

A Pure Church

1 Corinthians 5:1-13

Introduction

Polluted: I made you this dish and it just has a little bit of *salmonella* in it. Or just a little bit of *e. Coli*. Or I just have a touch of the *covid* or *flu*.

- A little is too much. Get rid of all of it because a little will grow and make you sick. A little will infect everyone.

Adult Content: The very first verse of tonight's sermon is going to deal with very adult themes (the Bible is not G-rated). I will try to be clear rather than crass.

- But when you preach the the Bible the way we do, in context, you are forced to wrestle with uncomfortable topics, and have challenging conversations. It's actually for our good because our world is filled with brokenness.

Providential Timing: Church discipline is upon us (Family Meeting). God, in his grace, has brought us to one of the primary chapters in the Bible dealing with the subject. We didn't plan this, we didn't choose this, God guided us. We couldn't foresee needing this, but God did.

- God's providence to bring us to this issue today (his plan, not ours), sermon calendar

¹ It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. ² And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. ³ For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. ⁴ When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 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. ⁶ Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? ⁷ Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸ Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. ⁹ I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— ¹⁰ not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. ¹¹ But now I am writing to you 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."

1. The Problem of Sin in the Church: Toleration (vv. 1-2)

Reputation: ¹ It is actually (ὄλως) reported that there is sexual immorality (πορνεία) among you, and of a kind (τοιαύτη πορνεία) that is not tolerated even among pagans (ἥτις οὐδὲ ἐν τοῖς

ἔθνεσιν), The word translated “actually” means it’s widely reported, publicly known! The **testimony of this church** is that they have sexual immorality in their midst. That’s what they’re known for!

- Pagan (odd) = “non-Christian”; here “Gentile”, non-Israelite (derived from the word for “nation” or “people”).
- (1) It’s bad enough to be bad, but the “non-Christian” world is living to a higher and holier standard than the Corinthian church. We shouldn’t have to look to politicians for moral guidance and righteous standards, we should be leading the charge.
- (2) The “Gentile” Corinthians are no longer considered Gentiles as they are now saints in the church of the living God. **They are the people of God!**
 - When you and I place our faith in Christ and are baptized into the body of Christ we belong to a new world, a new people. We have new allegiances. Our actions, attitudes, identities, dreams, and desires should all now flow out of our new life in Christ. **We can’t be in Christ and be like the world.** You and I are, first-and-foremost disciples of Christ (*primary* identity is not employment, ethnicity, generational category, Meyers-Briggs, etc.).

Sexual Immorality: πορνεία is the word in the NT that includes any type of sexual sin (prostitution, adultery, promiscuity, incest, etc.). In the Bible, sexual immorality is any type of sexual expression outside of God’s design of marriage (cf. Genesis, Jesus, Paul, etc.). Despite apparent rapid evolution of sex in our culture, the Bible has been **remarkably consistent** from Genesis to Jesus and beyond on both what marriage is and, surprisingly, many of the sexual questions we have in our day and age were dealt with in Scripture at various points in time.

- Have questions? Ask Pastor James.

Observation: Most objections I encounter around scripture are not technical, textual problems but the areas Scripture “challenges our deeply held beliefs... The biggest challenges for most people are not over issues where the Bible is unclear, but over issues where the Bible is very clear, and people don’t like it.” Lots of people want to follow God until he tells them they can’t sleep with whoever they want. **Jesus is not just Lord of your prayer life but of your sex life!**

- “Whenever Scripture challenges some of our deeply held beliefs, as it often does, we have a choice. We can challenge the Bible, or we can let the Bible challenge us.”
- Sexual immorality has always been one of the great challenges to discipleship.

Particularly Bad: for a man has his father’s wife (γυναῖκά τινα τοῦ πατρὸς ἔχειν). Look we got problems, but they aren’t these kinda problems (this is why I’m confused when I see “Corinth Baptist Church,” or maybe they’re trying to tell us something). **Probably** (but not definitively) not his mom (father’s wife), aka his **stepmom** (father has passed away?). Still impossibly bad.

- Illegal in Roman law. Capital offense in Judaism. (Deut 27:20, Lev 18:8, 20:11).
- Apparently an ongoing, unresolved problem (i.e., he still has)

Tolerate: ² And you are arrogant (πεφυσιωμένοι)! Ought you not rather to mourn? Arrogant? They think they are “spiritual” and “godly” while tolerating this sin in their midst. They put up with sin in their midst yet have the gall to claim they are godly.

- It *could* imply they are flaunting their “freedom” to sin in this way (e.g., 1 Cor 6:12).

Rather than walking around puffed up with pride, they should be mourning sin. **Sin is death and death is an occasion for grief.** I've seen churches proud of their production value, attendance numbers, budget, etc. while harboring sin.

