



Discipline for a Culture of Holiness

1 Corinthians 5 | Jonathan K. Dodson | August 22, 2014

A passage like this can come off as authoritarian, intrusive, judgmental. We tend to not like people to tell us how to live, but we've seen how living under God's authority actually promotes our well-being. Like a conductor's authority promotes beautiful music, or a stoplight promotes human safety, *good authority is for our flourishing*. Now, that all gets challenged when it comes our sexuality. Some people overreact to sexual sin in crushing judgment; others overlook it in permissive indifference. The overreactor sees this passage as a guide to enforcing sexual absolutes (but that not really what its about). The overlooker sees it as intolerant and unloving advice. It is neither. This passage describes a *culture of holiness*. How to get it, how to keep it, how to lose it.

Getting Holy

How do you get holy? The word holy means "to be set apart," not to rules or your own preferences, but to God. Holiness is about being close to God. This passage gives us instruction on how we get close to the Lord Jesus, so close that he rubs off on us, such that we bear faces of liquid light and love. And if you're going to be like that, it requires that you be a part of the church that maintains a culture different from the rest of the world. All organizations have their culture, and so does the church, a culture of holiness. And whether your conscious of it or not, you are here because you know, deep down, being close to God is how to really live. So how do we get it, holiness? There's an incredibly rich passage in the middle of this chapter that helps us understand how we become holy, vs. 7-8, [Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.](#) There are two related events in the Jewish feast of Passover that unlock the meaning of holiness, the lamb and the lump. The **lamb**. When Israel was enslaved to Egypt, and God was saying through Moses, let my people go, the powerful Egyptian Pharaoh kept saying no. Until the final plague. He sent an angel of death to kill every firstborn in Egypt, except the homes that had the blood of lamb pasted on their door. One by one the firstborns died, but those who sacrificed the lamb, who put the blood on the door, God passed over them. He saw the blood and liberated them from oppressive Egyptian rule into his gracious lordship, where Israel became his collective firstborn (Hos 2), his set apart people, a new family freed to be close his beauty, power, and love. This how we become holy. God does the work. We're all oppressed, enslaved, and he looks down and sees the blood of the final lamb on the door of our lives, and passes over to set us free, to live as whole new people set apart to him, holy. So how do you get holiness? You receive it in Christ, the Passover lamb 100% free, unearned. I grew up the eldest of three sons in east Texas. As all three sons grew up, we got married, had kids, and as family often do, we would go out to eat when dad and mom were in town. Now, you know that awkward moment when the check is brought to the table, and there's a pause, and you're not sure who's going to pay the bill, or when you both offer? Early on in our marriages, my Dad pulled each of his sons aside and said, "Anytime we eat

out, I don't want you to pay for it. I don't want you to feel awkward. Because I can pay for it, it's my pleasure to do so, and I don't want you to every worry about whether or not you should pay the bill." That's grace. That grace draws us close to him. Endears us to him. Don't even worry about it. Jesus paid the bill, once and for all, and doesn't want us to feel awkward about not paying sins or to grovel because he did pay. He doesn't want us to go for our wallets to sheepishly pay out for our failures. It's his pleasure to liberate us from our debts and *put us into his family*. To set us apart. You know why? Because he loves us, like a Father who draws us close and provides for us. How do we get holiness? By the utter grace of God, through Christ our Passover Lamb. He pays so we don't have to. What about the second image—**lump**?

Keeping Holy

If the Lamb shows us how we get holy, the lump tells how to keep holy. [Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened.](#) A little leaven affects the whole lump. Like a rudder directs a massive ship, sin affects the whole community. Anger can wound a marriage, greed can ruin a company/church, and lust rip apart a family. To commemorate the Passover, Israel would eat unleavened bread for six days, always leaving a lump of unleavened bread aside to make the next batch. Then, once a year they would throw the remainder lump away because it would ferment, and make leavened bread, affecting the whole lump. They had to get rid of it or it would contaminate the whole. The point is that we need to be earnest about getting rid of sin, greed, anger, lust because if contaminates the whole. Paul says: "Cleanse it!" Get rid of it, run it off, be done with it. That's how we need to treat sin. Now why? SO THAT you may be a new lump! But I thought we were already right with God, holy because of Christ? Correct. The so that must mean something else. What? **He's saying run off sin so you can be who you really are.** Come back to your senses. My first year of marriage I would sometimes get off of work or go out to run an errand, and get side-tracked. Get a cup of coffee, stop by the bookstore and blow through an hour, and then arrive home. Robie would be upset. No idea why. Then it would dawn on me. I hadn't taken her needs into account. I'd been acting single, when I'm actually married. I'm not being my new married self. Paul is essentially saying get rid of your old identity because you have a new identity. Stop sinning because you're a saint. Clean out the old because you really are new. A student once asked the famous science fiction writer, Philip K. Dick, to define reality. He responded "[Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away.](#)" I wasn't living in line with my martial reality. *Gospel* reality is that you are right with God because of what Christ has done, even if you have a lapse in belief, *but because of that reality, you will snap out of your sinful dreams and wake up to the reality who you are in Christ to get on with your true humanity.* This is how you live a sincere life. [Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.](#) Sincere isn't just being nice. It's living in light of the truth. It's a vessel with no cracks, when you hold it up the light its solid. Your beliefs line up with your life. Now, there were people living with leaven, **boasting** in their self-made morality. Insincere, they turn a blind eye to their beliefs, even approve of sexual immorality. This is the person who **overlooks**, who thinks it's gracious to overlook and

