

Purge the Evil

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- [0 : 0 0] For those of you who are visiting, my name is Sean. It's a welcome you here, and I have the privilege of, I'm one of the pastors here and get to preach God's Word on most weeks. And the benefit of going through a book of the Bible expositionally, like we're doing now, going through the book of 1 Corinthians, is that you don't get to skip difficult topics, right?
- So here we are with talking about incest and judgment and excommunication on this Sunday. But God's grace will still shine through in this passage. So let's look at 1 Corinthians 5, 1-13.
- And figuring out whether or not we should pass judgment on others as God's people is, and if we are supposed to do it, then what is appropriate judgment? What is an appropriate judgment?
- That's a very complex biblical issue. So, for example, look at Matthew 7, 1-5, where Jesus says, Judge not that you be not judged, for with judgment you pronounce, you will be judged.
- And with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, Let me take the speck out of your eye, when there is the log in your own eye?
- [1 : 1 3] You hypocrite. First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. And it's a very famous passage we all know about. And then in the preceding chapter of this book, Paul said in chapter 4, verse 3, But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you, or by any human court.
- In fact, I do not even judge myself. Right? So what in the world then, given all these things that Paul's saying, does he mean here in verse 3 of chapter 5, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who is sexually immoral.
- So is Paul doing what Jesus told him not to do? Is Paul doing what he himself prohibit the church from doing in the previous chapter? And so the question, this is a complex question, and the question of whether or not we are to judge is further complicated by our own sinfulness.
- Because on the one hand, in our sinful pride, we hastily pass judgment on people while simultaneously thinking ourselves to be above judgment. And so we're to say things like, Who are you to judge me?
- Right? On the other hand, in our sinful fear, we neglect to confront persistent willful sins in our brothers and sisters who need our loving admonishment. So our passage for today is one of the most helpful and clear passages for navigating these complex issues that we face in our life together as a church.
- [2 : 3 4] So Paul's main point in this passage is this, is that the church that has been purified by Christ's sacrifice must purge the evil from their midst. That's the main point. The church that has been purified by Christ's sacrifice must purge the evil from their midst.

And we will talk in turn about whom we should purge, verses 1 to 2 and 9 to 13, and then about how we should purge evil, and then finally about why we should purge evil from our midst.

And they'll be my three main points. So first, let's look at whom we should purge in verses 1 to 2 and 9 to 13. So having addressed the Corinthian believers' inappropriate boasting in human leaders and their worldly wisdom up to this point in the letter, Paul turns his attention to the related but more specific issues that beset the Corinthian church.

So here it begins in verse 1. It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans. For a man has his father's wife.

The word actually conveys Paul's disbelief, right? It's actually reported that there's sexual immorality among you, right? And according to Genesis 2.24, the only appropriate context for sexual relations is intergendered and monogamous relationship in the context of marriage.

[3 : 53] So in the word sexual immorality, that includes all forms of sexual relations outside of that biblical vision. And sexual immorality is often featured prominently in the list of vices throughout the New Testament.

And it's not because, you know, Christians are particularly prudish or squeamish when it comes to the topic of sex. In fact, Christians are the only ones that truly know how to enjoy sex within the God-given proper bounds.

But the reason why sexual immorality is so frequently condemned in the New Testament is because it was one of the most prevalent and persistent sins in the Greco-Roman culture in which the New Testament was written.

There was a widespread saying among the Greeks. It went like this. Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of the body, but wives to bear us legitimate children.

That was a prevalent attitude among men in the Greco-Roman culture. No wonder the New Testament vehemently condemned sexual immorality and repeatedly it does so. And so, furthermore, we know for certain that from chapter 6 in the next chapter, that the Corinthian believers, Corinthian believers before their conversion were in fact guilty of sexual immorality.

[5 : 01] And in fact, some of them were still persisting in sexual immorality after. And so this is definitely a very pertinent issue. And that's why it's often mentioned throughout Scripture. But it wasn't merely the case that they were engaging in the kinds of sexual immorality that seemingly everyone around us seemed to engage in.

Their offense was even more flagrant because Paul says in verse 1, So it's been reported that this is a kind of sexual immorality that even the non-Christians in their culture condemn.

But yet that has been reported to be existing in this Corinthian church. And the phrase father's wife is taken from Leviticus 18, 7-8. And in that passage, uncovering, the language is used, uncovering the nakedness of one's father is distinguished from uncovering the nakedness of one's mother.

And both are condemned. So the fact that those two things are distinguished shows us that the father's wife is not a reference to someone's mom, but rather to probably his concubine or a woman that's sexually related to his father but not his biological mother.

But both were condemned nonetheless. And here it seems that because only the man is addressed, the man who is sexually immoral, it seems that the issue is the woman is not a member of the church, but the man is.

