

Sexual Immorality

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 November 1999

Preacher: Warwick Grant

[0 : 0 0] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 14th of November 1999. The preacher is Warwick Grant.

His sermon is entitled Sexual Immorality and is from 1 Corinthians chapter 5 verses 1 to 13.

Okay, well here's a hypothetical situation for us to think about. Purely hypothetical, okay? Imagine we found that among the members of this church, there was a bloke who was sleeping with his step-mom.

Okay, his father's wife. Now this guy isn't someone who's outside of our church, but he's someone who calls himself a Christian and he's an active member of Holy Trinity.

This is hypothetical, okay? And let's say for argument's sake, the woman wasn't a member of this church. So we've got this Christian bloke and this non-Christian woman sleeping together and it's his step-mom.

[1 : 1 1] Well, as a church, what should we do about this situation? I suppose there's all sorts of different things we could do.

Generally speaking, there are two things that come to my mind. One, we could just ignore it and say, hey, look, that's cool.

If you're happy, that's fine. I mean, look, that's, just as long as you're happy, that's cool by us. No worries. Or we could challenge the person about this situation.

First, privately, and then if that warning isn't heeded, then eventually with one or two witnesses present. If the person still didn't take heed of those warnings, we would reject the man from our church.

What do you think? If this situation arose, what, as a church, do you think we should do? This is exactly the situation that confronted the Apostle Paul when he wrote this chapter of 1 Corinthians.

[2 : 2 1] He was writing to a town called Corinth where there was a church that he had founded. And this letter is preserved for us in the New Testament.

And Anne-Marie read chapter 5 of it for us tonight. So that's what we're looking at tonight. And let me suggest you'll get stacks more out of what we're going to do as we look at this chapter if you follow it along in the Bibles with me.

So we're on page 928 of the Bibles in the seats in front of you. Let's just remind ourselves, to put ourselves in the picture, where this joint Corinth is.

And Wilma's just going to put up a map so you can see where Corinth is. Some of you have seen this map before. But if you haven't, Corinth was near the southernmost part of what is currently the nation of Greece.

And it wasn't too far from Athens, this place called Corinth. And Paul made a number of journeys around the Mediterranean Sea to tell people about Jesus. And it was on his second journey that he founded the church at this place called Corinth.

[3 : 23] Well, about three years after he'd first arrived in Corinth and the church had been established and begun to grow, things started to go off the rails. And there were divisions and immorality was creeping into the church and all sorts of stuff.

So Paul heard of this and wrote this letter. And we think he was in the town of Ephesus, which you can also see on the map as he wrote this letter. Okay, thanks Wilma. Okay, well let's look at chapter 5.

As I say, it's page 928 of the Bibles. The first verse says, It's actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not even found, not found even among pagans.

For a man is living with his father's wife. Okay, now we know it wasn't the guy's mum, because if it had been mum, Paul would have said mother. It seems it was a stepmother.

Paul's actually saying, Look, you won't even find this sort of behaviour outside the church. I mean, this is just really a bit sick. Well, what should we do in this situation, if this situation was in our own church here?

[4 : 33] Well, the action that Paul suggests is in verse 2. And you are arrogant. Should you not rather have mourned, so that he who has done this would have been removed from among you?

It seems that these Christians at this church in Corinth have become sort of numb to sin. They sort of couldn't see it anymore. They couldn't pick it. And they weren't just numb, but even worse, they were arrogant.

Almost pride about these things that were happening. Saying, well, so what? It's okay. If it feels good, do it. They should have been mourning.

And the offending man should have been removed from the church. Now, you might think that that's pretty harsh. This poor guy, he's lost the plot a bit. Why should he be removed from the church?

That's pretty harsh treatment. Well, the Bible outlines a very clear structure for discipline for church members who go off the rails, so to speak. And Wilma's just going to put up a table which highlights some of these different...

[5 : 34] different things. Now, I know that not many of you could probably see that from where you are. But Jesus, in Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 18, outlines for us what are the initial steps for challenging someone who might be going astray, going off the rails.

