

I Corinthians 1 – 7

“Sin in the World, Sin in the Church”

I Corinthians 5”

So this week, chapter five, we near the whole chapter, it's only 13 verses listening God's word.

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you and of a kind. It is not even tolerated among pagans. For a man has his father's wife, that would be his stepmother. And you are arrogant or puffed up what you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. For though absent in body, I am present spirited as if present. I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you were assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus. And my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus. You were to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 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. Let us therefore celebrate the Passover not with the old leaven, the 11 of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people. Not at all meaning the sexually immoral people of this world, or the greedy or swindlers or idolaters. Since then you would have to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of a brother. If he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, whereas in idolater, revile, or drunkard, or swindler, not even to eat with such a one. For what do I have to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. Purge the evil person from among you.

Let's pray for a moment, Lord. your word covers everything, including shocking levels of sin, even within the Church of Christ. I pray that we would not only hear and take instruction, but also hear the general call to holiness to be who we really are, your pure people. We pray in Jesus name, Amen.

Now I'm going to use a name that is very, very rare, so no one thinks I'm connecting it to anyone in particular. There was a man named Hans O7, that man named George. There was a man named Atlas. Come what you will. It's none of you. But he was gifted. When some leader of this Christian community from his college years onward, people urged him to go to seminary because he seemed godly and had the gift of utterance, of speaking well in public and encouraging people.

And he graduated from seminary near the top of his class, became a pastor, and, and, was a very energetic pastor and was rising quickly, you know, first youth and then young adults and then an assistant pastor, then an associate pastor, and then because of his gifts and his winsome

ness organizational skills, he was on the short list and was about to be called to be a senior pastor at a church.

But instead of taking that call, he surprised a number of people by taking a call to industry, and he decided he would like to be the CFO. And then soon the CEO of a modest and then growing organization. He still occasionally taught in Christian churches and even spoke now and again from a pulpit, but less and less as his financial success grew. Nothing wrong with financial success? Nothing wrong with that. But he also seemed to change. He didn't come to church as often as he did. He would talk about himself a lot in public. A couple times people thought he seemed to be inebriated or high or something, and then and then reports of partying and infidelity began to appear, and people came to him with their concern.

And he said, I think I smell envy. You just can't stand it when one of your own has become successful in the ways of the world. How can you criticize me for relaxing a little bit after a business success? You need to loosen up in your ideas of what it means to be a joyful Christian. Now, that's not one person, but it's kind of like several people I've known a little bit over the years.

And among Christian leaders, it would sound somewhat familiar because there are people who grow to status or have status in this world, and when they're corrected for their sin, they push aside. They laugh at any attempts to correct them. That's the norm for unrepentant people in the church, of course, the norm. God's purpose is that people would repent and be humble and recognize that we need to come to the gospel and again, again in our lifetime.

The situation in first Corinthians five was, if you can imagine in an important way, worse, because this church has any number of problems, it's almost a study and what can go wrong in churches. I'm not sure. I realized that when I chose First Corinthians. It gets better later on, but there's a lot of troubles. And the troubles include, as we've already seen, rivalry and party spirit and pride in my leader, who's better than your leader and jealousy and misplaced adulation of human beings.

And now in chapter five and then in chapter six, he's going to address another problem. And that's the problem of sexual immorality. And here, especially sex or sexual immorality that goes unchallenged. That's the problem, you see, he says, and we'll keep our verses up in verses one and two. He says, it is reported that you that you have a kind of sin among you that's not even tolerated by secular people, but you are arrogant.

It could be translated, puffed up. The word means something like a person who takes a deep breath and puffs out his chest before photographs so he looks good. Suck in your belly and poke out your chest and try to look good. And believe it or not, that's, even before photographs, people understood that people would puff up their chests to look impressive.

That's the word Paul uses your puffed up about this sin in your midst. The sin is taking his father's wife. That would mean that he has taken his stepmother. Now, we don't know how old

she was. Maybe they were roughly the same age. Maybe this is his father's second or third wife. We don't know the details, but even the Law of Moses, prohibited this particular form of marriage.

