

# Drive Out Immoral Persons

1 Corinthians 5:9-6:11

This is such strong strong teaching here from Paul,  
Dragging me well outside of my comfort zone.  
So we are going to go well outside the comfort zone this morning.

Paul himself is doing this with the Corinthians.

He is really upset that they are characterised by a complacency  
Back in Chapter 4 he has said "you are like kings, you are so wise"

And just a moment ago he has said "your boasting is not a good thing"

There has been the case of the man who is living with his father's wife,  
And everyone is carrying on.

Paul has sent a letter saying that people are not to associate with immoral persons,  
And this seems to have been sent as a general injunction  
Or something that has lost its force, because it has been read as people who are outside,  
And they are the ones to be avoided,  
And Paul now draws the Church into something very painful.

I am not talking about the outsiders  
I am talking about you yourselves  
And you are not to be associating with the ones amongst you  
Where there is immorality.

I am not letting you point the finger outside  
You are going to have to look at yourselves  
And the complacency you are currently feeling is totally misplaced.  
This is getting uncomfortable.

What has happened, and threatens to take root in Corinth is a form of faith which does not  
change people.  
Where people take the name "brother or sister" but then they are not changed  
They do not enter in this dynamic of Christ.

It is so tough.

First of all Paul makes it quite clear,  
I am not going to let you deflect from this by pointing outside  
We are going to have to look at ourselves.

And he is clear that we cannot disassociate from the outside world  
That is a interesting point, about not withdrawing,  
And now we land our key point here  
You are not to mix indiscriminately

With anyone who bears the name brother or sister  
But is immoral - sexually immoral  
Or who is grasping in their stance, someone who is always trying to accumulate money  
Getting up the ladder by pushing others down  
Or who is involved in idolatry - that could be going to temple, or does it go deeper to general  
covetousness  
Or who is a person who is verbally abusive  
Or someone who is a drunkard  
Or someone who gains by extortionate dealing.

I am not going to judge outsiders he says  
But we have to judge those who are inside  
And if someone falls into the things above  
You are not even to share your table with someone  
You are to banish the evil person.

Now what do we do here...

Firstly, this is the opposite of what we often do as Churches  
Often we drop our associations with everyone outside as we get to know people  
But we don't discipline ourselves, we don't want to rock the boat.

This is the opposite  
This is a Church which has many connections with the outside  
Which is part of the world  
And when people join  
People notice a difference in the way that people are  
There is something different about these Christians  
And when there are people in their midst who flout and abuse that  
They do not turn a blind eye, but they confront,  
And at some point they even go so far as to exclude  
And they won't eat at table with those whose conduct is persistently questionable  
They will not just give them seal of approval which eating at table was.

So turned outside  
Strong calling inside  
Not turning blind eyes  
Or giving approval which table fellowship was.

This is the opposite to the self satisfied boasting and complacency and being pleased with  
themselves which the Corinthians did  
And it would have been the easiest thing for Paul to ignore this  
But he will not even though he know that his relationship with the Corinthians is a bit shaky  
That they might turn round to him and say we've got Apollos now, we've moved on  
He will confront this  
And I wonder what this says to us  
To closed to outsiders  
To complacent with ourselves

Secondly note that Paul expands the categories of sin...

This was originally about sexual sin, and a very clear cut case.. the man who lives with his Father's Wife

And the great thing about that is that everyone can point at it, see it,  
But no he broadens

He says anyone who is sexually immoral - well what does that mean, because a lot of that is hidden, and there are areas of grey, but he insists that we are asking the question here.

The second category is grasping in their stance, sometimes the translation is greedy  
Now this is wide, this is about attitude  
This seems to be about the 10th commandment  
This is bigger

Or idolatrous  
It could mean that this means people who go to temple  
Or people who have an idol in their life

Or is a person of verbal abuse  
We can know people who are loose tongued  
But all of us have gossiped at some point, or have gone beyond the pale

Or a drunkard  
Perhaps this means someone who is loudly drunk all the time and doesn't care  
Or does it mean anyone who struggles with alcohol  
This might be our key in here

Or a someone who gains by extortionate dealing  
Someone who plays the game

So this is about wide categories of conduct  
Paul will not get trapped into making this only about sex  
Nor will he avoid the fact that this includes our sexuality.