[6 : 24] And so the man is the one that's being addressed here. But it wasn't... So Paul uses the language of possession here to refer to the crime. This is a man has his father's wife and the language of possession is a euphemism for sexual immorality, sexual relations.

And the present tense of the verb has implies ongoing, enduring relationship. So that means this has been happening out in the open for everyone to see and it has been ongoing.

It's something... It wasn't a one-off thing. It was not a one-night stand. And Paul is shocked that such a thing is happening in the Corinthian church. And so he continues in verse 2, And you are arrogant.

Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. What's even more shocking than the egregious sin that the Corinthians were tolerating is the fact that while harboring such sin in their midst, they were arrogant.

This is the same word that Paul used in chapter 4 to describe the Corinthians. They were puffed up. It's the same word, right? In their boasting in worldly wisdom and human leaders, the Corinthians were puffed up. And now, even now, instead of humbling themselves in repentance, they are boasting.

[7 : 37] They're puffed up in their own superior spirituality. And this is helpful for us because nowadays when we think about church disciplining its members, we assume that it's because of...

When the church refuses to discipline its members, we think that that's because of humility, right? I mean, that's the common way to think about it. We think, oh, who are we to judge, right? Oh, who are we to cast the first stone, right?

And so we think that it's humility that prevents the church from disciplining its members. And on the other hand, we think that it's pride that leads to judgment of its members and discipline of its members. We think it's characterized by a holier-than-thou attitude.

But according to Paul in this word of God here, the Corinthian church refused to discipline its erring member, not because of their humility, but because of their arrogance. If they were humble and they mourned the sin in their midst, they would have addressed it.

But because they were arrogant, they presumed upon God's grace and they were content not to do anything about it. So we're wrong to think that it's the humble church that doesn't discipline its church.

[8 : 40] It's the arrogant church that refuses to discipline its members. And the problem was not merely that the Corinthian was returning a blind eye and just saying, okay, let that be. I mean, it's not right, but just let it be.

That's not what they were doing. We know this because Paul uses the language of puffed up again in 1 Corinthians 8.1, where the Corinthians say things like, all of us possess knowledge, they said.

And because of that, they were eating food offered sacrificed to idols. And in that, Paul says, they were puffed up. And so they were using their spiritual freedom and their really pretext that they have all this knowledge, knowing that all these idols are nothing, that there was only one true God.

They were like, it's okay to eat food sacrificed to idols. I mean, it's true to an extent, but they were doing so at the expense of other believers' conscience. They're violating the other believers' conscience and making them stumble.

And in that, Paul says, you're abusing your spiritual freedom to harm other believers, and that was wrong. And in that, that was their arrogance. And we find an even closer example of this in chapter 6, verse 12, where Paul describes another one of the Corinthian slogans.

[9 : 43] And this one, it goes this way. They said, all things are lawful for me. So the Corinthians were saying this, repeating the slogan to themselves to justify certain sinful behaviors. And in chapter 6, specifically to justify sleeping with prostitutes.

They were saying, all things are lawful for me, so it's okay for us to sleep with prostitutes. And on the surface, it sounds, that phrase sounds like one of Paul's hallmark teachings, doesn't it?

Because Paul says here, in Galatians 5, 18, but if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law, right? And then, but they're, of course, abusing Paul's teaching because Paul anticipates the Corinthian response and addresses it in Galatians 5, 13, where he says, for you were called to freedom, brothers, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

Similarly, Paul says in Romans 6, 14 to 16, for sin will have no dominion over you since you are not under law, but under grace. What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law, but under grace?

By no means. Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?

[10 : 59] So while it is true that those who are in Christ and therefore, and because Christ perfectly fulfilled the law and his righteousness is ours, we are no longer under the law. That is true.

But the fact that we are no longer under the law does not mean that we can go on sinning because to do so would mean that we remain slaves to sin when, in fact, we have been freed from slavery to sin. So for Paul, Christian freedom in Christ was supposed to lead to greater obedience.

It was an opportunity to follow the Holy Spirit, not the flesh, but the Corinthians were abusing their spiritual freedom to say, all things are lawful for me, and they were living in sin. And so they were twisting Paul's teaching really to suit their fancies and indulge their sinful flesh.

They considered themselves to be so preeminently spiritual that they believed that they were above the law and saying, all things are lawful for me. And so Paul says to them and rebukes them in verse 2, and you are arrogant.

I should not rather to mourn. So Paul prescribes this in verse 2, let him who has done this be removed from among you. The only proper way to deal with this kind of sin in this situation is to remove the sexually immoral person from their midst.

[12 : 12] That's the final stage, really the last resort of the process of church discipline, which some people call excommunication. But wait, that's probably, some of you guys are the wrong way, right?

Because isn't this the case that a church is not a museum for saints, it's a hospital for sinners. You guys have probably heard that phrase, right?

