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1 Corinthians 5:6-8 “Purging Sin from Our Lives”

Intro. The Bible compares sin to many things. It is like a disease that results in death. It is like dirt that needs to be washed away. It is a bondage from which we need to be set free.

One problem that we must address as believers is carrying over into our new life the old life of sin. Even though we are forgiven, and even though we are born again, we still have our old nature. Furthermore, we live in a sinfully corrupt world, influenced by the devil. Therefore, even as believers we will face temptation to sin, and many believers yield to those temptations all too often. I'm sure I'm speaking to some believers today who still very much struggle with sin. You mess up, confess it to God, receive forgiveness, feel better, and then mess up again. The cycle repeats itself many times.

Paul recognized this problem in our text of Scripture. In the context he speaks of sin by a member of the church, even a vile sin. In our text today he shifts from sin in the church to sin in the Christian life. Several times in this text of Scripture Paul compares sin in the Christian to “old leaven.” Leaven causes dough to rise through fermentation. And the “old leaven” is that which is left over from the old life, before we were saved. It refers to the worldly and sinful disposition that was carried over in their hearts from their former life. Sometimes we allow old habits to reassert themselves.

Now how can we overcome this sin problem? Many come to Christ with the hope of a new life, only to find the old life creeping back in. So what must we do? Even though we will not become sinless in this life, we should nevertheless sin less and less. We can break old habits once and for all. And we're going to see how that is possible, and what steps we should take to reach that goal. I want to challenge you this morning to live a pure, righteous life.

I see from our text of Scripture 4 main things I want to you do or know. First:

I. TRUST IN THE SACRIFICIAL DEATH OF CHRIST

In this text Paul appeals to us to deal with the sin problem in our lives, as well as the lives of others. And the foundation for his appeal is the saving work of Christ on our behalf. He says in the last of v.7, “For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.”¹ Paul thought of the sacrificial lamb of Passover because he had already mentioned “leaven.” Removal of leaven was connected with the Jewish Passover. And clearly the Passover lamb prefigured the ultimate Passover sacrifice, Jesus Christ. Paul was certainly not the only one who saw the death of Jesus as a fulfillment of the Passover sacrifice. John the Baptist was the first to compare Jesus to the Passover lamb. He said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn. 1:29). The Apostle Peter described Jesus as “a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Pet. 1:19). Jesus certainly qualified as the fulfillment of the Passover lamb. And, in his vision of heaven, the

¹ This is the only place in Paul's writings where he articulately pronounces that the Paschal Lamb is a type of Jesus Christ.

Apostle John hears a numberless crowd singing to Jesus, “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain....” (Rev. 5:12)

Now the Sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross does two things for us in reference to sin:

A. His Death Provides Forgiveness of Sin – When a Hebrew family sacrificed the lamb and spread its blood upon the doorposts, the death-angel passed over that home. The first-born was spared the judgment of God. Even so, when we believe in Jesus who was sacrificed for us, God’s judgment against sin passes over us. Jesus said in John 5:24, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.” So the starting place to dealing with the sin problem is to put your faith in Jesus, who died for your sin at Calvary. Since He bore the judgment of God against sin on your behalf, you can be forgiven. Aren’t you glad Jesus died for you?

A mother living in a tenement house went shopping for groceries. While she was in the store, a fire engine raced by. She wondered, “Is the fire engine going to my home?” She had left her baby asleep at home. Forgetting about the groceries, she ran toward home. Her building had fire hoses aimed at it. It was burning like a matchbox. Rushing to the chief, she cried out, “My baby is up there.” He shouted back to her, “It would be suicide for anyone to go up there now; it’s too late.” A young fireman standing by volunteered, “Chief, I have a little baby at home, and if my house were on fire, I’d want someone to go up to save my baby. I’ll go.” The young fireman climbed the stairs; he got the baby, threw her into the rescue net, and just as he did, the house collapsed and he was burned to death.

The scene is 20 years later at a graveside. A 20-year-old woman is sobbing softly. Before her, at the head of the grave, is the statue of a fireman. A man stopping by asks respectfully, “Was that your father?” She replies, “No.” “Was that your brother?” “No,” she says. “That’s the man who died for me.”²

Yes, Christ was sacrificed for you. Have you accepted Him as your Savior? If not, will you believe in Him today? Receive God’s forgiveness.

