

1 Corinthians 5 Sermon 1

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Daniel Cox, PhD, is the Director of Research for the Public Religion Research Institute. He is a recognized authority on the relationship of religion and political issues in America. Dr. Cox recently published an article entitled, “Are White Evangelicals Sacrificing The Future In Search Of The Past?” in which he gave substance to some observations many of us have begun to take note of.

In the article Dr Cox describes a group of Christians he labels “white evangelical Protestants.” According to his article these are a population of Christians in Americawho appear stuck in a nostalgic rut longing for the past rather than embracing and adapting to societal change in preparation for the future. I want to share with you some quotes that I found significant and relevant to God’s message for us this morning.

Dr Cox notes that,

“As a group, they’re drifting further away — politically and culturally — from the American mainstream. There are growing signs that white evangelical Protestantism is no longer immune to the broader social and cultural forces that are reshaping the American religious landscape.”

Please note that according to Dr Cox it is not the culture that is drifting away. It is the “white evangelical Protestant” church that is drifting away form the culture.

After taking note that many evangelical churches grew after the 1960's, apparently because they offered a more “rigorous theology” than mainline American churches he says,

“Over the past couple of decades, though, Americans have become far more accepting on nearly every issue that fits under the rubric of sexual morality. Today, most Americans say same-sex relationships, premarital sex and having children out of wedlock are morally acceptable. And roughly three-quarters of the public has no moral qualms about divorce.”

The driver behind much of this change is “generational turnover.” And so a chasm has emerged between the views of these young people and white evangelical Protestants. A PRRI survey found that 83 percent of the latter believe that sex is morally acceptable only between a man and a woman who are married, but this view is held among only 30 percent of all young adults. For many young people, white evangelical Protestants in the 21st century appear to be advocating a mid-20th century approach to sex, relationships and marriage, even as American society resembles life during this period less and less.

But this type of theological flexibility is what many younger evangelicals want. Nearly half (48 percent) of white evangelical Protestants under 30 say that their

church should adjust traditional beliefs and practices or adopt modern beliefs and practices. Few older evangelicals agree. More than 7 in 10 (71 percent) white evangelicals over the age of 65 say their church should preserve its traditional beliefs and practices.

As Dr Cox closes his article he asks the question he has been leading up to all along. This is what he writes,

The relationship between evangelical Christianity and the broader culture has always been somewhat fraught . . . For many white evangelical Protestants, the feeling of being both a part of and apart from mainstream culture is entirely familiar, and perhaps inevitable. Samuel D. James, writing in the journal First Things, argued, “You cannot boil down Christianity to the parts that you are unashamed to speak about in the presence of your intelligent gay neighbor or your prayerful lesbian church member.” James’s instinct to hold the line against prevailing winds may resonate with many, but if white evangelical Protestants want to continue to be a home for younger Americans, they may have to reconsider what parts of Christianity are non-negotiable.

Apparently, there are some core convictions in the Christian faith, especially in regard to sexual values and practices, that for the sake of the church’s future in America, must be renegotiated.

No. There are not.

Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit to reveal God’s thinking on the matter of sexual integrity and church practice, decidedly rejects a culturally adaptive approach to Christian holiness.

In other words, when it comes to sexual standards and Christian practice, God insists there is only way acceptable standard: one man, one woman, in the bond of marriage. While the culture may accept other models and the church flaunt its cultural sensitivity and tolerance, God remains committed to the full disclosure of **His** glory in all creation and not the uncontrolled expression of human passion and lust for the pleasure of human participants. God rejects the options the world presents even as the world plunges more deeply into the darkness of selfish self-indulgence. Pornography, homosexuality, serial marriages and divorce, fornication, free love and the demand for abortion that supposedly erases undesired consequences of free love, unrestrained sex that in and of itself is nothing more than the selfish pursuit of one’s own pleasure at the expense of others, find no quarter in the word of God, the heart of God, or the plan of God.

As we will see, as Paul addresses the specific case of incest that is being publicly lauded in the Corinthian church, God does not instruct His people to regard deviant sexual practices with tolerance or acceptance or even resignation, but with love, holiness, and strident rejection. And so, this morning, I ask you to pay attention to these three messages God includes in His word in 1 Corinthians 5:

The first message is that God loves you, right now, in this moment, regardless of who you are or what you’ve done, and is prepared for forgive your sin based on the life and death of Jesus

Christ, God's Son.

The second message God wants you to see in this chapter, which we will deal with more fully next week, is that God really does care more about your personal holiness than the world's perverse idea of happiness.

The third message God has for the church in the world and here at Cornerstone is this: deal decisively in love with sin for the sake of eternal restoration and the integrity of your public witness.

It is important as we begin this morning to understand, first, there is such a thing as sexual immorality, sexual sin, sexual practice that denies and defies the boundaries of God's wise and loving will for human creation. When God created the human race he created them in His image and He created them one man and one woman and blessed them and sent them out with a singular mission to fill the earth with the image of His glory by filling the earth with people just like them. Procreation through a very specific arrangement was God's plan to fill the earth with the knowledge of His glory. God set the standard and the purpose for human sexuality, and any deviation from God's revealed will is sin.

Not everything a human being can find to do, not everything a human being finds to fill the void in their hearts, not everything a person desires in this world is acceptable to God. There is such a thing as sexual immorality, behavior that falls outside the will and intent of God. He created sex; He determines what is acceptable and what is not. Sex outside of marriage and sex that cannot, under normal circumstances, result in children (and I am speaking primarily of homosexuality), is outside the will of God for human beings and falls, therefore, under the rubric of sexual immorality. Sexual immorality is sin and since it is sin it is a source of guilt and shame and is subject to God's judgment.

