



CHARIS-MATTERS

STUDIES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Text

First Corinthians 5:1-13

Topic

Paul illustrates the potential effect of one man's sin on the entire congregation by likening his sin to yeast that corrupts a pure lump of unleavened dough

Title

"Always Take the Path of Yeast Resistance"

Introduction

You might call it "The Feast Without Yeast."

Passover commemorates the exodus of the Jewish slaves from Egypt. Unleavened bread, or matzo, is a traditional food that is eaten on Passover as a reminder that the Jews who fled Egypt had no time to bake their bread before leaving.

The symbolism of yeast goes beyond their hasty travel. In the Old Testament book of worship, Leviticus, the Jews were told "on the first day remove the yeast from your houses... For seven days no yeast is to be found in your houses" (Leviticus 23:15, 19).

Yeast is a symbol for sin (Exodus 34:25). Specifically it came to signify the sin of pride because of their similarities:

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- Yeast begins a corruption process when mixed with flour and water causing the dough to swell as it ferments.
- Pride does the same to us, hence the saying, “swelling with pride.”

The believers at Corinth were swelling with pride over the fact they were tolerating within their congregation a man who was involved in a particularly heinous ongoing sexual sin.

The apostle Paul told them what they must do to preserve themselves as a pure lump of unleavened bread. They must discipline the sinner by putting him out of their fellowship.

The action here in our text is church discipline. We’ll talk a little about that process. What I want to highlight is the insight that our fellowship together with Jesus, and to a certain extent our experience out in the world, is a feast.

I’ll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Think Of Feasting With Jesus And You Will Mourn For Saints Who Are Sinning, and #2 Think Of Jesus Feasting And You Will Move Among Sinners Who Are Sinning.

#1 Think Of Feasting With Jesus
And You Will Mourn For Saints Who Are Sinning
(v1-8 & 11)

I jotted down in my notes this quote from author John Phillips: “God does not condemn sin in the sinner and then condone it in the saint.”

If you understand what Phillips was trying to say you will have a pretty good handle on the direction of Paul’s comments. Christians tend to be intolerant of sinners out in the world but can be guilty of tolerating sinning saints in the church. Let’s look within first, eliminate our own ‘yeast,’ to be in the best position to approach the nonbeliever with the Gospel.

1 Corinthians 5:1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles - that a man has his father's wife!

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“Actually reported” means this was common knowledge among believers and nonbelievers throughout the region. A “man” was living in an ongoing sexual relationship with “his father’s wife.” More than that we don’t know. We don’t know the age of the step-mom or whether or not the father was still alive. We can assume the woman was not a believer since no action was suggested against her.

The word “sexual immorality” derives from *porneia* and is where we get our word *pornography*. It’s derived from two words that mean the selling of bodies. It includes all manner of sexual sin - anything outside of God’s blessed intentions within marriage.

As bad as this was, this case of incest, it was worse that the church was tolerating it.

1 Corinthians 5:2 And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.

They were “swelling with pride” over how tolerant they were. A modern example: Today a lot of churches, and entire denominations, are swelling with pride as they are changing their historic and biblical stance on the sin of homosexuality.

The proper attitude toward sin is to “mourn.” It’s the word that describes your reaction to the death of someone you love.

A common theme in literature or on film is for someone to see how others react to their death so they can change the way they live. We are to act towards the person as if they were dead to the things of the Lord.

The man needed to be “taken away from” them. Paul explained what he meant in the next set of verses.

1 Corinthians 5:3 For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed.

1 Corinthians 5:4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,

1 Corinthians 5:5 deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

These three verses are one sentence. They do not constitute a *formula* but they do establish that there are times when a congregation must act *formally* to discipline a sinning member.

Paul was “present in spirit, hav[ing] already judged,” meaning they need not wait for him to act.

“In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ... along with [Paul’s] spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ” is a strong statement of authority. The church on earth, its leadership and membership, has authority to act in the name of the Lord to appropriately discipline its members.

The process of church discipline is spelled out by Jesus in Matthew eighteen. It’s goal is the restoration of the sinning member. It involves going to the person urging them to repent and be restored. The Matthew passage assumes the sin is unknown to most of the congregation. The circle of those who know is kept as small as possible. If the person refuses to repent, the circle of those who know is cautiously expanded until finally you might have to ‘tell the whole church’ so that everyone can mourn and help encourage repentance.

So how come Paul told them to immediately excommunicate this guy? *Because everyone already knew about his sin.* The process of church discipline is not a firm set of steps that must always be taken in precise order. It is the principle of doing what is right and necessary to both protect the church and restore the member who is living in sin.

Paul described removing the man living in ongoing sin as “deliver[ing] [him] to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”

The “day” is probably a reference to the rapture of the church immediately followed by the Reward Seat of Jesus. Earlier in First Corinthians Paul

described some believers as saved but as going through a fire at the Reward Seat. Paul was dealing with this man as a believer.

He was to be delivered to Satan “for the destruction of [his] flesh.” Satan is the ruler of this world. This man was to be removed from the protection of and the enjoyment of Christian fellowship, treated as if he were back out in the world under the influence of Satan.

