

Title: With whom shall I keep company?

Truth: Maintain purity in the church and proper contact with outsiders.

Date/Location: Sunday May 3, 2020 at FBC

Introduction

In 5:1-8, we learned that the Corinthians were to put a person out of the church to purify the church and to put that person into the realm of God's judgment. Paul explains this more in the next verses.

I. The Misunderstanding, v. 9-10

A. Paul wrote a letter to the Corinthians before this letter which we know as 1 Corinthians. It is not preserved, thus indicating that it was not an inspired text. It was not necessary for us to live successful Christian lives. In this "0 Corinthians," Paul wrote something just like this:

"Do not keep company with sexually immoral people."

To "keep company" means to associate with or mingle. Understood rightly, this is very good advice, for keeping company with them can rub off on you and you may well become like them. They may fill your mind with trashy things that shape your character over time. And we are to mark certain ones and avoid them—like Romans 16:17-18 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15.

The world is full of the kind of people that Paul speaks of. If people are not exercising their immorality to the fullest, we can be thankful.

B. The Corinthians misunderstood Paul's intention. They took what he wrote too far and thought that this meant that they could have absolutely no connection with sexually immoral people who were unbelievers ("of this world", "outside"). They were thinking similarly to the Pharisees of the prior generation who criticized Jesus for spending time with sinners (Luke 5:30, 7:39, 15:2, 19:7, Matthew 9:11, Mark 2:16). They were also thinking like the Jewish Christians who criticized Peter for going to the Gentiles (Acts 11:3). To have no connection to unbelieving sinners would mean you have to leave the world, and go to heaven. That won't happen until you die, so you are stuck here in the meanwhile—unable to keep Paul's command if you construe it incorrectly. Jesus was a friend of sinners, and he was criticized for this (Matthew 11:19).

(The way I read this is not the same as the idea of 'friendship' evangelism. Friendship evangelism often has too much friendship and

too little evangelism. Maybe ‘acquaintance evangelism’ would be a better term in our modern parlance. Once the person becomes saved, then you can *really* be friends!)

- C. Sometimes you can rule out an interpretation if when you take it to its logical conclusion it becomes ridiculous. The problem with the Corinthian idea that you cannot actually live like that. Monastery or convent living is not realistic, nor is it God’s calling for us because we are to live in, but not of, the world. We are to evangelize the lost, to seek and save the lost, to reach the lost in a way similar to what Jesus did in his itinerant preaching. We are to maintain an undefiled kind of contact with the world that does not close us off entirely from them. Besides that, life in general requires some contact with the many people who don’t know Christ. We have to do commerce and things among an unbelieving world.

This is why I don’t get into all the ‘boycott’ movements. You cannot consistently carry them out, picking some unbelieving stores to patronize and not others. If the unbelievers did that to us, we would be cut off and complain that we are being treated unfairly—so how can we do it in one direction and not expect them to do it in the other direction?

This is another reason why we cannot live in quarantine or lockdown forever. Not only because we must be able to gather to worship, but also we have to have contact with other people in order to evangelize them. I’m not saying that the authorities are purposefully locking down to prevent the spread of the Christian faith, but that is a real result of our current COVID-19 state. In the meanwhile, we must work hard to proclaim Christ however we can and make sure that we overcome the lockdown in the evangelism department.

The Corinthians took what Paul said and extrapolated it to other kinds of sin as well. Paul indicates these in verse 10: greed, extortion, idolatry.

This Corinthian thought pattern was irrational, because while they rejected contact with sinners *outside* the church, they were puffed up about such behavior *inside* the church. It is like they strained out a gnat but swallowed a camel (Matt. 23:24). The more dangerous thing—sin in the church—was tolerable, while contact with outsiders was thought to be intolerable!

Watch your own inconsistency in this: do you accept behaviors in yourself that you criticize in others?

II. A Clarification, v. 11

A. The clarification contains additional text (shown in italics) to ensure understanding.

“Do not keep company with a professing brother who is sexually immoral people, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.”

B. To be “named a brother” means that someone calls himself a Christian.

C. For a second time, Paul lists a number of sins, but this time adds two more: sexual immorality, covetousness, extortion, and idolatry, reviling, and drunkenness.

1. Sexually immoral – fornicator. In this kind of context, this is a general concept that includes a multitude of sins available today to tempt us.

2. Covetous – greedy. This is the quality of desiring to have more than is needed or due.

3. Idolater – image worshipper. We have to consider also idols of the heart as well, not just tangible statues of gods or goddesses.

4. Reviler – an abusive person.

5. Drunkard – someone who is addicted to alcoholic beverage.

6. Extortioner – swindler, robber. This could be a white-collar type of crime or like old-fashioned pick-pocketing, purse-snatching, armed robbery, and the like. In verse 10, this word is neighbor to “covetous” and may indicate that a person who has the attitude of greed may well carry it out into some action to achieve his desire. But in the second list in verse 11, the word is separated from covetousness by several other words, indicating that they are separate ideas.

D. Someone who is a practitioner of the sins listed is giving more than strong enough evidence that they are not a true believer. In fact, the next chapter tells us in 1 Cor. 6:9-10 that such people will not inherit the kingdom of God.

