

The Church Keeps Judging the Wrong People

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[0:00] We are in a series on the book of 1 Corinthians, and we've called this series Hot Takes, and it's a combination of Paul's hot takes and the church's hot takes on Paul and Corinth's hot takes on themselves and lots of hot takes, all right?

And we are going to be in the book of 1 Corinthians chapter 5, so if you want to join me there, 1 Corinthians chapter 5, we will be talking about some serious things.

So quick little disclaimer, today's sermon does involve some frank conversations around sex and sexual harm, so please take care of yourselves, take care of your bodies.

If you need to step out, please do so. We will have myself and Pastor Tanetta and Antonio available to talk to after the service, and if you're in need of child care, we can make sure that your kids know where table kids are as well.

So big idea for today's sermon, this is not in the first slide, so don't worry, Marie, but the big idea is that God's kingdom is already among us.

[1:10] Therefore, the church needs to hold its own people accountable, and it needs to stay open to the world. God's kingdom is already among us, therefore, we hold our own accountable, and we stay open to the world.

So quick bit of review about where we've been. 1 Corinthians 1 through 4, Paul's addressing a church that has been split into fan clubs. I belong to Paul, I belong to Apollos, I belong to Peter, I belong to Christ, and Paul's trying to deal with that.

He is talking to a congregation where most folks are not particularly well-born, high class, wise, powerful, by the world's standards.

But there are some who do fit those definitions, and there's class conflict going on in this church.

Paul is emphasizing that God has chosen the nobodies, that's chapter 1, verses 27 and 28.

And in 1 Corinthians 4, which we haven't had a chance to preach on, but Paul has this great line of sarcasm where he says, Already, you have all you want. Already, you have become rich.

[2:18] Quite apart from us, you have become kings. And then he goes on to say, If only you had truly become kings, so that we might be kings with you. Paul is writing this as a man on the run from the state, from the empire.

And he is talking to some people who are either already, by the world's standards, high class, well-bred, wealthy, whatever you want to call them, and to a group of people who don't meet that definition, but are trying to get there.

They're trying to become a high class, either spiritually or practically. And Paul is saying, That's not what the kingdom of heaven is about. This is chapter 4, verse 20. For the kingdom of God depends not on talk or words, but on power.

And these couple of chapters, 4, 5, and 6, are framed by this conversation around kingdom and power, and what power means in God's perspective.

What Paul wants is a single church that doesn't have a bunch of factions. He wants the concept of status to be turned upside down, a la Jesus.

[3:22] He wants a community that's shaped like the cross. And he wants unity across this class-status-divided church. So, big, big picture, chapters 1 through 6, are Paul responding to things that he's heard from Chloe's people.

Chloe is some sort of leader in the Corinthian church. The Corinthian church meets throughout a series of house churches, oikoses throughout the Corinthian city. Maybe occasionally they could gather together in a large group, but mostly it's in house churches.

Chloe reports a bunch of things to Paul. Paul's responding to that in chapters 1 through 6. Chapters 7 through 16, he's responding to a letter that they have written to Paul, responding to a bunch of

things that they ask.

And so we're still in the what Paul has heard, what Chloe's people has responded to, part. And Paul's hot take for this week is, what business is it of mine to judge outsiders?

That's chapter 5, verse 12. What business is it of mine to judge outsiders? Which, you know, honestly is the reverse of what we may expect from the church. The church has become, unfortunately, famous for judging outsiders.

[4:34] For telling the world this is the way that you ought to act. All, in the meanwhile, not dealing with the poop in our own house, right? Not dealing with the things that I see that hand waving.

Not dealing with the things that are in our own house churches and small groups and large communities. Okay? So, Paul's hot take is, what business is it of mine to judge outsiders?

So, today's sermon, actually the next few weeks I'll be preaching. We're going to be doing quite a bit of just sort of expository, verse-by-verse preaching. Trying to untangle all of these things that Paul is responding to, either from Chloe's people or that they have directly asked themselves.

