**Get Rid of the Old Yeast**

February 7, 2021

1 Corinthians 5:1-13

Key Verse 5:7 “Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.”

In the next three chapters we deal with a very uncomfortable topic of sexual immorality in the church. Greeks’ view of sex was that sex was a biological urge, just like getting some sleep or exercise or eating. Today is no different. According to CDC (Centers for Disease Control), 20% of Americans have STD (sexually transmitted disease). It means that Americans are very promiscuous. Canadians are no different. But sex is sacred and it is a God-given endowment to be kept in trust only for the married couple. God established the church to be a good influence to the world so that God may be honored and glorified. Jesus said in Matthew 5:13-14, “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.” But instead of being a good influence, Christians are being influenced by the world and are being rendered useless. In this passage, Paul says, “Get rid of the old yeast.” We should live holy lives so that we can be a good influence to our culture rather than being influenced by it.

Look at verse 1. “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father’s wife.” Here Paul confronts an outrageous problem that happened within the church. The mentality of free sex had run rampant to the extent that a man is sleeping with his step-mother. This is the kind of thing that we may expect would happen among hamsters, but not among humans, not to mention among Christians. Even the Romans and Greeks frowned upon such practice. God condemns such sin. Deuteronomy 27:20 says, “Cursed is anyone who sleeps with his father’s wife, for he dishonors his father’s bed.” How could this occur in the holy church of Jesus Christ? How could it continue to happen and not be addressed by the Corinthians until they received Paul’s letter? As we studied, Corinthians were infamous for their sexual immorality. In those circumstances, perhaps this man was overcome by his lustful desire and thought that love conquered all.

Look at verse 2. “And you are proud! Shouldn’t you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?” Paul rebukes the church for this problem, not just those who committed the sin. They were proud that their church was tolerant, compassionate, non-judgmental and progressive. They were saying proudly, “Our church is full of love; we can forgive even such a person.” They thought that it was a personal matter. Many people say, “This is just between God and him. It is none of your business.” But Paul rebuked them for their pride. They honored their own opinions above what the Bible said. They should have been filled with grief and followed God’s command to kick him out. Sin in the church must be publicly and swiftly dealt with. If there is no repentance, the offender must be kicked out of the fellowship. According to verse 3, Paul said that he already passed judgment on the one who did this. How could Paul pass judgment on the man when he said that we should not judge in chapter 4? In chapter 4, Paul is talking about judging people’s motives and faithfulness which are difficult to judge. But here Paul is talking about judging the facts of one’s conduct. The man in this passage clearly committed a great sin in the sight of God. If he had repented, the matter would have been dealt with quietly and the man would have received some training and help. But since he refused to repent, Paul called for the Corinthians to assemble in the name of the Lord Jesus and in the power of the Lord Jesus to deal with it openly. What were they to do in this public assembly?

Look at verse 5. “Hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.” When this man was expelled before the whole church, it was like handing him over to Satan and he would have to struggle by himself. In this way, he could plunge into the depths of misery like the prodigal son in the mud among the pigs, and seriously think about what he did. Hopefully he would come to his senses, repent and come back into the loving arms of the Father. Today people want to be politically correct and not hurt anyone’s feelings. Sometimes we think that love means tolerating everything someone does gracefully. They even interpret John 3:16 in their own way. “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” They emphasize “so.” They think that we should love them unconditionally to the extent that we should accept their sinful lifestyle. However, the deepest love involves discipline that doesn’t feel very good. Hebrews 12:11 says, “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” Moreover, Proverbs 12:1 says, “Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid.” Discipline is a key to healthy churches, healthy families and healthy individuals. Correction is also necessary to get on the path to eternal life. Let’s take sin very seriously and be willing to rebuke those who sin, telling them to repent. Let’s bring back true love rather than superficial love. Let’s also accept correction and discipline humbly as God’s great love so that we may be blessed.

Look at verse 6. “Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough?” Yeast is a small microorganism. Yet when a small amount is mixed with sugar and heated, it grows quickly. While it multiplies, it emits a gas that makes dough puffy.

It is similar to the English expression, “One bad apple can spoil the whole barrel.” If you let a bad apple remain in a barrel, it will spoil all the apples in the barrel. You need to remove one bad apple immediately in order to save other apples. Likewise, sin spreads quickly and makes people puffed up, proud before God and boastful. Sin spreads rapidly like yeast through dough even though it is small. It is not just a personal matter; it becomes a bad influence like an infectious disease that corrupts many others. In the case of the Corinthians, when they began to compromise with the immoral culture around them, sin came in and spread until finally a man slept with his father’s wife. There might be many yeasts of sin, but Paul specifically addresses the yeast of sexual immorality. In Genesis 2, God established the family as part of his greatest love and blessing on mankind. A man and woman loving each other and getting married is really a beautiful thing. So some of the best music, the best movies and the best literature and indeed some of the best things in life are related to a man and a woman getting together and loving each other. But it is often the best things that God made that are twisted and perverted and become the most grievous of sins. The yeasts of pre-marital sex, adultery and homosexuality especially influence us. They may seem to be a small thing like yeast.

