

Excommunicating Sinners is Beneficial

Corinthians Explained

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1 Corinthians 5. Let me only read verse 7 and 8. 1 Corinthians 5:7-8.

7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: 8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

So far.

"Excommunicating Sinners is Beneficial." This chapter is about excommunication and excommunicating sinners is beneficial. Four thoughts. In the first place, the sin in the church, the verses 1 through 4, something happened in Corinth. Secondly, benefiting the sinner, look at verse 5, "To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." In the third place, benefiting the church in verses 6 through 8, "Purge out therefore the old leaven," out of the congregation, out of the church. And in the fourth place, the sin in the world. There's a difference between sin in the church and sin in the world, verses 9 through 13. Excommunicating sinners is beneficial: the sin in the church 1-4; benefiting the sinner, verse 5; benefiting the church 6-8; and the sin in the world, verses 9 through 13.

Yeast. Children, do you know what yeast is? You know when your mother is baking bread or something, you need to have flour and you make dough but you need yeast in there. If you don't have yeast, you get a very hard cracker, you get a tortilla, but you like bread to be a little puffy and soft and tasteful so you need in the dough you need yeast for that to make it more airy and tasty. You know that the yeast, we often use dry yeast, there's also fresh yeast, and sometimes in the olden days they took an old piece of bread and put it in the dough, and then the fungus, because yeast is a fungus, just goes through that whole lump and permeates it, and it all begins to just yeast and all is airy. So they didn't always use fresh yeast and new yeast but sometimes old pieces of bread in there to bring that yeast in there.

Well, the Israelites also used that unleavened bread. They sometimes did not put yeast there because if you put yeast in there and it's kind of fluffy, soft bread, it gets moldy

within a week, but if it's hard like a cracker, you can keep it for weeks and months. It doesn't spoil so easily. It does not get moldy. So when the people of Israel left Egypt, they did not use leaven. Leaven is yeast. They did not use it. They just kept the hard crackers and they quickly baked bread without yeast because they were in a hurry and that was a custom since then, that in the Passover week in the Passover feast, they did not eat bread with yeast but unleavened bread. Then that week and also in Egypt in those times, the people went through all the cupboards, so to speak, and whenever they found a little piece of bread or yeast, they just threw it all out. It had to go.

Exodus 12, "Then they shall eat the flesh on that night," of the lamb, right, "roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off." Wow. They had strong language. So they had to take all the leaven out of the house and if they were eating leavened bread, soft bread, they were cut off, they excommunicated themselves. It was absolutely forbidden. "Ye shall eat nothing leavened; in all your habitations shall ye eat unleavened bread." And so they did, "And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they brought forth out of Egypt, for it was not leavened; because they were thrust out of Egypt, and could not tarry, neither had they prepared for themselves any victual." Do you see? So the people in haste just left and since that time at Passover, no leavened bread, it's hard matzah they call them, hard crackers, hard tortillas.

Now this is also a metaphor, this has a meaning. You know that yeast is aggressive and that yeast goes to every corner of the bread, of the dough, and influences everything, and that as a metaphor that can mean something good. It can also mean something bad. The Apostle Paul writes in Galatians 5:9, "A little leaven," a little leaven, "leaveneth the whole lump." So you have to be careful with this, a little bit of leaven in the bread that's left over from the previous time just in that bowl left, in that pan left, in that oven left, can just ruin it. A little leaven leaveneth the whole bread again.

Sometimes it's meant in a positive sense. The kingdom of heaven "is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened." So when the Lord gives grace, there's also leaven, right, and that leaven is your whole body, your whole mind, your whole existence, your whole soul. It goes to every corner of your being. There's nothing left out. The kingdom of God is like leaven but also in Mark 8 the Lord Jesus speaks about that, "And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod." So the leaven of secularism and the leaven of religion can be a bad influence. Oh, that leaven of the Pharisees, it's in the heart, it's in the congregations, it's a leaven that goes everywhere. It's bad. It's the wrong influence of the doctrine of the Pharisees of good works.

