



“Let’s Stay Salty”  
I Corinthians 5:9-13  
July 4, 2021

As our nation celebrates two-hundred and forty-five years of independence, I want to encourage us, Bethel Grace, to stay salty.

I am not saying that because of my heritage as a Saltz-man. Now, my DNA test results indicates all kinds of European countries in my blood. However, somewhere in my paternal line given my name, I had family members in the salt business. It is likely that there were Saltzmann who owned and operated salt mines in Germany.

But, that is not why I am encouraging us as a church to be salty. I am encouraging us as a church to be salty because Jesus is calling us and He is empowering us to be the salt of the earth.

Several times over this teaching about salt is found in the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is because the qualities of salt illustrate the presence of the church in this world. In biblical times salt was used as a preservative to slow the process of decay in food so that the food could last longer. In addition to that, salt was also used back then, as is the case now, to enhance the flavor of food. Do you like salt in your food? So do I!

These functions provide a good picture of the presence of the people of Jesus Christ in this world. Understand that it is all about personal influence. As followers of Jesus Christ have close, personal contact all across the society that we live in, we have an influence for the Kingdom of God. By God’s grace, we influence lives in societies for the Kingdom and the process of moral decay is decelerated. It is reduced.

In addition to that, by the people of God not only gathering as churches, but spreading out in the world in which we live, the flavor of the Kingdom of God is added. There is genuine worship taking place. There is joy in the Lord that is happening. There is Gospel truth that is being spread. Not only is there preserving quality that this adds, but there is also the sense that we have the flavor of the Kingdom, and it increases all the more as more and more people are coming to a living faith in Jesus through the witness of the people that belong to Him.

We are to be salt on this earth. The Gospels record three occasions when Jesus encouraged His people to be salty. Perhaps the most familiar is out of Matthew Chapter 5 and Verse 13 in the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus said:

**<sup>13</sup>You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.**

So we see that this instruction about being salt in the world included with it a warning about losing saltiness. Christians must remain distinct by the filling of the Holy Spirit with Kingdom Truth and Kingdom living. We are to be in the world but if we become of the world, we lose value to the world. We need to stay salty, my friends! This is the will of the Lord Jesus Christ for us.

This morning we come to a portion of the New Testament that speaks about this, though indirectly. It gives us a picture of how all of this works, because the church in the city Corinth of was in danger of losing its saltiness and its distinctiveness.

In this portion of Scripture, Paul addressed a scandalous situation in Corinth that required church discipline. As we discussed last week, the Bible does not hesitate to reveal the sins of God's people. Sometimes we sit stunned at what we read.

There in the church of Corinth it is revealed in Scripture that there was man who was physically involved sexually with his stepmother, his father's wife. That was not the only issue. The other issues was that the church was being tolerant of it.

The church was carrying on as if it were not a big deal; as if it were not something to be addressed. So Paul did address the egregious sin that was continuing without repentance in their midst. Paul said, This person needs to be removed from the church.

Now as Paul continued maintaining his stance in the paragraph that we come to, he also needed to clarify something that he had previously written. Here is what it comes down to: Christians are to relate to different people in different ways.

There is a difference in how we relate to unbelievers outside of the church who are living in sin from how we relate to professed Christians who have become a part of the church and who are living in unrepentant, ongoing, flagrant sin. There is a difference.

So Paul wrote emphatically to the church of Corinth and these words ring forth from that time into our time because these issues and concerns are timeless and relevant for Southern California, a society that is in many ways similar to that of ancient Corinth.

Let's see what is written for us in 1 Corinthians Chapter 5 and Verses 9 through 13. Paul said:

**<sup>9</sup>I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—<sup>10</sup>not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. <sup>11</sup>But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. <sup>12</sup>For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? <sup>13</sup>God judges those outside. Purge the evil person from among you.**

That, brothers and sisters, is bold, direct teaching that helps us understand what it is to be salty and to remain salty as the church of God in this world. This is teaching us how we maintain a preserving and Kingdom influence presence of God here on the earth.

