
Accountable Living

1. Intro

- If ever you're driving in country, you'll often be driving on narrow roads that have ditches either side
 - Really need to concentrate because it's very easy to veer off the road and end up in a ditch

- Christian life can be like that
 - Jesus said living the Christian life is like walking the narrow road
 - And there are ditches on either side of the road we can easily fall into
 - The ditch on one side is legalism ... and the ditch on the other side license

- What do I mean by that?
 - Legalism is where we get caught up in thinking that its by my performance, my goodness, my obedience to the 10 commandments etc ... that I'm acceptable to God
 - License on the other hand says ... I'm so forgiven by Jesus and I know all my sins of the today and tomorrow have been paid for ... therefore I'm free to do whatever I want and my living a godly life is not necessary for salvation

- And both legalism and license will take you off the narrow road and cause you to crash your Christian life because both incompatible with the gospel

- And it's not just as individuals we risk running off into those ditches
 - The same can happen within a church
 - Churches can have a culture of legalism or license
 - Church can be a place that is very judgmental > that's always talking about sin and the need for holy living > and how you need to try harder to be a better follower of Jesus and honour him
 - Church can also be a place where God's grace is so emphasised ... that sin and repentance and godliness and holiness are lost ... so that sin is tolerated or swept under the carpet

- Either way ... neither is good ... in fact both are terrible

- How do you avoid being a church like that?
- How can we walk the narrow road between legalism and license where we
 - want to remember the grace and kindness and mercy of God to us in Jesus

- but at the same time ... recognise that following Jesus means living lives of godliness and holiness that are distinct from the secular culture around us
- In our passage today we see Paul give instructions to the church in Corinth about how to do that
- Context
 - If you've just joined us this week ... Paul writing to the church in Corinth
 - It's a church he planted three years prior
 - He's now in Ephesus and he's getting reports that things are going pear-shaped back in Corinth
 - Lot of issues
 - divisions within the church
 - lawsuits among believers,
 - idolatry,
 - greed,
 - abuse of Christian freedom,
 - disorder in church gatherings,
 - Paul writing to these Christians help them get their Christian lives and their church back on track
- One of those issues was the problem of sexual immorality in the church
- And as we look at how Paul instructed the Corinthians to deal with this issue ... we're going to see how we might walk that narrow path without falling into the ditch of legalism or license
- Warning ... today's sermon comes with a M15+ rating
 - Mature themes!
 - But the great thing about God is he's willing to get real and dirty with us in the in messiness of life
 - He did in Jesus coming to world
 - He does it in his word too

PRAY

2. The need for accountable living

- In v1 we see Paul is responding to the news he has heard from Corinth about this issue of sexual immorality within the congregation
- For Paul ... there are two issues at hand that he's rebuking them for

- First is the particular issue of sexual immorality which is that 'a man has his father's wife'
 - In other words, ... a man is having a sexual relationship with his stepmother
 - Not clear whether the man's father is alive or dead ... either way it doesn't matter ... it's still regarded as incestuous
- And what is shocking ... Paul says that this type of behaviour doesn't even occur among the pagans
 - Now that's shocking because Corinth was known for its highly sexualised culture
 - It was common for other expressions of sexual immorality to be tolerated or accepted in Greek culture
 - Sex before marriage
 - Sex with temple prostitutes
 - Sex with mistresses
 - Even homosexual sex
 - But not incest ... that was considered detestable even by these pagan Corinthians
- Which just goes to show how serious and alarming the situation is among the Corinthian church

Illustration

- Be like someone looking at an issue of morality in our church and saying ...
 - "man, you don't even hear of that happening at Kings Cross!"
- And to make matters worse ... the man seems totally unrepentant
 - The word 'has' indicates this is an ongoing relationship with his stepmother
 - Other translations say "a man is living with his father's wife"
- And so, it seems he's happily and publicly carrying on the relationship ... unrepentant and unphased by what he's doing
- But it's not just that the man's ongoing sexual immorality that is the issue
- There's another issue ... and for Paul this is the bigger issue
- And it's that the congregation's response to what is going on
 - They're tolerating it!
 - They've done nothing about it
 - They didn't rebuke the man
 - They're not filled with any sense of grief or sadness
 - There's no sense of this being an issue of godliness or sinfulness before God

