

A Christian sins. Not a surprise. We are sinners cleansed by grace!

Today we study which of these 3 is a good response of the sinning Christian?

- 1) I did it, and I'm so ashamed.
- 2) I did it, and I don't think it is wrong.
- 3) I did it, and I'm proud of it.

The book of 1 Corinthians exists because sins came into the church in Corinth. In response, Paul wrote this first letter to deal with sins.

We saw in chapters 1-4 how Paul dealt with the first sin – of divisions and disunity, by returning to Christ crucified, and by listening to Paul as father and apostle.

We turn to a new section here in chapter 5, where Paul deals with the second sin that came into the church in Corinth – the sin of tolerating sinning brothers or sisters, allowing them to stay within the church, while staying within their sins.

So, the first two sins Paul confronted were the first two characteristics of the church in the Nicene creed, we say, "...we believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church..." First characteristic of the church is that the church is ONE. We believe the church is one church. That is, ONE UNIFIED church. Since there is only one Head of the church - Jesus Christ, there can be only one body of Christians. One head, one body. We must be unified, not split.

The second characteristic of the church to protect is the holiness of the church – also the second topic in the Nicene' belief statement. "...One holy catholic and apostolic church." Holy! The people of the church must be living holy lives. God insists on holiness. Sin cannot be allowed to stay.

So that is the main point of this sermon... **Christ gave His church clear instructions for how to deal with sinning brothers.**

### **1. Publicly confirm no toleration of forbidden relationships. (v.1-5)**

In verse 1, Paul started with the facts, the public report that 7<sup>th</sup> commandment immorality was happening in the church in Corinth. A big deal, right? This was Corinth, known as sin city, famous for 7<sup>th</sup> commandments sins, right? But wait, would it surprise you to learn that adultery was not the core sin issue that Paul was addressing? The core sin issue was tolerating adultery in the church! In verse 1, Paul showed who did not tolerate it, in contrast to who did tolerate it. Paul wrote how evil was this variety of adultery that was being tolerated. It was so evil that even pagans would not tolerate this variety. Yet, it was being tolerated in the church in Corinth. It was more than just adultery – simple adultery was tolerated among many pagans. This was something worse that was being tolerated in the church, that pagans would not tolerate. Verse 1 lists

what it was. The idea “to have” is referring not just to certain activities in private between two adults, but rather this phrase “to have” always refers to a marriage. The church was changing the definition of marriage! These two persons, a man and a woman, were living in a marriage that should not have been allowed, because of how those two persons were related to each other. Here Paul showed clearly that the law of God revealed in Leviticus 18:8 was still in force on New Testament Christians. Namely, that a wrong marriage was ongoing and continuing to be allowed, while those two members of the church were remaining in good standing. Christ was being actively and perpetually dishonored, and the church was losing its witness within sin city, where God had placed them. The church was supposed to be more holy than sin city, and instead the church was less holy than sin city! Thus, a big deal. That is the evil Paul was confronting - An UN-holy church.

In verse 2, Paul then addressed a resulting sin. Tolerating sin resulted in the additional sin of the people of the church being arrogant. Again here Paul used the word puffed up, which he had used three times in the previous chapter. Here in chapter 5, Paul was shocked by their prideful attitude regarding the unholy behavior in the church, and so now Paul added direct comments about their arrogant attitude. Instead of being arrogant, Paul instructed them what their attitude should have been in response to this unholy situation – mourning and grieving about unholiness in the church! But that was not all. Already here in verse 2, Paul instructed them, what else should have been their response to this sin in the church – to take action to remove the person from the church, because the immoral person would not repent of the sins. Today we use the word excommunicate, which is easy to understand. Commune means you can have community and in particular, to partake of The Lord’s Supper, which is communing with the Lord and communing with each other. In the word excommunicate, the prefix “Ex” means “out.” External means outside. So, to excommunicate means to take a person out of that communing status, or to remove a person from the privilege of the church, and from the prerogative of partaking in the bread and wine.

In verse 3 – Paul stated his own verdict on this case of this immoral man, and because Paul was an apostle, his verdict was official. Paul had authority there, which had been revealed in chapter 4 by Paul referring to himself as their spiritual father. In addition, here in verse 3 Paul underscored his authority by writing that he was “*present in spirit.*” By his letter, Paul had already pronounced a guilty verdict, a guilty finding. And Paul was not even there physically or geographically – he was not in the city of Corinth while writing this letter. The narrow point Paul was making was that this case of sin was so obvious that Paul could already see it clearly from a distance. They could not claim that they had tolerated it because the issue was complex and ambiguous. No. The man was sinning an egregious and ongoing sin, and he would not repent.