The Apostle Paul is using that example in our chapter, right, because he writes in verse 7 and 8, let us read it again, maybe we see it now in a little different light, "Purge out therefore the old leaven," it has to go out, "that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened." Because you have a new heart and the Lord has given you cleanness, "For

even Christ our passover," you see, the Lamb, passover, our pasover "is sacrificed for us." If that's true, if the passover is sacrificed for me, then I must eat unleavened bread and purge out leaven constantly my whole life. "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

So that's kind of the heart and the metaphor in this chapter but why is the Apostle Paul talking about this? Well, then you have to go back to the first verses. He has heard, he has planted the church of Corinth in the first missionary journey and now he is on his third journey and he is in Ephesus, and he hears about Corinth and he's not happy because of division and problems and immorality, and not just immorality only but the worst kind, incest. That's what it says he's writing about. "It is reported commonly," it's known all over the place, everyone knows it, "It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you," immorality among you, "such fornication as is not so much as named," and known, "among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife," or his step-mother. "And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you." So the Apostle Paul is rebuking the congregation and he's saying, "No, I've heard this and you know about that, you know about that sin. It's commonly reported. The whole congregation knows about it and you have done nothing about it. You did not even mourn. You did not mourn. You're puffed up. You think you're a good congregation. You're Christians, you're different from the world but it's bad and you should have cried and prayed and felt sad and been mourning and being worried, and you should have brought this to the Lord's attention and you should have brought this up in prayer. It should have really worried you but it doesn't worry you. Do you care? Do you care for the world? Do you care for the church?"

You know, some of God's people are really concerned about the church and are feeling very sad, and some less. And here the church in Corinth was a living church but some of God's people did not mourn, did not grieve, just thought, "You know, that's the way it is." They were blind. They didn't see the problem and maybe they were in authority and maybe that's why they were off the hook, and maybe that's why some people swept it under the carpet and did not want to deal with that. But the Apostle Paul says, "You have to, you have to deal with that. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you." That leaven needs to go out. You may not let that leaven fester. You have to deal with that. You have to discipline. You have to think of censure in the church. You have to think about putting pressure on people. You have to do something about it. You cannot just tolerate it. It's something you can't tolerate. It's bad. Even the Gentiles look down upon it and say, "Look at the church. Look at the church in Corinth, at those Christians. See what they accept." That's bad.

So the apostle is rebuking the young congregation of Corinth. You know, we are an established church for hundreds of years. Most of our people are raised in the church, raised in a Christian family, and they know, they know what's right and what's wrong. They may not love the truth but they know, and those people in Corinth, first generation Christians, they're often so ignorant. They had to learn so many things. They easily fell

back in old patterns and they had that feeling of kind of everyone cares for his own business and did not really do anything about that and just left, they left the other alone, and they had to learn to take care of themselves instead of being so puffed up. So they were struggling so let us be thankful, young people, if you are married, if you find someone who stands on that same foundation, you should also be thankful that you were raised in a Christian family and that you know those things, that is in your system, and yet you also have to repent and to seek the Lord.

So they did not mourn and then the apostle says that they might be taken away from among you. Not just immediately, not just take their name off the list, not just telling them to leave the church building, we won't do that, but to tell them that they in a process have to be forbidden to partake of the Lord's Supper, that they may not baptize their children, that they cannot be members in good standing, and in the process just telling them more and more that this will lead to excommunication, that we've warned them and warned them and take steps and also talk to other churches in the area and just together come to consensus that this is unacceptable.

The process, being taken away from you. And the Apostle Paul is willing to participate in that because it is a congregational thing, "For I verily, as absent in body," he is not present at that time, "but present in spirit," it's possible, it is possible that people that are listening also today are present in the spirit, "For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already," have determined already, "as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed," I know that it is wrong, "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together," as a congregation, "and my spirit," together with you, "with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh." To deliver such an one unto Satan. What is that? Well, Christ is the head of the church and Satan is the head of the world. The prince of the world, right? So to deliver such an one unto Satan means that someone is taken away from the church, like also in verse 13, "But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." You have to put that person away, not that you condemn the person, not that you hate the person. No, but you have to just make it clear to the person that this is unacceptable, this is something you cannot continue with. The same you find in 1 Timothy 1, "Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme." So that they may learn. So given over unto Satan that they may learn.

