Get Rid of the Old Yeast

1 Corinthians 5:1-13

Key Verse: 5:7 “Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.”

In the previous chapter, Paul pointed out the main cause of the division in the church, which was the preference of leadership. So, he instructed them on the nature of true leadership and apostleship, such as being faithful, God-fearing, persevering, father-like and spiritual. He concluded his instructions with this: “*The kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power*.” (4:20) Indeed, the kingdom of God is proven through the power of the Holy Spirit, not with persuasive talk. Paul urged the believers in the church to grow as spiritual men who live and walk by the Holy Spirit, not by their fleshly desire.

Paul’s message of rebuke continues. He mentions the second issue in the church which was sexual immorality among church members. He also warns against their destructive influence in the church.

First. I am with you in spirit (1-5) Look at verse 1. “***It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father’s wife.***” Paul rebuked the sin of sexual immorality, especially incest among church members. Incest is having sexual relations with those who are too close to marry, such as a parent, child, relative, and so on. In the Bible, Lot slept with his two daughters and had two children, Moab and Ben-Ammi. (Ge 19:36-38) Reuben, the first son of Jacob, slept with Bilhah, Jacob’s concubine and defiled his father’s bed. (Ge 35:22, 49:4) Life in the city of Rome was very immoral. But even these immoral Roman citizens ridiculed the incest of the Corinthians. The more serious problem in the church was their indifference and tolerance toward incest. Look at verse 2. “***And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have gone into mourning and have put out of your fellowship the man who has been doing this***?” Incest is forbidden by Moses’ law. It is a detestable sin before God. If they feared God and were concerned about their future, they would have beaten their chest, tore their cloth, and mourned over the detestable sin. However, the believers in the church were indifferent while the sinners walked around, boasting their sin. According to Paul, they had to cast them out from their community. The Bible says, those who love God hate evil. (Ps 97:10) Those who fear God have righteous anger against such a sin. But the church people became silent over such a sin.

How did Paul deal with these people? Look at verses 3-5. “***For my part, even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. As one who is present with you in this way, I have already passed judgment in the name of our Lord Jesus on the one who has been doing this. So when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus Christ is present, hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.***” Paul said that he was not with them physically, but with them spiritually. Paul meant that he would feel, talk, and judge as if he were physically there with them, even though Paul was in Ephesus at that time. The fellowship of the Holy Spirit among the believers goes beyond time and space. Christians are a big unit in one spirit. Those who confess that Jesus is Lord and Savior share the same Holy Spirit. Even though we are physically separated, we are united in one spirit, one faith, and in one Lord. This is the reason why we pray together with one voice. This is the reason why we pray for others who are in other states and countries. This is the secret of men with the Spirit. Two years ago, we had the World Mission Report in Seoul Korea. More than a thousand families joined online. We were not present physically, but became one in spirit. Let us pray for the coming ISBC 2023 to become one be big unity among all people around the world for his glory through the Holy Spirit. Amen!

Second, get rid of the old yeast (6-13) In verse 5, Paul urges them to hand over the sexually immoral to Satan for the destruction of the flesh so that the spirit might be saved. Paul encouraged them to do so for the salvation of the soul whose flesh would decay. Paul urged them to cast out the person not only for his personal salvation, but also for the unity of the church. In short, Paul warned the destructive influence of the sinner in the church. Look at verses 6-7a. “***Your boasting is not good. 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.***” Once I accidentally stepped over dog poop and unknowingly walked around the house. The whole house was filled with a bad smell. In the same way, a person’s sin and sinful life emits a bad smell over the whole church. Paul warned against the bad influence of the man in the church by comparing him to a little yeast that leavens the whole batch of dough. People may ignore the power of a little yeast. But a little yeast rises the whole batch of dough until it become a big loaf of bread. Jesus warned his disciples against the yeast of the Pharisees, which was hypocrisy. (Mk 8:15) If his disciples envied their hypocritical lives, they would not follow Jesus. So, Paul commanded them to get rid of the old yeast so that they could become a new unleavened batch. Here, a new unleavened batch means the new creation with new life in Christ Jesus. It means that they become men with the Holy Spirit.

