

Jason Upchurch - 1 Cor. 5 - Expelling the Immoral Brother

Well we are diving into some deep water this morning as we tackle two issues that are serious and connected together. The first is the issue of sexual immorality. The second is the issue of what is commonly called church discipline. And the two are brought together in this chapter this morning as things had spiraled out of control at the church in Corinth.

And let me just front load my application here: you need to do everything in your power to guard yourself against sexual immorality of all kinds. Sexual immorality is the silent cancer that grows in the church. No one knows it, no one sees it, it grows quietly until it rears its ugly head and it's too late and there is nothing but devastation.

We have worshipped alongside people who have fallen into sexual immorality. Multiple people from our small church have walked away from Jesus because of sex. We've seen the devastation. Can I tell you something? There's a good chance we'll see more. If you're in a church long enough it will rear its head.

How do I know this? Because the church has been battling sexual immorality from within for 2,000 years. **Look** at **Rev. 2:11-17**. Two of the seven churches that Jesus writes to in the book of Revelation have a problem with sexual immorality. **Read**

So there's all kinds of persecution going on in Pergamum, but they're still holding fast to Jesus. They've even had a guy killed for the faith. But they've got people who are holding to the teaching of Balaam. Balaam, if you remember, was hired by a pagan to prophesy against Israel. A pagan king tried to hire him to speak evil against Israel and he tried to do it but couldn't. God kept putting positive words in his mouth and he kept blessing Israel. So Balaam hired prostitutes to go hang out by where people collected water and allured the men of Israel away from their wives. He undermined purity by prostitution.

That kind of sin was being tolerated in Pergamum. What about Thyatira? **Read 2:18-29**

They were doing basically the same thing. Jezebel, if you remember was King Ahab's wife and basically made Baal worship a household phenomenon in Israel. Part of Baal worship was cult prostitution and sexual immorality. And it spread through Israel.

Well, it was rampant in Rome as well. Anywhere you went in Rome idolatry was there and incorporated into social and business life. The idea was that in order to be part of the community you had to be around the Baal worshiping inevitably involved in some sort of sexual immorality. And there apparently were people in the church who were tolerating this cultural compromise in Thyatira.

Let me just get to the point: if you are struggling with sexual immorality you need put it to death. If it's digital on your phone or computer; or if it's being in situations with the opposite sex that should be reserved only for a spouse. Or even if it's struggles with same-sex attraction. These are things we need to put to death.

God said in Genesis 4: sin is crouching at the door, it's desire is against you but you must rule over it.

You can rule over it. By the power of the Holy Spirit in you you can slay it. And you must slay it. Don't get rid of most of it, or a lot of it. Jesus calls us to go nuclear on our sin. Proverbially cut off hands and feet, gouge out eyes if they cause us to stumble. That's hyperbole, but the point is it's serious.

The grace of Jesus that has redeemed you, also provides a way of escape from this sin. I've counseled and encouraged many men out of the sin of pornography over the years. There's hope.

And especially with warmer weather coming, men guard your hearts and your eyes.

Job 31:1 I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?

And ladies, I want to encourage you to all the more dress in modesty and helpfulness. You can't control what men look at or where their eyes go, but you can be more or less helpful by what you're wearing. I would encourage you to have very honest conversations about what is and is not appropriate to wear with a godly man you trust.

And men, the same thing. We know you're strong. We don't need to see your manly 6 pack or bulging biceps to prove it.

Why am I going on about this? Because in Corinth the problem was that there was sexual immorality. And sexual immorality usually doesn't happen overnight. It's a long series of compromises that eventually result in outright and open sin. It starts with looking or talking and slowly goes down hill.

Look back at this situation in 1 Cor. 5. Read 1-2

So this is crazy. In the Corinthian church there's actually a situation where a guy is sleeping with his step mom. It's probably his step mom and not his biological mother because Paul seems to make a distinction: he says "his father's wife." He doesn't say a man has his mother. That would indicate an incestuous situation. But this is likely his father's second wife.

That doesn't make it a lot better because technically it's a form of incest. Incest is sexual relations among the family. The OT forbade this explicitly.

Lev. 18:8: You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife; it is your father's nakedness.