disregard sin, but Paul says, if you're in line with gospel, you'll get rid of that arrogance, repent of that superiority, and highmindedness. You won't parade your tolerance in love, pride yourself on openmindedness, while your brother or sister is dominated by sin, torn apart. That's not sincere; it's selfish. It's not love; it's hate. It's not living in line with Reality. To keep holiness you have to live like the gospel is real, fight to be yourself with others.

Losing Holiness

Now there's a case study here in losing holiness, a real live issue in Corinth where a man is sleeping with his father's wife, probably not his biological mother, but a mother-in-law. Paul is pained by this saying that even those outside the church don't approve of incest, and its happening inside the church?! He's dismayed over the state of the church, and those who boast over their progressive morals, "**And you are arrogant!**" literally "puffed up" on highminded tolerance. He longs for the church to be holy. We're meant to show a countercultural holiness. They are conforming, even going beyond cultural norms. **He's saying if you really call yourself a Christian, then you have to live like it.** So how should we respond when people lose holiness? Instead of ignoring their sin, you should mourn over it, grieve, feel pain and pursue them, NOT approve, ignore, or be indifferent. He says "**remove them from among you.**" This is the community's responsibility. But what exactly does it mean? This is where people often **overreact**. This is not a shunning, the silent treatment, like the movie *Witness*. We're actually meant to talk them back into Reality, into being themselves. This doesn't happen overnight. 1,2,3 people should be progressively involved, and then, if they refuse to live in line with Gospel they are excluded from our fellowship. **This is why healthy fight clubs and city groups are so important**, that we're surrounded by people who help us live in gospel reality, to be ourselves in Christ. In verse 11, he says this means not **associating** with the immoral person. The word means to mix socially, which often happened over meals. Now, this doesn't include people in the world. You'd have to leave the world he says. But why do those in the church do this? Because eating with people is a cultural way of showing approval. You may be saying, I don't want to do that, but why? **Could it be because you care about your reputation than you love and care about God's reputation, how he is reflected to world?** You'd rather the church be sullied than stand up for Christ, to cultivate a culture of holiness? Remember, this is God's church. This isn't about your reputation; it's about His reputation. That's why Paul says when we assemble, we do in the name and power of the Lord Jesus, not our own name. How we respond to those in unrepentant sin says something about Jesus. To honor Christ as Lord, he says **you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord (5)**. Now, this sounds extreme, but the word flesh doesn't refer to his actual physical body; it's a term that refers to his desires that are set apart to the world. He's saying let the man follow his preference—to live outside God's authority, within an unholy community, so that his self-destructive, Christ-belittling desires will be undone. He is not suggesting that the church has the power to sick Satan on the immoral person. He is saying let them have their way, in grief. To what end? So they're destroyed? **So that his spirit might be saved in the Day of the Lord**. Redemption, healing, salvation, flourishing is always the goal of good authority, of church discipline, whether its light everyday correction in a fight club, marriage, or



friendship OR when it gets the point of removing someone from fellowship. We're striving for wholeness, restoration, and there should be no surprises when the Lord Jesus comes back, on the great day of the Lord, when he judges all humanity. We want this to be a day of rejoicing and not mourning for our friends, brothers, sisters. See, we are supposed to live as God's endtime community, a people who have been made into a new lump, been passed over and forgiven, and reveal the light and love of his holiness to the world. That's why you are here Christian, to celebrate that the Lamb has come and is coming back as a Lion. Clean out the old, so you can be the new, *because you really are new.*