In this text the word *associate* becomes very, very important. It is used in Verse 9:

**<sup>9</sup>I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people**

Then it is used again in Verse 11 as Paul instructed them to not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother and who is living a life that includes certain ongoing behavior.

The word *associate* is so interesting to me. The Greek language is so interesting and so colorful, so the terminology helps us so often. The Greek word for *associate* is *Sunanamignumi*. The basic meaning of that word is just to mix and mingle together. It means to keep company with; to mix together; to mix up with.

It is not necessarily talking about formal association, but it is talking about making yourself at home with certain people, mixing in. This is what salt does. It mixes in. When salt is used for preserving food, it gets rubbed on and even rubbed in. Then when seasoning food, salt gets mixed in. When I have a pile of mashed potatoes, I sprinkle salt on and mix it in! Salt is mixing and mingling

We will take two of Paul's main points from this passage. We the church must be careful about our mixing. We heard that song beautifully sung this morning – God Bless America. That video gave me goose bumps! How is God going to bless America?

God is going to bless America as His people have a salty presence. Having a salty presence means that we keep mixing with some people. According to this text, we have to stop mixing at least for a time with other people so that we will maintain our saltiness.

First, we need to keep mixing with the unredeemed people of this world. Second, we need to stop mixing with unrepentant people who are of the church. This is what is laid out for us very clearly in Scripture.

In the desire to be salty and to have such influence, let us consider this one point at a time. To have influence for the Kingdom:

**1. Keep mixing with unredeemed people in the world.**

People who are not born again and are displaying patterns of sin in their lives. Stay among them. Be close to them. This is Paul's point in the couple of verses in this paragraph.

**<sup>9</sup>I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—<sup>10</sup>not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.**

Do you get Paul's drift? That is the last thing that he wanted. He did not want the church to be out of the world. He wanted them to be among the world, while not being of the world.

It is like the language of a book that was popular back in the late 1980s written by a woman named Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker and Into the World!* That's the point that is here. A few moments of reflection on this verse will reveal how remarkable what Paul was talking about here.

Corinth has been described as a wealthy pagan, sex-obsessed seaport. It had a booming economy. There were all kinds of wealth. There were all kinds of luxuries to be enjoyed, purchased in the Agora, the marketplace in the center of the city.

It was filled with pagan shrines. Some have estimated that somewhere near a thousand of them were temples to Apollo and Aphrodite being the most prominent. Did you notice that Paul included in this mix of people that we needed to keep those who are idolators?

As we understand the teaching of Scripture, what we find is that there are in fact different species of idolatry that come even into the Twenty-First Century California today. Idols of the heart, worshipping the created things above the Giver of created things. There are multiple species of idolatry.

What Paul had in view in this text was full-on pagan idolatry. They were people who went into those pagan shrines and temples. They were bowing down and praying to and worshipping graven images. They were offering blood sacrifices, then eating the sacrificed animals. Often in the midst of this worship, they were getting drunk out of their minds and they were engaging in sexual behavior that I think would probably even make many Southern Californians blush.

Paul was saying, Oh no! Don't remove your presence from them. Stay among them. Keep mixing with them. You need to have an influence on them for the Kingdom of God. You need to be reaching out to them. They need the distinct character of the Kingdom of holiness and mercy and grace to be among them. No, no, no, Corinthians, don't go and start a compound twenty-five miles outside of town. Stay there and mix with the men and women who need the presence of the Kingdom of the Lord and the message of the Gospel.

The point is to keep mixing among the unredeemed people of the earth. This point comes to us in Southern California today. The body of Christ is to be salty. One function of salt is to mix in and have this kind of influence for the Kingdom and to go and be among them with redeeming grace and a Gospel message that saves. Being among them with understanding and humility and with love, with the message that Jesus Christ saves sinners.