It's a popular quote from Pauline Phillips who ran an advice column entitled Dear Abby in the 1950s. But it was adapted and popularized by this viral Christian spoken word video.

I'm sure you guys have seen it. But the statement is only half true. Because yes, it is true that a church is a hospital for sinners, but it is also true that the church is a home for saints.

Christians are simultaneously saint and sinner with the biblical accent actually falling on saint because for the Christians, sin is an ever-decreasing reality while our holiness is an ever-increasing reality as we conform to the image of Christ.

[13 : 19] So the church, yes, it is a hospital for sinners in a sense that all sinners of all stripe, no matter what kind of sinner you are, you are welcome here to come and receive the grace of God and to find the healing of Jesus Christ.

But it is not a hospital for sinners in the sense that you can come here and keep sinning, that you can come here and remain a sinner. The problem here is not that a sinner is sinning, but that a so-called saint, a person who claims to have renounced his sinful ways is persisting presumptuously in his sins.

That's the problem. So don't misunderstand me here because Paul's not saying that only sinless people can be members of the church because if that's the case, we'd have exactly zero members in our church, right?

And that's not what he's saying. But a Christian, and if you're a Christian who is struggling with certain besetting sins during your life, whether it's sexual immorality or something else, and you repented of them and you've been trying to reform your ways, then this passage should not be something that makes you insecure about your salvation or make you worry that you're going to get kicked out of the church.

What Paul's addressing here is unrepentant sin, right? What Paul's addressing here is of a public and egregious nature. And the sexually immoral Corinthian brother was brazenly and unapologetically persisting in this incestuous relationship and that's why Paul's teaching that we must judge such a brother.

[14 : 47] And that's why this teaching to judge one another in the church doesn't contradict Jesus' teaching about not judging in Matthew chapter 7 because there Jesus is disallowing hypocritical judging, right?

When you have, we point out a minor shortcoming or fault in a brother or sister while ignoring a much greater fault of your own that's clouding your judgment, right? So Jesus is condemning that kind of hypocritical judgment.

And also, it doesn't contradict what Paul said earlier in chapter 4 verse 3 when he said, but with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. Because in that case there was no sin involved, right?

Paul didn't sin, that's why he added, for I am not aware of anything against myself. So the Corinthians were not judging Paul because of his sin, rather they were passing judgment on his ministry saying that that's a poor way to do ministry, it's not fruitful, we know a better way, a better way that's in addition to, that supplements the gospel.

And so there, Corinthians were arrogantly and prematurely judging the quality of Paul's ministry, they weren't judging his sin. And so here, it's a different case.

[15 : 53] So then whom are we called to judge as a church? Skip ahead with me for a little bit to verses 9 to 13. There Paul mentions a previous letter that he had written to the Corinthians instructing them not to associate with sexually immoral people.

So this wasn't actually the first Corinthian letter, but by God's providence, we don't have access to that letter. And apparently in that letter, he had told them not to associate with sexually immoral people, but the Corinthians misunderstood what he meant or deliberately distorted it.

And so Paul clarifies himself in verses 9 to 13. He says, I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people, not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world or the greedy and swindlers or idolaters.

Since then, you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler, not even to eat with such one.

For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside, purge the evil person from among you.

[17 : 02] This passage is so helpful for clarifying whom the church is called to judge because we are not called to judge the immoral people of this world. They don't accept God's authority and they are not accountable to the church.

So it's futile and inappropriate to pass judgment on them now. Rather, Paul's concern is with someone who claims to be a member of the family of God who nevertheless is guilty of sexual immorality or greed or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler.

And this list of sin that's mentioned here, it's probably not exhaustive because Paul lists other vices in different parts of his epistles and they overlap some but they also differ in some ways. But while these are not exhaustive but they are probably representative of the ones that were most flagrant and common in the Greco-Roman culture.

And it's amazing as we look at this list how representative it is of the current sins in 2018 as well. First, look at sexual immorality as I mentioned earlier. It includes all kinds of sexual relations outside of intergendered and monogamous marriage.

And nowadays, sexual aberrations are normalized and sexual transgressions are glamorized but the church must observe a different standard. This doesn't mean, however, that the church should expel all members who have ever been guilty of sexual immorality or currently struggle with immoral sexual desires.

[18 : 23] Being tempted by sexual desires and indulging those sexual desires in an unrepentant and persistent way are two different things. Second vice listed is greed, which is everywhere in our day, right?

But perhaps seeing it next to sexual immorality surprises us a little bit, right? Because we tend to think, ah, greed, I mean, everybody's greedy. You know, we think of it as a lesser sin. But Paul, listen here, right next to sexual immorality.

And it's because we live in an economy, right, where profit is the bottom line, right? And for generations and generations, we have leveraged people's greed to build our society, right?

