

We're studying what's known as Paul's 1st Letter to the Church in Corinth. It's not actually his first letter – There was an earlier one, but we don't have it any more... But when he wrote this one, he addressed it like this:

1:2 To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

That's the address: And wow!! There's some depth to those words. And when we begin to understand these words, - only **then**, are we ready to get into Chapter 5.

Regardless of whether the church of God is in Corinth; or whether it's in St George; or Westmar; or Begonia; Bongen; Dirranbandi,,,, It doesn't matter where it is – the people of God (Christians), need to recognise **this** about themselves:

We are:

- Those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus . That means we've been made holy. We are **all** forgiven sinners. At one time, we **were** enemies of God. We did evil in God's sight. Our rejection of God, and our actions, were deserving of death...

But here's the graciousness of God: Jesus died in our place. Jesus took my sin on Himself, when He was nailed to the cross. And so all those, who call on the Name of The Lord Jesus Christ, are sanctified. That means we are made pure and holy. All of our wickedness

– all of our evil, is taken away

Not only are we **sanctified in Christ Jesus** though, But we are **also**:

- called **to be saints** together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours

Alright, we are called **to be** saints – not only on our own – We are called to be saints together, as God’s church... Together, in this little fellowship here. Together, in the church universal.

Are there any saints here today??? I hope so... Because using Biblical terminology, the saints, are God’s holy ones...

Christians – Brothers and sisters in Christ, are saints... And so we are called to a lifestyle which reflects who we are. The holiness of God has **already** been established in us, through the blood of Jesus. We **are** holy. Therefore, live in holiness. We are called **to be** the saints that we are¹.

*If a student, is elected as a “school captain”. His status, is that of “school captain”, by virtue of the election... So, he **is** a school captain, but he is also called to be, a school captain. His actions and demeanour, must be those **of** a school captain. And if they’re not, he’ll probably get demoted.*

And it’s like that with us. Through the grace of God, we are already sanctified – we are already “made holy”. Therefore we are **called to be** the saints (the holy ones) that we already are.

Somebody once said:

“A saint is someone whose life makes it easier to believe in God.”ⁱⁱ”

Would you agree with that?

“A saint is someone whose life makes it easier to believe in God.”

Well, the thing is, that **should** be true... How we live, either makes Jesus look good, or it makes Him look very, very bad... How we live, will either honour Christ, or it will dishonour Christ...

I was talking to someone the other day, and this wasn't a unique conversation – I've had similar conversations before...

*He said, “I can't see how God can be real if he lets priests do what they do to little kids....” Now of course, we can give all sorts of answers to statements like that, but we cannot get around the point that he was making. When those who claim to be God's children, behave badly, it dishonours God terribly... And particularly so, when the behaviour is even worse than godless **society**, will tolerate.*

We have such a case, in 1 Corinthians 5: Incest. It's been reported to Paul, that a man in the church, is being sexually immoral, with a lady, who is (most-likely) his step-mother. Word had gotten to Paul, that **a man has his father's wife**

Now, there is no 'grey area' here – it's simply outrageous...

The Pagan Greek culture (that was the culture of Corinth), was thoroughly immoral. Sex-outside-of-marriage, was normal for them. Adultery was common (almost “a given”). Homosexual relationships were not **un**common. ... But even the Greeks, drew the line at “incest”. It was repulsive to them, and it wouldn’t be tolerated...

But there it was, present in the church in Corinth – sexual immorality, of a kind so obscene, that it wouldn’t even be tolerated by the pagan Greeks...

And as a church, they were proud ... They were “puffed up” – they were boasting... Perhaps they were celebrating “We are so free – We are so liberated, we can even do this...”

When there is a great wickedness present in the church, Paul tells us 2 things – How we should **feel** about it, and what we should **do** about it...

How should we feel? Angry? No, not angry. Sad. We should mourn (mourn, as we would at the death of a loved one). And what should we do about it? The person who is responsible for the great wickedness, should be removed from the fellowship...

Woh, that’s a big call, isn’t it??? And how could that **possibly** fit with what we’ve been hearing in the last couple of weeks? (about not judging)

We know Jesus said: **Matthew 7:1** **"Judge not, that you not be judged."**

And even in this very letter to the Corinthians, we're told that the Spiritual person is to be judged by no one,, Paul was telling us how the Apostles and teachers should be judged by no one... We've been hearing that "It's not my place to judge. God does the judging." "Don't bring the judgment before its time."

But now, he says this:

¹¹ ... not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. ¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you **are** to judge? ¹³ God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."

So, he **was** telling us "Don't judge." **Now** he's telling us to "Judge". What's the difference?

Well, there's 2 very **important** differences.

1. Firstly, the command for us not to judge, was a command to individuals or factions, within a church. As an individual, I have the duty to be discerning (so that I don't put my trust in the wrong thing or the wrong person), but I do **not** have the right to judge, or to pronounce judgment. As an individual, I

don't have the right to judge you. And you don't have the right to judge me.