It is a great sin according to Leviticus 18 and also Deuteronomy chapter 22. And people in that culture also viewed it as abominable. Cicero, who lived around the same time as the apostle Paul, called it unbelievable and wicked, and a scandal among men to marry your stepmother. So Paul is saying only what is correct now, what he's shocked about is not just that it happens, but what the church does about it, which is nothing.

He says you're arrogant about this. You're puffed up about this. You should mourn over this. You should remove this person. Verse two says from your midst. Now people have wondered why nothing was done. And there are three possible answers and they're all plausible. Nobody knows which one is right. Answer number one is they had a seriously flawed notion of Christian freedom that because I'm in Christ, I'm free from the guilt of sin and the power of sin and the law.

I can just do more or less whatever I want. There were some people, certainly at the time who believed that. Let's hope that's not what it was. The second possibility is in a highly status conscious society, that this person had high social rank, maybe very high social rank, and that would account for them being puffed up. We have this person in our midst, this high ranking Roman Corinthian official and we can't touch him because in those days, a person of lesser status could not challenge a person of higher status in courts.

That seems like a really solid possibility. The third possibility is they're just too lazy or too frightened to do anything about it, and we don't know which one it was. But Paul says we cannot. Christians cannot tolerate sin. In those days, the Christian church was a tiny, tiny minority and not well loved. And so Paul knew that what we have to do is create an alternate kind of community commune that's beautiful, that has, a moral excellence about it that attracts people.

And instead they're living a life of corruption. A little bit later, in verses three, four, and five, Paul points out that it's possible I'm not going to do those verses right now, but it's possible for a lack of interest in putting out sin to cause corruption, to grow in a society. So what do I mean? I mean that once a sin or a habit starts to take root, it takes root deeper and deeper.

I'm sure all of you have noticed that, cursing and obscenity and rude talk has grown and grown in our society in the last number of years. And unbelievable as it may sound, there is today a group of pastors who try to show how cool or how close to society they are by doing things like cursing or using crude language in the pulpit, because it gives them a sort of cachet among highly secularized people.

And people even come to hear the cussing, pastor. And if you do nothing about it, what are you what are you doing? You're becoming more like the world when we're supposed to be less like

the world in its sinfulness. Sadly, one time I was talking to a pastor and he used a four letter word in front of me and I said, oh, so you're one of those cussing pastors?

And he said, what? I said, you know, one of the cussing pastors, that too, that's the approach you're taking. He said, what? I said, well, you just use this word in front of me with ten people around. He said, oh, I didn't realize it. And what that means is that not only has he adopted a secular practice, but he's adopted it so thoroughly he doesn't even know what he's saying.

It. That's the opposite of what God wants of us. He wants us to be different, not to conform to this world. As the Bible says elsewhere. Let me put it differently. I'm not saying that if you cuss and use four letter words, God reject you or hate you. God loves sinners as they are. That's the beauty of the gospel.

And we're never going to take anything away from that. But God loves us and accept us as we are, but he also transforms us so that we become a better version of ourselves. We become what chapter five verse seven says who we really are. We're called the saints of the family of God, and we can and should become the saints and the family of God because of our time in God's presence.

Now, you know, some sins are more common and some sins are less common, and some sin seem worse and some sins seem lighter. But Paul is vexed with a congregation that will not address serious sin in its midst. They have failed to be who they are, which is the holy people of God. And Paul says in verses three and four and five that he is not with them.

He's writing a letter from hundreds of miles away, but he's willing to address it because of his zeal for holiness. And candidly, he has a right to do so. If they're interested in, you know, who has status enough. Paul's a Roman citizen, extraordinarily highly educated person, a privileged person. So he's going to address it even though he is, as it says, absent in body. I'm present in spirit and as if present. I have already pronounced judgment on the one who has done this thing. Now, you may have a couple questions about this. You may remember that Jesus said, judge not that you not may not be judged. And you may remember that, Law of Moses says No. Once everybody is a witnesses to what happened, nobody's disputing it at all. And it's very important that we remember that Jesus who said, don't judge in Matthew seven, also said, judge with righteous judgment in John seven, don't judge means don't judge hastily. Don't judge when you don't know. Don't judge people's motives. Don't guess the worst about people.

