

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