2. And the second very important difference, is that the earlier references (to not judge), were to do with disagreement over finer points of doctrine, or debatable matters – matters that aren't fully clear in Scripture – matters where faithful people can and do, come to different perspectives to each other. On **these** matters, don't judge...

Whereas now, we're being told that the Corinthians (as a united church) (not individually) should judge this wicked person, because they are agreed as a fellowship, that his behaviour is indisputably outrageous... It was blatant, unrepentant, and there are no 'grey areas' here...

Paul tells them, that as a church, they should gather together (in the Name of The Lord), And together as the people of God, Christ is with them, and he says a rather strange phrase:
⁵ you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

Why would Christians deliver someone to Satan? What does that mean?

To be put out of the church (to be excommunicated), is to be cast out of God's Kingdom. The world is Satan's domain – the church is God's domain. And so, for the wicked man to be put out of the church, is to be handed over to Satan. And it's done with a purpose – for the destruction of the flesh. (now,

does that mean to get a blow-torch and to burn away the muscle & tissue)....

Paul often uses the word “flesh”, to describe that part of us, that is unrepentant, sinful man... In Galatians he says:
Galatians 5:17 ... the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for [they] are opposed to each other...

And so to hand the evil person over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, is done with the hope and the prayer, that the person will be so grieved, that they would repent, and be saved...

*It's like sending a misbehaving child to “the naughty boy corner”. We don't want them to **stay** there – we want them to re-join the group. We don't get any joy in sending them there. They're excluded from the community, because exclusion hurts, and the intent of the naughty boy corner, is for them to be sorry for what they've done, and to repent – to start doing the right thing....*

Righto...

The Christian church, has always taught the need for uncompromising adherence to purity, especially in the areas of ‘sexual ethics’... Why is that? Is it because of tradition? Is it because a certain level of morality is the expectation of society? *For instance, when my parents first got married, they didn't think to take their wedding certificate with them on*

their honeymoon, and because there was a fair age difference between Mum & Dad, the place they'd booked for their honeymoon wouldn't let them sleep in the same room, because they didn't believe they were married... Alright, so that should give you some idea of how society's expectations have changed in the last 50 years...

The question is: “Should the ethics of the church, evolve with the changing ethics of the community?”

So, 50 years ago sex-outside-of-marriage was frowned upon, whereas now it's not only common-place – it's expected... The world will think you're strange, if you wait until you get married...

But the thing is, when it comes to ethics and morality, our society today, is pretty much akin to the Pagan Greek culture of Corinth, ... And for Christians (even in Corinth) it's always been right, to turn our backs on worldly immorality, and to choose to live differently to the world around us... Why do we do that???

Well, Paul tells us why. And he talks in terms of “the Passover”. Let me take us back to Egypt, and Moses standing before Pharaoh, with a message from God, “**Let my people go.**”

And for the people of God to be set free from Egypt, was going to take death. The Lord said, take a lamb and kill it. Paint its blood on your door posts and the lintel, and I will pass over your house, and you will be saved.

And they were told to prepare unleavened bread... Some of your bibles might say “Bread without the yeast in it”... But they didn’t have yeast like we have nice little packets of yeast today. Their yeast, was old mouldy dough...

When they kneaded the dough to make the bread, they would take a small piece of that dough, and put it away somewhere in the house, and it was left to putrefy... At a later date, when they were making bread again, they would take a small piece of that putrid dough (bacteria & fungus), and work it though the new lump of dough, and that would be the leaven. And the fungus, would cause the bread to rise...

Biblically, “leaven”, is used as a metaphor, for everything that is rotten in our lives. And it’s a pretty good analogy, isn’t it (that bit of old, mouldy bread)... And God said to the people of Israel, “When I set you free from Egypt, leave all your leaven behind. Leave everything that’s putrid behind, and take only what’s pure.”

And from that time on, once a year, Israel would celebrate the feast of unleavened bread. They would go through their homes, searching for any old mouldy dough that they’d set aside, and they’d take it out of the house and throw it away... And here’s the thing, they would search their own house for the leaven – not everybody else’s house.

Alright, so you got this? This leaven – this putrid dough, is used as a symbol for all that is rotten in our lives.

Sin, is dirty and defiling. And like leaven, it will work through, and grow, and permeate everything. The only remedy, is to clean out evil entirely. And so Paul says:

⁷ Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened.

The Christian church, is not just the old society, patched up a bit. It is radically new. The evil, that characterises worldly people, has been taken away, and we are free of corruptionⁱⁱⁱ. This is what the blood of Jesus does for us – It purifies us. It makes us new. It makes us holy.

But our freedom from sin, has been bought at a price. It wasn't the blood of a common lamb that bought **us** freedom – it was the blood of Christ. Jesus paid with His life, to give us holiness... What's my holiness worth? What's your holiness worth? How do we celebrate it? Do we sing a few songs? Do we pray a few prayers?