That's what don't judge means. But when the facts are clear, then there is a place for speaking against yes, even condemning sin. In verse four he says, if I remind you, when you were assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus, and my Spirit is present with the power of Jesus, you were to deliver this man to Satan.

Now there are three things that are happening here. First, he says, you're assembled, meaning you are present together as the body of Christ. You are present in the name of Jesus. It's either

a worship service, some kind of very serious gathering of the church. And he says, actually, I'm present there. Two and finally, Jesus is present in his power.

That's what happens when the people of God gather sincerely for his causes. Jesus is present. The power of Jesus is present. And he says, deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that he may be saved in the day of the Lord. Now the word flesh in this case does not mean it's physical flesh.

You're not going to kill them. They're not going to destroy his body. The flesh in the Bible very often is used by the Apostle Paul specially as the opposite of the spirit. So his spirit is against the Holy Spirit, so destroy his flesh, that is to say, his sinful nature. If you remember in the book of Galatians, it describes the sins of the flesh, and they include things like dissensions.

And quarreling and selfish ambition. So the flesh is not simply the deeds of the flesh or the physical flesh. It's anything that's opposed to the Spirit of God. And he says this, that the goal of disciplining this person, of putting him out of the church, is to destroy their sinfulness so that the very seriousness of this action with Atlas, let's say, makes it clear to him, you can't claim to be a Christian, a follower of Jesus if you persist in drunkenness and drug abuse and infidelity and carrying on against all God's commands and chide Christians if they say anything to you about it, that's not the behavior of a believer.

So the goal is to destroy their flesh, their sinful nature, so that their spirit may be saved by their repentance in time for the last day when the Lord comes. In other words, church discipline is not punitive, it is remedial. It is reclaiming someone, bringing them back from sin. As James says in one place in chapter five. Now Jesus, of course, talks about this.

What he's talking about is excommunication. And Jesus says, when someone has finally been put out of the church by 2 or 3 witnesses persisting in sin, they should be to you as a tax collector or a Gentile. Now people get confused about this sometimes because Jesus, of course, welcomed tax collectors and welcomed Gentiles. And so they said, oh, so you're saying we should welcome him?

No, Jesus not say treat him as I treat a Gentile, our tax collector. Treat him as you treat a Gentile or tax collector, you exclude them. In other words, once someone has been put out of the Church of Christ, they are treated as an outsider. There are no longer a member of the family of God. Now, the good news about this is that people do repent often.

If you deal with sin candidly. In fact, in Second Corinthians chapter seven, which you can read later on if you would like, there is an account of a man who repented after Paul sent a letter that was harsh or sharp enough that many people were dismayed. And although we don't know who that person is, a lot of people think that the letter Paul is referring to in Second Corinthians seven is the letter that we call First Corinthians, and that the person who has been rebuked harshly and has repented in second Corinthians seven is this very man, and we don't know which man it is, but at some point or other someone was corrected sharply by the Apostle and

by the church, and they returned, and they had real sorrow, real grief. They repented. They're part of the family of God, part of the people of God. Again. Now you may say, well, that's far away. Most of us will never have any dealings like that. And so the next verses tell us what this has to do with all of us.

Every day we might say verses 6 to 8. Paul says, your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? That is to say, if you ignore sin, leaven is a sign in the Bible most of the time of corruption or what needs to be rooted out of our life. Don't you know that one bad apple can spoil the whole barrel, as we say in America?

Don't you know? That cussing pastors often start with one cussing pastor and he says it's cool and there are waves in Christendom even among leaders, you know, advocating Christian freedom. And they say, you know, we're really free. We're really free. So we get to some smokes, smoke whiskey, and drink cigars. Then I got it backwards. smoke cigars and drink whiskey and prove that we're free and cost because our mouths are free and it's.

I've just watch it go in little waves. There was a wave of it back in the 30s, the 1930s, another wave in the 50s. It caused a rift in a group of presbytery. I saw it happen in the PCA and sometimes, you know, let's get together. Let's go down to the cigar bar and have some whiskey. And then there's a little dispute about that.