Membership in a church affords you spiritual protection. I’ve seen too many people drift away from the church on their own and become more vulnerable, more susceptible, to the lies and strategies of Satan. Never underestimate the protection of being involved with a local church - for you and for those you love.

The “destruction of [his] flesh” can mean any of a number of things, including these two:

1. It can mean that the experience of being out in the world, treated as someone needing to repent, would show the man the power of his “flesh” and his need to be restored. (This is, in fact, what does happen to this man according to Second Corinthians).
2. Or it could mean that God will discipline him by killing him similar to Annanias and Sapphira in the Book of Acts.

We get some greater insight into exactly what we are to do as we drop down to verse eleven.

1 Corinthians 5:11 But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner - not even to eat with such a person.

“Keep company” is a compound word meaning *to mix together*. Paul gave an example when he said “not even to eat with such a person.” The idea is that you can no longer share intimate Christian fellowship. Your only concern is helping the person to repent and be restored.

Paul gave a representative list of other sins that we might have to discipline:

- Sexual immorality would include anything outside God's loving and fulfilling boundaries for sexual behavior in marriage between one man and one woman.
- Covetousness must refer to some overt act, not just the motive. A person dishonest in business dealings, who tries to separate business from Christianity, would fit this.
- Idolatry, in context, referred to a believer still worshipping in the pagan temples, mixing paganism with Christianity.
- Reviling means to speak abusively or harshly against others.
- Drunkenness is pretty obvious - except I don't know at what point we determine someone is under the influence of a substance.
- Extortion is using force, or even manipulation or intimidation, to get gain.

It's not that we shun the person. *Far from it!* It's that we share with him or her the need to repent and be restored.

The bigger issue here was the swelling pride of the Corinthians. Paul returned to it. Look back up at verses six through eight.

1 Corinthians 5:6 Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

1 Corinthians 5:7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

1 Corinthians 5:8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

If they didn't act sin would spread. It doesn't mean they'd all start committing incest. It meant that their attitudes about sin would change. Each would become more tolerant of some sin in their own life until they were not only committing it but were reveling in it.

The day before Passover was called the Day of Preparation in which the Jews would rid their homes of every trace of leaven in preparation for Passover and the six-day Feast of Unleavened Bread. Paul drew on this

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well-known practice as a call for a recommitment to holiness and purity on the part of the Corinthian church.

Jesus was “our Passover” in that we have left Egypt - the world - through the blood our Passover Lamb shed for us on the Cross. We don’t “keep the Feast” annually but we are to see our entire Christian life on the earth as an ongoing feast with other believers.

Notice Paul said we are already “truly... unleavened.” As to our position in Jesus, we - the church - are pure. But in practice we still sin and need to deal with it. Paul described sin as “old leaven” and “leaven.”

- “Old leaven” refers to returning to sins we were delivered from when we were saved.
- “Malice” refers to the evil habits of our mind. “Wickedness” is the outworking in action of malice.

Sweep your spiritual house for yeast and remain “sincere,” without the mixture of the world, based on the “truth” revealed in the Word of God.

We are feasters! We’ve been seated at the Lord’s table. Yeast is not on the menu. It will ruin us for serving Him now and it will greatly affect seeing Him later.

#2 Think Of Jesus Feasting And You Will Move Among Sinners Who Are Sinning (v9-10 & 12-13)

If we are to be intolerant of sin in our midst, how does that affect us out in a world of sinners?

1 Corinthians 5:9 I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people.

1 Corinthians 5:10 Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.

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Paul had written a prior letter but they had misunderstood him. Sometimes we need to use our sanctified common sense. Of course we cannot avoid sinners out in the world. In fact, we shouldn't even try because they need to be reached for Jesus.

Skip to verses twelve and thirteen:

1 Corinthians 5:12 For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside?

1 Corinthians 5:13 But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "PUT AWAY FROM YOURSELVES THE EVIL PERSON."

Paul made it clear they should deal differently with nonbelievers. The unsaved are already under the judgment of God. He will judge them in the end. We are to keep ourselves a pure lump *not* by excluding nonbelievers but by disciplining believers.

I got to thinking about this in the context of feasting. Jesus loved to eat with sinners. It never affected Him, but He greatly affected them.

That's our example, that's our model. To be out in the world without becoming "of" the world. We don't need to adopt the world's habits in order to reach sinners. In fact, they rarely respect us when we do.

Neither are we to go about judging them. Rather we are to see them as those under God's judgment who will die and face eternal separation from God unless they get saved.

Sinners who are sinning are acting according to their nature. They haven't the power to do anything else. It's amazing they don't sin more!

Why don't they? One reason the Bible would suggest is that the church is on the earth as a restraining force against full-blown evil. We're not a restraining force because we pass laws but because we present love - the love of God for sinners through the sacrifice on the Cross of Jesus Christ as God in human flesh.

We want to keep the feast of our fellowship with Jesus pure so that we might move among sinners in such a way as to reveal Jesus to them - to make them hungry for what we enjoy and to want a seat at our table, the Lord's table.

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