But, I want to stop here and point you to a point Paul makes in this 5th chapter of 1 Corinthians: whether you are the victim of someone else's immorality or the perpetrator of your own sin, **you need to know, God loves you and has already made arrangements in the death of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sin.**

Do not miss this simple little sentence in the middle of the chapter, for it makes all the difference in understanding the Spirit's intent in the rest of the chapter. Paul, wanting to correct not only a specific behavior, in this case sexual immorality, but also the church's attitude toward that behavior, calls the church to deal decisively with not only the man's sinful behavior but their own. They have been arrogantly boasting of their tolerance. Paul tells them up front that their boasting is not good. He calls them to remove the corrupting influences among them and then reminds them, in verse 7 that "**Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed.**"

Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son has died on the cross, His life and His death a substitute for our own. He died in our place, on our behalf, and on account of His death, the full measure of God's wrath and justice, which stands against our sin like the judgment of unbreakable law, has been completely satisfied. No matter who we are or what we've done in life to this moment, the

way is free and clear for us to return to God and find through faith in Christ, God's forgiveness.

God has made it plain in His word, dear ones, that "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness*" (1 John 1:8, ESV). That forgiveness comes not because we confess but because Christ died. Confession of sin is nothing more than the occasion in which, by faith, we appropriate the grace God has already supplied in His Son.

You need to know this morning, whatever your sin, whether you are struggling with pornography or same-sex attraction, or anger, or spite, or unbelief, or greed, or selfishness, or spiritual lethargy, these sins are all the same to God and are all equally forgivable in Christ! Each of them requires only faith for forgiveness and forgiveness will require only repentance. With forgiveness comes the grace to repent and the grace to live by faith and the power to excel in the Spirit.

If you are a Christian and struggling with sexual sin, you need to know today that God loves you and will forgive you if you will come to Him in faith, confessing your sin, and relying on Christ. If you are not a Christian today, but you feel the burden of guilt and shame and conviction weighing upon your heart, keeping you from being the person you know you can be, undermining your efforts and crippling your spirit, you can have a new life today by coming to God, believing in Christ, and receiving God's forgiveness. When God forgives He removes our sins from us, the Bible says as far as the east is from the west, and that God will remember them no more.

The world will tell you there is no hope, there is no freedom, that you shouldn't even want to be free of the things that weigh you down. The world will tell you that the way of escape from guilt and shame is to own and embrace your sin and fully indulge in them. Some of you have tried that and you know in your heart you are as broken and wounded as ever. God tells you there is hope and freedom in his love and you can have both freedom and hope today if you will accept God's loving grace offered in and through Jesus Christ to you!

The world will keep you enslaved to sin as a means to downplay and ignore its own sinfulness, but a day is coming when God will judge the world once and for all. You can read about God's plan in the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, in the 18th chapter. Everything in the world that opposes God is represented by a city named Babylon. This is probably not an actual single city, but God uses an historical city familiar to the people to whom the Revelation was initially given, to paint a picture of the systemic rebellion of the entire world against the sovereign rule of God the Creator. Listen to what God has to say about this world and its rejection of Him, His grace, His glory, and His plan for your life:

Revelation 18:1-3 (ESV) *¹After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory. ²And he called out with a mighty voice, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast. ³For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the*

merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living.”

God follows up the announcement of Babylon’s certain and impending doom with this plea to His people:

Revelation 18:4-5 (ESV) *⁴ Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; ⁵ for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.*

Take note this morning of an invitation and two warnings. The invitation, which is really an exhortation that has the strength of a command is “Come out of her, my people.” God calls for a real separation between his people, those who trust in Christ for salvation, and the world. It is a separation not of location, but of heart, spirit, mind, intellect, and affections. The apostle John puts it like this:

1 John 2:15-17 (ESV) *¹⁵ Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.*

In another place, Paul, citing Isaiah the prophet, instructs the Corinthians the same way:

2 Corinthians 6:17 (ESV) *¹⁷ Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you,*

And here are the two reasons God gives for calling His people to confront sin in themselves and in their churches: 1) lest you take part in [the sins of the world] and 2) lest you wind up sharing in “her plagues,” that is, the judgment God will bring upon the sinful world. But notice this, God’s call from something is always a call to something. God calls us from sin to forgiveness, from death to life, from wrath to mercy, from selfish love to sacrificial love, from the kingdom of the world to the kingdom of God’s Son, from the world’s destruction to the Father’s love.

The overarching message of 1 Corinthians chapter five is that God has acted in Christ to give those who are called to faith, not the means to adapt to the world, but to resist the world and flee from the certain destruction that is coming upon the world. And now, **faithful Christians must act in that same spirit to rescue themselves and one another from the clutches of sin and the world that loves sin more than it loves God.**

Daniel Cox suggests that we may have to reconsider what parts of Christianity are non-negotiable in order to guarantee the future of the church. Dear friends, the future of the church will not be determined by compromise with the world but by the command of Christ and the conviction of the Holy Spirit. No matter how attractive, pleasing, desirable, culturally acceptable the world

attempts to make sexual immorality, God will always call sin what it is, a rebellious affront against the sovereignty of God over the world that belongs to Him.

Don't fall for it. And if you've already fallen for the lie that it is okay to live in open rebellion against God, if you've already begun to believe that maybe God doesn't care who sleeps with who or who sleeps with you, please, please, take another look at God's life giving word, confess your sin, repent, and find God's gracious forgiveness and the new life He offers.