

## #180 “Set Apart for the Gospel”

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*“Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.”*

-Romans 1:1

1 Corinthians 5:9-13 says,

“I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler--not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.”

The Scripture is clear throughout that, as believers, we must be careful whom we associate with. 1 Corinthians 15:33 says, “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals.’” And Psalm 1 says, “How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!” We are in the world but not of it. The reality is that, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5, we will never be able to be totally separated from evil people as long as we are alive on this earth. Sin is rampant, and unless we go and bury ourselves in a hole in the ground, we will encounter evil people. Jesus didn’t call us to go to a monastery, but He called us to be salt and light as His witnesses. He had a burden to reach out to the corrupt people of the world with the truth of the gospel, bringing grace to the broken and the law to the proud. Either way, He didn’t run from the world and shelter Himself in a sanctified environment of sorts. Rather, He went out to the lost and preached to them. Paul affirms that the objective as believers is not to shelter ourselves from the world entirely but to guard our hearts from taking in its evil influences. In other words, we need to be careful that, even though we are around unsaved people as we go through our day to day lives, we do not let them negatively influence us toward sin. We need to be influencing them toward Christ. Never can we say that we are influencing someone toward Christ when we are, at the same time, engaging in their sinful behavior, even if we try to argue that we are doing it as a way to reach out to them. This is nonsense, and it proves that we have let the leaven of sin corrupt our hearts and deceive our minds. This is what Paul desperately wants us to avoid.

Paul observes in 1 Corinthians 5:1 that there is a horrific sin going on in the church, even worse than the unsaved participate in. He wants this individual removed from the

fellowship. The professing believer who makes a practice of sin is, according to Paul, the type of person that we need to avoid at all costs. (Note: Paul is not saying to run away from a brother or sister if they are struggling with a certain sin or if they made a mistake. We all stumble, and God is willing to forgive us an unlimited amount of times. The person Paul has in mind to avoid is not a humble, struggling person but an arrogant, unrepentant person. Those who care less about sin and yet claim to love Jesus have no place in Christ's church.) The church needs to carry out the process of church discipline by removing the person from fellowship (Matthew 18:15-18, 1 Timothy 1:20). The Christians there needed to stay away from this person until he changed his ways at which point they could gladly welcome him back into the fellowship. But when confrontation fails to bring conviction and change, church discipline must occur lest the sin spread into the rest of the body. Scripture is adamant that the church not tolerate sin (Revelation 2:20). We must not even eat with those who practice sin and yet call themselves brothers or sisters. The effect of corrupted professing Christians is so detrimental and dangerous even to the most sincere and humble Christians. After all, it is not too difficult to see through the lies of the world as the sin is usually quite blatant and even gloried in. Yet, when a person is allowed to move among the sheep and influence them toward sin, this is typically done in a more calculated, devious manner that is not so obvious and therefore that much more dangerous. These people need to be called out by the church leadership and removed before other sheep are injured and led astray into sin.

In order to reach out to the unsaved, Jesus associated with prostitutes and tax-collectors. These were the people most easily recognized as corrupt and sinful by the Jewish people of the day. Jesus came to be known as the friend of sinners (Matthew 11:19), which He didn't mind, for He came to seek and save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). It was the sick, not the healthy, who needed a Physician (Matthew 9:12). Now, Jesus never compromised His integrity in mingling with the sinners, but He did preach to them. He went to them with the truth, confronting them of their sin and offering them grace. We should never view sinners as "untouchables" as if just being within throwing distance of them would corrupt our hearts. We should, however, get as far away as possible from a professing believer who lives as a sinner. We should have nothing to do with these people. They wreck our testimony, they lead us astray, and they corrupt our minds. They are the true danger and the ones Paul is most concerned about.

We must not let ungodliness corrupt our hearts and minds, whether from influences outside of the church or from within (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). Our mission is to preach the gospel, and for this task, we must remain set apart.