. The purpose was “that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” The prayer of God’s people for an overtaken brother is that his inner spirit might be saved from this sort of wickedness in the day the Lord Jesus grants him repentance and strengthens his inner man. We both want to see our brother converted from his error as well as see Christ receive all the glory for granting him repentance.

So that which Paul exhorted the church to do—which the church has authority to do in our day—is found at the end of verse 13, “Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.” If this man is a believer then Christ will use this to bring him to repentance.

For a believer, there is no greater chastening from the Lord’s hand than for the Lord to use his church—our brethren—to awaken us to repentance. It is God our Head chastening us but he often uses the members of his body to do so. It is to show us that our sin is so great, so distracting, and so detrimental to ourselves and to the whole church, that the church is forced to take this rare step of removing us from their company. Nothing is more serious to a true child of God than the thought of being removed from hearing the gospel of Christ, from assembling with the saints in public worship, and from fellowship with our brethren.

Brethren, what are we to do when a brother or sister is overtaken in a sin? First, go to God and mourn for such a brother, asking God to correct him. Then we are to “restore such a one in the spirit of meekness” while we bare their sin as Christ did for us. (Gal 6: 1-2) Later, we will see there are at least two more steps and much time to take before we come to this rare measure spoken of in our text.

If a brother is so overtaken in a sin that it comes to the church having to remove such a one then great, great care is to be taken by the church. It is to be done “in the name of Christ”; it is to be done trusting “Christ’s power”; it is to be for the saving of the brother and the good of the whole church; it is that his flesh might be mortified and his inward man be saved by Christ our Lord.

What are some reasons why we mortify the old sinful man of our flesh? The Holy Spirit uses Paul to declare several reasons in the end of chapter 5. May God give us grace now so that we all heed this personally for ourselves. If we would examine ourselves and judge ourselves then the church will not be forced to take this extreme step with any one of us.

A LITTLE LEAVEN LEAVENETH THE WHOLE LUMP

The first reason we are to guard ourselves against sin is because a little sin and self-righteousness will grow to cause great harm to the whole church—“Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?” (1 Cor 5: 6)

You ladies put leaven in dough. A very small amount of leaven makes the whole lump of dough rise. Likewise, a little sin, a little self-righteousness, a little contentious, divisive spirit will grow and grow until it puffs up and divides the entire church.

We see it in Adam—“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered in and death by sin and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” (Rom 5: 12) We see it at Corinth. This sin, left unchecked, had caused them all to be “puffed up” both in excusing sin and in self-righteousness. We see it in our nation. Our nation keeps legalizing various sins. Now, if you say a word against any of these sins, folks become puffed up. They say, “How dare you speak evil of me!” Our nation thinks we are so advanced that the word of God is old-fashioned.

God give us grace to heed this important warning. Sin—be it immorality, be it an ill, self-exalting spirit be it self-righteousness or be it false doctrine—may start out small, but before long, it will permeate through the whole congregation, leaving all divided and puffed up one against another.

YE ARE UNLEAVENED

Our motive to mortify the deeds of our old sinful flesh is because of what we already are.

He says, “Purge out therefore the old leaven.” (1 Cor 5: 7) This brother that they were to put away is represented by old leaven because he was living dominated by his old sinful fleshly wicked man. Each one of

us should ask God's grace to do this to ourselves. Scripture tells us to "put off the old man, put on the new." (Eph 4: 22; Col 3: 5) We can only do so by God's grace. Let us live constantly casting our care upon Christ to keep us and to mortify our old nature.

He is still speaking of the church as a lump when he says, "Purge out therefore the old leaven that ye may be a new lump." (1 Cor 5: 7) When a sinful and self-righteous person is distracting a congregation, as this leaven permeates through the church, everyone loses their focus on Christ. It will cause each believer to begin looking to themselves. Our fleshly nature starts to puff up more and more while our inward man grows weaker because we are distracted from Christ who is our Wisdom and Power.

But when God removes such persons or uses his church to do so or Christ brings them to repentance and faith in Christ then the whole church is like a new congregation. Every believer in the congregation breathes a sigh of relief. Once again you can worship Christ without distraction. The flesh begins to be mortified through the gospel of Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit and the inner man begins to be strengthened again.

Now watch the reason he gives for purging out this distracting brother who is overtaken in wickedness. This is the motive for each believer to mortify our flesh. He says "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened." It means every member of Christ's church is already holy. The true church is those chosen, redeemed, and regenerated by the triune God in Christ and assembled by Christ himself. Each and every true member makes us Christ's true church and we are already holy.

We do not become holy by purging out the old leaven. We already are pure and holy by Christ our Sanctification. So our constraint and motivation to purge out the old leaven of wickedness is not to make us pure and holy but because, ye already are!

FOR CHRIST OUR PASSOVER IS SACRIFICED FOR US

Here is the great constraint of the new heart! How is Christ's church, each individual member in particular, made holy and righteous? "For Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us." (1 Cor 5: 7)

Christ is our Passover. He was sacrificed for each chosen child of God. This was typified on the night of the Passover in Egypt when God provided a lamb for the children of Israel alone. God said,

Exodus 11: 4: About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt: 5: And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die,...7: But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how that the LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.

