

Christ-Centred Community

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[0 : 00] Our Bible reading is on page 1147, 1147, and I'm reading from 1 Corinthians chapter 5, verses 1 to 13, page 1147.

Let's read God's Word. 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. 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?

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 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.

[1 : 32] 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.

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.

I wrote to you in my letter, not to associate with the sexually immoral people, not at all meaning people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers or idolaters.

In that case, you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister, but is sexually immoral or greedy or idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler.

Do not even eat with such people. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?

[3 : 08] God will judge those outside. Expel the wicked person from among you. This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. Thanks very much, Alan. It's safe to say it's an interesting passage, to say the least. I'm sure it's no coincidence Martin's on holiday this week, as we have to think about incest and handing people over to Satan.

But there's no doubt about it. It's a tricky passage we have this morning. But to be clear right from the outset, as Paul makes very clear in this, this is teaching to people who would describe themselves as followers of Jesus, people who find themselves within the Christian community and not only just find themselves in that place, but are committed to Jesus, shaping their lives and forming therefore how we live and operate among one another.

So I would encourage you, if you're a guest here, if you're somebody who's looking into the Christian faith, yep, as I'm sure they will say this a lot of times when we're looking at 1 Corinthians, please, you're more than welcome to sit and listen, but hear it through that lens.

Even through that lens, it's still some tricky stuff Paul has to say for us this morning. So I'm gonna pray and we'll just dive right into it. God, I pray through your spirit, you would give us ears to hear and eyes to see the uniqueness of what it means to be people who are formed by the living and resurrected Jesus.

[4 : 37] Would you inspire us as to what that means for our lives and for the lives of the world we live in today? I ask that in Jesus' name. Amen. So in the notice sheet, if you want some points, I've managed to crack alliteration, so we've got four E's we're gonna look at this morning.

We're gonna look at the ethics, which is the values of the Jesus-centered community. Then we're gonna deal, I hope, well, the Bible deals with the idea of expel, this idea of some of the boundaries of a Jesus-centered community.

And everybody, the connectedness of a Jesus-centered community. And then finally, engage the witness of a Jesus-centered community. So firstly, the values of a Jesus-centered community.

So Paul has heard this outrageous claim that among the people in Corinth, there's this case of sexual immorality where you have a man who is sleeping with his father's wife.

Now, it's more than likely his stepmother, because Paul would have said otherwise. And most people would probably read that and be like, yeah, that is probably a bit shocking. But actually, that is a command that you find elsewhere in the scriptures.

[5 : 44] In the Old Testament, in Leviticus 18, the people of God are explicitly told not to do this. In verse 8, in chapter 18, now we might hear that and think, well, obviously, that shouldn't be something you need to tell a group of people to be sleeping out with the kind of norms of how we consider family.

But it is rooted in the scriptures as a command. And that's because when the Levitical laws came about 3,000 odd years ago, as the people of God wandered around the desert, lifespan was quite short.

So if you were a man, your lifespan was probably to the early 40s. And if your wife died, usually, you remarried to somebody younger. Now again, they're living in community.

So you've got a young dad, maybe a teenage boy, and then your father remarries somebody who's in her early 20s. And they're all living on top of each other in community. So these laws had to come around to kind of give good guidance as to what it meant to live well and to live in line with who God says they're to be.

And in fact, the whole of Leviticus 18, there's a lot of context I think you need to understand this chapter in general, is about how the people of God are supposed to be different from the pagan nations.

[7 : 00] The whole idea was that the people of God were rescued to be a light to the world, to show the kindness and goodness of God demonstrated in the way they live. And so you had these laws that said, this is what will make you different.

This will set you apart and head you towards something better. And how does Paul critique what he's heard in verse one? It's of a kind that not even the pagans do.

So if you're reading this and you understand the parts of the Old Testament, the epithets that you ring in your ears, it's not just that this act in and of itself disobeys something within the scriptures. And more than that, Paul says disobeys something within the culture.

It's kind of going against the grain of who these people were originally called to be. But it is worse than that. Like under Roman law, incest was illegal. So you'd have been in Roman law, you'd have been cast off to some island.

It's a bit like when British people used to send people to Australia if you did something bad. The Romans did a similar thing with incest. But Paul says even the Corinthians don't do this. Now the Corinthians, when it comes to sexual freedoms as they might call it, would have been off the scale compared to some of our modern standards.

