

Day 17: A Little Heaven

Today's Reading

1 Corinthians 5:6-8

Devotion

"Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch – as you really are."

1 Corinthians 5:6-8

The word "leaven" refers to a bit of bread dough that has yeast in it. Yeast is what causes dough to rise. Paul, however, is not referring to "leaven" as a bit of dough. He is using the word figuratively. With the exception of one contentious passage, "leaven" refers to sin and evil whenever it is used figuratively in the Bible.

In this passage, Paul is saying that the Corinthians' boasting in the sin of the man sleeping with his stepmother was like leaven. When Christians begin to boast in sin (e.g. by calling it 'Christian liberty' or 'loving tolerance'), it will spread like leaven throughout the whole church.

Are there sins in your life, or in the lives of other Christians, that instead of confessing and repenting of, you boast about? Sins that you justify or tacitly accept by calling them 'Christian liberty'? Let's not forget that all it takes is a little yeast to leaven the whole batch of dough.

Prayer

God, we confess today that all of us are guilty of allowing seemingly 'small' sins in our lives and in our church go undealt with. Help us by your strength to get rid of even the smallest hint of immorality, so that the church may more fully reflect your holiness to the world. Amen.

Day 18: A Delicate Tension

Today's Reading

1 Corinthians 5:9-13

Devotion

*“What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church?
Are you not to judge those inside?”*

1 Corinthians 5:12

In our readings over the past few days Paul has emphasised to us the importance of preserving the purity of the church by disassociating with those who are immoral. However, many Christians take this command too far and end up isolating themselves altogether from their non-Christians friends, family members and colleagues.

In today's passage Paul clarifies that this is not what he intended to say at all. In verse 10, he points out that if this is what he was asking us to do, we would have to leave the planet altogether – for who isn't immoral (including ourselves)? Indeed, it is not our responsibility to judge those outside of the family of God, but rather to lovingly and patiently live among them as we seek to share with them – through word and deed – the love of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Gospel.

So whilst it may be true that “bad company corrupts good character” (1 Corinthians 15:33), let us also remember our identity as salt and light in the world, charged with the mandate to bring transformation on earth until it resembles heaven!

Prayer

God, may you keep me from misapplying your call for us to be holy and set apart. Instead, give me the wisdom and courage to be in the world but not of the world – boldly living for you even in the midst of a culture that neither worships you nor recognises you. Amen.

Day 19: A Case of Spiritual Amnesia

Today's Reading

1 Corinthians 6:1-8

Devotion

*"...do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world?
And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to
judge trivial cases?"*

1 Corinthians 6:2

In this section, Paul poses eight questions in eight verses. By peppering the Corinthians with questions, Paul is making the argument that when conflicts arise within the church, they should be kept out of the courts and instead dealt with within the confines of the local church.

The decision by the Corinthian Christians to litigate reveal how little respect they had for the church's authority and ability to settle its own disputes. Yet, earlier in the letter Paul was emphatically reminding the Corinthians of their identity in Christ: that they were saints (1:2), not lacking in any gift (1:5-7) and even having the mind of Christ (2:14-16). In other words, they had in their body of believers all the resources necessary to settle disputes!

As God's representatives who have been created in His image, we have been given His authority to judge in the present and in the future. That being so, surely we ought to be competent enough to decide the comparatively mundane kinds of disputes that occur among the members of our church. We should live out who are.

Prayer

Lord, keep us from forgetting our spiritual identities. We are thankful for the riches of our spiritual inheritance in Christ. May we live to the fullness of all that you have enabled us to be! Amen.

Day 20: What Some of You Were

Today's Reading

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

Devotion

"And that is what some of you were."

1 Corinthians 6:11

In these three short verses, Paul lists ten vices that characterise unbelieving sinners in order to exhort believers to live like saints. At the end of this list, Paul reminds the Corinthians that they, too, were previously like the wicked in Corinth (6:11). In spite of their behavioural problems, Paul insists that the identity of these Christians has changed – for they are now completely forgiven (washed), set apart as God's children (sanctified) and declared righteous in the eyes of God (justified).

Far from threatening their standing with God because of their sins, he affirms the security of their standing with God, in spite of their sins. How can this be? Because our standing with God is never based on our work for Him, but always and only on Christ's finished work for us – and our willingness to receive it. This means that you don't have to modify your moral behaviour before you can come to Christ – you have to come to Christ the way you are before your moral behaviour can be changed. The issue is not how bad you've been or even how good you'll promise to be from now on. The issue is: are you willing to believe in Christ and allow Him to begin changing your life from the inside out?

Prayer

Jesus, we revel today in all that you have accomplished for us as your people. You have exchanged your righteous identity with our unrighteous identity. As your radically transformed people – washed, sanctified and justified, let us not live out of what we are but instead out of who we now are in you. Amen.

Day 21: Why Marry?

Today's Reading

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Devotion

"Flee from sexual immorality...he who sins sexually sins against his own body."

1 Corinthians 6:18

A radio talk-show host was asked what she thought about couples living together without the benefit of marriage. The caller felt that living together before marriage would be a safeguard against a bad marriage. He did not want to repeat his parents' mistake of getting married and then finding out they couldn't bear to live with each other. In response, the talk-show host pointed out that the divorce rate among couples who lived together before marriage is higher than for those who did not.

More importantly, what some couples call a safeguard is something that the Bible calls sin. Whether it happens in the first or in the 21st century, sex outside of marriage is immorality, and immorality is sin. When God instituted marriage, he said that a man and woman who are "united" sexually "become one flesh." As old-fashioned as it may sound, only a husband and wife are meant to become one flesh.

Sex is a special gift from God to be enjoyed within the bond of marriage. Outside of marriage it is destructive. Millions live with the guilt of a sexually promiscuous lifestyle. Sexually transmitted diseases are at an all-time high. Thousands of children are born as an unwanted consequence of sex outside of marriage. God gave his guidelines to protect us, not to keep us from enjoying life. So we ignore those guidelines at our own peril.

Prayer

*Lord, we thank you for creating us male and female and for the gift of sex. Help us to enjoy your gift the way you intended. In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen.*