- They just stand back and turn a blind eye to it
- Like the three wise monkeys
 - See no evil
 - Hear no evil
 - Speak no evil
- And all the while they remain proud and arrogant as a church while this behaviour is going on amongst them
 - There is no sense of shame or concern
 - They just carry on in their puffed up and boastful manner despite the sin in their midst
- So that's the second issue ... there's a spiritual arrogance and complacency among the Corinthians that meant they failed to do anything about this very public, ongoing and unrepentant sin in their church
- And Paul is rebuking the church as much as / if not more than the man about this

Application

- Now we shouldn't be surprised that sexual immorality in its various forms still happens within the church
- Christians not immune from the influence of the world
- World says
 - Sex will satisfy you
 - Unless you're having sex you're not fulfilling your purpose a human being
 - You can have sex with whoever you want, whenever you want, in whatever form you want
- Because our culture is so individualistic, sex is all about me ... fulfilling my desires, passion, needs and wants ... and little to do with what is good for the other person or the community
- And that mindset or worldview invades the thinking of Christians and churches
 - And so it's pretty common to hear of
 - Christian couples being in sexual relationships before they're married
 - Christians having affairs > Christian ministers too
 - Viewing pornography
- Question is ... how as a church should we respond to that?
 - What should we do that avoids the ditches of legalism and license?

3. The call to accountable living

- Paul doesn't just rebuke them over their behaviour ... he calls on them to respond
- What does he say they should have done?
- To start with ... they should have mourned and been grieved by the man's sin and the dishonour it brings to God and his church

- But the key thing they should have done as Paul says in v2 was to put the man out of their fellowship
- Now he's really adamant about this and he wants them to take it seriously and do it urgently ... because he says it over and over again
 - "Get rid of the old yeast" – v7
 - "Expel the wicked man from among you" – v13
 - In v5 he says "hand this man over to Satan"
 - Which just means to exclude him from the Christian community into the secular community ... which is the realm and influence of Satan

- And Paul's point is that ... this man is acting in a way that's inconsistent with living as one of God's people ... and so he's to be denied the privileges of being part of the community of God's people

- Now Paul takes this principle of separation and applies it to **all** circumstances of serious and unrepentant sin in v9-11
- But before he gets to his main point, he clarifies something he'd written to them in a previous letter on the topic of sexual immorality
- And in that other letter, Paul had told them not to associate with the sexually immoral
- And he uses this current issue to clarify that he's not talking and separating themselves from immoral **un**believers ... because if they did that ... they would have to become like monks and leave the world
- He's not talking about them excluding immoral outsiders from the church
- He's saying they're to not to associate themselves with those who are part of the faith community who fail to live according to their faith ... those who continue to live in unrepentant sinfulness
- And we see this in v11
 - ... *you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.*
- Paul's not calling the church to separate themselves from the wickedness of the world ... but to keep the wickedness of the world from infiltrating the church

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- And so, in the same way the Corinthians were to remove the incestuous man from their church for his unrepentant sin ... the Corinthians were to apply this principle for **all** instances of unrepentant sin
 - And here's where it gets shocking ... because Paul says to do this ... not just for sexual immorality ... but also for slander, greed, idolatry, and drunkenness!
 - And his point is ... there must be accountability within the Christian community for unrepentant sin
 - It's not to go unchallenged > be ignored > or swept under the carpet
 - There's no room for license within the people of God
 - **Illustration – Rugby League / Business**
 - Now we shouldn't be surprised by this ... because it's perfectly normal and accepted part of life in any organisation
 - When St George Rugby League player Jack de Bellin was charged with sexual assault ... what happened? He was stood down by the NRL
 - When I failed to turn up for work one day as a paper boy ... what happened? I was sacked!
 - It's right to exclude those who fail to live according to the ethos of an organisation
 - Now notice Paul is addressing the **whole** church here ... not just the leaders
 - This is a community responsibility to hold one another accountable for the way they live their lives
 - God's people are not to allow unrepentant sinners to continue to be in fellowship with them

Application

- Notice we are talking about 'unrepentant sin'
- We're not talking about the Christian who sins, repents, seeks to follow and honour Jesus and sins again
- That's the normal Christian life
- Every one of us fails to love God and love our neighbour every single day
- Not talking about looking around and going ... expelled, expelled, expelled
 - If we expelled every person from the church who was a sinner there'd be no church!
 - You'd turn up next week and the place would be empty!