We're going to try to untangle the mess of this to try to get some clarity. So, again, I encourage you, if you have your Bibles, 1 Corinthians chapter 5, physical Bibles, digital Bibles, or table.center, you can follow along with the notes there.

And we're just going to go verse-by-verse. So, starting in chapter 5, verse 1, it is actually reported. Pause right there. See, I told you. Verse-by-verse. Pause right there.

[5:40] So, what I love about what's happening already is that we have got Chloe's people. So, Chloe, some sort of woman of status in the church. She is reporting on what's happening with other women inside the church.

Okay? Women be talking. And the women that be talking are doing this to protect themselves. It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you.

And the sort of sexual immorality that's not even found among the Gentiles or the unsaved or the non-Christians. For a man is living with, and we'll talk about that phrase, living with his father's wife. So, some key words. It is reported that there is sexual immorality. The word sexual immorality is a Greek New Testament word, porneia. And porneia has a root that means to sell.

To sell. So, porneia, the sexual immorality, is rooted in the concept of economic exchange. And porneia is also related to the Greek word porne, which is how a woman in the sex trade was referred to.

[6:51] So, a porneia or porneia, almost always in that first century world, was about somebody who was exploited by or failed by a patriarchal society, a male-men-dominated society.

And outside of Jewish and Christian writing, so your Old and New Testaments, porneia always meant commercial sex. It always meant sex that was bought and paid for.

And Jewish and Christian writers then expanded the definition of porneia to any sort of sex that objectifies or exploits people in not just economic ways, but any particular way.

So, porneia, usually translated to sexual immorality in your New Testaments, never just means sex. It always has some connotation of exploitation, either economic or emotional or social exploitation. It's about using a person, not as a person, but as an object. Alright? So, what happened over the, you know, basically King James Version on English translations of Scripture, is that you had particularly English, British, Victorian, Edwardian morals imported into how we translated porneia.

[8:08] So, the idea that porneia only ever refers to sex before marriage, or making it to third base, or whatever, that is foreign to what Paul or the New Testament writers or Jewish writers writing in Greek would have been thinking about.

They weren't just thinking about particular sexual acts or the chronology of when you did what with whom. They were thinking about porneia as an economic, a money exchanging hands, an exploitative action relating to sex.

And, the other thing to keep in mind, in terms of your sort of mental imagination of the first century world, is that sex was also deeply related to the thing that we call religion today, related to the things that you did in a temple to get the gods on your side.

So, sex, money, trying to convince the powers, the gods to be with you, with your agriculture, or your business, or your family, these are all deeply tied and related together.

So, when Paul says there is a sort of sexual immorality happening among you that not even the Gentiles would do, think about exploitation, think about money, think about trying to convince the gods to be on your side.

[9:18] So, the sexual immorality in question is that a man is living with, or some translations might just say, has his father's wife.

Now, has is the idiom, the Greek idiom, going on here. A man has a woman. And, has could mean a bunch of different things. It could be just the idiom for marriage.

Because, in Hebrew, there actually is no word for marriage. So, that was just the typical way that you would refer to a wedding or a marriage happening. A man takes a woman. A man takes a wife. Okay? And, you can hear, in that language, patriarchy. Right? Woman is human, but sort of an object to be owned. So, if I'm going to take a wife, I'm going to take her.

Sometimes physically, literally. Right? And then, in Greek, there are words for weddings and marriages and all of that. Husbands and spouses and wives. But, the idiom still exists that you just take a wife.

[10:13] So, it could mean that. It is also the idiom used for exploitative sex, abusive sex, rape, non-consensual. It's also the idiom for having sex with, either with permission, without permission, or marrying.

So, we have to do a bunch of reading between the lines to understand what is happening here.

Now, notice the way that Paul refers to this woman. A man has, has taken, is living with his father's wife.

Now, most of us might think, well, his father's wife, that would be his mom. Right? No, Paul would have just said that. So, his father, this man's father, apparently has either divorced this man's mom, or she has passed away.

Or, there is a polygamous relationship going on. So, there's a second woman who's not his mom involved. And, again, lots of reading between the lines. This man has died, or the man has just began to have a sexual relationship with a stepmother, or a woman who this man has a relationship with.