You see the same thing in other places in the Bible, for example, in Matthew 16, "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." So the church can use the keys of the kingdom. So the church needs to be active, not just the consistory, the church. It's a common thing, it was commonly known, verse 1, so we need to deal with this in public, in official congregation when you are together, with authority, in the power of the Lord to deliver such an one. That's why there's a form of excommunication in the back of the psalter.

So that's the first thought, the sin in the world. Secondly, benefiting the sinner. The second thought, verse 5B, "To deliver such an one unto Satan," why, "for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." Now frankly there are different thoughts on that and we cannot go into the details, but what is that flesh, unto the destruction of the flesh? Some say the Apostle Paul gives that person over or he supports to give the person over to Satan that he may suffer physically. So in a kind of miraculous thing, the Lord gives that person over unto Satan and then he will begin to suffer and have a terrible disease so that his soul is saved.

Well, you know the flesh in the Bible also can mean something else, being fleshy can also mean sin. I think that's what it means, sin, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of sin that sin may be mortified, to mortify that old man so, "that the spirit may be saved," so that the soul, the person himself may be saved, "in the day of the Lord Jesus." That's interesting. So when a person is living in a public sin, commonly known, or when the sin has become public, and if the person does not want to repent, does not want to admit, does not want to let go and is stubborn, there comes a point that we have to let him go, to deliver the person unto Satan so that he begins to realize, we hope, that it is bad, that I'm excluded from the kingdom of God, in the hope that someone comes to his senses that the spirit may be saved.

So church discipline is never ever retaliation. It's never ever punishment. We don't punish people. The government punishes people. They can put people in jail and they fine people, that's something else. The church doesn't ever do that. We don't let people pay a fine or go to jail. We also don't want to shame people. That's not the reason, to shame people. No. What we hope is that it works as a medication, as a pill that people begin to be aware of that and begin to realize this is too far, this is wrong, and repent and come back and confess their sins and say sorry not to the people so much but that they explain to the congregation that they see that it is a sin and feel sorry for their sins towards God. So whenever someone is put under censure starting with silent censure and public censure, that's too difficult for now, if that happens, if a name is mentioned in the church pulpit or if it is mentioned there is someone in church under censure and there are, that's not to shame them, that's not to give them a problem, it's only to put some pressure on them to say, "Man, woman, brother, brother, sister, member, you need to repent of this. This needs to change. You need to be saved. This leads to nothing. This leads to hell. So we are giving you over if you don't repent, we give you over unto Satan." And even if we cut someone off, excommunicate officially someone, that's not to do harm, it is only to bring that person to his senses, to her senses, that the spirit may be saved, that the person may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. When you need to die but especially when there is that judgment seat and if you have been excommunicated rightly, you're standing outside and you won't be let in.

So you see, the church cares. We mourn. We are grieved. We do something. Now if someone is reported, if someone is living in a secret sin, we tread carefully. If it's a public sin, we must deal with it publicly. So the Apostle Paul realizes that sometimes you need to inflict pain. Do you know when you have an ulcer on your leg, you go to the doctor and he deals with that. He may say, "This will be painful, okay? But be careful, sit still

and it will be painful for a while but then it will get better." And he uses his scalpel, this little sharp knife and just takes it out. It hurts. It really hurts but it's for your best. It's good for you. Or you need to go to the hospital and they need to cut you open, it's for your best. Or if there is a cancer and that cancer is also like a leaven, cancer is also like something that is aggressive, that needs to be taken out and the doctor takes it out and you may feel worse than before but it had to happen. And so in the church also sometimes that knife needs to be used.

Sometimes the Apostle Paul just wrote a letter, also a letter very plain, for example, in 2 Corinthians 7, "For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season. Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing." Damage in nothing, being sharp and straightforward and just tell them the way it is and that's not to harm them but to heal them.

Then in the third place, benefiting the church, 6 through 8. "Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" So what is he referring to? He's referring to the fact that Christ died, "For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us." That lamb that was kept apart and was butchered on the Passover feast and was eaten pointed to the Lord Jesus, to that sacrifice, and the blood on the doorposts pointed to the blood of Jesus, and the Apostle Paul said, "You found shelter under that, didn't you? You believed in that Savior, didn't you? Christ our passover is sacrificed for us," he said. He's talking to the living church. So that's the context. If that Jesus saved you, if he paid for you, if he took your guilt, if he has given you his righteousness, if that's your everything, if that is for you the only name given among men by whom we must be saved, if he is that Savior of the world for you, then also think of the consequences, that therefore you also need to eat unleavened bread and that you cannot accept a little leaven because a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.