[8 : 05] And Paul is saying like even these guys don't do this. And there's an important word in here in terms of the values of how we understand what it means to be a Jesus-centered community.

When Paul uses the word sexually immoral here, and it's important because he will use it continually in the chapters to come, it's the Greek word *pornea*, which is obviously where we get the word pornography from.

And it means something far more than adultery. This isn't simply just having an affair. It is anything outwith the breaking of the covenant relationship between a man and a woman as described throughout the scriptures.

And Paul is pointing to the idea that you've got what the people of God believe and how we are supposed to then guide our lives and communities around that.

And it doesn't fit there, but it also doesn't fit within the culture you find yourself in. In fact, it goes completely against the grain of even some of the pagan nations. And obviously, that makes little sense to a lot of our culture today, where I think, you know, it's not a new comment to say that probably a lot of the way we understand in our culture today to do with sexual freedom and sexual ethics, the kind of baseline is as long as it's safe and as long as you love somebody, you're free to do what you want.

[9 : 22] But I think one of the things Paul is essentially saying here is that every single culture in all of human history, including our own, has its own versions of boundaries around sexual ethics. Our culture is no different.

I think for me, one of the fallacies of the world we live in today is that anything can go. Nobody really believes that. No culture, even the Corinthians didn't believe that with their own idea of what taboos are.

I don't know if you've ever even come across that in your own lives. I know in my own life as somebody who's single and seeking to live well for Jesus, as much as I can try to do that. I've even been with some friends where I've said, well, here's how I choose to express my sexuality is to not sleep around.

I've been told that that's a wrong way of how to express your sexuality, even though they're telling you, you should be free to do whatever you want to do. Every culture has its own ethics and every culture has its own taboos.

And for the Christian faith, I mean, this could be an entire sermon in and of itself. Don't worry, it won't be. I'll try and keep it short. We have something unique in how the gospel puts forward what it means to live well as individuals and as community.

[10 : 27] And as opposed to it all being coached in the negative, which I think when I first came around Christians, they always talked about what they were not allowed to do. And if you ask them why, sometimes they didn't really know why, they just weren't supposed to.

Paul is not a prude here. Paul is leaning into a very big picture of the idea of covenant relationship between individuals and community and family where when we live out the way the scriptures tell us to live out, it brings life, it brings beauty, it brings goodness to the world around about you.

It is different from a view of sex that sees sex as purely just a natural appetite that you've got to manage, just like hunger or anything else. It's different from potentially the way, I don't know, the Victorians would have saw sex.

This is a bad thing, it's kind of dirty, it's necessarily, you know, it's necessary for procreation of humanity, but other than that, which I think is what most of my friends think Christians think. But it's also different from, I guess, what is more prevalent today, which is the view of like it's about repressed creativity, that I find myself, I will be more fully known the way when I give myself freely to exploring this part of my life.

That is where I'll find my identity, that is where I'll find all of who I am. And the gospel says something different to all three of those things. I've literally nicked all of this off Tim Keller, so if you want the article I took it all from, you can have that.

[11 : 42] He says, the Bible views sex not primarily as self-fulfillment, but as a way to know Christ and build his kingdom. That view undercuts both the traditional society's idolatry of sex for social standing and the secular society's idolatry for sex for personal fulfillment.

So, one of the things he's saying there is as opposed to sex being a neutral appetite, it's actually quite broken and to give yourself over to it as the guiding force in your life leads to more brokenness. But as opposed to it just being like a baseline animal thing that you need to get away from, it's actually very, very good, it's very beautiful and it's a gift from God.

And actually, for the British person, the Bible can be incredibly uncomfortable in the explicitness of how it talks about this good gift. But as opposed to being a source of identity, it is something that is given to us within community that helps us form our identity but is never the source of identity.

So, Paul is not being a prude here. He's pushing into the values of what it means to be people who gather around God. But more than that, he's not just saying, look, you're doing something a bit weird that not even the nations around you do.

He goes further than that. He says, you're proud of the fact this is happening. It's not just that it's happening as you seem to enjoy and like that you're the kind of community that celebrates this. Now, arrogance and pride are a part of the macro problem going on in the Corinthian church and these chapters, Paul's going to start to really push into the implications of how that is working itself out in the community.