So hundreds of years of this has desensitized us to the evil of greed. But that's why it's helpful to have the unchanging word of God critique our culture rather than vice versa, having our church critique the word of God.

And so the word greed is usually translated as covetousness, which is a form of idolatry according to Colossians 3, 5. And it refers to desiring and scheming to acquire what belongs to someone else.

[19 : 24] So a person who is guilty of greed is someone who seeks to enrich himself for herself at the expense of other people and whose greed manifests itself in a harmful way in his or her regular interactions with others.

And the third term is idolatry. Our pluralistic society tells us that all religions are essentially the same and all the gods are different manifestations or aspects of the same thing that all human beings long for.

And this is not dissimilar to the idolatry that was common in the Roman Empire because the people in those days thought it expedient to worship all forms of gods and appease all the gods so that they can have their favor and so that their society can flourish.

And because of that when Christians refuse to worship their gods and only claim to worship one god they call them Christians atheists people who don't believe in God. And for a similar reason Christians are denounced today as exclusive because if we acknowledge a god other than the one true god we become an idolater.

Fourth item is reviler. Reviling includes all forms of verbal abuse such as demeaning insults and damaging slander. But the person in view is not someone who slips up once in a while and repents of it.

[20 : 39] Rather the person in view is someone who is known as a reviler. Someone who is consistently verbally abusive and who consistently slanders others. A drunkard is pretty self-exponent but refers to a person who is regularly given to drunkenness and the disorderly conduct associated with drunkenness.

And then swindler is someone who steals from or defrauds others for his own gain. Money laundering tax evasion pyramid schemes false advertising graft all types of scams would fall under swindling.

And Paul instructs the Corinthian church not to associate with such a person not even to eat with such a one. And the phrase associate with literally means to mix up together with.

So it implies some kind of reciprocal relationship some kind of joint activity. And Paul is saying that as a community you should not do that with such people. And he also says it's in a similar way not even to eat with such a one and there's some debate about what that means and it's possible that this is a reference to the Lord's Supper of communion together but I think it's unlikely since the word eat with in the Bible is never used to refer to the Lord's Supper.

This will be the only occasion if that's the case. And also so I think Paul is referring to and also kind of Christian expulsion from the church would assume I mean you would assume that that excludes the Lord's Supper because Lord's Supper implies partaking in the church.

[22 : 09] And so I don't think that's what he's referring to. I think he's referring to table fellowship right? And he's saying don't have table fellowship with such a person because even today right if you think about it when you have someone over to your house for a meal it implies that you are going beyond mere acquaintance to actual acceptance right?

It's a relationship you're saying acknowledging some form of trust but in the ancient world table fellowship was even more meaningful and significant than it is today for us. So now at this point you're probably wondering as I did as I was studying this passage isn't that a little harsh?

You know? Like I mean after all didn't Jesus eat eat with sinners? Right? Luke 15 verse 2 Pharisees and the scribes grumble against Jesus they say this this man receives sinners and eats with them.

That's the exact same word that's used here Jesus ate with sinners. So if Jesus ate with sinners because he said he came not to you know not to heal the healthy but to heal the sick then why can we as his followers eat with sinners in order to minister to them and bring them to Jesus?

What's so wrong about that? Right? And I think the solution to this seeming contradiction lies in the context in look at the following verses in verses 12 to 13. For, right?

[23 : 27] Meaning this is the reason, this is the grounds for this command. For, what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside, purge the evil person from among you.

So these two verses follow a neat kind of A, B, A, B kind of formula. So A, right here, he's speaking of how we shouldn't judge outsiders. And then B, he talks about how we should judge insiders.

And then A, again, about how God will judge outsiders. And then B, how church ought to judge insiders and purge the evil from among them. That's a quotation from Deuteronomy 13.5. And Paul's point is this, we're not supposed to judge outsiders in this way by dissociating with them and refusing to eat with them because they're not claiming to share in our Christian fellowship in the first place.

And moreover, it's God who will judge them on the day of judgment. But we are supposed to judge those who claim to be Christians and therefore members of the church yet simultaneously live in an unrepentant, persistently sinful manner, living a double life because by doing so they are besmirching the name of Christ and they're damaging the corporate witness of the church.

You guys follow what I'm saying? The unbelievers are not accountable to the church, but believers are accountable to the church. The behavior of unbelievers does not affect the credibility of the church, but the behavior of believers does affect the credibility of the church's witness.

[24 : 58] So while we can tolerate unbelievers as Jesus did and freely welcome them, eat with them and minister to them, but we must exercise strict discipline inside the church.

That's what Paul's saying. Because if we let an unrepentant believer continue to associate with the church, we're sending mixed signals and wrong message to the world about who Christ is and what the church is.