And sometimes people drink a little bit too much and it's leaven leavening the whole lump cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump. You think I don't even know what he's talking about, what he's talking about is the Passover. And the Israelites removed all the leaven and ate unleavened bread as a signal of breaking with the old ways of Egypt, the ways of corruption.

Because leaven, if you've put leaven in a loaf of bread, or while you're making something, you know, the little leaven changes everything, and it can change everything for good when you're baking bread. But it can change everything for bad when it's something corrupting. And in case we miss it, Jesus is. Paul says, making it clear Christ is our Passover lamb.

He's been sacrificed. Jesus is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. And it's a reference to the Old Testament. When the people of God left Egypt after I left Egypt physically, the bondage of Egypt. But they also left all the sinful ways of Egypt. And Jesus covered over their sins through this form. This this type of his own work, by having the blood of a lamb put over the doors saying, these people are different, these people belong to God, and Jesus is our Passover lamb.

He's been sacrificed. So let's act like it. Let's act like we're celebrating the festival. A festival of Passover was celebrated till that day, remembering that the Lord delivered them from Egypt and all the ways of Egypt, and therefore, we're going to continue to celebrate it truly, deeply and fully by removing leaven. And then case, we're wondering, is Paul being literal?

No, he's saying the leaven I'm thinking about is malice and evil. Now it's pretty clear what evil is. It's anything that's sinful. But malice is deliberate evil. It's wanting to do evil. We should purge that. There's a difference between evil that we perform accidentally. We got caught off guard. I lost my temper momentarily, I was exhausted, I reacted to something that happened to me.

Malice is entirely different, and we replace that with sincerity and with truth. Sincerity means we don't just do the right thing, we do the right thing from the heart. We do it truly. One of the things I've noticed about America today is that people have kind of replaced words like righteousness and justice and mercy, good Bible words with lesser words like, he's a nice guy. He's kind.

People now, no, they get image consultants, people in public places that if they can't be good, at least they can appear to be good. They can show up at some place. Photo opportunity leaders do. And ordinary people know that if you can't be nice, at least you can. It can't be truly good. At least you could be nice and polite and polished and have good manners and say hello and smile to people.

And that can be extraordinarily good, and it can be extraordinarily superficial. When God is calling us to authentic holiness. Now, the part that's really interesting, I think, for us comes in verses nine, ten and 11 and then 12 and 13, as Paul says, okay, so how then do we live in this world? He says, now listen in my letter.

So sidebar for those of you like insider stories, first Corinthians is actually the second letter to the Corinthians. And Second Corinthians is used to the third or the fourth letter. But he says to them, I wrote you in my letter. That is to say, I wrote to you in a previous letter, not inspired, not in our Bible, but in that previous letter I told you not to associate with sexual, immoral people.

And he says, now when I said that what I meant was not sexually immoral, people of this world, or the greedy or swindlers or the idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. That is to say, when I tell you not to associate with immoral people, I am not telling you to leave the world.

You have secular, secular neighbors. Spend time with them. You have coworkers that are swindlers and greedy. Don't run away from them. Spend time with them. I'm not warning you about them. Why not? Why does he warn them about verses 11, 12 and 13? Just for a second. Put them up there, but we'll go back to nine and ten, he says.

I'm warning you not to associate with anyone who has the name of brother who is guilty of sexual immorality, greed, idolatry, a revealer. Back to the previous one. What are you saying? Is this the danger of corruption does not come from a clearly secular person. The danger of corruption comes from someone who says, I am a brother, I am a sister of yours, and my way of life is just fine, and you can live that life to.

So that I had a pastor one time come to me and say, younger pastor. He said, Dan, I don't know what to say to you here. I got to talk to somebody. I would talk to you. I think I drink too much.

And he said, I think it's because my mentor drinks too much. And I'm in a circle of pastors who drink a lot.

What do you think I said? There's a really good chance you're right. As he told me his story, young pastor, his mentor, drank too much and suggested to him, that's a fine thing to do. Now, if you're with somebody who's a wants and sinner, a partier or someone who spurns the name of Christ, maybe thinks God exists, doesn't exist, doesn't matter one way or the other, that person is not going to lead you astray nearly as much as a person who says, I'm your brother, I'm your sister.