[13 : 13] But he essentially is saying here, are you kind of out of your minds that this is happening? What are you actually doing? In fact, you should be mourning this, is what he says. In verse 2, and you are proud, shouldn't you rather have gone into mourning, less literally, like, it's like someone has died and removed this man from the fellowship.

So, he doesn't just say you should not accept this, he says you should have done something about it, and the thing you should have done is get rid of this person, which will bring us on to our second point of expel the boundaries of Jesus-centered community.

So, just to be clear, this is Paul challenging somebody who's living in unrepentant sin. So, this is someone who's consistently and unapologetically choosing to live in sin, is like picking up the Bible, reading what Jesus says about money or sex or whatever, and is not struggling with it or having questions about it, that's not what this is talking about, it's like reading it, disagreeing with it, and saying, I'm going to do the complete opposite, and I'm going to encourage other people to do that, and I'm found in a community that somehow celebrates that.

So, just to be clear, this is very, very different from struggling with things or having questions with things. If that was the case, I'd imagine this might be quite an empty room we'd be sitting in this morning, there's highly little chance I'd be standing up here if it's about not struggling and not having questions.

It's about an approach and attitude that is consistently against the teachings of Scripture and the life of Jesus. And it might feel like hard teaching, it is hard teaching, but if you think I'm trying to push from the point, this is not some sort of cultish community that as soon as somebody has a question, or as soon as somebody has a struggle, or as soon as somebody's lifestyle does not fit in, then you get rid of that person to maintain the whole.

[15 : 00] This is about a different approach. And actually I think what Paul is doing here is he's deliberately lifting straight from the teachings of Jesus. So in Matthew 18 verses 15 to 17, Jesus says this, if your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you.

If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church. And if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

This is the teaching of Jesus right in the middle of Matthew's gospel. I think what Paul is doing is he has lifted that and he is teaching the Corinthians to do the same thing. So what is Jesus saying here? Well, Jesus, I think, has kind of four pretty clear steps.

He says, if you know a brother or sister, that's not someone outside the church or somebody you barely know, somebody you know in community, you do this. The first step is you go to them. That's not text them or email them.

[16 : 11] That is, have a face-to-face conversation in love. And if they listen to them, if they listen to you, you've won them over. So you forgive. It's the end of the matter. If not, you go with a couple of others.

So again, I think the principle here is turning up the volume. That's what Jesus is doing. You turn up the volume. And in harmony, you say the same thing to this person. We love you, but what you're doing is wrong.

So you need to return to God. Again, if they listen, excellent. But if not, step three, you turn the volume up again. You tell it to the church. Now that is not during the announcements, we start to get up and be like, well, I've had a few chats with a few people, so Jesus tells me that I need to go through Darren's personal life because he's not listening to us.

It's absolutely not what Jesus is saying. It's the principle of like, in love and in community, there's now 10, 20 people, all of one mind saying to this person, you need to stop.

This is destroying you and it's destroying others. Please listen. And if then, they still do not listen, there seems to be these boundaries that come in where even Jesus says, treat them like a pagan or a tax collector.

[17 : 25] Now Jesus obviously loved those people. He's using the metaphor of like, what did the Pharisees do with those people? They had nothing to do with them. And interestingly, I don't know why I've never made this connection.

The way Jesus finishes this teaching is he says, for when two or three of you are gathered together, there I am also. There's a verse we often use to talk about singing and praying, that when we're gathered together, Jesus is there with us, which he is.

But Jesus is saying, would you live like this? This is the kind of community I am present with. This is who I am with. is in the context of real family discipline, of real relationships.

But in love, you're seeking to call one another out and call one another to a higher standard. And the roughness and the edge that can come with that, then Jesus is saying that I'll be there with you as you seek to do this.

And then in verse four, he goes on where he says, so when you're assembled, I am there with you also. So when you're assembled in the name of Jesus, and I think, not to kind of skim over this verse, but just to go into a wee bit, I think Paul is like, when I'm there with you in spirit, look, I've already know what I've told you what I've thought about this guy.

[18 : 42] I think Jesus is there with you, which where he says he's alluding back to this Matthew 18, and people who are in the power of Jesus together. And after many attempts at reconciliation, the church needs to deal with this guy.

But the way he says to deal with it is to 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. So what is going on here?