"Purge out therefore." Purging out what? Well, two approaches and they probably come down to the same thing. What leaven needs to go? Well, the leaven of what's mentioned here: malice and wickedness, evil things, sin, or what's later called the fornication of the world, immorality, covetousness, greed, extortioners, swindlers, abusers, idolaters, all those people living in open sin, railers. They need to let that sin go. That sin needs to go, you need to clean it, you need to clean your own heart. Purge out therefore the old leaven from your own body, from your own mind. You're a temple of the Holy Spirit. Get rid of it. Get rid of sin. Live a holy life.

Well, there is something in there in this chapter that's correct, but that's not the only thing. It's not only so that God's children are the bread and that they have to purge out from their own life the leaven, but also the congregation is the bread and the congregation is the body of Christ, and therefore purge out therefore out of the church that sin and the sinner because that sinner as long as that person is continuing in that sin, may not be accepted and must be given over unto Satan and must leave the church, may attend but be not part of the church.

Remember Matthew 18? "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee." So if your brother trespasses and it's visible to you, "go and tell him his fault between thee and him." It's nobody else's business. Don't involve anyone else. "If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." That's fantastic. He says, "You're right. I won't do that anymore. I'll just stop that." "But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more," members, one or two more, "that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them," if he still does not budge, "tell the church," meaning the consistory, the leadership, "but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." Then view this person as Gentile. Titus 3:10, "A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject." So that's why in our church order we have three steps because of Titus 3. After the first and second admonition reject. The first step, the second step, and if he still does not want to hear, the third step: reject. It's in the Bible. Romans 16, "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them."

"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. And if there come unto thee one that does not bring this doctrine, receive him not into your house neither bid him speed." So why do we sometimes put people under censure? Not only to have the person repent and that his spirit may be saved, that was verse 5, but also that it does not ruin the church, that it does not infest the church, that this sin is not becoming accepted in the church and becomes contagious. So for the congregation's sake we sometimes have to put our foot down and say, "I like you, I know your circumstances but it's wrong and we have to put you under censure." Why? "For you and also for the whole congregation that people may know that it is too far, that we cannot go this route, that we must stop it and must nip it in the bud." And of course, behind that is the honor of God because we apply censure for the person himself that the spirit may be saved, and for the congregation that the old leaven is purged out of the congregation, but also for God's glory, right, for his honor because otherwise his name will be blasphemed. So we must be grieving because of the name and the glory of God.

Look at verse 8, "Therefore let us keep the feast." That's interesting, "Therefore let us keep the feast." What feast? Passover? No. The Passover feast is the metaphor. But what does that Passover feast point to? What feast? The Lord's Supper? I don't think so. What I think is this: the life of God's people, entire life since conversion until their death must be a constant mortifying of sin, must be a constant keeping the feast not with old leaven neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness but with unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. So the rest of your life celebrating the Lamb and living all your life. That's the festival for God's people.

So the Apostle Paul is not negative. He said that is such a good thing, it's such a good thing, it's such a good fight, that's such a precious thing to do. That's a feast, let us keep

that feast but not with sin and not making a feast for your flesh, making a feast for your spirit, "with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." So that Passover lamb points to the justification, the forgiveness of sins and that unleavened bread points to sanctification, to purging out that leaven, mortifying that old nature, fighting the good fight, walking that narrow pathway. It's all the same. That's hard work and yet it's beautiful work. It's a feast therefore let us keep that feast.

May I ask you a question? That Passover lamb, even Christ our Passover, did you hide under him? Have you seen so much of your sins that you could not live with it anymore and that you have been taking refuge unto that sacrifice of Christ on the cross, of that sincerity and truth of Christ? And he became poor to make rich. He was holy, immaculate. He did not have to purge out any sins. He was without sin but he was made to be sin to make the righteousness of God in him. Oh, that's what we need. We need that Savior. We need that sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. We need that blood. You know, you may be a fornicator, you may be an extortioner, a covetous man, an idolater, all those things mentioned, but repent of that and seek your salvation outside of self in that sacrifice, even Christ the Passover sacrifice.