Lots of things we don't know. But, what seems clear is that from Paul's perspective, this is immoral. And, whatever punishment is going to happen, it happens only to the man.

[11:29] As we read further into the chapter, the consequences are for the man, not the woman. So, we can make some assumptions that, one, this is not consensual. Two, this is not some sort of protective action to help the woman out, because this is the sort of immorality that the Gentiles won't even do.

Meaning, the Gentiles, Roman and Greek culture, was not chill with a man taking his stepmother into the bed with him. This is not a consensual or helpful relationship.

He is using her body. It's porneia. It's exploitative. Even the kindest scenario would be exploitation, because there are ways that this man could have cared for his stepmom without marrying her or having sex with her.

Okay? Later wording in a couple chapters we'll talk about in a couple weeks also points to this being a sexual, non-exploitative relationship. And, it's also present tense. It's ongoing.

It's not a one-time thing. This is a repeated action. So, he has his father's wife. He has taken her and is exploiting her in some way. It's a stepmother forbidden in Torah.

[12:39] It's forbidden in Roman law. It's forbidden in Greek law. This is something even the empire would call wrong. And, there's lots of reasons he might do this. It could be for her dowry and her estate and her inheritance.

So, if he takes her, he keeps the money in his hands. It could have to do with his standing in the church. Lots of commentators assume that this man is a patron of some sort. A man that the church needed for his finances.

So, he's doing this clearly immoral act, but the church doesn't want to say anything because, well, he's got some money and we don't want to push the money away.

Highly likely a non-consensual abusive relationship. Feminist readers and commentators on scripture have assumed so for a long time.

Other commentators are coming around to this point of view. Every word for the offender is he. She is never disciplined. Paul never blames her. And, we also note that she has no voice in the text.

[14:05] And, it's our job to notice that. Okay, verse 2. And, you are arrogant. Or, some translations will say, puffed up. Should you not rather have mourned so that he who has done this would have been removed from among you?

Now, puffed up shows up quite a few times in Corinthians. It shows up in chapter 4 when he addresses the arrogance in verse 18. Some of you thinking that I am not coming to you have become arrogant.

In other words, you assume that Paul is never coming back. And, so, you think you can do whatever you want to do. Mistake. Paul is coming back. Verse 2, right here. Some of you are still puffed up or arrogant.

Chapter 13. The love chapter. Love is not puffed up. And, the church is clearly a problem here. He addresses the church before he addresses the man. Saying, the problem is that you are proud. Arrogant. Of the sexual immorality happening in your church. But, you should have mourned. The first step should have been grief. The first step should have been realizing that what is happening is worthy of tears.

[15:12] And, anger. And, all the things associated with mourning and grief. This week has been newsworthy due to the Cornell 7. Those who have sexually assaulted a woman at Cornell.

And, then received very, very, very, very few consequences. And, the lawsuit says the men were offered an essay to mitigate what they did. Essays.

Essays. I know some of you all hate writing. Not on par with the crime that they committed. And, there were no charges until there was public outcry. And, Jane Doe, the woman who was assaulted, is being courageous and stepping forward.

And, Cornell's response is, well, there was more, you know, consequences than that. They won't say what, but that's their response. But, there's no sense of grief or mourning.

Verse 3. For I, Paul says, though I'm absent in the body, I'm present in spirit. And, as if present, I have already pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing.

[16:21] When you are assembled and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

So, the mistake is that you were puffed up. You did not mourn. So, church, you've got to deal with that. In the meanwhile, while you wait for me to arrive, assume my spirit is with you, and you need to take these actions against the man, the man who has exploited this woman.

Now, note, again, the repetition of the word power in verse 3. I am present in spirit. I have already pronounced judgment. When you are assembled, my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus.

The kingdom is not just words, but it's power. However, that power shows up when the church gathers. The kingdom is here in this room when we gather. Not someday, not sometime else.

The kingdom of heaven is not some future far off, far away thing. It's happening in this room. And what happens when we gather together is that power has to show up and give consequences to those that would harm those who have no power.