Furthermore, I wish to make application to the Lord’s Supper. Most of you know that the Lord’s Supper was instituted during a Passover celebration. As Passover was a perpetual memorial celebration, even so the Lord’s Supper is a perpetual memorial for us. And what are we especially called upon to remember? It is the death of Christ for our sin. In effect, Christ said: “You do not need to remember the Passover any more. I am the true Paschal Lamb.” The Lord’s Supper witnesses that Jesus thought Himself to be what Paul tells the Corinthians that He is, even our Passover, sacrificed for us.

B. His Death Provides Deliverance from Sin’s Dominion – Remember, the Passover was to celebrate the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage. Even so, Jesus Christ was sacrificed that we might be delivered from the bondage of sin. Jesus’ atonement was not intended to free us to sin but to liberate us from sin. Through Christ’s death we have both the power and obligation to turn from sin. You see, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God’s perfect Passover Lamb, not only removed the penalty of judgment, but it also completely separates us from the dominion of sin. Christ died to separate us from the bondage to sin and give us a new bondage to righteousness (Rom. 6:19), which

² Ronald J. Lavin, "I Am the Resurrection and the Life," www.eSermons.com.

is the only true freedom. One of the greatest protections from sin that we have as Christians is simply focusing on our Lord and on the sacrifice He made for us. To understand that His death for sin applied to us calls us away from sin. How can we hold on to sin when Jesus paid such a high price for sin? And remember, Jesus gives the power to deliver us from sin.

A good, moral man was skeptical about the power of God to change lives, but believed people should just live as good a life as possible. So he determined to help a friend who was having a problem with alcohol. "I'm going to help you overcome this problem," he told the friend, and moved in with him. When the man was tempted to drink, the skeptic would keep him from going to the tavern and watch him every minute. Then one afternoon a group of Christians came to visit his friend. They gathered all around him, read him some Bible verses, and then they all got on their knees. He got on his knees with them and prayed to invite Jesus Christ to save him. And you know what? His friend no longer wanted to drink anymore. The skeptic had to acknowledge that the saving power of Jesus Christ really works.³

Do you believe in the power of Jesus Christ to change lives? Do you believe that He can set you free from the power of sin? Don't remain in bondage to sin, when Christ has made you free! The Passover Lamb has been sacrificed. Judgment has fallen on Him instead of you. As Israel was then able to flee from Egyptian bondage, so you should flee from the bondage of sin.

So first you must trust in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for you. In Him you will find forgiveness and freedom. Notice now the second step in overcoming the sins of your past:

II. RECOGNIZE WHO YOU ARE IN CHRIST

Notice in v.7 another basis of his appeal. He says that we are to purge sin from our lives that we may "be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened." In the passage in front of us the Apostle Paul makes a contrast between the old life of sin and the new life in Christ. The old life is compared to old dough that is fermented, stale, old. But the new life in Christ is compared to a new batch of dough that is unleavened. Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:17, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

There is a seeming contradiction here. On the one hand, Paul acknowledges the need for the Corinthian Christians to purge out the old leaven. But on the other hand, he tells them that they already "are unleavened." Now which is it? Well he is doing what he likes to do in many of his other letters. He calls upon his audience to "become what they are." In other words, in their spirit they are new creatures in Christ. They are pure and righteous in His sight. He is just calling on them to become on the outside what they already are on the inside.

You see, when you repented of sin and placed your faith in Jesus Christ, you were born again. You received a new nature. That is the "new lump" that Paul is referring to here. Now, you are to utilize the power you possess. And since by your faith there has been given to you a new life that can conquer all corruption and sin, see that you use the life that is given.

³ Jerry Vines, *God Speaks Today: Where to Find Wisdom*, page 31.

This same approach is found in the very opening of this letter. Paul said that the Corinthian Christians were “called to be saints” (1 Cor. 1:2). Thus, since God calls them saints, they are saints! Once you understand that you are a saint, then you are more likely to live like a saint.

How a person views himself will largely determine how they live. If a child feels unloved and cast aside, they will view themselves as worth very little. They will tend to abuse their bodies, and live sinful lives. But if you view yourself as one who is loved by God and by others, and if you see yourself as a child of God, then you will live a much more noble and good life.