Have faith. Right? Because you're on guard against that person. Jesus. Let us remember spend time with tax collectors and sinners he loved. He would talk to anybody. He was a an equal opportunity party attender, tax collectors and Pharisees both invited to dinner. He went to both of their homes gladly so, because he wasn't afraid of them. And as the Spirit of Christ fills us, we're not afraid either.

They want to make sure we say a little word about these sins. First of all, the word sexual immorality is the broadest possible word for sexual sin. It means every kind of sexual sin. The next duo really goes together. The greedy and the swindlers are quite a team, because people who are greedy are going to try to take advantage of others if they can.

And as Paul almost always does in his sin list, and he has about 30 of them, and sorry, about 30 of them in the New Testament, as he almost always does, he says, idolaters too. He almost always mentions idolaters, either first or last, because godlessness is the root of all kinds of sin. And what he's saying is, I don't want you to leave the world.

I don't want you to form an enclave and circle the wagons. I want you to be out in the world. Then verse 11 and following the danger again, is those who claim to be your brothers and are guilty of sins. Now you notice the sin list. How similar is the first one? He's saying Christians can be guilty of sexual immorality and they can be guilty of greed.

I'm going to pause over greed for a second. secular people sometimes make lists of sins that Christians tolerate. They do this because they want to accuse Christians of hypocrisy. And the sad truth is, we are at least inconsistent at times, and they start off with what they call the three G's that Christians don't seem to care about.

And those three G's are greed, gossip, and gluttony, which includes drinking too much. And then there's others. There's other sins that we kind of neglect a little bit. And I have a list of them somewhere, and I can't find the list. Pride certainly would be on the list. Boasting would be on the list.

I find the rest of them eventually and tell you what they are. But here, Paul adds. Security. Immorality. Greed. Idolatry. Reviling. Reviling is someone who just uses harsh language over and

over, can be reviling God. It can be reviling other people. Like maybe, maybe sometimes we revile politicians. We disagree with and say dreadful things about them. That would be perhaps a sin that Christians might indulge.

And then he says, A drunkard, now a drunkard is not simply someone who drinks too much. On one occasion, perhaps many of you have gone to a party of some kind, and you had a little too much to drink. That's very different from being a drunkard or a drunkard. If someone is drunk over and over and over and they give themselves to alcohol and a swindler and he says, don't even eat with people like that, you need to avoid them.

You need to avoid them. Because, as he says later on, bad company corrupts good morals. If you've heard that saying, you might think it's a secular one or Benjamin Franklin. It's the Bible. Bad company corrupts good morals, not all bad company. You got to be willing to have bad company with unbelievers. God's placed in your life for evangelistic reasons, but the bad company, its most dangerous, is your fellow believer who leads you off toward greed or gossip or harshness, pride or party spirit, or the other sins that we tolerate.

Don't even eat with such a person. Now he goes on to say that we need to be careful about eating and careful about judging. He makes the statement in verse 12. He says, what do I have to do with judging outsiders? That's God's business, my responsibility. And candidly, our responsibility is to judge sin inside. Now, that doesn't mean we go around judging, condemning each other.

He means that if there's gross sin, we have to judge it. But it also means we judge, we assess, we label, and break with our own sin or sin in our family. We tell lovingly, kindly, gently our husband or wife or child or parent, maybe a sibling when they're falling into sin, we gently rebuke, we gently correct.

But judging outsiders, that's God's business. God judges. Those are outside. On the last day. Our judgment now has to do with the behavior people have in front of them day by day. Well, he closes with a line which is from the Old Testament a number of occasions. The Old Testament says, purge the evil person from among you. And that statement appears in places where people commit sins that are worthy of the death penalty.

Now he says it with regard to a sin that merits excommunication, so that there's been a substitution that's occurred in God's community. We don't execute people anymore. We put them outside the body of the living, which is a more grievous thing. And we do that again, that we may save their spirit, that God may save their spirit. In the last day.

