

Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 5. This morning as we are gathered together today we enter into our first communion season of this year. Some of you may not be familiar with communion seasons, but essentially they are times set apart with a particular focus on self-examination and repentance leading up to the communion service. Next week we will come together and partake of that blessed sacramental meal, and one of the requirements of each person coming to the table is to examine themselves and partake in a worthy manner. In 1 Corinthians 11:28-29 the Apostle Paul writes, “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.” This is why during communion seasons there is a preparatory sermon preached prior to the communion service, to aid in preparing the body to come to the Lord’s Table. This is the focus of our sermon this morning. So hear now the Word of the Lord from 1 Corinthians chapter 5 beginning in verse 6.

Read 1 Corinthians 5:6-8

Pray

Oftentimes theologians and scholar refer to the church in Corinth as a church in chaos. This letter that Paul is writing to these saints is not of the same kind as that which we have considered in Philippians. Where Philippians is a letter of joy and encouragement, 1 Corinthians is a letter of correction and instruction. This chapter begins with an account of grievous sin within the congregation. A man is openly having a sexual relationship with his father’s wife, something which is so detestable that even the Gentiles recognize its wickedness. So Paul addresses this issue which the church failed to address, pronouncing excommunication against the unrepentant sinner, and casting him out of the church to be delivered “unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” (verse 5) This is why oftentimes pastors will go to this chapter for a sermon concerning church discipline.

But the topic concerning casting a sinner out of the church does not end in verse 5. Instead Paul continues the same topic in verses 6 through 8. He does what he often does, which is to go from the specific incident using it to make a general application to all of the saints. What we see here is the principle that if sin is not dealt with in the church, both individually and corporately, then it has destructive consequences. Sin not dealt with will permeate throughout the church either by encouraging others to sin or causing others to become indifferent towards sin, or it may even permeate throughout the church so much so that a church ceases to be called such as we see in the book of Revelation. So Paul uses this imagery of leaven to teach this important principle. If any of you have ever baked bread you have experienced this principle firsthand. The smallest bit of leaven added to the dough will leaven the entire loaf. Leaven spreads throughout everything that it touches. Such is the effects of sin both in our own individual lives as well as in the corporate life of the church. So before coming to the Lord's Table, in keeping with the commands of 1 Corinthian 11, we must each examine ourselves, searching out any leaven of sin which remains, and purge out the leaven from your hearts. We will consider this command by looking at it in three aspects: first, purge out vain-glory; next, purge out malice and wickedness; and finally, feast with sincerity and truth.

First, purge out the leaven of vain-glory from your hearts. Look with me at verse 6, "Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" This is the transition in Paul's argument to go from the specific case of casting out the unrepentant sinner from the church to the general application of the purging out of sin from the individual and corporate body. They proudly gloried as if everything had been perfect among them, while in the meantime there was so much among them that was wicked and disgraceful. The one man who was carrying on this incestuous relationship was glorying in his wickedness, and this motivated others within the church to glory in their own wickedness. How often do we see this among churches today. Many glory in their own

pride, in their own self-righteousness, in their own debauchery, and in doing so it motivates others to do the same. I have seen members in churches boast of their times of drunkenness and that give cause for others justifying overindulging in alcohol. I have seen men glorying in their breaking of their covenants that they have made with Jehovah and that motivating others to publicly violate their covenant vows. Friends, this is evil. It is the height of wickedness to glory in wickedness. And so to illustrate the infectious nature of this vain-glorying he uses the imagery of leaven as we've already made mention of. This vain-glorying has begun to permeate throughout the Corinthian church in the very same way that leaven permeates throughout the lump of dough. It's like a cancer that once it has infected one area of the body, if left untreated, continues to spread throughout the whole body, destroying everything it touches.