Is Paul saying do some weird ritual where you hang him over to Satan? Is Paul saying hand him outside and he'll be killed? I don't think so. In fact, the rest of this chapter is, I think, loads of Passover imagery.

And Passover is the story in Exodus of God rescuing his people out of slavery. And the night before they are left, they are commanded to go into their houses, sacrifice a lamb, put blood over the door, and as death passes through the nation, if you are inside the house, you are safe.

If you are outside the house, you are no longer under the protection and goodness of God. And death and Satan have an interesting parallel in the Old Testament.

[19 : 48] But Satan is described as the prince of this world. I think Paul is saying this echoing Passover teaching of like, once you're outside the community, once you continue to choose a particular path, you're no longer under the blessing of God.

Again, there's so many caveats you could add to all this. That doesn't mean like, you know, as soon as you're outside the church building, then the devil's out there going to get you. That's not what he's saying. In fact, Paul will go quite far to say the problem's actually in the room, it's not outside.

But there's a principle here of like, once you're outside the community, you're outside of a relationship with God. This is being handed over to Satan in his realm.

But Paul gives two life-giving reasons to do this. The first is this idea of the destruction of the flesh. And again, I don't think that means so he'll be killed. But the Greek word for flesh is that word sarx.

And it's, in the Bible, when you're described as a Christian, you're described as a new person, a new life. You've been given over to someone new who is Jesus and he's forming and making something in you.

[20 : 51] And that's often called the spirit. It wants to do what is good, right, and beautiful and pursue life-giving ways by trusting God and knowing who he is. Yet we're all a work in progress and the other bit of us that says it's a complete contrast to that, that wants to pursue self at all costs, is often called the flesh.

And it's that word Paul's using here, it's the warring part that is we, all people in tension, seek to live a new life. There's always this bit of us that seeks to do the opposite. And Paul's like, hopefully that will mean that bit will be destroyed.

And secondly, that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord. So the purpose here of discipline is one of salvation, not punishment. The focus is on restoration and redemption, not just being like, well, we can't stand this person anymore, so let's get rid of him.

Punishment for sin is pretty clear in the scriptures, has taken place on the cross. Our punishment for sin here is about saving life.

It's about saving the individual and the community. It's got a thrust behind of like, we have to do this. There is no other option left. It's a bit like shock therapy in a family.

[22 : 06] I don't know if any of you have had family members where you've had struggles with addiction in it. I know I have in my family. And it gets to a point for the sake of the individual and the sake of the family is that we cannot continue to live like this.

We have tried everything and we don't know what to do anymore other than to draw new boundaries. It's for the sake of the individual and it's the sake of the family and it is the hope that new life may come.

It's straight from the teaching of Jesus and it is hard, but it is about pursuing this idea that on the day of the Lord, his spirit may be saved. And that's because of the way Paul and the scriptures view community, which is our next point.

Everybody. So then Paul goes on to challenge this dangerous reality about boasting and he uses this metaphor of yeast and bread in verses six to eight. And again, it's loaded with Passover imagery.

I'm a useless baker. I've no idea how it works, but a tiny little bit of yeast spreads. It's totally imperceptible and it can go into everything. And it rises and puffs up like the Corinthians arrogance and their boasting.

[23 : 13] Now, one of the challenges of this type of passage where Paul says, look, a little bit of yeast, it will spread everywhere. So true. So it is also true of sin and the community. If you do not deal with this, it will spread everywhere.

I hear that and go to instinctively apply it to myself. Okay. There's some sin in my life. I need to be careful. It doesn't spread everywhere, which is true, but that's not the way Paul is using this. Paul is talking about a community here.

He's talking about a group of people, which is a real challenge to the way I think I think about sin as an individual, which is obviously true. But he's talking about like, if you do not deal with this as a community, if you don't deal with your pride and arrogance as a community, this will spread through and wreak havoc.

That's why the scriptures so often talk about the communal life of believers as a body or as a family. It's not just a random collection of individuals who happen to get together every now and then because they believe the same stuff.

It's that now under the blood of Christ, you've made something new. You're connected to one another and to God. And we all know that, don't we? Like I know my attempts to silo off my anger or my lust or my cynicism and deal with it in my own strength.

[24 : 18] I'd be naive to think that that somehow does not affect the lives of the people I'm closest to. It's that principle, but drawn out in a far deeper way. That's why Paul says, get rid of the old yeasts that you may be a new unleavened batch as you really are.