And this can be found in Matthew, Chapter 18, Verses 15 to 17. Three steps I go through very briefly. Go to the brother or sister and reprove him or her in private. And this is all Jesus' words in Matthew 18.

If he or she does not listen, go along with one or two witnesses. If the person still refuses to listen, take the matter before the whole church fellowship. So deal with it on a one-to-one level initially.

If the person doesn't respond, one or two witnesses. And all this is done in the context of God's love and Christian love. We're not just putting this person down. We're seeking to help this person and serve them.

Now, if that doesn't work, the next step is the one that Paul outlines for us in this letter. Remove the one in error from the fellowship. There are other steps following this.

[6 : 44] If the church gives united disapproval, but forgiveness and comfort are in order if the person chooses to repent. So there's always time for a person to turn back and repent of their sin.

And in the end, after everything has been exhausted, the last step is, after two warnings, reject the person from the fellowship, from that church. Thanks, Wilma.

So what Paul is speaking of here is in the context of a private challenging of a sinner who still refuses to listen.

Well, we as Christian people need to have a holy hatred of sin in the same way that God does. As Anthony was saying before with his illustration of his famous omelet, even one bad egg in that omelet that has 99 good eggs in it will spoil the omelet and make it unacceptable.

Similarly, our lives may be full of good deeds, of a sincere love for God, but even the tiniest smidgen of sin makes our lives unacceptable to God. And look, I'm sinful.

[7 : 52] I do wrong things, I think wrong things, and I say wrong things. All Christians are sinful. Well, then why does Paul say then, remove this person from the church when all Christians need God's forgiveness?

It's because this guy calls himself a Christian without obeying God and acknowledging his need to repent and receive God's forgiveness. Christian people know that they are scumbags who need God's forgiveness.

This guy didn't think he was a scumbag. He thought he was fine. He's okay. He's just going on his merry way, aware of the sin that had gone right into his life.

Let's go on in verse 3 to 5. Paul writes, For though absent in body, I am present in spirit, and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing.

When you are assembled and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

[9 : 09] Well, gee, that sounds like pretty heavy stuff, doesn't it? You might remember, some bells might be ringing in your head about Jesus' words from Matthew chapter 7, where Jesus says not to judge other people.

What Jesus means by this is not to sort of set yourself up as their eternal judge, saying that they'll be in heaven or they won't be in heaven. Jesus doesn't want us to judge others.

That's Jesus' job. It's not our job. Well, then how can Paul then say that he's pronounced judgment on this sinful guy? Surely that's a contradiction. Well, we'll talk about that when we get to verse 13.

Sufficient to say now, Paul is judging this guy because he's a member of the church. He's not outside the church, but he's a member of the church. And we have in verse 4 this picture of the Corinthian church assembled, and Paul is there in spirit, so to speak, and the Lord Jesus is there in power.

Whenever Christian people gather, Jesus is present with them. Tonight, in a way that we don't fully understand, Jesus is present in this room with us in a way that we will never completely comprehend.

[10 : 21] But when Christian people gather in Jesus' name, there he is in the middle of them. And that's the same Jesus is present in power at the church in Corinth. Well, what does verse 5 mean, this stuff about Satan?

Well, it seems that Paul is referring to excommunication of the man from the church. All that means is the man's complete cutting off from the complete church fellowship. Now, within the church, we know that we have God's forgiveness and are enjoying God's gift of eternal life.

In this life, and we know that when we die, we'll go to be with God forever. And that's a complete certain hope and utter confidence that Christian people have. That's because we rely and trust in Jesus alone for our forgiveness.

Outside the church is the realm of Satan. Satan is known in the Bible as the prince of this world. Now, I don't mean as soon as you walk onto the footpath outside the front gates, you're in Satan's territory.

I'm not talking about a geographical sort of area, like within the boundaries of this church site here, you're safe. But as soon as you step across Church Road, woe betide you because anything could happen.

[11 : 35] It's not like that at all. But inside God's church, we are safe. We are protected from every snare that Satan would have us get caught up in.