Furthermore, in verse 4, Paul gave them specific instructions for what to do as soon as this letter arrived. They were to gather and assemble as a church in the name of the Lord Jesus, with the power or character of the Lord Jesus as the driving factor, and upon Paul's authority as an apostle of Jesus, and they were to do what Paul wrote in verse 5. As a church, they were to deliver that man, that sinning brother, over to Satan for the destruction of his sinful flesh, so that his soul may be saved.

This seems strong to us, as if it is overkill or retribution, lacking gentleness.

*Holiness within the church is more important to God than we might have thought!* The church must be holy and pure for God, because of Jesus.

In fact, purity in the church was so vital, that a man who claimed he was a Christian, but kept on living in sin, would need to be turned over to the evil one. Why? So that the sinning brother, while suffering under Satan's control, would be shown the difference between the evil one and the Holy One. There, right there, that sinning man needed to cry out to the Holy God for his own soul to be saved from the evil one and from the sins in which he was stuck. Every week we pray in worship, "*deliver us from the evil one.*" Jesus taught us to pray this prayer daily, as part of the Lord's prayer.

No, Paul was not being harsh here. No Paul was not lacking in gentleness when instructing the church to turn that sinning brother over to Satan. No. This was loving. This was just.

This was the only right thing to do in order to protect the honor of Christ and the holiness of the church, and it was also the only right thing to do in order to reclaim the sinning brother from his sins.

It was not just Paul who had a zero tolerance policy of sin in the church.

It was Christ who had a zero tolerance policy for sin in the church.

That was the driving issue in the church, addressed in this chapter.

Verse 4 said they assemble in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Verse 4 said they must excommunicate a brother in the power of the Lord Jesus.

Christ was the head of the church, and Christ is holy.

Christ died and rose again to cleanse the believers of their impurity and sin, and they could not look lightly on sin in the church. But each of them were sinners! How can anyone remain in the church then?

This brings us to point two, moving ahead to verses 6-8, where we...

## **2. Focus on Christ's sacrifice with sincerity and truth, and purge evil from the church. (v.6-8)**

In verse 6, Paul addressed their toleration of sin which had led to their boasting of sin. How could they boast of this sin? To illustrate the danger of toleration leading to the danger of boasting, Paul used a word picture, a metaphor

of yeast being added to bread dough.

The church was like a batch of bread dough, and yeast had been added. What happened next? The whole batch of dough was impacted. If yeast was in dough, all of the dough felt the influence of the yeast. Everyone who had ever watched bread being made, knew that. Because everyone knew that, Paul used common knowledge as a great way to show his lesson here.

What was Paul's lesson? As soon as one person tolerated sin, and started boasting about sin, the whole church started tolerating sin and boasting about it.

What could they do now? Was it too late? Had the church been ruined by sin and evil? No. The church could do something.

In verse 7, Paul wrote that because Christ was sacrificed, there was always hope and renewal for His church. All they needed to do was come back to Christ, and start over with a new batch of dough! Don't allow any yeast into the new batch of dough, and the new batch of dough would not be impacted by the chemical reaction of the leaven or yeast. All they had to do was start over with a church in which every member was cleansed by the Lamb of God. Every single member retained a place in the church not because they stayed clear of certain sins on a sin list. No. Rather, they stayed in the holy church because whatever sins they committed, Jesus gave them conviction, Jesus gave them repentance, and Jesus gave them faith. Because of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, each brother and each sister remained in a holy church.

In the Spirit of Christ, every church is without leaven. Every church community is pure. Whenever and wherever a church finds sin in the lives of our members, we all run to the cross, and we find grace to cover our wrongs, grace to change us, and grace to believe that the cross is sufficient for us. No Christian has room to boast. To do that would be to mock the very sacrifice of the Passover Lamb Himself, Jesus Christ.