- Notice that Paul is *more concerned* with the church's sin than the sin of the man. The man is not the only sinner, the church has done something wrong.

Mourn: Sin should sadden us. It should grieve us. We can't learn to live with it. Don't make peace with your sin, fight it.

- We're going to talk a lot about dealing with sin in the church. You might hear this sermon and think we're talking about creating a church that is perfect, holier-than-thou, no sinners allowed. **That is not the case.** The problem here isn't that sin is in the midst *per se*. We all have sinned and will sin. And the closer we get to Jesus, the more we'll see an understand new areas of sin in our life. The problem is when are **defiant in or tolerant of sin**, rather than **repentant**.
 - Come **broken** and **repentant** over our sin and be welcomed in the loving and gracious arms of Christ and his church.
 - Come **arrogant** and **defiant** in sin and invite the judgment of God and his church.

Shoulda: Let him who has done this be removed from among you. Rather than tolerate this man's egregious, unrepentant, ongoing sin, they should have **removed** him and mourned his loss. They are celebrating what they should be lamenting.

- In the church we are bound to each other as family, as one body, united in one faith, around one gospel. We have a responsibility to each other. If one rejoices, we all rejoice. If one suffers, we all suffer. If one sins, then we all have to deal with that sin.
 - "Until **we all** attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to **mature** manhood, to the measure of the **stature of the fullness of Christ**" (Eph 4:13). Corporate *contra* individualism (cf. Achan and Ai, y'all, etc.).
- You and I have to take each other's holiness seriously.
 - Some of you don't like it, don't want to be held accountable (find another church).
 - You should joyfully and gladly become a member so you can *belong* to the body of Christ. It is not good or healthy to attend a church without joining than it would be to perpetually date without marriage.
- **If you are a member and are in sin and refus to repent, to submit to the accountability of the church, then for your good and ours, for the testimony of the gospel, with tears in our eyes and grief in our hearts we will remove you from membership and we will bar you from taking the Lord's Supper.**

What keeps us from dealing with sin? Who am I? Don't like confrontation? Not that big of deal?

2. The Goal of Dealing with Sin in the Church: Restoration (vv. 3-5)

Judgment: ³ For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. **Judgment is good and necessary** (e.g., justice). None of us want to live in a world where there is no justice, no punishment for sin,

no righteousness. Most of us *long* for judgment, we just don't want to be judged. We judge things every day (e.g., half of our reality shows, food competitions, Olympics, etc.). Without judgment there is no right and wrong and no justice.

- Most famous Bible verse 50 years ago? Jn 3:16. Today? Matt 7:1 (“Judge not, that you not be judged”; “lest you be judged”).
 - BTW, I've never felt more judged than by people telling me not to judge. The judgiest people are the “judge not” police. They will judge your judging so hard..
- But that passage is not about *not judging* at all but (*context alert*) is a warning against **hypocritical judgment**, of holding other people to a standard you yourself violate.
 - Hypocrites judge to accuse, and condemn. Jesus judges to heal and to save. **What is your goal in judgment?** Is it to trap and shame or to rescue and heal?

Assembly: ⁴ When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus (ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου [ἡμῶν] Ἰησοῦ συναχθέντων) and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus,

- The context of this **discipline** is the gathered body of the church. It's reminiscent of the other famous **church discipline** passage in Matt 18. If a **sibling in the faith** sins against you, you are supposed to go to them (1) **privately for correction**. If that doesn't resolve it, then you go in a (2) **small group for clarification**. If that doesn't do it, then you (3) **bring it before the church**: ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church... ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them. And if that doesn't do it, then you are to (4) **exclude them from fellowship**.
- **Worship Service** is meant to *serve God* but we often think it is to serve us (consumers). What are we bringing to worship God? “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship (i.e., service). 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” (Rom 12:1-2).
 - That's why we are to examine ourselves, and judge our hearts, before we take the Lord's Supper so we do not incur the disciplinary judgment of God (cf. 1 Cor 11).

Deliver to Satan: ⁵ you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh (σαρκός), so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord (ἵνα τὸ πνεῦμα σωθῆ ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τοῦ κυρίου). This may be one of the more perplexing and powerful passages of Scripture. What does it mean to hand someone over to **Satan**?

- You are removing them from the protection of God to the dangerous dominion of the world (“domain of darkness,” Col 1:13; “world lies in the power of the evil one,” 1 Jn 5:19; “no hope without God in the world,” Eph 2:12). God is control over all things, but he allows Satan to tempt, attack, and afflict those outside of his protection.
- When you are outside of the church, you are outside of the protection of God. You are susceptible to the attacks of Satan (e.g., Passover safe inside, covered by the blood; unsafe outside, not under the blood).
 - (Spiritually) when you are outside of God's people you are exposed to spiritual, emotional, and physical attacks of the devil. **But even practically**, when you are

not connected to the church, the material support, intercessory prayer, and accountability that would help you in time of need and protect you from sin are removed (e.g., practically help pay your bills; spiritually warn you of the dangers of your sins, provide with wisdom).