Even if we do become ill or have an accident or die, even if we lose our very life, we are still not separated from God. We go to be with him. And we may die, you know, tragically or for our faith or something like that.

But still Satan can't ensnare us because we'll be with God and enjoying his love forever. Well, what does the expression the destruction of the flesh mean?

Well, it could mean that such a sinful man is removed from the church and he might come to his senses and realize what he's done and repent and receive God's forgiveness.

So it could just mean he wakes up and says, Goodness, have I been doing that? I need to repent. The expression could also mean that there are physical consequences for this man's sin.

[12 : 38] It could be illness. It could be death. Sometimes people want to pursue a course of sin. And God abandons them to it and says, Okay, if you want to do that, you just go for it.

And the consequences of their sin are the punishment that they receive. In the book of Acts, in chapter 5, a couple called Ananias and Sapphira died when they were confronted with their sin.

We need to remember, though, that Jesus is more powerful than Satan. It's not like Jesus and Satan are in a boxing ring and they're having a fight and hopefully Jesus will win.

We know that Jesus is more powerful than Satan. He showed this because at the first Easter, we remember that he defeated death. He rose from the grave and rose to new life for us.

He conquered sin and death and all evil. Those who trust in Jesus share in that victory. You are victorious with Jesus because he has defeated sin and death and evil.

[13 : 42] Death won't conquer you. You will conquer death and be with God forever if you trust in Jesus. It seems so that Jesus allows Satan to have some power. He only has it because Jesus permits him to.

The day of the Lord, which is referred to in the end of verse 5, is the day when Jesus will return. And we don't know when that will be. Jesus himself didn't know when that would be. But that day, whatever that means, however that happens, what that will be like, whenever it happens, and we believe it will happen, that will see the end of Satan completely, totally and utterly.

The destruction of this guy's flesh, so to speak, could mean that he dies. It's incredibly severe discipline, isn't it, for this sinful guy. But it may lead him to repent and be forgiven.

Hence the comment, his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. So this guy is saved. He's forgiven.

He'll be in heaven. Because this incredibly severe discipline that God has meted out to him, and it could be his own physical death. In that whole process, he may come to his senses and repent.

[14 : 54] He knows he will be with God. Friends, God's discipline for us isn't because God's a meaning. He wants us to come to our senses and realize our need for his forgiveness. He doesn't, he's not satisfied to just leave us in our sin.

He sent Jesus after us. He disciplines us and helps us to see the error of our sinful ways so that we can come back to him. Sometimes, as in this example, his discipline is incredibly severe.

But at least this person is saved and is in heaven. We need to remember that God is 100% holy and good.

No sin at all. It's great that God doesn't tolerate sin. I wouldn't want to follow him, even if he tolerated a tiny bit. He couldn't be God, really, if he tolerated and compromised himself and tolerated just a smidgen of sin.

It's great that God is completely pure and holy. This guy was mucking around with God. It reminded me of a verse in the book of Hebrews in the New Testament where it's written, It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

[16 : 08] It's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God. That's in Hebrews chapter 10. We can't fool around with God. He's not stupid. He knows what we do in private and in public.

He knows every thought that goes through our brain cells. He knows everything. He's not stupid. And we know we can turn to him for forgiveness at any time. And he'll lavish us with his forgiveness and love.

Let's go on in verse 6. Your boasting is not a good thing. Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough?

Well, my wife's brother used to be a baker and ran Brumby's Bakery in Balaclava. That's hard to say. A Brumby's Bakery in Balaclava.

But he did. And I was talking with him last night and he was saying that if you're baking a loaf of bread, and those of you that are good cooks, unlike me, will possibly have done this, you need just a small amount of yeast, which I think of technically as a fungus, and the tiniest bit of yeast will make the dough rise.

[17 : 14] And the tiniest amount will have that effect on the dough. Well, another analogy for sin, and yeast is used as sort of a metaphor for sin in the Bible, is perhaps a rotten apple in a bag full of good apples.