For Christ, our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. Therefore, keep the festival not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

And again, this is Passover imagery. So the Passover celebration, before they had the big party, they were told get rid of all the yeast because yeast also was a symbol for evil in the Old Testament. So get rid of it because that's not who you are anymore.

That's essentially what Paul is saying. You need to get rid of it because the lamb, which is Jesus, has already been sacrificed. So be the new batch you already are.

I think that's what Paul is saying. You're already, in Christ, you're a new batch. Don't let this stuff reign. You've been given a new identity. And in the same way, the Passover lamb in Exodus spared God's people from death.

[25 : 23] So too, it's the same with Jesus. And Paul's like, the festival's already begun. This is a new festival that's already begun. So don't continue to live like this. Live like the people you already are.

To be who God has made you to be. Do not let this sin or any sin permeate you as an individual or as a community. He is pleading with them to take sin seriously.

And again, not because he's got a low view of sex, but he's got a high view of what it means to be people who together pursue new life, holiness, righteousness, all the different wonderful words the scriptures use to describe that.

Because you are all connected. Family in the biblical sense is real, open and honest conversations with people who know you and love you and are seeking to engage with one another, not just as common interest, but as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Know your weaknesses, your successes, your hopes, your dreams, your failures, the haunting bits of the past, the stuff of the present, there's a real tension, your dreams for the future. And as we seek to do that together, we're seeking to pursue something new.

[26 : 31] And that will and has to involve the areas where you think, no, hold on, that's going off on a different track. And those types of relations take initiative. So, like, I plead with you, if you hear this kind of teaching, you think, right, I just need to be really better at hiding my sin in case the community kick me out.

That is literally the opposite of what Paul is saying. He's like, in love, pursue who you are together because the Passover lamb has already been sacrificed. Live like this. It'll take risks.

But it's because the aim of Christian community is not one of simply tolerance, but transformation. And the uncomfortable reality is in that, that means Paul is saying, you need to judge one another.

Now, if you hear that, a red flag will probably rightly go up in your head and you're like, I'm sure of all the things Christians are not supposed to do, they're not supposed to judge. Paul explicitly says it later in verse 13, you're to judge one another.

So Jesus said the opposite. So how does that work? Well, I think the context is always clear, key and clear. Well, Jesus, when he says that in Matthew 7, is talking to Pharisees and religious leaders.

[27 : 33] He is rebuking hypocrisy and pride. He tells them not to judge, which means do not stand in distance condemning people, thinking you are better than them. Looking down on them and thinking that you are the point of success and that everybody just needs to join you up here.

Jesus says, do not live like that. Paul is speaking to the other side of the spectrum of a community of people who are proud that they are so accepting they'll let anything happen in their community.

Even if it's in complete contrast with what the scriptures say about what new life looks like. Paul to them says, you need to get better at judging one another because you're new creations and you're under the covenant of a Passover lamb.

You need to talk differently. You need to be in transparent Jesus-like relationships with people where you call one another out in love, speak truth and having real honest conversations.

And if it comes to it for the sake of the individual and the community, you have to draw new boundaries. Paul, inspired by Jesus, I think is simply inviting the community to live as honest biblical family.

[28 : 41] It is hard, the reality of that, but that is what he is calling them to do. It's what he's calling us to do as well. And then finally, in verses 9 to 13, he says, and this isn't something you hide away for yourselves.

You're supposed to engage. This is the witness of Jesus- centered community. So Paul goes on to reaffirm these principles of not associating with people who claim to be part of God's family.

And again, this is someone who, this is not someone who just makes mistakes or is living in the tension of spirit and flesh, which is everyone. And he expands it beyond simply sexual immorality to include things like greed and slander, the way that Christians seem to talk about one another, which can be appalling, I guess.

Well, I know it can't be. And he's not just making a random list of sins here. I think he's deliberately using Old Testament language. He's lifting out of Deuteronomy all the different kind of things that would include, that would have led to somebody being excluded from the community.

And actually, in the Old Testament, it wasn't exclusion. It was execution, which, yeah, again, that's another talk for another time as to what we would do with that. But he's challenging a misunderstanding from a letter he previously wrote to them, which I guess would make this 2 Corinthians.