Romans 12:1 present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed** by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Once a year, the Hebrews had a festival of unleavened bread – **1 week** every year, when they would celebrate their freedom from Egypt. We Christians, are to celebrate **our** freedom in Christ, **every** day of every week. How do we celebrate? By cleaning out the old leaven of malice and evil, and celebrating with sincerity and truth...

Do I really need to tell you why righteous living so important? It's because Jesus saved us from our old way of life. That's our **old** way of life... The old way of evil, and malice – He saved us from that... And we celebrate holiness, by **being** holy...

If as a Christian, I live to satisfy the cravings of the flesh, that's just the same as if the people of Israel, chose to go back to being slaves in Egypt... We have been set free from sin. Why would we embrace being slaves to it again? We celebrate our holiness by being holy.

It's not very popular to teach this sort of stuff anymore, but this **is** what the bible teaches – Blatant, unrepentant sinners, who claim the title of “Christian”, should not be allowed to go unchecked in the church.

In a previous letter that Paul wrote (which we don't have any more), he told them **not to associate with sexually immoral people** . He now clarifies that by saying “Not people of the world” - if we set out to not associate with the sexually immoral in our culture today, we wouldn't be able to go to the shops or the schools; hospital;.... We'd have to cut ourselves off completely...

And Jesus was well-known for spending **His** time with some of the most sinful people around. And we should too. How

are they going to hear the gospel, if we cut ourselves off, from those who need to hear it most???

So we **don't** cut ourselves off from the world, but as a church, he's saying, "We should not even **associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler....**" "Don't even eat with them", he says.

As Christians, we are to be a transformed community – in every area of life...

We should not **associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty** (and I think it's important to make the point that this is an ongoing, unrepentant guilt – not just 'slipping up' every now and then) **if he is guilty of:**

And, the first one on the list, is sexual immorality. "Sexual immorality" encompasses many things, but basically, God's gift of sex, is only properly expressed, between a man and a woman who are married to each other. Everything else, falls under the heading of "sexual immorality".

Now, some people would end the list there, but that's **not** where the list ends. If someone who claims to be a Christian is guilty of **greed**, they shouldn't be allowed to go unchallenged.... Jesus saved us from the sin of greed – always wanting more – more money – more land – better superannuation – a bigger house – a faster car.... But when's

the last time someone was put out of the church for their ongoing and unrepentant greed?

Or if he is an idolater. An idolater is someone who trusts or worships something other than God.

Here's an interesting one: A reviler. Does anyone even know what a "reviler" is? To revile, is a sin so heinous, that if I blatantly and unrepentantly practice this sin, I should be excluded from the church, and yet what is it? Do we even know???

It's a sin of the tongue. It's someone who is well known for uttering bitter complaint. They are scornful and speak with disdain, and no respect. It's someone who speaks abusively, with scorn or criticism... And that sort of verbal bitterness, has no place in the church.

Then there's the habitual drunk, or a swindler (maybe a better word might be "a thief" or "a robber") – someone who clutches for what is not theirs...

These are all examples of sins so heinous, that if we are characterised by these sins, and refuse to repent, there comes a point, where the church should say (with one voice) "You've got to go to the naughty boy corner". You're giving Christ a bad name, and until you repent, we have to count you as an unbeliever....

Righto, where to from here?

The **worst** thing we could do, is to become like the Spanish inquisition, and to go on a witch-hunt to try and root out all of the ‘sinful’ people in the church.

What’s the **best** thing we can do? The best thing, is for you and I, to each examine ourselves... – to realise, what Jesus payed, to free us from sin ... And with that knowledge, to begin to live as the saints that Christ has already made us...

But should it ever come to a time when a church believe it is necessary to cut ties with an unrepentant sinner, we must realise “That’s a final step in a process of journeying together in grace.”

Jesus told us how to go about it, in Matthew Chapter 18... And every step of the process, has the aim, not of punishing, but of restoring to grace.

Matthew 18:15 "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. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Every step, has the aim of restoring to grace.

Let’s pray:

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you, and we praise you, for that very costly price you paid. The pain; the suffering; the

humiliation you went through, to free us from our sin. Lord, it is no little matter, that you set us free from sin. You've made us Holy by your blood, but sometimes we've not valued holiness as we should. As your church, we have been guilty of:

- sexual immorality;
- greed;
- idolatry;
- We have reviled others, and spoken with scorn and disdain
- There's been drunkenness
- And dishonesty
- And so much more...

God, forgive us.

Lord, as your word urges us to clear out the old leaven, give us a passion, and a resolve, to make a break, from that sin that so easily entangles us. And the sin, that in some cases, has defined us.

And Lord, may we become the saints – the holy ones, who you saved us, and call us to be.

In Jesus' name,
Amen.

ⁱ *so believers are called to a lifestyle which reflects their already given status*

Thiselton, A.C., 2000. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text*, Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

ⁱⁱ William Barclay in Rowell Edward K., *Quotes & Idea Starters for Preaching & Teaching*. Baker Books: Grand Rapids. 1996. p.149

ⁱⁱⁱ Morris, L., 1985. *1 Corinthians: an introduction and commentary*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.