[17:32] So, Paul's response is, get this man out of here. Now, some weird language here. Paul says, give this man over to Satan.

Now, again, first century versus 21st century assumptions. We live in a world post-Dante's Inferno, post the medieval period, where there was lots of, for lack of a better word, fanfic written about Satan.

Okay? And all of those images have come into our social imagination about what we assume Satan is for and what Satan does. First century was in the midst of a transition about how it was thinking about Satan, or in the Hebrew, hasatan, the Satan.

Because Satan was originally on God's payroll as sort of this attorney who would come and make cases to God about why such and such a human may be guilty or not.

And the Satan would be used by the divine in the Jewish imagination to go met out punishments or consequences. Now, eventually, this began to develop into the Satan becoming an adversary, not of just humanity, but of God, God's self.

[18:47] And in the first century, some of these images get mixed because you have moments like here, which assume that Satan is actually doing God's bidding in some way. And you have moments where it's assumed that Satan is this rebellious tyrant who's trying to, you know, ruin God's plans.

And it's hard to always sort of pull apart which is happening which. I've got a sermon on this called The History of Satan. You can check that out on our website. But in this moment, the assumption is that if we kick the man out of the church, the man who has assaulted this woman, if you kick the man out of the church, hand him over to Hasatan, the accuser, the Satan, outside of the church, notice what Paul is hoping for.

So that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. So whatever happens to this man, it's not the end of his story.

Paul's assumption that the destruction of his flesh, his leaving the community, being kicked out of the community, to have consequences for his clear case of sexual assault, will ultimately be for his reconciliation, restoration, for his good.

Okay? So again, get the 21st century picture out of your mind. Well, if somebody's handed over to Satan, that's the end of their story. Not for Paul. It's the beginning of a restoration process.

[20:05] Okay? So kick the man out. Give the man consequences. The purpose for this is salvation on the day of the Lord, so that this man, his spirit, may be saved.

Verse 6. Your boasting is not a good thing. Do you not know that a little yeast leavens all of the dough? So clean out the old yeast, so that you may be a new batch of dough, as you really are unleavened.

For our Paschal Lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. So Paul is pulling in some Jewish metaphor and simile and analogy to make a point about being a pure people.

That if you have somebody who is assaulting somebody else, the church response should not be like, well, let boys be boys. No. It's have a community that is safe and trustworthy, that those who have no power or little power can know that they are going to be safe.

And those who have a bunch of power, they need to suffer consequences for their actions, so that we can be a community that is unleavened, like the unleavened bread of Passover.

[21:17] Clean out the old yeast, so that you all may be a new batch, since you all really are unleavened. Let us keep the feast, not the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Verse 9, I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons. So as Sonata referred to, last week there's an earlier letter, a zero Corinthians, that Paul has already written.

And he says, I wrote to you not to associate with sexually immoral persons. I didn't mean the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy or the swindlers of the idolaters, since then you all would have to leave the world.

Okay? So Paul is already, you know, 50 AD, having to clarify himself to people who are misunderstanding him. Yes, I said to you, do not associate with sexually immoral persons, pornea persons, sexually exploitative persons.

Do not associate with them. I didn't mean the people outside of the church, because guess what? Everybody is exploitative in some way. You just have to sort of kick the bucket and fly off of this earth if you're going to stop associating with them.

[22:25] What I did mean, Paul says, is the sexually immoral, the pornea, the exploitative people in the church. Don't even associate with them. For now I'm writing you not to associate with anyone who bears the name sibling, who bears the name brother or sister, Christ follower, Christian, don't associate with people who bear that name and are sexually immoral, pornea, sexually exploitative, greedy, or idolaters, seeing the sex, money, religion, a reviler, a drunkard, a swindler.

Don't even eat with these people. And then verse 12, for what have I to do with judging those outside? Are you not the judges of those who are inside? God's going to deal with those on the outside.

What we have to do is drive out the wicked person from among you. So Paul's hot take is that the outsiders, those are God's business.