E. Finally, Paul tells them not even to eat with such a person. Eating a meal together indicates fellowship, friendship, commonality, and acceptance. That is not to be the case with this type of person. The Christian faith and the Christian person are not to accept or support the sin of the ‘brother.’

1. Potential objection: family members. In the immediate family, I believe this passage does not override the familial relationship and

responsibility to live together, including eating. In extended family, the issue becomes more difficult. In some cases, I believe a complete cutting off is appropriate. In other cases, if many in the family are unbelievers, you are going to a meal in such a way that you are not specifically supporting or accepting a particular professing believer's conduct, then you can share a meal with them. Before this happens, you should have spoken to your straying family member and made it clear that you can't support their conduct and call upon them to repent. In general, be fully convinced in your own mind about your own situation.

2. What about taking the sinning brother out to lunch or coffee to talk over the issue? You can just as well talk it over on the phone or sitting on a park bench. This avoids the whole question of whether you should eat with them or not. The probably won't want to spend time with you anyway if they know what your goal is.

F. Have you ever tried to understand why Paul instructs the church to treat one group of unbelievers differently or more "harshly" than another group? Here's what is going on: there are unbelievers outside the church. There is apparently an unbeliever inside the church as well. The person is acting like an unbeliever, and how the Corinthians are to regard them if they do not repent—whether or not they actually are in a temporary backslidden state or not is to be left up to God, not to the church to keep them inside. But the bottom line is that Paul seems to lay out a more strict standard for those professing Christ and sinning (don't eat with them) compared to those **not** professing Christ and sinning (you can have a meal with them—like the Lord did). Why?

1. The principle is this: there must be a clear distinction between the people in the church and the people not in the church. The church cannot look like the world.
2. There are three different levels of relationship because there are three different kinds of people called out in this passage.

So we do not get confused, note that there are the two general divisions of humanity: saved and unsaved. That is ever and always true. We saw a few weeks ago that in the saved group, there are some very immature believers who can be said to be behaving carnally. That doesn't eliminate the two-fold division of humanity; it simply zooms in on one of the groups to see some more detail.

Similarly in this passage, we have three groups: those who are inside the church, those who are outside the church, *and* those who claim to

be part of the church but whose lifestyle matches better those outside the church. They truly belong to the second group, the outsiders, but they are more dangerous than an unbeliever because they falsely claim to be an insider. They muddy the water for less discerning believers and confuse the witness of the church to the world. If the world can see no difference between some sinner in the church and itself, it will not see what the church really is.

3. What are the three relationships we can sustain to people? First, we share full fellowship in the church. Second, we have evangelistic acquaintance with those outside the church. And third, we remove from fellowship those who call themselves Christians but live in unrepentant sin.

I used the word “harsh” earlier—but we need not be brutish in our treatment of those who are removed from the church. Of course they will call our actions “unloving.” But we should be kind and gentle and concerned and burdened for them so that God will evaluate our action as being proper.

III. Judgment in and out of the Household of God, v. 12-13

- A. To explain this whole idea of how we address sinners inside and outside the church, Paul asks a couple of rhetorical questions in verse 12.
 1. “What have I to do with judging those also who are outside?” means “I don’t have anything to do with the judgment of those who are outside of the church. God handles that. Our responsibility toward them is to make disciples. We don’t expect unbelievers to act like believers, friends. They are sinners. They are lost and in darkness. Why be surprised or shocked when they do what they naturally are?”
 2. “Do you not judge those who are inside?” means “You are responsible for taking care that your church is pure.” Our responsibility is to protect the church. For example, what about the children in the church—they see what is going on, and when they come of age, they will be able to figure out what was going on in the church. Just what is acceptable in this institution of the church anyway? Is divorce acceptable? Sexual immorality? Any unrepentant pattern of sin? Are those all cool, or is this place different than the world?”
- B. In verse 13, Paul makes explicit what he says in verse 12:
 1. Those outside the church are judged by God.

2. Those evil people inside the church must be removed by the church for the benefit of the church. Paul alludes to a number of OT texts that speak of removing impurity from the nation of Israel—often by the death penalty (Deut. 13:5, 17:7, etc.). Obviously capital punishment is not his meaning here as is clear from verse 5 and 11, though some in church history misinterpreted this for their own inquisitorial pleasure. God prevented Israel from doing this willy-nilly in the first century because they had to submit to the ruling authority of Rome over them. Strangely, this might have served to save lives and display a level of mercy that so-called religious people sometimes don't have!

C. 1 Peter 4:17 tells us that judgment begins with the household of God. But it also extends to those who do not obey the gospel in a much more terrible way.

Conclusion

God takes purity seriously. After all, God is holy, and calls us to be holy in our conduct as well. If we can't be holy in the church, then we have a major problem. God would then call us to repent, and if we don't, He should remove our lampstand from its place (Rev. 2:5). Purity has such benefits though, including encouraging more holiness and better service for God, and that is what we want. And if this message has stirred up in you a desire for more holy and pure practice in your own Christian life and church, then we have accomplished something that will honor God today.

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