Deut. 27:20: 'Cursed be anyone who lies with his father's wife, because he has uncovered his father's nakedness.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

This is explicitly outlawed by God. And since a married man is one flesh with his wife, when someone sleeps with their step mom it's like sleeping with their own father. Does that make it gross enough? That's exactly what God is saying.

And even the pagans - unbelievers - know this is wrong. **Read 1**

Isn't this crazy? He's shaming them. The disgusting Romans - who have prostitutes at their meat markets (like the grocery store) - even know you don't go sleep with your step mom. That's pretty bad when pagan morality is better than the church.

And here, the Corinthians think it's great. **Read 2**

They're arrogant. They're proud of this situation. "Man, look at how gracious we're being." "We're so tolerant and loving. We practice forgiveness and grace at First Baptist Corinth."

No they don't they practice sin. Paul says all this pride in sin should actually be mourning for sin. This is bad on an epic level.

By the way: the church was hiding this from Paul. They weren't telling him. Remember the church had sent a letter to Paul asking a bunch of questions and Paul responded to a lot of those later in this letter? But they didn't write to him asking about this situation.

Whoever gave the letter to Paul let him know that there were some other things going on in the church that were crazy. Remember all the division going on? The church didn't tell Paul about that, the messenger delivering the Corinthians' letter to Paul told Paul that. Same thing with this situation. That's why he says "it is actually reported..." - they weren't telling him. He found it out from someone else.

The church was hiding this sexual immorality from Paul and everyone else. That sound familiar? It's like reading a headline in Christianity Today. Sexual sin goes on undetected, then it's rampant, and then the church wants to ignore it and hide it. And then justify and defend it. It's the same old story.

What's Paul's solution? **Read 2**

Remove the person. That means they are no longer welcome in the fellowship. They are no longer welcome to come to church or be part of the lives of those in the church. They are cut off. More on that in a minute.

First, let me say that this is the outworking of church discipline from Matthew 18. **Turn** over there.

You need to know that virtually no church in America actually does this. When we talk about church discipline there are precious few churches that every follow these steps. There are ways that churches deal with those that are in sin, but almost never according to these principles. The issues are swept under a rug or dealt with behind closed doors. But Jesus could not be more clear how we are to address someone that we perceive is in open sin.

And it's basically a 4 step process. **Read 15-20**

So step 1 is go to your brother one on one. Don't tell other people, don't ask advice. If you see them in blatant sin, go have conversation. If you win them over - if they repent - great! That's the goal. The goal of confronting sin is always, always repentance.

If they don't you take one or two with you. This actually goes back to the OT where if someone was caught in sin you had to establish the sin with 2 or 3 witnesses for it to be prosecuted. Here, the idea is that these witnesses help to understand the whole situation. If the 2 or 3 witnesses are in agreement that the person is not in sin, or if they persuade the person to repent - great! That's the goal. By the way, in the OT the witness process was done with full knowledge of the city's elders - the rulers - so I think it's appropriate that situations that reach step 2 include an elder or two.

What if they don't repent? You tell it to the congregation. It goes public. The whole church needs to know what's up so they can pray and call this person to repentance. Again, if they repent, great. If not, then they are removed from the church. That's step 4. At step 4 they are treated like Gentile or a tax collector. Those were people who were not considered part of the people of God. They were outside the faith and no Jew worth his salt would go anywhere near them.

That's how it is with professing Christians who continue on in sin. Once they get to step 4 we no longer have fellowship with them. The rest of Jesus's statement basically means "if you follow this process, I'm with you." If the witnesses agree the person is bound in sin, so do I. If the witnesses say all is good, so do I.

Now, the whole purpose of this process is to win the brother back to purity! That's the goal. The goal is not to shun people for shunning sake. It's not to kick 'em out because we're better than them. It's actually done in love through and through with the goal of them coming back to a life of purity.

This is a hard process but it is necessary. **Back in 1 Corinthians 5** - you can turn back there - they were basically at step 3 because the whole church knew what was up. This was out in the open and going on with the full knowledge of the congregation.

And so that's why Paul jumps ahead and says remove this person. **Read 2**

The sin has already been established, everyone knows - so going through the first 3 steps would be pointless. The only way forward is step 4 so he says remove the person.