But then is this not just everybody...

And this brings us to our third point, this is about people who are stuck,  
There is even a hint of this in "one who bears the name of brother"  
Suggesting that they are adopting the posture, but inwards they have not made the move to being a brother or sister,  
They are not making the move.

Lets deal with the drunkard category and use that as our way into understanding here  
At alcoholics anonymous the first step is to admit that you are an alcoholic  
But you do not leave things at that point  
You then "We came to believe that a power greater than us could restore us to sanity"

“Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over the care of God as we understood him”  
“Made a fearless moral inventory of our lives”

What Paul seems to be pointing at here  
Are the people who have not even got to step one  
Who carry on regardless.

There is a strong sense of this movement in chapter 6:9-11

*9 Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, 10 thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.*

There is a sense that this is what I used to be...  
But I am on this journey now,  
There is a new identity that characterises me  
And this is the new journey that I am on to being holy.

There is a big difference between this and the Corinthian boasting  
Which nothing matters, we are already resurrected  
Haven't we done well.

And this is a dynamic that is all through the New Testament,  
And why we see Jesus so often with those who are regarded as beyond the pale...

We see this in Jesus' life  
His embrace was wide, so wide...

*(Luke 5:27-32)*

*27 After this he went out and saw a tax-collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, 'Follow me.' 28 And he got up, left everything, and followed him. 29 Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house; and there was a large crowd of tax-collectors and others sitting at the table[a] with them. 30 The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, 'Why do you eat and drink with tax-collectors and sinners?' 31 Jesus answered, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; 32 I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.'*

And do you see this dynamic here  
This repentance - which really means an entirely new way of thinking  
Is made not in the place of lecturing, or exclusion  
But encounter with Jesus  
Who brings people into a new place, almost by his very word - "Follow me"  
By his presence,  
By his embrace.

Or another time that Jesus was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of sinners  
He says this curious phrase  
"Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds" - Matthew 11:19  
There is a sense here that wisdom itself is understanding what takes place in these encounters  
And summons us to a new possibility of living a different kind of life  
There seems to be a wisdom in this  
Because it is born of embrace and welcome.

I would go so far to say it is not possible to have a true, engaging, immersive experience of the  
love of God and not want to change  
That is why I think these people take the name brother or sister  
But they have not been immersed in the great truth of the mercy, the kindness of God.

After what looks to be a similar incident in Matthew's gospel of the call of the tax collectors, Jesus  
turns to his opponents whose approach to religion has not brought about change  
And says "I desire mercy not sacrifice"  
There is something in encountering the mercy, the loving kindness of God, the forgiveness of God  
that enables us to change, in fact any form of encounter in which forgiveness has to be earned or  
is dangled upon us, will not bring us to change by increase our pride and our self loathing.

This is to be the dynamic of the Corinthian Church  
And it is to encounter the power of Christ in our sexuality  
In our attitude  
In our money  
In our speech  
In our idolatry

And if we get to the point where we say  
That is just me  
I am not going to change  
Paul is saying you have to experience the mercy, the kindness of God  
If you refuse, then the Church is to challenge you on this.

Remember that it looks likely that the immoral brother of earlier in this chapter  
He was changed by the time that 2 Corinthians came along  
This is all about our deep deep transformation  
And we have so badly failed in this

This was what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called Cheap Grace  
Grace though discipleship which did not truly encounter grace

In fact I think it is when you fully understand the depth of God's kindness  
That we are prepared to challenge  
And when you don't you do actually become a Church of respectable people  
Who are not being changed

You then become what Bonhoeffer says

Those who are shocked to discover any sin  
Because we do not believe our sin can be changed and so we hide it  
And we become this complacent holy huddle.

I find this so so deeply challenging to us  
How we let things go  
Because actually we don't fully understand the grace.

So the question is  
And this is a big question for us this morning  
Where is the challenge of the grace  
Where are we being summoned to not be complacent or boastful  
To truly become a Church where all are welcome.

Let us draw near to the table of our Lord Jesus Christ  
Where we will receive the mercy and grace that sets us free

We used to be characterised by these things  
But now we have been washed  
We were sanctified  
By the death of Jesus we were justified  
In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ  
And in the Spirit of God

Thanks be to God

AMEN