Brothers and sisters, you must be careful of this. You must not glory in the things of the world or the sins of the flesh. Too often we let what seems to be minor sins go unchecked, and eventually we begin to excuse them away saying that they are not a big deal. That ultimately grows into apathy towards sin and then leads to actually glorying in that which is contrary to the law of God. Consider Paul's condemnation of the Judaizers and false teachers in Philippians where he speaks of their glorying in the works of the flesh, in their own self-righteousness, in their being a Jew. Do not fall into the same error. If you are glorying in the works of the flesh then you are glorying in your worldly ways which are not pleasing to the Lord. If you are glorying in your own self-righteousness then you are glorying in your own vain attempts to do things in your own strength and not relying upon the Holy Spirit to work righteousness in you. You have traded the Gospel of free grace for one of works-righteousness, and that is the vanity of vanities. If you are glorying in the fact that you said a prayer or your name is on the membership role, then your glory isn't in Christ but instead in your own status. Friends, hear the words of the Apostle in Galatians 6:7-8, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall

of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” Vain-glory is sowing that which is corruptible, and you will reap corruption. Heed the call of verse 7 in our text and purge out that leaven, lest it leaven the whole of your own body as well as the body of this church. Let your glory be only in the cross of your Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto you, and you unto the world. You must purge out vain-glory.

But vain-glory is not the only thing which must be purged out of your hearts. You must also purge out malice and wickedness. Look at verses 7 and 8, “Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: 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.” Malice is hatred towards others. There must have been and issue of malice within the Corinthian church for Paul to specifically mention it here. This malice towards others is likely connected to the sin which has begun to infect the congregation, likely a malice towards those who are against the perversions and seeking to see the church purified. This is so often the case, that those who are bold enough to stand on the truths of Scripture and call out sin where it is found are often the target of the most vicious malice expressed within the body. Paul connects this malice to wickedness which is as leaven to the body. This is a more general term encompassing all sin. It’s not enough to simply purge out the big sins like vain-glory and malice. No, every sin, every bit of wickedness must be purged out. Paul is implying that they should purge themselves from all impurity of heart and life. This is the call to the saints in Corinth to search out the secret places of the heart, those hidden places which are not easily seen, and to purge out any sin that is found there. Whether it be pride or covetousness or self-confidence or cowardice or whatever it may be, it must be searched out and purged from the heart lest it continue to fester and grow and spread, infecting every bit of the man.

Matthew Henry writes, “Christians should be careful to keep free from malice and mischief. Love is the very essence and life of the Christian religion. It is the fairest image of God, for God is love (1 John 4:16), and therefore it is no wonder if it be the greatest beauty and ornament of a Christian. But malice is murder in its principles: He that hates his brother is a murderer (1 John 3:15), he bears the image and proclaims him the offspring of him who was a murderer from the beginning, John 8:44. How hateful should every thing be to a Christian that looks like malice and mischief.” Friends, are you careful to keep free from malice? Do you do whatever is necessary to ensure that a root of bitterness does not spring up in your heart towards another? If that malice is there, if that root of bitterness has been planted within you, purge it out. Cast it away. Hear the words of Christ Jesus in Matthew 5:21-24, “Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.” Do not come to the Lord’s Table and partake of that sacramental meal next week if you have anything against your brother and have not been reconciled. Go to him first and be reconciled and then come to the table. Spend this week in self-examination and if the leaven of malice is found within your heart purge it out and go and be reconciled.

But, I pray, most of us here do not have the leaven of malice within our hearts. But what we all do have is the leaven of wickedness within us. Each of us still has indwelling sin which remains within us that must be purged out. We should die with our Saviour to sin, be planted into the likeness of his death by mortifying sin, and into the likeness of his resurrection by rising again to

newness of life, and that internal and external. We must have new hearts and new lives. Every sin, no matter how great or how small, no matter how public or how hidden, must be purged out of the body. Any impurities that remain in you in regards to doctrine, piety, or practice, ought to be purged out and brought into conformity with the Word of God. Examine yourselves, as the Apostle commands. Perform a test on your heart. Friends, if we would retain a purity of heart and life, we must never forget that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." If we pray to God not to lead us into temptation, we must take care that we run not needlessly into it ourselves. Let your prayer be that of the psalmist in Psalm 139, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." You must purge out malice and wickedness.

This purging of leaven from your hearts is what is required of you in your due preparation for coming to receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The Westminster Larger Catechism makes this clear in question and answer 171, "How are they that receive the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper to prepare themselves before they come unto it? They that receive the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, are, before they come, to prepare themselves thereunto, by examining themselves of their being in Christ; of their sins and wants; of the truth and measure of their knowledge, faith, repentance, love to God and the brethren, charity to all men, forgiving those that have done them wrong; of their desires after Christ, and of their new obedience; and by renewing the exercise of these graces, by serious meditation, and fervent prayer." This is what we all ought to have been doing over the last three months since our last communion service, but even more so this is what we all must make a concerted effort to do over this week leading up to communion. It is only then that you come and feast with sincerity and truth. Look at verse 7 and 8 again, "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: 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.”