Now, one more thing I need to address, and that is, so why are we slow at doing this? Why are we slow at addressing serious sin? Why are we slow at addressing minor sins, perhaps in the body of Christ? And the answers are several. One answer is, it's been abused in the past. You know, reformers throughout the centuries were condemned, were kicked out of the church.

Martin Luther, John Calvin, people like that were condemned for being orthodox. That's one thing that happens. Another thing that happens sometimes is people say they've been disciplined and they say it's groundless, and they hop in their car and they drive a couple extra miles down the road to another church, and they tell a tale of persecution of the church.

And that church doesn't call up the other church to see what really happened. And they just will call you poor people. You've been so mistreated. And they and they just welcome them. And so discipline seems pointless. And if you've tried it, you may say that this is, say, telling somebody who's not real receptive, you may say, well, I'm never do that again.

And I just want to say to you, this is God's good plan for us, that we take care of each other. There's a man named Daniel Neary, one of my first sermons here, a quoted, part of one of his books. But, he's a Persian Christian, and he tells a story in one of his books about a blood feud that began decades ago at the beginning, early stages of the automotive era, at least in Persia. And it goes like this.

There was a prominent physician, one of the first men in his town to have a car, and he was known to drive his car recklessly from place to place, go too fast over bumpy roads, and sure enough, he was tearing around a highly bumpy road and it, Taurus something or other, an axle. Some major problem. The car had to be fixed and he had to go do something very important. And so he rushed into town. Fortunately, his car broke down near town, and there was really only one mechanic in town, and he was an auto parts dealer, first of all. But he would help people, take care of matters if a repair were needed and complex. And the doctor came into the auto mechanic parts dealer's business just as he was sitting down to lunch with his brand new bride. They'd been married a couple of weeks, and she had brought him a magnificent meal to celebrate their first I think it was four weeks of marriage together, and they'd just begun the meal, and the physician stormed in and told him to drop everything and take care of his car. And according to the customs of Persia, his name was Hassan. Hassan said, no, no, please join us. Have some tea, share the meal with me. And the doctor would not refused, yelled at him, insulted him and said, and I quote, A car parts dealer who doesn't fix cars is like a hospital without an ambulance. And Hassan replied, no, he's like a grocer who doesn't fix supper for you. But you are a doctor who orders X-rays for Hangnails, so return an insult for insult. And you may think, well, okay, no big deal. People had some sharp words and they became foes and the whole community ignored it until five years later when Hassan became very sick and was under the care of the physician who chose to let him die. He died because no one would intervene in a feud that was judged to be inconsequential by the neighborhood. Now that's an extreme example, but what I'm saying is this it's wrong to ignore sin. It's not your responsibility to make somebody respond positively when you correct them. But the Bible says it's true. Proverbs nine whoever rebukes a scoffer will get abuse.

You can expect that sometimes when you try to discipline people, but it's also true that if you reprove a wise man, he will love you, give instruction to a wise man and he will be wiser still. It's

not our job to decide who's wise and who's a scoffer. It's our job to speak when we see sin, and to do so is an act of love.

And they say in Paul's words, you're new. God has made you new. God accept you as you are, but it doesn't leave you where you are. You're part of the family of God that's removed the old leaven of sin. You're clean. The church is clean. So let's act like it. We've been reconciled to God through the work of Christ in the cross.

Reconciled to God means our sins are forgiven, but reconciled to God also means that God's holiness is ours. And so we should act like it. And that'll make the gospel more beautiful when the church is what it ought to be. Several places the New Testament, the Bible says, adorn the gospel, beautify the gospel, make it make the beauty of the Christian life powerful and clear.

Make it clear that he's the Savior of the Lord. He's got holiness. The world will look for these things. And so the purity of the church enhances the mission of the church and presents Christ in all of his fullness, the one who forgives us of our sins and the one who purifies us from it, as well.

Let's pray together.

Heavenly father, I pray that we would be who you make us to be, that we would be who we really are. People cleansed by the Passover Lamb, a new lump, your word says. And that seems kind of odd to us. A new body, a new life. It's ours. You cleanse sin from us and so make it so. Give us, we pray, a community of those who love you and love each other enough to pursue holiness. Together we ask it in your name.

Amen.