In doing this, we follow in the example of Jesus. I was looking at that list of four vices, four sins that are listed in this passage, and Jesus went to people such of these. He was among them. Not only was Jesus among the sexually immoral, but He was also among those who made a profession of it. Not only was Jesus among those who got drunk with wine, but He was among them so much that His enemies were able to slander Him, and to accuse Him of being a drunkard Himself.

This text also mentions the greedy and the swindlers. Jesus spent time with the master swindlers, the very tax collectors of Israel itself. He even called one to be His disciple. He also scandalized the city of Jericho when He said, Zacchaeus, you come down from that tree. Guess where I am having dinner tonight?

So we see this picture with Jesus not by any means being close to them that He would engage in sin with them. He was the pure, unblemished, sinless Lamb of God. But He had a vision driven from love, driven from mercy and grace, a vision driven of their redemption and their transformation and their newness of life in the Kingdom. So Jesus remained among them.

Who are the people in your life? Who has God placed you among? Who is in your SOIL—your Sphere of Influenced Lives? Kristy was telling me, Hey, Jeff, if you want to get a little bit more growth of those plants you are trying to grow, put some Epsom Salt in the soil. Put some salt even in the soil. Have a vision for the people that God has providentially placed you with. Picture them giving praise to King Jesus. Picture them walking in newness of life.

Pray that the Holy Spirit would be at work for your testimony and for your witness. Call upon the Lord because for so many of us, the tendency is to withdraw and we need the grace of Jesus Christ to move us forward; to permeate; to be present and while being present, not to be influenced by the world but to be an influence for it and to do so with truth, winsomeness, grace, and with the kindness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are to be a Gospel presence in this world. Brothers and sisters, on this Independence Day I praise God that we are living among the land of the free and the home of brave, but that we also understand that the United States of America is sick. There is darkness in this land, and we are salt and light.

Jesus does not call us to withdraw. Rather, He calls us to mix in, and how we need this vision of His Kingdom advancing and spreading to drive us forward. As this is put into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, pray that He would give us hearts to see. Pray that He would give us feet that move, because as a church of believers we need to have eyes for those who need to be brought into the Kingdom. Be salty, my friends!

This is one aspect of having influence for the Kingdom of God. We continue and as we look at what else Paul has for us in this text, understand that Paul was overjoyed that the church was in Corinth; that the Kingdom of God was present and people were being brought in.

Paul was overjoyed that the church was in Corinth, but while desiring that the church permeate Corinth, he did not want Corinth to start permeating the church. So, Paul had another concern that was very close to his heart.

The Corinth church had become tolerant of unrepentant sin in its midst, and when it comes to on-going flagrant sin in the household of God, there is a different approach. We need to pull away and to:

## 2. Stop mixing with unrepentant people in the church.

This is what comes to us next as we read what is in Verse 11:

**<sup>11</sup>But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.**

At first glance, we might read that ask who can we associate with. Who can we associate with even in the church? Who is not guilty of one or more of these things? We all are! We are all sinners.

Not only is that the case, but if we are being honest and transparent with each other, these are not just pre-conversion vices but we stumble into these sins as followers of Jesus Christ. So what is this verse all about?

Understand that this is not about the believer, the brother or sister in the Lord who is struggling with sin; who is battling with sin; who is tempted with sin and who is even trapped in sin, but their hearts are grieved by it, and they confess to God that they keep falling into that sin.

These brothers or sisters are fighting the fight, and that is not what this verses is addressing. There is another verse that speaks to that situation in Galatians Chapter 6 and Verse 1:

**<sup>1</sup>Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.**

Brothers and sisters, that is all of us. We all have areas of struggle that we need help from others in that battle. This is what we read here in Galatians.

But the text in I Corinthians Chapter 5 and Verse 11 has a very different tone because it is talking into a very different situation. This is talking about a brother or a sister that is continuing in sin without a sense of contrition or repentance.