That's the equivalent to what Jesus said back in **Matthew 18**. Treat them like a tax collector or gentile. They're no longer part of your fellowship, your church. Get them out. And Paul says this in various ways. **Read 5, 7, 9-11, 13**

What does this mean? As plainly as possible it means they don't get to step foot inside the church. They don't get invited to church activities. You don't go get coffee with them - Paul says not even to eat with such a one. And it's in the active voice. It's not "Well, if they fall off the face of the earth, oh well." No. It's you go out of your way to make sure they know they can't come. And they're not part of your life. It's active removal.

Remember Jesus said in **John 15:2**: Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away?

Same word. They are cut off. We'll see more about why in a minute. But here's the earnestness of Paul. **Read 3-5**

Remember Paul is hundreds of miles away. He can't just hop on an airplane or Zoom meeting. So he says "I'm with you in Spirit." There might also be a sense in which he's saying "Look, because we're all filled with the Holy Spirit, I am with you spiritually speaking." Every believer is united to Christ and therefore united to one another. I think that's what he means by his spirit present with the power of Jesus.

But as an apostle of Jesus, he's rendered his judgment. If he were there, this guy would be out. He would be removed immediately. So he gives specific instructions: the next time you are assembled - that's Sunday morning church - deliver the man to Satan.

What does that mean? It's a synonym for removing him from the church. It's some weird witchcraft thing. You have to understand how precious it is that we gather every Sunday. There is a special grace of God when the saints gather. When we raise our voice - even crying children voices - in song, when we read the Word of God, when we take the Lord's Supper, when we pray and listen to the Word. It's like a spiritual pit stop in the Indy 500 of life. And we need it because the Holy Spirit is here nourishing us in ways we can't even understand.

When someone is removed from all of that, they no longer have those graces, and it's as though they've been handed over to Satan. They are removed from that protection.

By the way, that's why gathering at church weekly is so important. And why people who skip church or make every excuse not to come or their schedule doesn't allow them will usually struggle in the faith. That's not everyone, but it's rare. There is a special grace of God in the plain-Jane gathering of the church week-in and week-out.

To be proactively removed from the gracious work of the Spirit is to be handed over to Satan.

Paul gives us several reasons why removing the sinful person needs to happen. First reason: sin has a tendency to spread. **Read 6-8**

A little leaven leavens the whole lump. When you put yeast in a batch of dough and knead the dough the yeast spreads. That's what happens when you've got someone in blatant, open, unrepentant sin in a church. It never stays with just them. People inevitably find out. "And if that lady is in sin and they don't do anything about it, then why should I worry?"

And by the way, people who are in unrepentant sin usually recruit other people into their sinful ways. Misery loves company. Well, sinfulness loves company too. If you've read through Proverbs recently you know one of the warnings that Solomon gives his son over and over is "if sinners entice you, don't go near them." Why does he give that warning? Because sinners like to entice people to do what they're doing. That's just the reality of sin.

Paul takes the illustration of removing leaven because he doesn't want sin to spread. The bigger illustration is the Passover. You remember that the week leading up to Passover, the Jews were to remove all the leaven

from their houses. When the Jews in Egypt they needed to be ready to go at a moment's notice so they weren't allowed to have leaven. They cleaned it all out.

Well, God used leaven through the Bible as a symbol of sinfulness. And they needed to please the sinfulness from their lives just like they cleansed leaven out of their house.

Well, here's where he ties in the gospel: Remember the night of the Passover, the Jews were to slaughter a lamb and spread the blood over the doors. The blood of the Passover Lamb would keep them safe from the wrath of God. And they were also to cleanse out the leaven to be ready to leave.

Well, Paul says that Passover lamb really pointed to Jesus. He is our Passover lamb. He died to save his people from the wrath of God. His blood keeps us safe. And as his people, we like the Israelites of old need to cleanse out the old leaven. Not literal yeast, but the yeast of sin.

And we celebrate Jesus with sincerity and truth. That whole thing down Egypt where God did the 10 plagues and the Passover and the Exodus and celebrations of the Passover - all of that pointed to Jesus. And if they cleaned out their literal leaven, how much more should we clean out our sin.