In one other place we see Paul deliver some to Satan: Among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme (1 Tim 1:20).

- E.g., Job is handed over to Satan, through his affliction it led him to see God's grace more clearly (Job 2:6, 42:6-7).
- E.g., Paul describes his "thorn in the flesh" as a "messenger of Satan" which led him to experience and depend on God's grace even more (2 Cor 12:7-10).

The ultimate goal of this action is to teach, purify, and restore.

- Here we see the goal, to teach, purify, and restore. The purpose of church discipline is **salvation, not punishment**. We desire someone's **long-term spiritual health** rather than their **short-term fleshly comfort**. Discipline can lead to transformation. **We want your restoration.**

3. The Importance of Dealing with Sin in the Church: Holiness (vv. 6-8)

Problem: ⁶ Your boasting is not good (Οὐ καλὸν τὸ καύχημα ὑμῶν). Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Sin doesn't just impact the individual, it impacts the entire church. Sin has a corrupting influence.

- The boasting (of their maturity and their health) is not good, in fact it's dangerous. Because they think they're alright when actually they are corrupt.

A little leaven spreads through the whole batch of dough and is used as an illustration of sin that spreads through the whole church.

- E.g., cancer (a little is bad because it will multiply and spread to the body; what seems small, innocent, and un concerning can quickly turn into a deadly problem).
 - And you wouldn't boast of your health while having cancer.

Clean Your House: ⁷ Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸ Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice (κακίας) and evil (πονηρίας), but with the unleavened bread of sincerity (εὐλικρινείας) and truth (ἀληθείας).

- The promise of the gospel is that "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away [and] the new has come" (2 Cor 5:17). Thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness (Rom 6:17-18).
 - If Christ died to free you from sin, why would you go back to it?

This is why we practice **membership** the way we do. We want to do the best we can to assure that everyone who is a **member** is **actually a believer**. So you have to have a genuine testimony of saving faith, a clear understanding of the gospel, and a willingness to submit to the accountability of this local church.

- “Perhaps the origin of Baptists is best explained as a search for a pure church” (McBeth). This is how Baptists started, in response to the mixed membership of the state churches of the day.

If you are a member of this church, we want you to have confidence that you are a believer and if you stray from the commands of Christ, know that we will, in love, call you to repentance.

- **Regenerate church membership.** We are not interested in gathering a crowd at any cost. We want *true* disciples of Jesus.

If you refuse to submit to the body of Christ for examination, accountability, and ministry, if you refuse to gather with the body for worship and serve with the body in ministry, then there is no practical way for us to affirm your faith and support your discipleship.

Unleavened Living: Removal of leaven, Passover ceremony. Remembering the provision of God when he freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt (had to leave so quick they didn’t have time for the bread to rise). Now they remove all leaven as a reminder of the salvation of God and a commitment to live under his commands. (Cf. Torah, *Exodus 12:15*, part of the Bible you don’t read; Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Do the Right Thing).

- **Bigger point than some crispy bread.** The Passover is the last of the 10 plagues (Nile to blood, gnats, flies, boils, hailfire, darkness, etc.). The last was the angel of death killing the firstborn of every family (both Israelites and Egyptians). The only solution was to put the blood of a sacrificed lamb on the doorposts and the angel would spare them. **They were saved, their lives were spared by the blood of the lamb.** Our lives are hidden with Christ. We live and move and have our being because of the spilled blood of the lamb of God.

Which means, true life, a life worth living, a life that starts now and lasts forever is found under his good commands.

- **In the house**, under the rules, covered by the blood is where our life is.
- **Outside of the house**, vulnerable to evil, doing our own thing is where death is.
 - “When we choose sin without repentance, we choose against the purpose of the cross. Christ not only died to pardon your sin, he died to empower you against sin. And those who do not embrace the power of the cross to fight their sin likely do not have the pardon of the cross to forgive their sin” (Piper).

Why should we obey God’s commands? (1) Because he is God and we are not. (2) They lead to life and joy rather than death and despair. The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes (Ps 19:8).

- E.g., sexual immorality. The gospel shows us the joy and purpose of sex. “Sex is wonderful because it isn’t everything and it isn’t nothing. It is an appetizer. It’s a sign post. The most incredible sex between a husband and wife is an echo [of the oneness we will experience in Christ one day]” (Keller).
- The guidelines for sex in the Bible are for your flourishing not your harm. They are like tracks on a rollercoaster. The tracks increase the thrill and facilitate the joy. Going off the tracks is not satisfaction and life but terror and death.
- The sexual revolution lied to us and told us we could sleep with who we wanted with no consequences, no emotional investment, and no responsibility.