[30 : 00] But he's written to them already, and somehow they've come to the conclusion, even though they're living like this, they're like, yeah, but we don't really need to be involved in the world. And in verse 10, he says, not at all meaning the people of this world that you're supposed to avoid.

In that case, you would have to leave this world altogether. So Paul has been very clear here. He's like, if you somehow use this teaching to avoid people who do not identify as followers of Jesus, I think he's again, he's like, are you kidding me?

How on earth do you arrive at these conclusions? You're supposed to be right in the thick of the world, loving your neighbor, being a light to the nations. Again, it's Leviticus 18 stuff. You're supposed to be somebody different.

And if somehow you conclude you need to remove yourself from the world, away from all these bad people, you've completely missed the point again. You're supposed to be living right in the thick of a world where people's lives are completely not in sync with the gospel, whose ethical and sexual norms are completely different from yours.

You're not supposed to avoid them. But then he goes further in verses 12 and 13. What business is it of mine to judge those outside of the church?

[31 : 12] Are you not called to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. What business is it of ours to judge those outside the church? None, Paul says.

Now, unfortunately, you don't need to know much of world history to see how wrong the church has got this. Very good at turning a blind eye to the sin that goes on inside the walls and very good at channeling all its vitriol and anger at the world round about it.

Particularly, I'd have to admit, I guess, it was evangelicals over the past 30, 40 years, we've become particularly targets for that being a parody of how we operate. Now, I'm thankful to say I don't know, I've never experienced that in this community.

That's a parody of Christians today, isn't it? They ignore what's happening inside the building, and that's called hypocrisy, and then they go and shout at people at the world for all the bad things they do. Paul seems to be saying, look, if you've got somebody in the community who's not going through all this, yeah, go pick it their front garden if you want to, but the world, you don't judge them.

Now, again, I'll have to kind of understand what exactly he means, because I don't think he's saying turn a blind eye to things, but he's like, what business is it of yours to say to somebody, well, because of this behavior, we're going to remove ourselves from you or remove God from you?

[32 : 38] It doesn't make any sense when you think of a gospel that has at its core one of, I've got nothing to bring here, Lord, because of the freedom and goodness of your mercy and your grace and your love.

I give all of who I am to you, because you've given all of who you are for me. And you say to certain people, yeah, well, as soon as you get this bit of your life turned around and sorted out, then you'll be more acceptable to God.

It's a nonsensical communication of a gospel that we would have, and it creates a culture where moral respectability is like one of the main values, where members look down on those who misbehave out there in the world.

And again, that's probably a lot of people's unfortunate experience with the church. I use the church in the global sense. When I use that word, that's what I mean there. But Paul is saying there's real poise, like you need to be people who are pursuing holiness together.

Yet that is not supposed to like bridge itself out into the way you treat those outside. It creates this culture, and only does it not create a culture where if you start to communicate that to the world, you'll definitely start to internalize that, and you start to slowly think, and that's also the way we become acceptable to God, the more morally, now again, there's always caveats to this.

[33 : 54] We're trying to pursue something better, so transformation is part of it. But if you think, well, my perfection is the thing that makes me more acceptable to God, again, that is not what the gospel says. And you end up in this kind of, I don't know, karmic rollercoaster of how you relate to God, based purely on your perception of your own behavior.

Like, Jesus spent much of his time, as we all know, with those who the religious hierarchy condemned and dismissed as unclean. You can go near such people, not Jesus and the disciples.

He loved them and wanted to rescue them, and that's why he was with them. So that's where they spent a lot of their time, to bring knowledge of love and forgiveness and mercy and grace. It wasn't just hang out with them to be nice, because that's what Christians supposed to do.

But in the midst of the mess of people's lives, had a posture of, we're pursuing something new together, and that allows us to be fully present in a non-judgmental way, holding out a different message of truth and hope.

Now, does that mean we don't stand against abuses or the degradation of human life or the value and dignity of other people and have something new to say to the world?

[35 : 01] That's not what I'm saying at all. It also does not mean we're supposed to become desensitized to sin and be like, oh well, that's just what people are like. So that is not what Paul is trying to say. He's trying to get out of this tension of like, you know, you're called to live like this, but never let this become an excuse of how you treat those who do not know you, do not know Jesus.