Look at verses 7b-8. “***For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.***” Paul brought the Passover Lamb Jesus, who was crucified on the cross, in order to make us a new creation. In Exodus, God commanded Moses to kill lambs and put their blood on the door posts of the Israelites so that the angel of God might pass over them when he judged all the firstborns in Egypt. By the blood of the Passover lamb, the Israelites were delivered from death to life. In the same way, Jesus became the Passover Lamb for the sins of the world. He was sacrificed on the cross and shed his blood so that whoever has his blood can be saved and cross over from death to life. The night before the Exodus, they ate the Passover meal with unleavened bread. The unleavened bread symbolizes hastiness and obedience. They did not have time to put yeast into the dough for bread. They had to eat quickly and leave right away. Since then, the Israelites began to celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread a day before the Passover.

In verse 8, Paul urged them to keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. What is the yeast of malice and wickedness? It is our fleshly desire which make us sinful. Verses 9-12 describes those who live by their fleshly desires: the sexually immoral people, the greedy, swindlers, idolaters, drunkards and so on. Paul strongly warned the believers not to associate with them, and even not eat with such people. Look at verse 9a and 11b. “***I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people...Do not even eat with such people.***” In verse 13 Paul even asked them to expel such people from the church. Look at verse 13. “***God will judge those outside. “Expel the wicked person from among you.***” Why did Paul give such a harsh message to them? This is because of their influence like a little yeast in the batch of dough. Paul wanted to protect the church and the person himself. It is better for them to be separated for a while so that they may have a chance to repent. In the Old Testament, Joshua confronted a big obstacle for his journey to the Promised Land, not from the outside, but from inside of the camp. One of his people Achan stole the plunder and hid some for himself in his tent, and it provoked God to anger. God exposed his sin, and his people stoned him to death. In this way, Joshua removed evil from the Israelites. In the New Testament, Peter found that Ananias and Sapphira hid some of their offerings for themselves and lied that they had offered it all. They deceived not people but God. They were killed on the spot. The fear of God filled the heart of the people. (Ac 5:1-11) Why did God treat Achan and Ananias and Sapphira in such a harsh way? It is because of their influence which broke the unity and the work of the Holy Spirit. It was painful, but necessary for the whole community. It was like surgery to get rid of a lump of cancer. This is why Paul said, “Get rid of the old yeast.”

Getting rid of old yeast means repentance. Repentance is confessing our sins and turning from sin to God. Confessing our sins is painful but necessary for healing. Without repentance we cannot become a new creation. Without confessing our sins before the cross of Jesus there is no forgiveness of sin. Without repentance there is no work of the Holy Spirit. We cannot become spiritual men without repentance. We have been praying for a spiritual revival around the world. Without repentance and the work of the Holy Spirit there is no spiritual revival. During the First Awakening in 18th century in America, there was a great movement of repentance among the people. Under the leadership of Jonathan Edward people confessed their sins and repented. There was the great work of the Holy Spirit and spiritual revival in the hearts of Americans. We expect another awakening and spiritual revival in America in this post-pandemic era. We need the forgiveness of sin and the baptism of the Holy Spirit through repentance. Peter said in Acts 2:38. “*Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*.” Amen!

Paul said in Galatians 5:16, “*So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.*” In order to overcome the desires of the flesh, we must walk by the Spirit and live by the Spirit. How can we walk by the Spirit? First of all, we have to think spiritually, talk spiritually, and desire spiritually. We must be careful of what we see, hear, think, and desire. Our mind is mainly driven by what we think, and our spirit is mainly governed by our minds. I mean that our thoughts and desires should be governed by the Holy Spirit. Paul said in Romans 8:5-6, “*Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desire; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace*.” Second, we must seek the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth and the Spirit of the Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit is with us and in us as Jesus was with his disciples. We need the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. Remember what Paul said, that the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk, but of power, the power of the Holy Spirit. (4:20) Amen.

I pray that we all may get rid of our old yeast, our old sinful desire so that we may become a new creation in Jesus who lives by the Spirit and walks by the Spirit. Amen!