

1 Corinthians 5:8

A Ministry in the Word

Scripture Reading

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. I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators, yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then ye must needs go out of the world. 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 know not to eat. 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.

Two Kinds of Leaven

Are two different kinds of leaven being described here — old leaven, and leaven of malice and wickedness? Probably the second is an intensification of the first, with emphasis added on account of what was so vividly present in the Corinthian assembly itself. The old leaven is the general pattern of the old life — as we read in Ephesians 4: *having put off the old man, which corrupts itself according to the deceitful lusts*. That is simply the general manner of the former life. The leaven of malice and wickedness brings out the active and specific character of what had manifested itself at Corinth.

Sincerity and Truth

The word rendered *sincerity* was used by the Greeks for something unmixed in character — genuinely pure, unadulterated. Unleavened bread of sincerity: that which has nothing foreign introduced into it. And of truth — truthfulness in the inner parts, as Scripture says. That which is sincere and that which is true is, by its very nature, pure. Leaven, then, is the introduction of something impure into what is pure.

As established last time, this feast refers to the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which began the day after the Passover. In preparation for the Passover itself, the Israelites were to hunt through their houses and remove all leaven. And the feast of eating unleavened bread ran from the fifteenth to the twenty-first of the month — a seven-day period, speaking of the believer's entire life here. There was no gap between the fourteenth, the Passover, and the fifteenth, the beginning of the feast. So it flows directly from the Passover: Christ our Passover is sacrificed, and immediately begins the seven-day feast of our walk. We are told here to keep that feast with unleavened bread of sincerity and truth — that is what our entire walk should be characterised by.

The Epistle — Not a Lost Letter

Verse 9 — *I wrote unto you in an epistle* — has occasioned a good deal of speculation, some suggesting it must refer to a previous letter to the Corinthians that has not been preserved. But a number of sound expositors believe this is a reference to this very epistle — *I have written to you in the epistle*, that is, in this present communication. Not to associate with fornicators: not to accompany them, not to mix freely with them. Any easy and happy social mixing with a fellow Christian who has fallen into fornication must come to an end.

No Exception for Relatives

A theory was put out some years ago that one may associate freely with relatives even when they fall under the sentence of this passage, drawing on certain Old Testament scriptures. But that part of the Old Testament instruction which deals with defilement by the dead is cited selectively — the requirements for cleansing oneself afterward, and what is to be done until evening, are quietly set aside. In any case, those scriptures concern defilement related to death, not leprosy. It is leprosy that answers to leaven in the Old Testament — the working of sin through a person. And one can easily understand that when there is a communicable disease, one does not want to be around it. The same principle applies here, with equal clarity.

The instruction says, plainly: *not to accompany with fornicators*. There is no exception for relatives. To insert one is to read into the text what is not there — to make an easier path for oneself. There are no exceptions about being a little bit leavened for the sake of a family member. The passage is speaking of the character in which one has been placed — unleavened — and in which one should therefore walk.

There is an account of a faithful brother who attended a conference where a fornicator was present and sitting down at the meal unhindered. This brother and his wife left and went to a restaurant. That was a shocking thing to witness — and rightly so. The scripture is plain. When those who profess to be gathered to the holy and the true act in direct defiance of this word, there should be brethren who quietly approach such a person, read him the scripture, and ask him to leave. There is no need to be rude about it. But the word of God must be honored.

Within and Without

Verse 9 speaks of a discipline that applies to those who are within. And verse 12 confirms: *Do ye not judge them that are within? But them that are without, God judgeth*. The last half of verse 12 and verse 13 answer respectively to verses 9

and 10.

Verse 10 makes clear: *yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world*. Those are outside. God judges them. We have nothing to do with judging them in that sense. We do not break bread with the world, nor make ourselves one with it — but the responsibility set out here concerns those within, those who make a profession of being a brother. A different responsibility attaches to a person who does not claim to be a Christian than to one who does. And we treat a person on the basis of their claim, even if we have private doubts about the reality of it. The testimony requires it.

