

A Little Leaven – 1 Corinthians 5:1-8

Introduction – Consider the way the world handles the word, “love.” It would seem that love and discipline could never be understood except as opposites. And the world has learned this from the church which adds words like “open,” “affirming,” and “tolerance” as synonyms for love. But the Scriptures teach us that discipline is a form of love (Prov 13:24). To hate correction is to give oneself to death (Prov 15:10). Hard words produce soft hearts and soft words produce hard hearts. Is it no wonder the church is so full of hard hearts?

Porneia (vv1-2) – Paul judges the man given to sexual immorality (porneia, a word with broad meaning covering all kinds of sexual impurity) and calls the Corinthians arrogant for not judging him. Notice, it is *arrogant* (according to Scripture) to be *tolerant* (according to the world). Pride and arrogance had not only led to divisions among them, (3:21, 4:6-7), but to a callous insensitivity to sin. This particular sin (incest) not only is a breach of the Mosaic law (Deut 27:20, Lev 20:11), the sin really is an abomination of Gen 2:18, 24. If a helper suitable for Adam is a woman, then it isn't a man, it isn't an animal, it can't be a direct relative, and you can only have one wife. This is not intolerance; it is biblical obedience. It is love for God and for mankind.

To imitate Paul (4:16) and Jesus means to speak hard words to the church when necessary, when they want to hear it and when they don't (2 Tim 4:2-4). Biblical grace is not freedom to sin; it is freedom and power from sin (Rom 6:1-2, 12-14). Grace lifts us up, out of the deep morass of immorality. Abuse of such grace plunges us deeper than even the unbelievers will go.

Church Discipline (vv3-5) – Because the case is not in dispute, Paul can pass judgment from a distance. These verses describe the process and purpose of excommunication. The process is to put the unrepentant sinner out of the church communion and hand him over to Satan. The purpose is for the “*destruction of his flesh that his spirit may be saved.*” Both phrases need to be unpacked.

First, we must remember the fallen world in which we live. It is appointed for man to die once, and after this the judgment (Heb 9:27). This is not a neutral world; that ship has already sailed (Rom 1:18).

Everyone, outside of the saving grace of God, is on their way to judgment (Rom 3:23, 6:23). At that judgment, the sheep will go into eternal joy and the goats into everlasting torment (Matt 25:31-46). There are only two roads in life, and only one way to heaven (Matt 7:13-14, John 14:6, Acts 4:12).

Second, it is obviously not enough to simply call yourself a disciple of Jesus (Matt 7:21-23). We are never saved by good works, but we are saved to good works (Eph 2:8-10). And so, when it is determined by their fruit that they are not followers of Christ, they are to be placed outside of Christ's communion. But notice, church discipline does not estrange anyone from Christ; it simply makes the declaration that he is already far away. This is what it means to “*hand him over to Satan.*” In essence, the church is saying to the unrepentant sinner: “thy will be done.”

Third, one of the purposes of church discipline is the destruction of the flesh. As in 1 Cor 3:3, Rom 7:5, Gal 5:13, Paul is using “flesh” here to mean the rebellious orientation away from God. Rom 8:13, Gal 5:24, and Col 3:5f command believers to mortify the flesh and its desires – and church discipline is one of the means the Spirit employs to accomplish this. Excommunication is the last step of a patient and loving effort to bring someone back to Christ.

Christ Our Passover (vv6-8) – Paul was concerned for the church in general for a little leaven would leaven the whole lump. Unrepentant sin in the church leaves the church vulnerable. Like Achan in the camp, the church loses its purity and potency when it compromises with sin. Paul teaches that to tolerate sin is to refuse to keep the unleavened feast of Passover. What's that about?

Leaven is not a bottle of yeast. It is an active lump of sourdough starter. The point is not that leaven is evil; the point is that leaven brings in and grows into a loaf something foreign to the loaf that will then transform the whole loaf. The picture of Passover's unleavened bread was to purge out all of Egypt's

idolatrous and enslaving influence and to start anew with Yahweh. Also, the bread was unleavened, made in haste, because deliverance had come and now was the time to be saved from slavery.

Christ is our Passover. This is the gospel. We are not a communion of people who never sinned or never sin. We needed a Passover Lamb. His blood has been shed and our atonement is painted on this house in which we reside. The Lord in His wrath will pass over because Christ's blood shed for us has been displayed to the Father. It is shameful to live in the world showing the blood of Christ for it declares, "I deserve to die," and this is the scandal of the cross. It leaves us with nothing to boast in except the grace of God. And in a sense, each week we come to get rid of the old leaven we have picked up during the week. We confess our sins in the service, cleansing the temple that we are (3:16-17). We come and keep the feast, "not with the old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

Dave Hatcher - June 24, 2018

Notes for Little Saints

A very important phrase that comes from this passage is found in verse 6 –
“... a little leaven leavens the whole _____”

One application of this has to do with each one of us. If we come and live in the church community with sin that we refuse to repent of we will harm the rest of the church.

Remember the story of Achan (in Joshua 7). The Israelites were told by God to go and take the city of Ai. But they lost the battle. It turns out that they lost because Achan had hidden some treasures he kept for himself from the previous battle – something the Lord had forbidden. Because of Achan's sin many other people died.

This teaches us that if we sin and refuse to repent we can harm the rest of the body – these people all around us.

Write out 1 John 1:9 and then thank God that when you confess your sins you are made clean because you are in Jesus Christ.

1 John 1:9 -