They don't battle this particular area of sin. They have made peace with the sin, and they are going to do battle with anybody who tries to address the area of sin with them. Instead of resisting sin, they resist anyone who is willing to deal with it.

Last we talked about a lengthy process with several steps of coming and appealing and counseling and pursuing and caring, trying to help a person to come out of that sin and back in to walking in obedience to the Lord, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This process starts with one person going as they are aware of the sin. Then a couple of people going. Then if the person is still not responsive to a handful of people going, the situation is told to the church. At Bethel Grace we would understand that to be to the Elders who have been elected by the church to represent the church in many matters.

Then if the person is still not willing to repent, the next step is to treat them as a tax collector or a sinner, namely someone who does not believe and to remove them from the church. They can be excommunicated because if sin is allowed and remains present in an unrepentant way, Paul said that a little leaven can leaven the whole lump. It spreads.

Then going into another food illustration, the community of God loses its saltiness. They are no longer salty for the presence of the Kingdom on this earth. So, the Lord has given us this pursuit which in the whole essence of it, is to be a gracious pursuit to help turn sinners from the error of their ways of ongoing sin. This is what the Lord calls us to. These things are in Scripture.

Brothers and sisters, what we talked about last week and are talking about this week is that the whole process from beginning and especially at the end, it is so hard. Maybe it is easy for some people, but it is not easy for me. It is not easy for the people that I have been involved with in carrying these steps out. It is not easy.

There are some aspects of the ministry that are very, very joyful and uplifting in the Lord, and there are other aspects of ministry that are very daunting and serious. I don't know if there is another area of ministry that is more taxing and causes the rise of more anxiety than this.

I will tell you right now that I struggle with this tremendously. The first couple of stages of this process, they go on all the time, and they should. That is brothers and sisters ministering and watching over one another, so that nobody is hardened by the deceitfulness of sin like it says in the book of Hebrews. Even that is hard.

But when it comes to even the possibility of a public discipline in the church, that is something that can be very, very draining. According to the wisdom of Scripture and our Bylaws, the Elders of the church are the ones that are called to guide the process when it comes to that, so please pray for us. Please pray for us!

We want to be salty out there and we want to remain a salty and distinct community. If sin proliferates in the church just because it is not being dealt with, we no longer are a salty community. So there needs to be understanding among the church that this process is here in the Bible.

We pray that it never comes to a place where there is public discipline, but it might. There is a dimming in the world, even though the world has always been a dark place. We are seeing dimming in churches. And if we are going to remain light and salt, we need to have eyes to see what Christ has prescribed, and walk in the path of humble obedience.

So please pray for us, understanding once again that what we are talking about is the pattern of flagrant sin, where everybody sees the sin except the one who is doing it. Maybe they see it but are just not willing to let it go, and there needs to be church discipline for the good of the one sinning, for their redemption, but also for the health and the vitality and the holiness of the church.

Here is an easy way for me to be transparent. I spend way more time on Facebook than I should. I was scrolling through my Facebook feed and there was an advertisement for a shirt somebody wanted me to buy. I don't know how it ended up on my feed, but I saw what was written on the shirt but I will be honest with you, I chuckled and said, How amazing to see that shirt while this has been something I have been studying all week.

The shirt said: "Am I perfect? No. Am I trying to be a better person? Also no." There is some cheeky wit about that that appeals to the Adam in me! But understand, what this passage is about is not a bunch of people trying to be better people. That is not what we are. We are a community of people who have been raised from death to life by the grace of the Messiah.

We are a people who have been born again; who have been forgiven of sin; who have been given the gift of imputed righteousness. We are a gathering of people supernaturally saved by the power of God and we are to be characterized by humility in our own struggle with sin.

We are also to be characterized by obedience to the will of the Lord, seeking to grow in holiness and whenever there is a situation where somebody flagrantly says they are going to continue in their sin, it is a serious affront to the holiness and the grace and the power of God and it needs to be taken seriously. And may God give us hearts of grace, not hearts of severity in order to carry out the process.