So I believe our response to this truth is to see ourselves as God sees us in Christ. Paul is telling us to live out who we are. You are holy so now you must live a holy life. My brothers and sisters, the order here is crucial. Paul doesn’t say, “Throw out the old dough so you become clean.” Rather, he says, “Because you are a new batch get rid of the old yeast.” He says, “Because you are holy get rid of sin.” He says, “Because you are a new man, get rid of the old man.”

So the second step in overcoming the sins of the old life is to recognize who you are in Christ. You are a new person. You are a saint. You are clean. Now you can live like it by taking the third step:

III. PURGE OUT THE SINS OF THE OLD LIFE

It is interesting to me that in this text Paul is calling upon Christians in v.8 to “keep the feast.” What feast? The Passover feast! Yet not in the same way that the Jews kept it. After all, Christ has fulfilled what the Passover feast was pointing to. We do not sacrifice a lamb, because Christ is the true Lamb of God that has been sacrificed for sin once for all. And we do not keep the feast by removing physical leaven from our houses. You see, part of the Passover observance was to search the house for leaven (Ex. 12:15⁴; 13:7). That was the first step toward removing it. Many Jewish parents would even hide old pieces of dough for the children to find. [Is this the basis for hiding Easter eggs?]. No, we should keep the feast by removing what leaven was symbolic of: sin! That is why Paul says in v.7, “Therefore purge out the old leaven...” Paul has a similar teaching in Eph. 4:22-24 where he says, “that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.”

So I want to share with you 2 steps in observing the true spirit of Passover feast by purging sin out of our lives. First:

A. The Old Sin Must Be Searched For & Identified – The first step in removing sin is to identify sin.

In the text of Scripture Paul gives some of the examples of the sins of the old life. In v.8 Paul speaks of the sins of “malice and wickedness.” The first word (*kakia*) means “malice, ill-will, or desire to injure.” Thus, it refers to a vicious disposition. Or it may

⁴ “Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.”

mean “depravity, or wickedness that is not ashamed to break laws.” Then the second word (*poneria*) is very similar in meaning, and is a synonym for the first. These two terms are general enough in nature to encompass just about every possible sin with which believers might become associated.

Then notice the examples in v.11. He talks about people who are “sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner.” The specific sins mentioned particularly characterized pagan Corinth in the mid-first century. And guess what? People haven’t changed much have they? These are the kinds of sins unbelievers commit today. Should these sins be in the lives of believers? No!

We need to apply this to the proper way to observe the Lord’s Supper. If you look over to 1 Cor. 11 Paul gives instructions concerning the Lord’s Supper. In v.28 of that chapter he says, “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.” As we observe the Lord’s Supper, we should search our hearts and lives for any sin that displeases God. Then, we must take the 2nd step:

B. The Old Sins Must Be Purged – Again, Paul says in v.7, “Therefore purge out the old leaven...” After the Passover in Israel there was no old dough to be found in the house. It was to be purged, or cleansed, out of the house for a whole week. That was called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And notice that one basis for his appeal is stated in the last of v.7, “For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.” He is saying, “The Lamb has already been slain on Calvary and yet you have not gotten rid of the leaven!” As Israel was set free from Egypt as a result of the Passover and was to make a clean break with that oppressor, so believers are to be totally separated from the old life, with its sinful attitudes, standards, and habits. We are not to continue to bring over into our new life the sins of the old life.

Remember another basis of this appeal: the insidious, spreading nature of sin, as Paul illustrated in v.6. If we do not eject evil, it will eject the good from us.

This does not mean that we are or can be perfect and sinless. All of us know and admit and experience the continuing power of sin in our lives.

When I was a boy, I had a weekly Saturday night ritual. I had to take a bath, whether I needed it or not! We went to church every Sunday, I my momma insisted that I get cleaned up for church! By the time I got to be a teenager I found out that once a week just wasn’t enough. I would start smelling after just a day or two! Friend, the Church is the Bride of Christ, and we need to stay clean for Jesus!

Once again, I want to apply this to the Lord’s Supper. Just as the cleansing from all that was leavened was the essential pre-requisite to the participation in the Passover, even so we should identify and purge sin from our lives before we partake of the elements of the Lord’s Supper.