As that rotten apple decays, it'll affect the other apples. And before too long, the whole bag of apples is rotted. Sin is like that. You can sort of compromise one little bit of sin, and it just creeps its way into your life, and it starts to sort of grow, and it's bigger.

And the growth is sometimes not able to be perceived, and it just grows and grows. And before too long, you're not even aware that it's there, but it's growing. And you can be doing things that you know don't please God.

So we need to be on the lookout for the yeast, if you like, in our lives, the sin. Are there areas in our lives, and I can ask myself the same question, where we sort of accept a little bit of sin?

You know what it is in your life. I know what it is in my life. Are there things that we compromise and think, oh, look, that's okay. Even the tiniest amount can have a bad effect and grow.

[18 : 26] Leaven is another expression for yeast. It says here in verse 7, Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened.

For our Paschal Lamb Christ has been sacrificed. Paul is saying, clean out the yeast. Get rid of all that sin. Don't compromise your lives with sin.

If a loaf of bread is leavened, it's got yeast in it. If it's unleavened, it doesn't have yeast. It reminds us this verse of the celebrations of the Passover that the Jewish people used to have.

And before the Day of Atonement, which was the special day once a year, where an animal was sacrificed, and that animal was part of the ceremony of God taking away the people's sins, all the people had to go through their houses and remove all the yeast.

And that had to be taken right out of the house. And when they baked their bread, it had to be unleavened, baked without any yeast in it. God's like that too.

[19 : 36] He doesn't tolerate any sin. It's an interesting comment when Paul says at the very bottom of the column there, as you really are unleavened.

But hang on, that doesn't sound right to me. I know I'm sinful. As I said before, I do lots of wrong things. I've got lots of yeast in me, if you want to use the expression.

How can Paul say, you really are unleavened? You really don't have any sin in you. Well, this is one of the amazing things about Jesus. If you trust in Jesus and trust the fact that he died on the cross for you and offers you forgiveness and eternal life, and you've grabbed that, and you know whether you have or you haven't, when God looks at you, if you have accepted that for yourself, God seems a completely sinless person.

Completely sinless, without a speck or a spot on you. You are totally pure and holy in his sight. That's because Jesus died for us, and we know that he has forgiven us.

And to God, we are acceptable and pure and holy. But we live in this time in our human lives where we know that we do sin. We do do wrong things. So we're in this state where we're sort of forgiven, and we're sinless, but we still sin.

[20 : 56] It's hard for us to get our minds around that. But Paul is saying, you really are unleavened. He's actually saying, become what you really are already. I was trying to think of another analogy, and I suppose I was thinking of footy, and I was thinking of a coach revving up the team for the grand final saying, guys, you are a premiership side.

As if to say, look, you've won the premiership. You're that good. Your goal kicking is really accurate. You're a great team. You play really well. You're a premiership side. So now go out and win the premiership.

Go and actually be what you know you already are. Now there's faults with that analogy, but that's one that came to my mind. So we need to become what we already are.

We are forgiven. We are holy. We are pure. So let's live lives that have those characteristics too. And we know that's because of Jesus' sacrifice for us.

Paul says, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, with all that sinful stuff, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. Paul goes on in verse 9 to refer to a letter which we now don't have in our possession.

[22 : 10] It doesn't exist anymore. He says, I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons. Paul wrote a few letters to the church at Corinth and ones preserved in the second book of Corinthians, but this letter here refers to here, we don't have anymore, and we don't know the full contents of it.

It seems that when they received this letter, they misunderstood it and misinterpreted it, and Paul has to correct some of their misunderstandings. I'll read verse 9 again.

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons, not at all meaning the immoral of this world or the greedy or robbers or idolaters, since you would then need to go out of the world. These Corinthians had thought, oh, okay, Paul's saying to us we shouldn't associate with the immoral of this world or the greedy or robbers, basically saying let's shut ourselves off from the sinful world and let's just become a holy huddle.

