

In the World But Not of the World – 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

Introduction – There are many metaphors describing the community of God’s people. “*The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son...*” (Matt 22:2). We are the temple of God (1 Cor 4:16) and we are a festal community of joy (1 Cor 5:8). In verse 8, we are told to keep this feast with the “*unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*” Sincerity doesn’t mean doing whatever you feel like doing (some of the most wicked acts have been done in sincerity). The word speaks of purity of motive, ingenuousness, and aligned with the purity of God. The truth of this feast stands in opposition to the misbehavior that speaks a lie about God and His good law. This is the festal life of the community of God’s people. We are to be a sincere and true community that is simultaneously in the world but not of the world.

In the World (vv9-10) – Corinth was a metropolis, full of all kinds of unbelieving sinners. Paul takes it for granted that believers take full part in the community and society in which they live. When dealing with those of the world, we are not to withdraw into our Christian ghettos to avoid defilement. Jesus told us to “*go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature*” (Mark 16:15) and that means that we will be *in the world*. In the Old Covenant administration, touching a leper made you unclean. But now, in Christ, we can touch the unclean and instead make them clean. You do not have to be afraid of worldly “cooties.” Of course, this requires that we often do not fit in (Psalm 1:1-2, 1 John 2:15-17). And there are plenty of warnings to avoid becoming too comfortable with them; we are not to be pressed into their mold (Prov 13:20, Rom 12:1-2). And we are not to render our children to them (Eph 6:4, Mark 12:17). In summary, Paul had written to them before (v9) but needed to clarify that he did not mean that they couldn’t associate with sinners who were not Christians, “*since then you would need to go out of the world*” (v10).

But Not of the World (v11) – And this is just where we tend to get it all wrong. We distance ourselves from worldly sinners, but we continue to keep company with those who claim to be Christians and yet refuse to repent of high-handed sins. Paul gives us a clue as to where this list comes from at the close of v13, “*put away from yourselves this evil person.*” These are all offenses that are found in Deuteronomy, sins which God said could require the death penalty. The sexually immoral (Deut 22:23-24, 30). This is listed first possibly because it is the immediate concern of the chapter. Covetousness finds no direct parallel but is connected to idolatry (Col 3:5). Idolatry was a grievous sin (Deut 17:1-7). A reviler is among other things a slanderer (Deut 19:16-19). Drunkenness is a sin and in at least one instance carries the death penalty (Deut 21:18-21). Extortioners are swindlers and kidnapers (Deut 24:7).

We are to be in the world in such a way that we invite the lost to come in as refugees, repenting of their sins and coming to Jesus in faith. We are to be “not of the world” by removing the leaven of wickedness that refuses to repent, the apostles of rebellion, from our midst – not because we have never sinned or seen sin like this – but because the church is a community of sincerity and truth before God. And that means we cannot share the Lord’s Table with them (v11). We must refuse to give any insincere sign that we believe they are “with us,” both for their sake and for the sake of the God’s holy name.

Let’s make something clear from this passage: Your identity is never to be found in a particular sin or tendency to sin or temptation to sin IF YOU ARE IN CHRIST. And that is why the two cannot go together. We die to sin, we crucify the flesh, and we live in Christ – our identity is in Jesus Christ. We are Christians. Or...we are not.

Biblical Judging (vv12-13) – But wait! I thought we weren’t supposed to judge others. “*Judge not, that you be not judged*” (Matt 7:1). The world loves that verse. But once again it is the church that taught the world this verse. Paul called out a man in sin, judged him, and judged the Corinthians as arrogant for tolerating that sin. Matt 7:1-5 teaches us that we must judge, but not as hypocrites, for we are all judged by the same standard. This leaves no room for a saying like, “*do what I say and not what I do.*” We are not to try and get the speck out of our neighbor’s eye unless and until we are willing to get that fat log out of our own eye.

But then, having judged ourselves by the Word of God, sincerely repented ourselves and turned to Christ, we are instructed to go and help our neighbor remove his speck (and having removed our plank it often turns out that what we thought was a plank in their eye was really only a speck). We become grace-filled people, not people who refuse to name a sin, but people ready and willing, desiring to see other sinners join us in repentance, faith, and our Passover feast.

A Community of Sincerity and Truth - Tolerated sin will spread like leaven through the lump (v6). Sin does not get to be defined by the consenting adults nor by the community. It is defined by the Word of God - and that is hard work for a church community to do. It takes love for God over everything else - and it takes love for people, a love that says we take all refugees from the world, but no apostles (Psalm 138:6, Isaiah 66:1-2). The separation called for here is to distinguish God's church a loyal, covenant keepers where God's Holy Spirit dwells. And when the discipline is exercised it is with all hope that God will bring them back to us and to Him.

Dave Hatcher - July 1, 2018

Notes for Little Saints

At the end of 1 Corinthians 5:8 - we are called to be an unleavened loaf of

_____ and _____.

That means we are to be a people who are celebrating God's kindness to us and our devotion to Him. That is why we cannot allow people who refuse to obey God to remain with us as though they were a part of us.

It doesn't mean that we can't love sinners - those who are outside the church.

That's verses 9-10.

It does mean that we can't let sinners who won't repent pretend like they are actually Christians. At the end of verse 11 it says we shouldn't even _____ with them.

A good verse to memorize is Psalm 138:6. Write it out here -

Humble people are so thankful that God has saved them and changed them. Humble people quickly respond to God's ways, believing them to be the best ways to live. Humble people are quick to join with others in celebrating God's goodness. That is what the church is supposed to be - and you are welcome to come and join in with us.