Because unfortunately, that is the first thing that people hear, is once you, because of your life and how bad it is, once you get it all sorted, then you're acceptable to God. The gospel does not start with stop what you're doing.

The gospel starts with Jesus loves you and has died for you. Now, if somebody accepts that, you're into a completely different conversation about how that life therefore leads and where that goes. And that for some people takes us years because it is messy, but it's one of transformation and hope.

That's never the starting point. Now, again, I think there's occasions where it's probably not wisest just to throw yourself into every single situation you find yourself because Jesus says, love the world.

Well, I may as well go and do whatever the world is up to. I know myself, you have to, like, work this out in community. I know myself, I've had to, like, draw particular boundaries of when I'm with my mates or particularly when I'm away on football away trips.

[36 : 14] It's just, no, certain places I'll not go because it's not helpful and it will be seen to condone stuff. But then there's the kind of smaller nuances of, like, I mean, sometimes mates don't notice they're too drunk anyway, but I have a point where the night has kind of descended into chaos.

I just decide to go home because at that point this is not helpful for anybody anymore. Also, I'm getting old, so it's easier just to go home as well. There's certain forms of conversation where I'm like, oh, man, what does it look like to be a loving presence here that isn't judging these people, yet it's holding true to who I think Jesus has called me to be?

I cannot do that by myself. I need brothers and sisters who will hold me accountable, who will pray for me, who will chat that through. I've had a group of people around me who's like, yeah, just do what you want. In fact, that's the love of God.

And then, actually, why don't we all do that? Paul said that is dangerous for the community, but never transpose that on the way you live in the world. So there may be occasions when it's wisest to withdraw, but I don't think that is the norm.

And that will mean you're just going to be regularly up against the lives of people whose lifestyles and opinions you just do not like and you do not agree with. And maybe for good reason. And Paul says, what business is it of yours to judge those people?

[37 : 31] You leave that to God. So there's a hard challenge about the exercise of communal boundaries when we think about what it means to have ethics as a community, what that means when we start to draw boundaries around that, but how we then see how we're actually all connected.

And actually, that is supposed to lead to us engaging in the world. And Paul says, essentially, if you shrink back from the challenge of living like this, it will wreak havoc on you, it will wreak havoc on your community, and it will undermine what it means to be a witness in this world.

This tiny little bit of yeast, it will spread. It's dangerous, so do something about it. But do something about it because this is not who you are anymore. Therefore, the festival has begun.

And actually, when you live like that, Jesus says, and I am there with you as you seek to do this. So I'm going to finish, well, I've gone way over time, sorry, Robbie, with this, just this brief wee, I don't know if any of you have heard of the epistle to Diognetus from the second century.

It was like, they were trying, this guy was trying to write a letter to try to justify how Christians lived, because the Romans were like, who are these people? We don't know what to do with them when they were trialing them. And in a hostile culture, this is just a little part of it, when he's describing the new community who lived in the monk Corinth in Rome.

[38 : 51] It says, every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do others. They have children, as do others. They do not destroy their offspring.

They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but are citizens of heaven.

They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time, surpass the laws in their lives. They love all, and are persecuted by all, undergoing punishment.

They rejoice, because they are brought to new life. In particular, that bed, they shared a common table, hospitality being one of the key things to demonstrate love.

But they do not have a common bed. They were a complete contrast. And as they did so, they were giving their lives away as communities, as God did something powerful in their midst. I'm going to pray, and then the band are going to come up.

[39 : 51] We're going to have prayer ministry at the back, on my right, your left. And I guess I'd encourage you, if anything's come up, particularly when you think about your own personal life, and what it means to be more engaged in the community, but also, you know, as you're living in the world, and there's places where that's hard and difficult for you, come and we'll pray with you, or whatever you like.

You can come and pray whatever you want. You don't need to put caveats in prayer ministry. Okay, I'm going to pray. Father, I thank you, the call to community, and the call to holiness, and the call to righteousness.

These words that we use quite a lot is really high. God, I, is all of who we are, but we only do that because the Passover lamb has given all of who he is to enable this new way of living.

Would you help us to live well in the tension of what it means to be new people, where you're asking us to get rid of the yeast, and as we do that as individuals and as a community, and help us to do that in full view of a world where we are called to live with this poise of pursuing right living and strong convictions, yet never in a way where it calls us to judge those outside.

I ask that in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[41 : 15] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.