That's how they'd interpreted that. But if Christians just form a holy huddle, how on earth can they go out and tell people the good news of what Jesus has done for them and the forgiveness he offers us? They can't.

Sometimes you hear of people who have been in monasteries all their life. I heard of a lady who was in her 80s and I don't doubt her devotion to God at all, but she'd been cooped up in these four walls of this monastery for 60 years and never set foot out of it for those 60 years.

[23 : 34] I'm not sure how you can actually be in effect for change in the world as you are cooped up behind four walls in a monastery. That's not to say that people who, as I say, I'm not doubting their devotion to God, but I just think there's a problem with that.

Paul is saying don't associate with sexually immoral people who call themselves Christians. Let's go on. Verse 11. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister.

That's a Christian brother or sister. I'm sorry, whether you like it or not, you are my Christian brothers and sisters. Okay? I don't know if you're happy about that or sad, but anyone who calls themselves a Christian, I mean, I've said this before, I'm an only child.

I don't have any physical brothers or sisters. And I thank God for you guys, my Christian brothers and sisters. Paul is saying don't associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral or greedy or an idolater or a reviler, drunkard or a robber.

Do not even eat with such a one. Paul is saying people who call themselves Christians and behave in these ways who are greedy or robbers who steal or idolaters, they worship things other than God or they're sexually immoral or they're reviler, they backstab people or they're constantly drunk.

[25 : 02] That's not to say we shouldn't have compassion for people that have a problem with alcohol. We need to cut ourselves off from those people if they call themselves Christians because they're accepting sin as part of their life and yet thinking that they're still acceptable in God's sight.

Like the bag of apples, the one rotten apple will affect the whole bag. Paul says in verse 12, for what have I to do with judging those outside that is outside the church, non-Christian people?

He knows that that's God's job. He goes on, is it not those who are inside that you are to judge? God will judge those outside. So Paul is saying in the matter of church discipline, we need to be very, very strict and very, very careful.

Not because we like throwing our weight around and being vindictive, but because we know if we accept a little bit of sin into the life of our church, our own personal lives, it'll be like that yeast.

It'll grow and get bigger and get bigger and get bigger and have profound effects, a ripple effect like the waves after you've thrown a stone into a pond. We need to be distinctively different to God, for God, sorry.

[26 : 20] Sometimes you hear of churches that don't take swift action when there are problems in their fellowships. What does that say to the outside world when they see people in a church who they know are doing things that are quite clearly wrong?

The message to them is, well, the church is just like us. What's the point of being part of the church? It's the same as everyone else. Jesus calls us to be salt and light in the world. The world is a very dark place and it needs Jesus' light to be shone in many places.

And we need to be distinctively different as we shine that light for God. In my early Christian life, I used to meet Christians who swore a lot and used to be arrogant like this guy that they slept around.

And I was really confused. I thought, well, hang on. I thought if you were a Christian you weren't meant to do that. And as I grew in my faith, I came to see that perhaps in the church that these people belonged to, swift action hadn't been taken.

They were compromising their faith and the churches were compromising their sincere devotion to God. Paul's last sentence is harsh but it's said for the sake of God's church.

[27 : 32] Drive out the wicked person from among you. And that's after those other steps have been taken, of course. So, all this is done in the context of love but we need to realise that sin is a serious issue with God and we don't want to compromise ourselves with this issue.

Let's pray and ask God to help us as a church follow his teachings. Lord God, we thank you for the fact that you've preserved this letter of your servant Paul in the New Testament for us.

God, some of these things are really, really hard and maybe they're hard for us to get used to the severity of them. Lord, but we would ask that you would help us to have a holy hatred of sin as individual Christians and as a church.

Help us to remember, Lord, that you want the absolute and complete best for us. You want us to enjoy life in all its fullness. Lord, help us to have the strength not to compromise ourselves or our church with sinfulness.

Lord, help us to have pure hearts always willing and eager to serve you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

[28 : 56] The song we're going to sing now is called Jesus Christ and remembers as life as towel as as as why God saves Mason and together all.

water and she don't have the also just