- But there will be times ... when sin within the church needs to be confronted and removed from its midst
- For example,
 - a couple continuing to sleep with each other before they're married
 - a woman continuing to slander another in the church
 - the greedy person who refuses to give money to gospel ministry
 - a man who abuses his wife

- And if such a person refuses the pleading, concern and accountability of their church family over a matter of public and unrepentant sin ... then the church needs to take steps to remove them from the fellowship

- **Illustration – Falling Out**
- Minister who refused to allow to men from church to take Lord's Supper because they had fallen out with each other and they had refused to repent and be reconciled
- He treated them – as far as the Lord's Supper was concerned ... like a non-believer

- Now of course ... we need to be extremely wise and gracious about this
- We're talking about the person who calls themselves a Christian and yet refuses to live according to the gospel that saved them
- Not talking about the person
 - who's investigating Christianity
 - not sure where they stand as a Christian, or
 - still trying to work out what it means to be a Christian following Jesus

- **Illustration – Rosaria Butterfield**
- Rosaria Butterfield is an English professor in USA
- She was a skeptic of all things Christianity and in a committed lesbian relationship
- Her academic specialty was Queer Theory, a postmodern form of gay and lesbian studies
- She was engaged in a research program trying to refute the Religious Right from a lesbian feminist perspective and after reading the Bible as part of her research ... she found herself one Sunday getting out of the bed of her lesbian lover, and an hour later sitting in a pew at the local Presbyterian church
- And for more than two years, the minister and people of that church welcomed her, befriended her, loved her and pointed her to Jesus while she wrestled with
 - her faith

- what it meant to follow Jesus
- implications for her lesbian relationship
- Eventually she did become a Christian ... and her life changed accordingly

- And at C@P we will want to welcome anyone and everyone who wants to come and find about Jesus
 - Gay, lesbian, prostitute, adulterer, divorcee, former criminal,
 - And say ... "here is the wonderful news of the gospel that brings healing and restoration and peace and hope and salvation to all who believe"
 - And we'll want to walk with them and alongside them as they investigate, and consider the claims of Jesus and the implications for their life

- However, when a person says they are a Christian ... and they fall into unrepentant sin ... then its right that the church holds them accountable ... and if they refuse to listen and remain unrepentant ... then the right thing to do is to exclude them from the church

4. The reasons for accountable living

- Now Paul is not being a self-righteous moralist here
- He has good reasons for urging the Corinthians to accountable living
- He gives three reasons why they should take unrepentant sin in the church so seriously

For the sake of the individual (v5)

- The first reason is for the sake of the individual
- In v5 Paul says
 - *hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed, and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord*
- By dealing the man and his sin so ruthlessly, the man might see the seriousness of his sin, he would be shocked, and humbled ... and as a result repent of his sin and thereby be reconciled back to God and saved on the day of the Lord

- And so, a person's exclusion is ideally ... only a temporary thing ... until they see the folly of their sin come back to the Lord seeking to live in line with the message of the cross
- Excluding them is for their own good ... that they might return to God and receive eternal life

For the sake of the church (v6)

- The second reason Paul gives for excluding the unrepentant sinner is for the sake of the church
- Paul's concern of the effect of this on the Corinthian church ... and they if they continue to tolerate it and him ... it will contaminate the church and ultimately destroy it
- And to make his point he picks up on the imagery of yeast and dough in v6-7
 - *Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are.*
- In the same way yeast works its way through and affects the dough ... so will unchecked sin work its way through and affect the church
- It's like gangrene in a person's toe or foot > sometimes you need to chop it off ... because if you don't it will spread further up the leg and eventually kill them
- And Paul says, sin needs to be removed so that you may be the batch that God has made you to be ... as you really are

- Remember how Paul reminded the Corinthians in 1:2
 - You are the "church of God ... sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy"
- Similar to what he's saying here ... Christ has made you into a new batch ...
 - You're meant to be a people without yeast / without sin
 - You have a new identity
 - You're meant to be different to what you once were
 - And so, you ought to live and be what you truly are ... your new self in Christ
- And so, for the sake of the church ... they are to be ruthless and get rid of the evil and sin among them