How can we overcome our evil desires and the influence of the sinful world? Look at verse 7. “Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new unleavened batch - as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.” The blood of the Passover lamb was the turning point between the old life of the Israelites in slavery in Egypt and their new life as God’s holy people. Likewise, the blood of Christ, who was crucified on Passover, is the turning point between our old life of sin and the new life in God’s grace and the life of salvation with hope in the kingdom of God. So we must get rid of the old yeast, which represents our old lives of sin and be a new batch without yeast as we really are. Before he met Christ, St. Augustine enjoyed many kinds of sexual immorality and had a child by a mistress. When he first heard the gospel, he liked it but also liked his sin. So at that time he said, “Lord, grant me chastity, but not yet.” Then one day, God convicted him through Romans 13:13-14, “Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” After that when Augustine met the mistress on the street and she called out, “Augie,” he ran the other way and he became one of the most influential Christian intellectuals in history.

So Paul is saying in verse 7, “Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover Lamb also has been sacrificed.” For a week after the Passover lamb was sacrificed in Israel, the house was supposed to be free from all yeast. Removing yeast was a symbolic expression of removing all elements of bad habits from Egypt. Paul takes this as a picture of sin in the church. The yeast of sin is to be put out permanently. We never make peace with sin again. We fight it and confess it and flee from it and never boast in its presence. But the pride at Corinth was saying, “Christ has been sacrificed for our sins, therefore we can sin and grace will abound.” But Paul said, “Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed, therefore clean out the old leaven.”

Look at verse 8. “Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.” According to this verse, Christian life is like one continuous festival. In the Old Testament, the Feast of Unleavened Bread lasted for one week, starting on Passover day. Along with the sacrifice of the Passover lamb, God commanded the Israelites to eat bread without yeast and rid themselves of yeast. It was an assembly which joyfully celebrated God’s grace through the Passover. Here Paul says that with Christ as our Passover Lamb, the Passover festival of celebrating God’s grace does not last just one week but our entire lifetime. Many worldly people think that church is like unleavened bread, bread with no taste. So many people are afraid to join. But to those who taste the feast of the kingdom of God, worldly parties have no fun. According to a food historian, it was fashionable in Europe in the medieval times to put all kinds of spices to cook food. Spices were so expensive since it was imported from India. It was a reason why Christopher Columbus wanted to find a new way to India to get spices. But many people died of eating too much spices. Likewise many people are addicted to bread with many preservatives and spices. When they realize that it is harmful, they will be interested in the bread without yeast. May God help each of us to keep the Festival continually, getting rid of the yeast of sin and sincerely celebrating the grace of Jesus.

Look at verses 9-10. “I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world.” By being so uncompromising with sin, they might have misunderstood that Paul was saying that they should separate themselves from all immoral people, such as the greedy, swindlers and idolaters who are everywhere. On the contrary, God called Christians to live in this world among sinful people and make friends with them. When I was a young Christian, I misunderstood what it means to be holy. My officemate was living with his girlfriend. I considered him like a leper. Once he invited me to their house. I was so uncomfortable. Even their cup looked dirty. But Jesus spent time with tax collectors and sinners to save them. When he was criticized by the Pharisees for that, he said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” (Lk 5:31-32) God has left us here in the world to associate with people in the world and be a good influence to them. Jesus said that we are in this sinful world, but we are not part of it. (Jn 17:16-18) May God bless our campus ministries to help many young people to experience the grace of Jesus that is greater than all kinds of sin. May we also invite many of our friends even online so that they may know Jesus and come out of the life of sin.

While loving people, we have to hate sin and not compromise with it. For those in the church who sin and should know better, the way to truly love people is by being strict. Paul says in verses 12-13, “What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. “Expel the wicked person from among you.” Paul again asserted that they should purge evil among them. When we are clear with sin in the church, in the short term it is painful. But it is the best medicine. The command to expel the immoral brother made the Corinthians very sorrowful, and the man who was expelled had a very difficult time. But we know that the man who was handed over to Satan finally repented of his sin and was changed by the grace of God. In the letter of 2 Corinthians Paul he asked them to accept and embrace the man who repented. 2 Corinthians 7:9-10 says, “For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.” Helping people to repent is very difficult. Often people get mad and try to retaliate when they are asked to repent. But even though it is very difficult, it is a very joyful thing to see people come to God.

May God also give us a clear attitude towards sin so that we may not be influenced by the world, but be strong and healthy Christians who can be a good influence on the world. May we celebrate with joy our Passover Lamb Jesus with pure lives of sincerity and truth.

Big Idea: Holy people of sincerity and truth.