Because a church that represents the God whom we sang about holy, holy, holy must itself be holy and set apart for him. Because in order for the church to be a city on a hill, in order for the church to be a light in the darkness, in order for us to be an alternate community, a contrast community, we have to be in the world but not of the world.

Our values, beliefs, and priorities have to reflect heaven, not earth. Now, I don't think that means that the church shouldn't speak out against the evils in the culture and society at large at all.

I do think that there is a place for a prophetic voice in society, especially since we live in a democratic republic where our discussions and discourse shapes the trajectory of our nation. However, we shouldn't judge and condemn unbelievers by dissociating with them here and now because that's not our prerogative, but God's.

[26 : 17] And there are two extremes to avoid as we seek to apply this biblical principle. And the first pitfall is fundamentalism, right? Where we hold the world accountable to the same strict standards as the church.

So we pass judgment on unbelievers and refuse to associate with them and we create this insular kind of separatist community. That's fundamentalism.

And the other pitfall is libertinism, right? Where we hold the church to the same loose standards as the world. So we refuse to pass judgment on fellow believers and neglect church discipline, right?

We blend in with the world and create a so-called tolerant, inclusive community community that is indistinguishable from the world. Both of these are errors that violate this biblical principle and we find in this passage a good balance where we do not judge those outside but judge those inside.

Unfortunately, however, the modern church has done both the fundamentalism and the libertinism and actually the exact opposite of what's commanded here, which is to be quick to judge outsiders but slow to judge insiders.

[27 : 26] We have been intolerant and dismissive toward outsiders while indulgent and permissive toward insiders. No wonder then that we are charged by the world sometimes with hypocrisy.

We are not to judge those who are inside, or to be outside, but we are to judge those who are inside, right? That's whom we should purge from our midst. So scripture commands us to purge the evil person from among us, but how do we do this?

And that brings us to my second point. How should we purge evil? How should we purge evil? Paul's not telling us to simply, you know, ghost them. You guys know what that means? I learned that recently. It's a terrible thing to do to anyone.

But basically, ghosting is where you suddenly just, you know, without explanation, you just disappear from their life and don't communicate with them in any way, right? I mean, that's like the worst thing you can do.

Like, why would you, that's not what Paul is saying. Oh, don't just say, oh, dissociate with them. Okay, don't acknowledge them when they say hi to you. Don't return their phone calls or texts. That's not what he's telling you to do. That would be so hurtful. The process that Paul delineates is much more careful and intentional and loving because he says in verses 3 to 5, for though absent in body, I am present in spirit.

[28 : 36] And as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. And when you're assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

God, right? In Matthew 18, 15 to 20, right, Jesus teaches us how to deal with sin in the church community. And in case of personal offense, the first step that Jesus teaches us is that it should be handled one-on-one on a personal basis.

If someone offends you, then you need to approach that offending brother or sister and talk to them. And this ensures that there's no gossip or slander that destroys the church. It ensures that people are not hiding behind, you know, in a cowardly fashion and talking about someone's offense.

And instead, it calls for courage to go up to that person to talk to that person about their offense. However, if he does not listen, Jesus continues. He gives the second step. Take one or two others along with you that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

This next step involves mediation. And by involving one or two others in the process, it ensures objectivity and fairness. And if the second step also doesn't work, Jesus says a third step.

[29 : 52] He says, if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. That's excommunication.

It's the last step that Paul's talking about here. And since the offense of the sexually immoral man in Corinth was already public knowledge, and because the church was arrogantly really kind of embracing the sin in their midst, as opposed to mourning it and repenting of it, Paul kind of skips to the final step when he tells them Corinthian church to expel the man from the church community because those first two steps effectively have already been taken, effectively have been nullified already.

And so the Corinthians have neglected to judge this man, but Paul says he has already judged in verse 3. For though absent in body, I am present in spirit, and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing.

And I think Paul's, in the back of his mind, he's thinking about Matthew 18 as he writes this, because in Matthew 18, after delineating the steps of church discipline, Jesus says this, Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Again, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.

[31 : 10] So this passage is often quoted out of context, as if, like, you know, if two or three believers agree in prayer about anything, then God will grant it to us. If that's the case, I mean, there's no prayer that I pray that shouldn't be answered, because I usually pray with people, right?

But that's not what he's talking about, because this passage is given in the context of church discipline, right? He's saying that the church is given the authority, with Christ's authority, to bind and loose, right? To pronounce someone an unbeliever, to excommunicate them from the church, right?

So what he's saying here, and so what he's, the reason why I think Paul has this in mind is because he says, for the absent in body, I'm present in spirit, and as present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing.

Paul knows, based on Jesus' teaching, that it's not the individual person, or the individual member, or a pastor, or even an apostle that can pronounce judgment on a member like this, but it has to be the church community that pronounces this judgment, because Jesus said, when two or three are gathered.