There is a final aspect of observing the true spirit of the Passover feast:

IV. REPLACE SIN WITH NEWNESS OF LIFE

The positive moral antidote to sin is the new life in Christ. It’s not enough to purge sin from your life. It must be replaced with something better. Notice that Paul says in v.8 that we should “keep the feast . . . with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” This is the moral opposite of sin.

In England there's a paper factory that makes the finest stationery in the world. One day a man touring the factory asked what the paper was made from. He was shown a huge pile of old rags. Have you heard of the term "rag content" in reference to paper? That represents the percentage of scrap cloth that is combined with pulp fibers to create the paper. This value usually ranges from 20% to 100%. The higher the rag content the better. Well, the man couldn't believe that old rags could be turned into paper. In 6 weeks he received a package of paper from the company with his initials embossed on it. On the 1st page were written the words: "Dirty Rags Transformed."

Listen, God can take the dirty rags of our lives and transform them into something new. Now getting back to the original analogy, another aspect of the Passover feast was to eat unleavened bread. They were to replace leavened bread with unleavened bread. Such bread was unmixed, free of leaven. What does that compare to? What is the unleavened bread of our new life in Christ? Paul mentions 3 character qualities:

A. Joyful Celebration – I see this in the appeal of Paul in v.8 that we should "keep the feast...." Keep in mind that the Passover feast was a celebration of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage. Even so, the Christian life ought to be a continual festival. We are commanded to rejoice in the Lord, and what He has done for us. Rejoice, for you have been forgiven. Rejoice, for sin is no longer your master.

So we see here that the Christian life should be a joyful life. And since the joy of the Lord is our strength, the cultivation of joy in the Lord is our duty. If we would only steadfastly remember that the one source of worthy and enduring joy is God Himself, and listen to the command, "Rejoice in the Lord," we would find it possible to "rejoice always."

Secondly, our lives should be characterized by:

B. Sincerity – This word (*heilikrineia*) means "purity, sincerity, honesty, genuineness." The idea of purity fits in well with the idea of *unleavened* bread. The original Greek word is based on the idea of something being examined under the bright light of the sun, and found pure or clean.

Application: Even so, we ought to have an openness to the scrutiny of the light of God, and so live that no sin is revealed. We ought to be free of lies, hypocrisy, malice, immorality, drunkenness, etc.

C. Truth – This means that we should speak the truth, and live according to the truth. In fact, the truth of God's Word is the greatest and most important way to cleanse our lives from sin. Psa. 119:9 says, "How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word." Then Eph. 5:26 says of Christ, "that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word." The Word of God is the standard by which we judge what is right or wrong, what is good or sinful. We are living in a day of moral relativism, where people say there is no absolute moral standard. They say each person must determine for themselves what is right and wrong. But that is wrong. There is a God who is truth, and He sets the standard of truth for all to live by. Paul says in 1 Cor. 13:6 that love "does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth." Notice that truth is the opposite of iniquity.

Friend, if you are going to purge sin from your life with any success you must get into the Word of God. Read it. Study it. Memorize it. Come to Sunday School. Come and hear me expound God's Word each Sunday and Wednesday. Purge out the old leaven with truth.

Conclusion: Wouldn't you like to know that your sins are forgiven, and that you are clean before the Lord, and free from the bondage of sin? Wouldn't you like to live a life of joy? Wouldn't you like to be sincere, free of lies and hypocrisy?

Then trust in Jesus Christ, who was sacrificed for you. He died for you sins. He died to make you brand new. And once you have trusted in Christ as your Savior, you need to begin to see yourself as you truly are: a saint, a child of God, a new person. God has made it possible through the new birth, and by His Spirit, and by the truth of His Word to live a joyful life, a clean life, a life of sincerely & truth.

Yet at times you will still sin. Isn't it great to know that when you do, you can confess that sin, receive forgiveness, and be clean once again? Let's now observe the Lord's Supper. It points to the true fulfillment of the Passover. Search your heart and life for any sin. Confess it.

Sources: Craig Blomberg, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); Adrian Dieleman (notes from his sermon on this text); R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937); John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 14 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 5 (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Paige Patterson, *The Troubled Triumphant Church: an Exposition of First Corinthians* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures, Vol. 14* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931, accessed through *Online Bible*); Jerry Vines, *God Speaks Today: A Study of I Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Wise: I Corinthians* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).