In verse 8, Paul wrote that they came to worship with respectful celebration and also a joyful pleasant lightness and a delight of full peace. They participated in the festival of bread and wine. What sort of bread? Not the bread made with the yeast of immorality. Not the bread made with the yeast of arrogance. Not the bread made with the yeast of malice, which was an intention to hurt someone. Instead, with the bread without any leaven, without any wrongs. The bread that was not duplicitous and not lying to themselves about what holiness was, and how the Holy God looked at such things. Instead, the bread made with the holy characteristic of sincerity. The bread that was made with honesty with themselves about what God commanded. The bread made with truth. They didn't just have drab, dreary worship. No. They came into worship with an attitude of celebration! God is Holy. So they celebrated God's holy character. Why? How? Because God had made them holy, His church. How? By the sacrifice of Christ to remove their sins, their

evils, and their bad attitudes, so that they were left humbled, holy, and JOYFUL.

### **3. Reach decisions about sinning brothers, and leave others to God. (v.9-13)**

We know that Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners. Why? He was evangelizing them in the world. Christ prompted Paul to write here in verse 9, to not associate with immoral people.

In verse 10, Paul clarified that did not mean staying away from all immoral people of the world, for then Christians would have had to leave this world. In sin city, immoral people were everywhere! The topic of Paul here was not the social circles of Christians talking with non-Christians in the neighborhood, but instead the topic was church unity and church holiness leading to church community, and expectations for those belonging to and operating inside of the church of Christ.

In verse 11, Paul explained the instruction was not to associate with immoral people who call themselves Christians! SINNING BROTHERS IS THE TITLE OF THE SERMON ON PURPOSE. THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO BE HOLY BROTHERS AND SISTERS. THEY WERE SINNING. THEY WERE NOT REPENTING. Paul instructed they were not to even eat a meal with them.

Why? Because one sin tolerated, has the ability to deteriorate the moral sense of the whole community of that church. Paul instructed them not to let one sinning person change their fellowship, change their stance against sin city, change their beliefs, change their conversations, change their unity. One sinning person's rationalizations became a shared virus to their way of thinking, and soon his/her rationalizations were the rationalizations of everyone across the church.

They were not to even eat with one person. Certainly they were not to eat the bread of The Lord's Supper with sinning brothers and sisters, calling themselves a church. Why? Because they must be careful not to recognize openly wicked men and women as Christians.

Who would enjoy the task of saying to that sinning brother, who is also a boastful fellow, that he is no longer allowed to partake of the bread and the wine of the holy sacrament?

In verse 12, Paul showed that their job was not to judge the world's people, but it was their job to judge the people in the church. Interesting, because they tended to do the exact opposite. They wanted to band together around their own self-righteousness and evaluate themselves are good, because unbelievers are worse. Instead, they need to say nothing about the other people, and do their task within the church to keep it pure by finding sin when they find sin, and by calling it evil whenever they find evil, and together running to the cross.

In verse 13, Paul showed that the immoral people of the world would not get away with it. God would judge them. And Paul ended the chapter by again saying that the church was responsible for keeping itself pure, and the way to do that was to remove wicked persons from the church.

**Conclusion: My conclusion is 3 words – celebrate the festival!**

I draw these 3 words from verse 8. To ‘*celebrate the festival*’ from verse 8, meant that not just in The Lord’s Supper, and not just in worship services, but rather in their whole Christian lives they were celebrating a holy festival to the Lord. They themselves were consecrated to God. They themselves were dedicated to God, and they celebrated that fact. They belonged to Jesus! The Lamb of God was sacrificed for them! Celebrate their cleansing from sin, and closeness to God!

Back in the Old Testament days, whenever the Passover Lambs were offered, there was a feast that lasted seven days. For us who live in the New Testament days, since Christ was offered as a sacrifice unto death for us, there is a feast that lasts the length of our whole lives. As long as we live, we enjoy being in the truth. For all of our days, we exalt Jesus, and seek to live like Him.

We have sincerity. A straightforward clearness and openness. No covering. No hiding. No lying. No tricking. We are real. We mean what we say.

When we say we are Christian brothers and sisters, we live that out. Sincerity is like a sunroom in a house – the light can shine right through and show no flaws or discrepancies. We are genuine Christians, sinners washed clean.

Inwardly, we have a new moral condition in which we respond to God’s holy law and Christ’s holy character with an eager compliance and conformity. We live holy lives by the grace of God, because we want to live holy lives.

We celebrate the festival that is a holy festival, and we don’t find it boring at all. We find it to be the most exhilarating adventure in the world. Why? Because we are walking close to God.

Ephesians 2:13, “*now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*”

Hebrews 4:16, “*Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*”

James 4:8, “*Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.*”