Holiness means a difference has been made between God's elect child and the rest of the world, between Christ's church and the rest of the world. "Who maketh thee to differ?" Christ sent his Son into this world declaring to all that it is the LORD alone who makes his people to differ from the rest of this world. (1 Cor 4: 7)

On that night in Egypt, God ordered the head of every house in Israel to take a lamb, without blemish, a male of the first year and slay the lamb and sprinkle his blood on the doorpost of the house. God said, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy *you*, when I smite the land of Egypt." (Ex 12: 13)

That night every firstborn child died in Egypt—both in the houses of the Egyptians, as well as in the houses of the Israelites. The difference is the difference God made! God provided a lamb for the children of Israel. Therefore, the lamb died in the place of the firstborn in the houses of Israel.

Only the LORD made the difference between his elect and the rest of this world. God provided himself a Lamb. Christ is our Passover Lamb. In the room and stead of all God's firstborn children, Christ took our sins, he took our judgment, and because he was slain in our place, God sees the blood and passes over us; the plague shall never be upon us to destroy us.

Blood came out of Christ side by which our sins are remitted and we are made righteous. Water came out of his side representing the washing of regeneration in his blood by which we are made holy by the Spirit of Christ within. So by our Passover Lamb, sacrificed for us—ye are unleavened—holy and righteous.

LET US KEEP THE FEAST

For Israel only, God ordained that they partake in a feast so they would forever remember how God provided them a Passover lamb. Seven days they were to eat unleavened bread. The first day they were to put away all leaven out of their houses. If a man ate leaven during the feast then that soul was cut off from Israel. No work was to be done on the holy days. (Ex 12: 14-20)

God's spiritual Israel today has a feast. We are not keeping that old passover feast. That feast pictured Christ's church living throughout the entire life of faith consecrated to Christ in a state of holiness as we feast continually upon Christ our Bread and Wine from heaven through the gospel. The first day God draws us to Christ and teaches us we are saved by grace, by his grace, we repent from the old leaven of our sin and cease looking to any works in us for righteousness. The finished work of Christ redeemed us from the slavery of sin. The constraint of Christ's love is our only motive for purging out the old sinful leaven of our flesh, for purging out the sinful leaven of our vain works, and for purging out the old leaven of self-righteousness. Knowing what great things Christ has done for us to bring us to this feast of fat things, "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth." 1 Cor 5: 8)

Let us keep this feast by continuing in faith in Christ, eating his flesh and drinking his blood through faith as we hear his gospel together, observe his ordinances and wait for his return. Christ our Passover is who we must always remember as we feast upon his gospel. We preach Christ and him crucified because it is God's works for us which we are to remember. God our Father chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. Christ his Son laid down his life to redeem us from slavery into liberty. The Holy Spirit broke the chains of our fleshly nature and brought us out from under the dominion of the wicked taskmasters of sin and satan and the curse of the law. We dare not allow anything or anyone to disrupt this precious feast.

"Therefore let us keep the feast!" Let us keep it as an invaluable treasure! Let us keep this feast because it is a matter of life or death. Let us keep this feast, "neither with the old leaven of malice and wickedness"—such as any sinner who disrupts the worship of Christ by obstinate sin and rebellion. Neither with the malice and wickedness of sinful immorality or the false doctrine of free will and works or the arrogance of self-righteousness. But let us keep this feast "with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth"—with transparent clearness as we follow Christ the Truth, fully, in spirit and in truth. (1 Cor 5: 8)

Brethren, in this state of holiness, Christ our Passover is our only worthiness for this feast and Christ is our only motive for putting off the old man of sin and putting on the new as we live a life honoring to Christ in consecration to him. We need Christ and his gospel for he is the Way, the Truth and the Life of every regenerated saint.

ANY MAN THAT IS CALLED A BROTHER

Remember, we are not being told to judge unregenerate men of the world. Neither are we being told to judge our brethren who hate their sin and repent of it. Paul affirms this, writing, "I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? 13: But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." (1Co 5:9-13)

We must remember that each regenerated child of God has the old man of sin to contend with. Therefore, believers are not to seek sin in one another. We are not to expose one another's sin. Christ's church is not to create a board of elders with the intent of sending men out to find sin in our brethren just so we can bar believers from communion and fellowship. But in the rare instance where any of these sins is performed in a scandalous, flagrant way, without any indication of grieving or repentance, then with such we are not to fellowship.

GREAT CAREFULNESS AND FORGIVENESS WITHOUT LIMIT

We will end by reading Christ's word concerning rebuke and forgiveness. We are to be so very careful when we must rebuke a fellow believer. We must be ready to forgive at the first indication of repentance. Christ says we are to forgive and forgive and forgive without limit. Notice the steps we are to take. These are to be taken with much time, care and prayer. Christ said,

Matthew 18: 15: Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. 16: But if he will not hear *thee*, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. 17: And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican...

Paul affirms what our Master teaches. When a brother has been warned yet neglects to hear the church, we are not to have fellowship with him. But remember, the purpose is that Christ might grant the brother repentance. Therefore, we are to be ready to forgive without limit. That is what Christ taught Peter,

Matthew 18: 21: Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? 22: Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

What about the brother in our text? Paul called him “a wicked person.” Was he a true believer? Indeed, he was. It was his fleshly man that was the wicked person. How do we know he was a true believer? We know it because Christ granted him repentance. When Paul wrote a later letter to Corinth, he wrote concerning this particular brother,

2 Corinthians 2: 6: Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which *was inflicted* of many. 7: So that contrariwise ye *ought* rather to forgive *him*, and comfort *him*, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. 8: Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him.

This important instruction is not to make Christ’s sheep live in fear. We are constrained by love. “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” This important text teaches us that above all things we are to keep our focus on Christ alone. He is our Righteousness and Salvation!

Amen!