It brings us to the last thought. The Apostle Paul was dealing with sin in the church. He said purge it out. Give it over. Give it over to Satan. Be clear about those things and transparent and don't accept it. But what about the sins of people not belonging to the church, just in the Gentile world, our colleagues and neighbors maybe? So that's the last part of this chapter and he wants to clarify something. Verse 9, "I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators." So the Apostle Paul said there was an epistle before so before 1 Corinthians was another letter. We don't have that and actually we also read about another letter later on in 2 Corinthians. There were actually four epistles to the Corinthians. We only have two in God's providence.

"I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators." Don't be friends with immorally sick people. But you know, I would like to clarify that. What I mean is, "Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world," that's not what I mean, "or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world." So I'm not saying you cannot have contact with any fornicator, I'm not saying you can't talk to any idolater, I'm not saying you cannot have contact with anyone else but the holy ones in church. No. "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat." So if someone is not a Christian, does not belong to the church, does not profess anything and lives in sin, you may still have company with that person, actually you should have, you should warn that person, you should try to win that person over, you should eat with that person, you should be like the Lord Jesus at the table with publicans and sinners. You should evangelize. You should do mission work. You know, suppose that he would have said, "Don't have contact with any fornicators," what's left of mission work? There's no mission work anymore.

So do you know of immorally sinful people living in immorality? Talk to them. Warn them. Tell them the law. Tell them the gospel. Be open. Be loving. Reach out to them. But if someone is a member of the church, has done Confession of Faith, has been warned, is under censure, keep your distance. "For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." Do you see the difference? So if people know the truth, have professed the truth, belong to the church and yet live in such sins, we have to be kind of hard on them and keep distance and no not to eat with them, with such an one no not to eat. Don't go for lunch with someone belonging to the church and being under censure or being excommunicated. But if someone is a secular person, does not confess and profess anything, then have lunch with them and tell them about the Bible.

So a fornicator, someone living in immoral sin. Sometimes the word "fornication" has a wider and sometimes a narrower meaning. Or covetous, it's in the same list, and covetous probably does not just mean that you like more money but that you also use the wrong means to get more money, that you are not honest either. Covetous. Or an idolater. Or a railer, an abuser. Or a drunkard. A drunkard. So if you on a regular basis every week are kind of tipsy and have drunk too much, you know that's unacceptable, that's unacceptable if somebody is a drunkard. Or an extortioner, someone cooking the books. With such an one no do not eat. So the Apostle Paul writes that the church has a kind of authority over the church members but not over them outside of the church. Do you see the point? You know, we have mission work in Bolivia and Bolivia is a very immoral country. People don't know any better. It's so normal to be unfaithful and also that it's still noted in the church, those old patterns, what they have seen of their own parents. I have given the wrong example. There are some prone to follow those same sins so we must reach out to them.

So, "I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world." The fornicators of this world need our attention, "the covetous, for then must ye needs go out of the world." You have to just go to a monastery if you can't talk to anyone living in those sins because you know this world is so filled with sin and all the modern sins that if you can't have contact with them, you have to just leave this world. No, you don't have to.

Congregation, we're going to end. "Purge out therefore the old leaven," not to start with, it's not so the Lord says you take all the leaven out and you fight all sins and you clean your life up and then come back and then earn some points. No, the Lord says repent ye, repent ye but not as a prerequisite, not as something you have to pay the Lord with. You may come without money and without price to that sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, that Passover feast. You need to have that blood on the doorpost. Do you shelter under the blood of him? And then that motivates to purge out that old leaven. Well, what will it be in heaven? In heaven that purging is not necessary anymore. There's nobody that doesn't belong there. They all have been cast out already. In heaven only God's people find a place and they also don't have to clean up their own lives anymore. It's all purged out. It's heavenly, without sin, and then to have that feast, to have that feast. Therefore let us keep

the feast in sincerity and truth. The feast, that will be in heaven without sin to always be with God. Amen.