We are a living, breathing drama of the Exodus when we remove sinful people from among us. Sin spreads. It always spreads.

By the way, I've heard some pastors say that once you do step 4, the person is still welcome to come because then everyone knows they're in sin and the church has marked them as an unbeliever. That does not work. Because they still mark themselves as a Christian. And they're still in their sin and it will spread.

Imagine you moved in to a new house and there was an odd looking rock in the basement. And after some testing you found out it was actually radioactive and could cause cancer to people in your house. Would you keep it in the house? I mean, now you know what it is, you know that it's dangerous. Just stay a little farther away from it. Would you do that? No of course not. You'd get the hazmat guys to dispose of it. You'd get it out. That's what you do to unrepentant sinners.

Paul then says that this applies to those who profess faith in Jesus, not to the world. **Read 9-11**

So, again, we remove them, we don't even associate with them. There's no close connection to them. If they're in your household that's a different issue. But for the most part we stay away.

And this is for all kinds of sin issues: sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler. It could be sexual sin. Or money - maybe this person is controlled by greed. Or they can't stop bad mouthing people - that's a reviler. Or they can't get off the bottle or some drug. Or a swindler, they take advantage of people. These are all serious.

This isn't a complete list, but wants us to understand we don't just do this when it's guy sleeping with his step mom. It's for every kind of transgression. But we only disassociate with people who bear the name brother. That's people who are part of a church and would self-identify as a Christian. They've got the proverbial Jesus jersey on.

Why them? Because they are bringing a bad name on Christ. The world loves Christian hypocrites because they use it as an opportunity to slander Jesus. "Oh Jesus is your Lord, sure." When I was dating Jodee I was at work with a new guy. And we talking about our lives a little and I told him I went to Bible college and wanted to be a pastor one day. And he said "So mister preacher-man, are you living with your girl friend?" He was floored when she still lived with her dad, and I lived with mine. He was trolling for hypocrisy.

The world wants us to be hypocrites. They want to catch us in sin.

And yet here's the irony: although we separate from people who claim the name of Jesus and are in sin, we don't separate from unbelievers who do that exact same sin.

Jesus was called a friend of who? Sinners. You know what we should be called? The same. We don't avoid unbelievers - adulterers, greedy, so on - because then we couldn't operate in the world. Those are the ones who need the gospel! We should probably be careful that they don't have an adverse effect on us. But for the most part we go to them! We show them and share with them the gospel.

That's why Paul says: **Read 12-13**

We don't judge unbelievers. We can call sin, sin. But we don't avoid them because of that sin. That's what they do. God will judge them. That's pretty scary all on its own - but that's the reality.

Paul says "we judge those inside the church." That doesn't mean we have a judgy culture where we scrutinize everything. Nor does it mean we become all legalistic. It just means we go through this process. And if there's someone who's in sin and refuses and refuses to repent, we remove them.

Paul says purge the evil person from among you. **Read 13**

The people hearing those words would have been struck. This was a mic drop moment. You know why? Because if you look up that phrase "purge the evil person from among you" in the OT, it meant kill someone who was in unrepentant sin.

Deut. 13:4-5: But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught rebellion against the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you out of the house of slavery, to make you leave the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

Judges 20:13: Now therefore give up the men, the worthless fellows in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and purge evil from Israel.

Now, we don't kill people, of course. And we certainly don't harm them. We want to, but that's on God. Why does Paul say this? To show the absolute gravity of these situations. See, life or death isn't on the line. It's much more serious than that. It's **eternal life** that's on the line. It's heaven or hell.

We do this because eternity weighs in the balance. I skipped this part, but this important. **Read 5**

Why would we do this? Why would we turn someone over to their sin and Satan? So that they might hit rock bottom. So that they would return to their sense and their soul might be saved.

Keeping an unrepentant sinner in church won't save them. It's a one way ticket to hell while we pat their hand all the while hoping they'll hear the truth. No, at some point they need spanked. They need tough love. Not because we hate them, but because we love them and want to ensure their salvation in the end.

The gospel is guarded and upheld when we are faithful to do this hard work. But may Christ be glorified.

Pray