So because of that, Paul, knowing that he's now not there, he's absent, he's kind of casting an absentee ballot of sorts, right? He's saying, you know what, I'm not there, but as if present with you, I am pronouncing judgment over this person, and you as a church community must now do that, and that's what Paul is enjoining them to do.

[32 : 25] As your leader, do I'm not physically present? I have pronounced judgment with my spiritual presence among you, and no one, I think, knows exactly what he means that he's with them in spirit. I think it means a little more than what we say when we say, like, oh, I'm with you in spirit.

You know, I think we say that, we just mean, okay, my thoughts are with you, right? But I think Paul is here thinking of a little more vital, real spiritual communion that exists through the Holy Spirit, and he thinks in some way, because he's a member of this church, he's a founding member of this church, he sees himself as a part of this church through the Spirit.

And so he says in verse 4, when you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus, and my spirit is present, that's when he says you are gathered, pronounced judgment on this man.

So he's saying, when you are gathered, pronounce judgment, and know that I am agreeing with you in the Holy Spirit. So this is one of the ways how we are to exercise discipline and to purge evil, not as some lone rangers, one person condemning another, but the church community gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus, with the power of the Lord Jesus, we pronounce judgment in this way.

And Paul describes the act of excommunication in verse 5, he says, delivering this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

[33 : 44] This language of delivering someone over to Satan does not mean like selling his soul to the devil or anything remotely similar to that, but it's a technical way of referring to excommunication, of putting them outside the church.

And it occurs again in 1 Timothy 1, 19 to 20. So the church, the people of God, are the people who are under Christ's reign, but the unbelieving world remains under the sway of the rulers, quote, authorities, cosmic powers, and spiritual forces of evil, right?

We know this from Ephesians 6. And Ephesians 2, 2 to 3 tells us that all unbelievers are following the prince of the power of the air, which is Satan, and living in the passions of their flesh.

This is from Ephesians 2. So to excommunicate a member from the fellowship of the church is, in effect, to consign the person to Satan's realm and rule. That's why to deliver someone over to Satan is the technical way of referring to excommunication.

And this also explains what destruction of the flesh means, which is conceptually related to deliverance to Satan. So if you look at verse 5 carefully again, it says, deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh.

[34 : 55] So the destruction of the flesh is the immediate result of deliverance to Satan. So it's something that Satan probably does. And then the ultimate purpose of that is so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

So what does it mean, the destruction of the flesh? I think it can refer to two things, possibly. This was really hard to wrestle with and study all week, but I think it's most likely to be one of these two things.

And the first thing is that, for example, it could refer to physical suffering, an illness of some sorts wrought by the devil that's supposed to produce some kind of spiritual sanctifying, have some kind of spiritually sanctifying effect.

For example, in Job 2.6, Satan, God says to Satan, behold, Job is in your hand. That's the same word as deliver right here and only spare his life.

And so, and then what happens after that is Job's flesh is afflicted by Satan. But the end result of that at the end of Job is he says, now my eyes see you, therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.

[35 : 58] Ultimately, it's his redemption and salvation that happens, right? So that could be one way that is what destruction of flesh means. And second, I think the destruction of the flesh, so it's for the destruction of the flesh.

You could also just read as unto or into the destruction of the flesh. That's the literal translation. And I think it could refer to the death-like existence of fleshly living. And so when the word destruction can also mean ruin, and that's, if you look at 1 Timothy 6, 9-10, where the word is used, it says, but those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

It's the same word. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evils. It is through the craving, this craving, that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

So by destruction of the flesh, or ruin of the flesh then, I think Paul's referring to the ruin and destruction that characterize the life in the flesh. And by wandering from the faith, there will be pierced with many pangs.

That kind of pain, the destruction that characterized the life in the flesh, might be what Paul is referring to here. And Paul said in Ephesians 2 that living in the flesh is, the passions of the flesh is a sign of spiritual death.

[37 : 16] So that would make sense too. Both of these are acceptable views, and you guys can hold either one. But I think the second one is more likely for several reasons. And that's because in Job 2, while it's a suggested parallel, there's no reference to destruction of the flesh.

And then, and I think particularly in Paul's writings, whenever he uses the word flesh as contrasted to the spirit, he's not referring to the body and the soul.

He's referring to the sinful flesh and referring to the part of the human being that's oriented away from God to the spirit, the part of us that's oriented toward God, right? And that's why I think he used the word flesh here instead of using the more neutral word body, which he used earlier in this passage to contrast that he is absent in body but present in spirit.

But here, I think he intentionally used the word flesh. And so, and he used that, he contrasted flesh from the spirit earlier in chapter 3, verse 1, in a similar way because the Corinthians were living in a fleshly way instead of being in spirit.