- **Application**
- Like untreated gangrene ... when a church fails to take sin seriously and sweeps it under the carpet ... it causes untold damage to
 - The faith of others in the church
 - The reputation of the church in the community
 - The honour and glory of God whom the church represents
- You only have to look at the devastating impact of child sex abuse in the church ... and the failure of people who knew about it to take action
- And by failing to take action ... and sweeping it under the carpet ... and hoping it would go away ... look at what's happened
 - Abuse victims went unprotected
 - People hurt by it walked away from their faith

- The church is viewed with suspicion and contempt
- And the gospel is rejected by many because of it
- And so, you can see why Paul is so adamant about this

- And there may be times friends when we need to do that here are C@P
- Now in practice if there was a serious issue that needed to be addressed ... we would apply the principles of Matt 18 and go and speak to the person about their sin and read the Bible and see what God has to say about the issue and pray, and if they refuse to listen, then take one or two others along
- And it would only if they still refused to listen and repent ... would action be required
- But for the sake of the individual ... and the sake of the church ... it's not to be tolerated and must be challenged and removed

For sake of the Christ (v7)

- The final reason Paul gives why they should take unrepentant sin in the church so seriously is there in v7-8 and it's for the sake of Christ
 - *For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.*
- Here Paul carries on the imagery of yeast and cleansing by alluding to the Feast of Unleavened Bread which was a festival to remember how God saved his people out of Egypt centuries before hand with Moses
- At the time ... God told his people sweep the yeast out of their homes and only eat unleavened bread ... and then sacrifice a lamb and daub its blood on the door frame of their house ... so that as the angel of death swept through Egypt ... it would see the blood of the lamb and Passover that household, sparing them from judgment

- Just as Jesus did at the Last Supper ... so here Paul says Jesus is the true Passover Lamb who was sacrificed to save us from wrath of God ... and set us free ... not from slavery in Egypt ... but slavery to sin and death

- And Paul is reminding the Corinthians ...
 - Christ has been sacrificed for you
 - He's taken away your sin, dealt with God's wrath, restored you back to God
 - And therefore ... in Christ you've been made into a new batch ... a new people ... sin is not meant to be part of who you are now

- And so, he says keep the Festival ...
 - Not literally keep the Festival of Unleavened Bread ... but the way of life that urgently removes sin because Christ the Passover Lamb has died for us
 - They are to remember that in Christ ... they are no longer slaves to sin ... but slaves to Christ ... and therefore ... they are to live in a way appropriate to what he has done and to what they had now become
- So, three reasons ... for sake of the individual, the sake of the church and the sake of Christ

Application

- Friends ... if you are here this morning and you're still investigating Christianity ... and don't yet call yourself a Christian, please know ...
 - You're not going to be judged
 - No one going to be looking at you and your life and running a measure over it to see who and where you stack up
 - Because what matters most to us here at C@P is that you get to know Jesus and what it means for him to be your Passover Lamb who sacrificed himself for you
 - If you don't know that or fully grasp that ... sign up for Christianity Explored starting later this month > John would love to have you come along, share those things with you, have you ask all your question and raise all your doubts ... so that you can make an informed decision for Jesus yourself
- But for those of you who are brothers and sisters in Christ ... this chapter is help us as a church walk that road between legalism and license
- Because it's an exhortation to you and I to live lives that are consistent with the gospel
 - To be the people and the church that you already are in Christ
 - Not be holy **in order to** be right with God
 - No ... Jesus has already made you holy ...
 - So be what you are ... live in a way that reflects who you are in Christ
- And one of the ways we do that is by holding one another accountable in the way that we live
 - Not to perfection ... no one's perfect
 - But to live to please and honour our Lord and Saviour who died to make us holy
- And while it will always be a tragedy to do so ...

- There will be times when we need to exclude someone from the God's church because they refuse to repent of sin and openly and willingly live in defiance of God's word
- So, brothers and sisters ... collectively we have a responsibility to each other on this
 - It's important that we speak the truth in love to one another when you see and hear things that are not in line with the gospel
 - That we understand it's not okay to sweep things under the carpet or to ignore it and pretend they will go away
- And whether you are the one holding your friend accountable ... or the one being held accountable ... know this is a good thing
- It's good for
 - the sake of the person ... so they may see the seriousness of their sin and their need to repent and so return to the Lord
 - the sake of the church ... that the such sin will not infiltrate, infect and undermine the faith and godliness of the others in the church
 - the sake of Christ ... who is our Passover lamb who has already died to make us holy

PRAY