- The reality is that it has led not to freedom but slavery (literal sex slavery), people enslaved to pornography, relationships broken, and even physical consequences (STI [chlamydia] set to become the first to be immune to all antibiotic treatment).
- “The fullest freedom is not to be found in being as free from others as possible, but in the freedom we give to each other when we **belong** to each other in loving relationships” (Bauckham). We are not free in the gospel to do whatever we want but free to love God and others.

Watching World: The world is watching. Do they see a distinct church? A holy church? A Christlike church? Or are we so full of sin that we look the same (or worse) than them?

- Are we living in line with God’s commands? Are we in step with the character of Christ? Are we displaying the fruit of the spirit?

4. The Focus of Dealing with Sin: Health (vv. 9-13)

⁹ I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— ¹⁰ not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world (οὐ πάντως τοῖς πόρνοις τοῦ κόσμου τούτου), or the greedy (πλεονέκταις) and swindlers (ἄρπαξιν), or idolaters (εἰδωλόατραις), since then you would need to go out of the world. ¹¹ But now I am writing to you 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 (τοὺς ἔξω)? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? (οὐχὶ τοὺς ἔσω ὑμεῖς κρίνετε) ¹³ God judges those outside (ἔξω).¹ “Purge the evil person from among you.” (ἐξάρατε τὸν πονηρὸν ἐξ ὑμῶν αὐτῶν)

Outsiders: ¹⁰ not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world... since then you would need to go out of the world. God is calling us to get our house in order, not worry about those outside of the church.

- We need to look in before we look out (introspection).

We are not called to **withdraw** from the world but be a distinct community within it.

- **We are missionaries, not monks.** We don’t isolate from sin or approve it either. We are not a moral majority but a prophetic minority, an alternate way of living, a light in a dark world. *We are commanded to share the gospel, to call people to repentance, to invite them to place their faith in Christ. **We are called to be fishers of men, but you have to clean the fish before you catch them.**
- Paul is actually saying we *should* be interacting with the sinful outside of the church but those that are inside we should avoid.
 - This protects us from hypocrisy and unhealth while still keeping us living as salt and light.

Insiders: 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... “Purge the evil person from among you.” (ἐξάρατε τὸν πονηρὸν ἐξ ὑμῶν αὐτῶν) The real

¹ Compare Rosner on this list of vices as capital offenses.

danger to is always from within. It's why Jesus is most harsh toward the religious leaders who are most closely aligned to him in faith and practice. He is upset by their hypocrisy and pride, not their religious fervor.

- It's why I'm more sharp against those who claim to be Christians than those that don't.
 - That's why both here and Matthew 18 *only apply* to Christians ("if your brother").
 - Cancer outside of my body isn't a problem, only when it's inside it.

This is for our good and our witness. We can't be salt if we lose our saltiness. We can't be light if our bulb has been dimmed by sin (put your own oxygen mask on first).

- But when we are a healthy, repentant, righteous, faithful, and obedient church we can do the most good for our lost neighbors. We we take our own sin seriously we are a better witness to our community and more righteous within it.

Conclusion

Discipline is Hard But Necessary: Church discipline is a hard thing in our culture today.

- **Hard:** Our culture often thinks any opposition to sin is judgmental. We will be accused of lacking grace and humility (**and people can just leave**).
 - We need to be careful that we are not only picking on the sins of others rather than our own. We must demonstrate repentance in our own lives before we call others to it. It is a tough balance to hold between welcoming with grace and being lax in holiness. **We must pursue holiness without being judgmental or harsh.**
- **Necessary:** (1) **It's necessary for the sinner.** Without acknowledgement of sin, we cannot be saved and hard conversations can prevent hurt that results from rebellion against God's law ("love you just the way you are but don't want to leave you that way"). (2) **It's necessary for health of the church.** Sin will destroy our unity, corrupt our worship, and poison our love. (3) **It's necessary for the witness to the world.** When the world sees the church they need to see the purity of Christ not the decay of sinful culture. They need to see a distinct testimony to God's righteousness.

So What?

- 1. **Take your sin seriously.** Lead the way in repentance and holiness. Be better at seeing your sin than the sin of others. If your first instinct is to have a conversation with someone else rather than a conversation with God, you're headed in the wrong direction.
- 2. **Take your church seriously.** Commit to the body of Christ at this local church. Be a part of the solution. Belong to the members of this church.
- 3. **Take your relationships seriously.** Have hard conversations. Call sin "sin." Hold each other accountable. Not trying to trap, accuse, condemn, or shame but seek to love, restore, and heal.

God calls us to be a holy and healthy church; failure to do so harms both our internal strength and our external witness.