And so, that's what I think he's referring to here. And so, then he's saying by be delivered to Satan and to the destruction of the flesh, they're really referring to one and the same thing, right? Being handed over to Satan's realm and being living in really the flesh and the sin that's associated with it.

[38 : 31] Now, that sounds extremely harsh, right? On the surface. And because it almost sounds like Paul's condemning the sexually immoral man to damnation, right? It's like, oh, give him word to Satan and let him flesh in the destruction of the flesh.

But the next clause shows us that that's not what Paul means. Get it with me. Deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, and here's the purpose, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

That's so comforting, right? The purpose of delivering this man to Satan is not his damnation, but his salvation. In other words, the spirit of church discipline and excommunication is redemptive, not punitive.

The goal of the church discipline is reconciliation, not separation. Paul's expressing his hope that through excommunication, through the tough love of the church, the man would be led to repentance and faith, trusting that if he has truly tasted of the life and the spirit, that he would turn from his distaste of the destruction of the flesh back to the Lord.

That's his hope here. And that's why it's so wrong for us to say, you know, like, oh, like, I don't want to judge these people, because by refusing to judge one another, we're condemning one another to judgment on that ultimate day of judgment.

[39 : 52] By obeying this passage and judging one another in a loving way, we help each other so that we can be saved on that ultimate day of judgment. And I hope our church really gets this, understands this, because Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes about this in his book, Life Together.

He says, quote, nothing can be more cruel than that leniency which abandons others to sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than that severe reprimand which calls another Christian in one's community back from the path of sin.

A church that tolerates all manners of sin among its members because it claims to be quote, unquote, tolerant, open, inclusive, and affirming is not practicing compassion.

They're practicing cruel indifference. It's people we care nothing about that we leave alone to do and live however they wish. Is that not true?

It's phony friends that are content to watch us ruin our lives with vices and bad decisions. The true friends confront us, chide us, even get angry with us when we make bad decisions that jeopardize our present and future well-being.

[41 : 13] That's what we are called to be. That's the family of God, the true friends that we are called to be for one another. And this, by the way, is why our church emphasizes membership so much, right?

It's because the New Testament church assumed this kind of commitment among believers and assumed this kind of mutual accountability. But Christians nowadays do not assume that kind of mutual accountability and commitment.

That's why we have to formalize membership in order to teach our members explicitly of this kind of mutual accountability and commitment so that we can pursue this kind of vision of a church together.

And note well that the church discipline that Paul's talking about here will only work if we buy in together as a community. Only when we truly understand ourselves to be accountable to one another will we submit to church discipline.

Only if we humble ourselves and recognize that we really need each other will we esteem others' judgments more highly than our own. Nowadays, right, people who are disciplined by the church can simply leave and say, oh, I'll just drive over to the next church in town, right?

[42 : 16] And that reveals just how much the modern church is characterized by the same pride of the Corinthians of thinking oneself above judgment.

If we really saw each other as family and if we really valued each other's love and investment in our lives and their judgment of where we are spiritually, we would be fearful to leave like that.

So we are to purge the evil person from our midst in the context of the gathered church community, in the name and power of the Lord Jesus Christ for the purpose of restoration and reconciliation of the sinner.

That's how we should purge, right? That brings us to my final point. It's a shorter point. Why we should purge, right? The evil person from our, why should we purge?

One of the reasons I have already given, which is to restore the sinner, correct the sinner, but there are more reasons that Paul specifies in verses 6 to 8. Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven, leavens the whole lump, cleanses out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump as you really are on leaven.

[43 : 28] For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Nowadays, the word leaven can refer to, more generally, to all kinds of leavening agents, like baking soda or yeast. And if you have the NIV translation, it actually says yeast, but that's a mistranslation, because here the word, it has a more restricted definition.

It's referring to leaven, and leaven is actually like a fermented, when you ferment a dough to make it light and fluffy, right, and you save a part of that old batch of dough in order to use it for the baking of a new batch so that you can make it, again, light and fluffy without having access to yeast, that's what leaven is.

So it's the old part of the fermented bread that's kept reserved for the next batch so you could use it for fermenting other breads. And so yeast was very rare in the ancient world. I mean, yeast is also wholesome, so it doesn't really make sense.

And it's an ingenious way to really ferment bread, but of course the danger is that every time you do that, right, the chance of harmful bacteria growing grows every time, because you're taking the old one and you're probably preserving some of the really old one as you take a piece of the old bread and use it for the new one.

[44 : 49] And so that's the dangerous baking method if you preserve it over the long period of time. And that's one of the reasons probably why God commanded in Exodus 12, 14, 20 to purge their homes of all leaven during the annual feast of unleavened bread.

I mean, that's not the main reason. That's the secondary reason. But I think that may have been one of the reasons. Because for seven days they only eat unleavened bread, and then because of that they start up the leavening process all over again from the fresh batch, right, that they have.