The whole like, do not judge, lest ye be judged. Paul is directing that towards those who don't bear the name Christian. That is their problem. That is God's problem.

Our judgment, and this is going to become a repetitive word in chapters five and six, has to do with the church itself. The church has tended to get this exactly backward.

[23:53] We allow our own problems to be swept underneath the rug, to have a sort of like, well, isn't God a God of mercy and grace?

God will restore. And the problems outside of the church should be the ones that we get all fired up about. But the church should be a place where if the kingdom of God is among us, our standards should be high.

Now, I know there's going to be some consternation about legalism because some of us definitely have belonged to the other kind of religious community where legalism and perfection is the expectation.

But typically, it's legalism that's used as a cover to hide the actual exploitation and abusive behavior. So I don't want you to mishear me and say, hey, the table church is going to become a legalistic church now.

No, no, no, no. Because you have to have a set of values that tell you what we are trying to protect. And we have tried to make these values clear and we will continue to do so. That these values are about centering the margins, protecting those without power.

[25 : 01] And if I'm going to lean too hard into legalism, it's going to be that sort of legalism. The legalism that protects those who have no protection.

That's the place where the church has to grow up, has to be able to say, no, not here, you won't. I also think it's fascinating. So Paul, right here in verse 13, drive out the wicked person from among you.

He's quoting a text from Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy chapter, I don't have the chapter in front of me. Deuteronomy. You can search for it. And it's about sexual abuse and assault.

That if there's some sort of sexual sin, you're supposed to take the people, usually the man and the wife, and you're supposed to kick them out of the community, drive them out, and stone them, throw stones at them until they are dead.

Okay? That was the principle in Deuteronomy. And notice what Paul was doing. He is taking the principle from Deuteronomy, but adapting it. He's shaping it. He is twisting it towards mercy and restoration.

[26 : 05] So instead of kicking both the man and the woman out, it's kick the man out. And instead of stoning him to death, it's hand him over to the Satan so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.

It's not death, it's restoration. It's not unequal justice, both man and woman. The woman most likely has been exploited. No, it's the man whose fault this is. Kick him out, get him out of the community, protect the woman, and hope and pray and do all you can that this man suffers consequences with the purpose of restoration.

Not retribution, but restoration. Now, verse 12 for 13, you got this idea. For what have I to do with judging those outside?

Are you not the judges of those who are inside? Which gets us to chapter 6. Which also has to do with lawsuits and judgment amongst believers. This is case number 2 that Paul is dealing with for the things that he has heard from Chloe.

And as I have said many, many, many, many, many times, the chapters and verses in your Bible are also fanfic. They are made up. They did not exist before. So these two cases, the case of a man exploding a woman and the case of lawsuits amongst believers, Paul is talking about the same thing.

[27 : 18] We should be able to deal with these things ourselves and not rely on the world's systems, which are messed up anyway, to do this for us. But, my time is up.

So, this is a sermon that's left on a cliffhanger. It's left without takeaways and things that you should do for your homework. The only homework is come back next week to hear part 2.

Let me conclude with this. Paul says, we are the unleavened bread. Our Paschal Lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us keep the feast not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

And the reason that we come to a communion table each and every week at this church is a reminder of our reality. And it's a reality that is so difficult to forget, but the reality is, according to Jesus, we are the bread.

We are the cup. We have been incorporated into the body of Christ. Christ. And where we move and how we act in the world is how Christ moves and acts in the world.

[28 : 32] And when we see those who are exploited, those who are used, those who tell their story and their story is ignored, and the people with power and resources, they are lifted up, well, that means that if Christ is the one who is lifting up the high and pushing down the low, we are giving

Christ a bad name.

But rather, we worship a God and we are becoming one with a God who was crucified and buried. And yes, resurrected. Yes, ascended.

But the ascension and the resurrection came after the crucifixion and the lowering down into the earth. Therefore, we are the lowly people.

As Christ said, when you do it to the least of these, you do it to me. So we identify ourselves each and every week that the bread that is broken with the grapes that are crushed.

And this then affects how we show up in the world. Let us move into communion. Thank you.