Let's finish with a positive vision of what the Lord desires to do among us. You will notice in this text that there was a list of sins that was repeated. First there were four sins, then the second time there were two more added.

In order to finish on a more positive note, what I want for us to do is consider these areas of sin and iniquity and also consider the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in relation to each one for not only forgiving people, but transforming and turning the sin around and helping His people to walk in newness of life.

When you take a coin and flip it, you will see that there is a beautiful vision of holiness that Christ is nurturing in His people. We want to go in the way of Christ. So when the Spirit of Jesus is filling His people, they are going to understand and glorify God for His vision for sexual intimacy; what He has made; what is evident in nature and in Scripture.

That sexual intimacy by the design of God is for a husband and a wife in the wedlock of marriage. Taken out of that context, all kinds of problems are created. And the Lord gives us His Word and His Law to keep us in the safety of what God has designed and made good.

Sexual intimacy is the bond and it is the seal of one man and one woman in marriage. When the Spirit of Jesus is filling His people, we are going to see the beauty and the value of it, so that our hearts will say, Lord, let us honor what You have made.

So that husbands will love their wives and be head over heels bananas for that woman and no one else. So that the ladies filled with the Spirit will look at their husbands and are going to be like, my man, having eyes only for him.



Read the Song of Solomon, folks. There is this vision of joy and pleasure and purity and it will fill the hearts of the people of God, even to the point where they will have eyes only for their spouse. It is all about Jesus lifting our hearts with this picture in all of these different areas.

When the Spirit of Jesus is giving us eyes to see Scripture and is filling our hearts, instead of being greedy with the things that we have, we will hold the possessions that the Lord has given with generosity. Not prying onto them, but saying, Thank you, Lord, for what you have provided to me. Maybe you are blessing me that I might provide for others as well.

Then there will be the joy of generosity that overcomes the sin of greed. It is a lovely thing. Are we listening to the voice of the Spirit of Christ as wealthy people? Are we thankful not only for what He has given us, but are we seeing ourselves as vessels by which He is providing for others who might be struggling? When Jesus is filling His people and they are being obedient to what He is doing, they are not greedy. They are the exact opposite. They are generous and they see the beauty of generosity.

Instead of pursuing idolatry and false spirituality, acknowledging that it is fine to worship whatever god is chosen, the people of God will taste and see that the Lord is good. And that there is only one Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—the one and only God who they will delight in. And their hearts will be so filled with the worship of God that they will even speak of Him the Lord of heaven and earth.

We are all capable of being a reviler, Christians included. We can have a sense of resentment festering inside and it gets verbally spit out at the people around us. This is natural within us. However, the Spirit of Jesus is moving us in another direction.

So we say, Lord, fill me with Your Spirit, so that my speech will be a fount of life; so that I will not cut down; so that I will not have rash words that are like sword thrusts, damaging people internally, but instead that my speech will be a fount of life giving life and nourishment to the people around me. That is the vision and that is what Jesus does. That's what He is working to do among us.

Instead of being drunk with wine, you will be filled the Holy Spirit, bearing His fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control. That is the kind of influence we want to be under. We don't want to be under the influence of alcohol or other substances. We want to be under the influence of the Holy Spirit and see Him bear these things in us. This is His work.

Instead of trying to swindle other people out of their treasures and their resources, as Jesus is filling us, our hands are offering the best treasure that will never perish or fade, the treasure of knowing Jesus Christ the Lord forever and ever and ever.

So there is one path which is the path of sin and self and we need the power of Jesus and His Spirit to not only forgive us of our iniquities which are many, but we need for Him to transform us and renew us and make us new by His power working through us.

Imagine a whole community, a whole church, spread across the land and here at Bethel Grace characterized by these things. We will have salt and we have light. Let's pray