The Sins Listed Are Not Exhaustive

The list in verse 11 — fornicator, covetous, idolater, railer, drunkard, extortioner — is not an exhaustive list of the things for which a person is to be put out of the assembly. If it were a closed list, only those precise items would qualify, and everything else would have to be tolerated. Rather, these are representative kinds of things — things of that character. The nature of the Christian walk is not a legal one. It requires the exercise of discernment and spiritual judgment.

The phrase itself is instructive: *if any man that is called a brother*. Not *if a brother does this* — but if any man *called* a brother does so. It is left hanging there. It does raise the question of whether such a one truly is a brother. In the event, as we know from 2 Corinthians, the man was a child of God — brought to genuine repentance. But the form of the expression is purposeful.

Not Even to Eat

With such an one know not to eat. The word *know* is emphatic — understand this fully, settle it in your mind. Mr. Kelly found it necessary to clarify that this does not mean only the Lord's table — it means your table too. He sensed that there

were those who wished to restrict the application to the assembly meeting, leaving themselves socially free otherwise. But the text says, *not to mix with such a person* — and not mixing plainly covers the ordinary social meal.

There is a plain social significance to sharing a meal with someone: a fellowship, an acceptance. The Lord's Supper is a very serious thing — but even the common meal carries that sense when it is with fellow Christians. These things are simply not to be done. Statements like 'except for relatives,' or 'it only means the Lord's table,' or 'we can still socialise freely' — all of these are foreign to the text. They are what people want to read into it because they want a slightly easier path. They want to show the milk of human kindness. But what that really is, in practice, is unholiness of walk — and self is at the centre of it rather than the honouring of what God has said.

The Sharp Line Between Within and Without

There was a very sharp line of demarcation at the beginning between the in and the out. And that line is not merely the boundary of the local assembly. If the within were defined as the local assembly only, then all other local assemblies would be on the outside — which is manifestly wrong. Each local assembly is an expression of the whole body of God on earth, and acts for the assembly of God on earth. If a person is put out, he is outside wherever the Lord Jesus is in the midst of His gathered saints. They are all on the same ground, all expressing the same truth concerning fellowship.

At the same time, we must recognise what the Scripture addresses as the ruin of the church. Since prophecy is occasioned by failure, the book of Revelation stands as the witness to the fall of the church. The sharp line of demarcation between the within and the without does not exist today as it did at the beginning — that is the result of Christians running down the street to start another independent congregation, multiplying the confusion we see in Christendom. But

we act on the principle nonetheless: all those gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus, wherever in the world, act on the same principle. If a person is put out, he is out wherever the Lord Jesus is in the midst of His gathered saints, because it is the same Lord everywhere.

Reception and the Conscience of Others

A practical application arises when someone presents himself for fellowship, saying he loves the Lord and wishes to remember Him at the table. One of the questions to ask is where he comes from, and under what circumstances he left. It is possible that the consciences of that company of Christians were exercised with regard to this person's behaviour, and they may have acted on the principles laid out here. We are to act according to these principles, and to be careful with regard to the consciences of our brethren in Christ, whether or not we recognise the assembly from which that person comes as a true assembly gathered to the Lord's name.

The action there may not have been a true assembly act in the full sense. But where there was a genuine attempt to honour the Lord Jesus, we acknowledge it and honour that attempt, without simply assuming the full weight of an assembly act. The point is that we are not indifferent to it.

Removing the Wicked Person — Normative and Permanent

We know from 2 Corinthians 7 that two things proved true: ultimately this one was restored to fellowship, and — more importantly — the assembly proved itself pure in the matter. By taking the proper action, which to some may have seemed unloving, they in fact did the right thing, and the Lord honoured it. One who is put away, and brought in discipline to a true repentance, will be the first to say that the assembly was more loving in following the Lord's commands. As one brother was fond of repeating: *Some brethren think to be more gracious than*

God Himself. That is a solemn and presumptuous thing.

The particular case in 1 Corinthians 5 involved the apostle coupling himself with the act, because it required apostolic power for the delivery of such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. That is not assembly power. But what stands at the end of verse 13 is normative — it requires no apostolic authority and stands until the Lord comes: *Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.*

— *Study ends* —