And so in this way the word leaven for the Jews came to represent how sin and evil insidiously spread among God's people and grow until the whole bread is contaminated, right?

I mean, it's not a powerful picture. So it's saying a little leaven leavens the whole lump is similar to our English saying one bad apple spoils the whole barrel, right? So using a familiar analogy, Paul enjoins the Corinthian church to purge the leaven from among them, lest the whole batch be contaminated.

Because unrepentant sin in the context of the church, it's like cancer. It spreads. It doesn't stay where it is, right? You can't sweep it under the rug.

[45 : 59] You can't just cover it up like this and manage sin like that. It has to be, like cancer, eradicated. It's the only way to deal with the sin in a proper way, this kind of egregious sin, unrepentant sin.

And so that's why he says, cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, right? So that's the reason Paul commends the exclamation of the sexually immoral remains, the preservation of the purity of the church.

Because Ephesians 5, 25-27 tells us that Christ saved us. He's to cleanse us, right? To sanctify us. That's what he did, right? He sanctified us, set us apart as his bride, right?

And if we are to be betrothed to Christ, if the church is to be free of spot or wrinkle or any such thing, as Ephesians 5 says, then we have to cleanse out the old leaven.

How can we, the bride who is betrothed to Christ, the righteous one, the holy one, tolerate filth and stain on ourselves? But that sounds a little bit like works righteousness, doesn't it?

[47 : 04] Right? When Paul says, cleanse out the old leavens that you may be a new lump. Doesn't it sound like, yeah, make yourself a new lump by cleansing out the old leavens. Doesn't it sound like that? I think Paul's aware that it sounds like that.

So he immediately adds a qualifier in verse 7. Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, the Passover lamb, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

So what he's saying here is this. We do not cleanse ourselves of old leaven in order to be clean and gain favor with God. Rather, we cleanse ourselves because we have already been cleansed by Christ.

For Paul, the imperative to obey is always preceded and grounded in the indicative of what God has already done. And so what he's saying is this.

It's really a concise summary of Christian discipleship and sanctification. Become what you are, is what Paul is saying. Live as the new creation that you are because you have been born again in Christ.

[48 : 11] John Piper puts it this way. Act the miracle. Through Christ, we have experienced the miracle of salvation and new life. Now act it out.

Live it out because Christ has already done it for us. And since Passover is the first and the greatest day of the feast of unleavened bread, he continues that imagery by giving the reason why we are truly unleavened bread.

He says, For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Right? When Israel was enslaved to Egypt and God delivered them through the Passover, he told them to take a lamb and to slaughter it and put Dabit's blood on the two doorposts and the lintel of the house and then to eat the lamb in their house.

And when God went throughout Egypt to judge, bring judgment on the Egyptian slaveholders and the nation of Egypt, he killed the firstborn and brought judgment upon the household, of every household except for the homes that had the blood of the lamb on the door.

He's saying the Passover lamb that's been sacrificed so that we can be spared is Jesus Christ. And because Jesus was not spared, we can be spared from the judgment of our sins.

[49 : 24] Because Jesus was excluded, we can be received in fellowship with God, communion with him. That's the reason why we are clean. That's the reason why we're unleavened bread.

And as such, we must cleanse the old leaven from our mist. And Paul concludes this passage with verse 7, Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

David Brainerd was an 18th century missionary, American missionary to the Native Americans. He used to serve actually in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, and then he went over to New Jersey, and he wrote this in his diary.

He said, I never got away from Jesus and him crucified. And I found that when my people were gripped by this great evangelical doctrine of Christ and him crucified, I had no need to give them instructions about morality.

I found that one followed as the sure and inevitable fruit of the other. I find my Indians begin to put on the garments of holiness and their common life begins to be sanctified, even in small matters, when they are possessed by the doctrine of Christ and him crucified.

[50 : 47] The church that has been purified by Christ's sacrifice must purge the evil from their midst. And note, this is not a chore.

This is not something we do reluctantly. The image that Paul uses is of celebrating the festival, not literally the festival of unleavened bread, but to celebrate the festival of what Christ has done for us, in dying for us, in sparing us from sin and judgment.

And because of that, our life is a perpetual party, a perpetual celebration of what Christ has done for us. That's the image Paul has here. So let's do that joyfully together.

Because of Christ's sacrifice, purge the evil from our midst, as the sure and inevitable expression of that glorious reality of Christ crucified. Let's pray together. God, we know that this is hard for many people.

But we know, because of the love that you demonstrated in an unforgettable and unmistakable way in Jesus Christ, in his death and resurrection on our behalf, that it comes from the Father's heart of love.

[52 : 10] And we know it is true. So help us to model that, follow that, for your glory and our good. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.