Paul connects this purging out of the leaven of the heart with the keeping of the feast of Passover, not the Old Covenant ceremony of the Passover, but the New Covenant continuation of that feast in Christ who is our Passover. The Jews, at their passover, made sure to search every corner of their houses with candles in order to get rid of any leaven that might be found there, so that they might keep the feast with unleavened bread, according to the commandment. Because “Christ our Passover sacrificed for us,” we ought to exercise the same care to "keep the feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” The Jews were commanded upon threat of death to forsake the use of leaven, and to put it out of their houses for seven days, and they were to eat the lamb with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. So too must the leaven of sin to be purged out of our hearts with the greatest care; and while we feed by faith on the spotless Lamb of God, we must partake also of the bitter herbs of repentance and "the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” When you come to this feast you come as on who has purged out the leaven of your hearts, as one who has been covered by the blood of the Lamb just as the Jews covered their doorposts. You come as one who has been united to Christ and has been clothed in His righteousness. Christ is our Passover sacrificed for us. Rest in that sacrifice, that once for all sacrifice, in which Christ took upon Himself your sins and paid the penalty that you ought to have paid.

But perhaps you have not been covered by the blood of the Lamb. Perhaps you have never has your heart sprinkled clean. Perhaps you have never been clothed in the righteousness of Christ. If that is you then I implore you today to repent and believe the Gospel. “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” (Romans 10:9) Your sin is wicked and vile and an affront to the thrice holy God. Your sin has earned you eternity in hell where all that awaits you is weeping and gnashing of

teeth. But if you cry out to the Lord, if you confess your sins to Him and repent of them, then you can be made whole; you can be made clean. If you have not received the free gift of God which is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord, then friend, today is the day of salvation. Do not wait until tomorrow, for tomorrow may not come. And if you are deceived by a false assurance and have never really come to Christ then the call is the same for you. Do not be deceived. Do not deceive others. And do not come to the Table and partake of the body and blood of our Lord, lest you eat and drink damnation unto yourself.

Dear saints, Jesus, that spotless Lamb, has, on the very same month, day, and hour, that the passover was first killed, and in the midst of most inconceivable agonies both of body and soul, yet without the breaking of a bone, been slain for us. We are by faith to sprinkle our hearts with His precious blood and purge out any leaven of sin which may remain in us, and we are to feast upon His body and blood. Do not fail in your responsibility to examine yourselves and duly prepare to come to the Table. There is great judgement and great consequence which comes from eating and drinking in an unworthy manner. Make every effort this week to prepare yourselves to partake of this sacrament. But I feel I must give words of comfort in this as well, that you must not neglect the sacrament because of a sense of not preparing enough. It is not your own worth that admits you to the Table but the worth found only in Christ. Hear the comforting words of the Larger Catechism concerning this, "One who doubteth of his being in Christ, or of his due preparation to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, may have true interest in Christ, though he be not yet assured thereof; and in God's account hath it, if he be duly affected with the apprehension of the want of it, and unfeignedly desires to be found in Christ, and to depart from iniquity: in which case (because promises are made, and this Sacrament is appointed, for the relief even of weak and doubting Christians) he is to bewail his unbelief, and labor to have his doubts resolved; and, so doing, he may and ought to come to the Lord's Supper, that he may be further strengthened." The comfort

is, that God overlooks our involuntary infirmities, and accounts us unleavened, when yet there is much still to be purged out. So come and feast with sincerity and truth.

Brothers and sisters, the duty has been laid before you. The call of the Apostle is to examine yourselves so as to not eat and drink in an unworthy manner. Spend this week in deep and sincere prayer and meditation upon the Word. Consider setting apart a day this week for prayer and fasting to devote yourself to this. Use the catechism's exposition of the moral law as a guide in helping you see the leaven within your own heart which must be purged out. Cry out to God in sincere faith and repentance, for He will hear your prayer. Hold on to the promise of 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Prepare yourselves to come and partake of the feast of the Lord. Purge out the leaven of your hearts.