

1 Corinthians 5 - Discipline for Sexual Immorality; Ecclesiastical Separation

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1 Corinthians 5

- (2) By the bearer of the letter (1 Cor 5:1—6:20)

The second serious fault reported to Paul by Chloe's household was a case of sexual immorality in the church, that the members were tolerating. This was a grave sin, both by the perpetrators and by those who tolerated the sin.

Paul says that it is arrogant to not judge openly sinful behavior in the church. He reminds them that Christ has paid for our sin so we should no longer live in it. Paul recommends that the church remove the sinning member from the body and ostracize them with the goal of restoration.

- (A) Incest (5:1-13)
 - (a) Paul's judgment (5:1-5)

1 It is actually reported that there is **sexualimmorality** among you, and sexual immorality of such a kind as **does not exist even among the Gentiles**, *namely*, that someone **hashis father's wife**.

1 It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife.

1 It is actually reported that sexual immorality exists among you, and of a kind that is not found even among the gentiles. A man is actually living with his father's wife!

1 It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife.

— "...sexual immorality" - *porneia*, a general term to include various forms of an illegal sexual relationship outside of marriage. The Bible defines "illegal" as anything outside a created form.

- Since God created sexual activity to occur only within the form of a married male and female (Gen 2:18-25; Matt 19:4-6; Rom 1:26-27), anything outside of that construct is considered "illegal"
- Perversion is too often of sex, one of the most sacred things in the human personality. God takes sex seriously, and He uses marriage to communicate His most precious truths.
- Sexual immorality was prohibited by Roman law and the OT (Lev 18:8; 20:11; Deut 22:30; 27:20). In Israel, it was punishable with death by stoning ("a sin unto death").
- "...does not exist even among the Gentiles" - this man, believe it or not, was a believer (he was named within the church). This demonstrates, contrary to the teachings of Calvinism and Lordship Salvation, that a believer can indeed fall into grievous sin that even unbelievers avoid.
- This proves that you cannot ultimately evaluate whether someone is a genuine believer or not simply based on their behavior. What we can evaluate, to some extent, is whether that person (a believer) is in fellowship with the Lord.
- As depraved as Greek culture was at the time, even the pagans looked down on incest, and Roman law prohibited it
- "...has" - present tense; when used in sexual or marital contexts, is a euphemism for a continuing relationship (in contrast to a "one night stand" Cf. 7:2)
- "...his father's wife" - the woman involved was a step-mother (not his mother). Paul gives the impression that the father is still alive. Had the woman been his mother, other terms would have been more appropriate to use to describe the relationship.
- If the guilty man's father was still alive and married to the woman, adultery would have also been involved (in addition to incest). Most interpreters conclude that this was a case of incest rather than incest plus adultery.
- Since the man is the sole subject of Paul's admonition, it appears that the woman was not in the church. So Paul's directive was to discipline the man (unbelievers are never under divine discipline).

- 2 You have become arrogant and **have not mourned instead**, so that the one who had done this deed would be **removed from your midst**.
- 2 You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst.
- 2 And you are being arrogant instead of being filled with grief and seeing to it that the man who did this is removed from among you.
- 2 And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.
- The Corinthian church had a permissive attitude toward the man in the church who was committing incest. The reason for their acceptance of this sin was that they had become

arrogant.

- "...have not mourned instead" - instead of mourning over the sin and disciplining the offender, they actually were proud of the situation
- Why should they have mourned over this man's sin?
 1. As a fellowship of brothers and sisters in Christ, they should have been affected by the sin of one of them.
 2. When one person in the church sinned, his sin contaminated the whole group. For example, when one member of a family disgraces himself, his actions disgrace the entire family.
- They may have viewed it as within the bounds of Christian liberty, or their worldly "wisdom" encouraged them to cast off sexual restraint. Either way, they were clearly setting aside the clear teaching which prohibits tolerating sin within the assembly (Matt 18:15-17; Rev 2:18-19).
- They were obsessed with "wisdom" and "philosophy"—oblivious to the moral implications of the gospel . Tolerance of some things is an offense to God. Christian freedom is not license for self-life or sin (1 Cor 6:12; 10:23).
- They risked being placed under divine condemnation (v13). Paul says more about the church's sin than the sin of the offender. The church is always injured from within—never from without. Judgment must begin at the house of God.
- "...removed from your midst" - the proper, biblical action that should've been taken within the church was excommunication, with the goal and intent of restoration

Verses 3-5 encompass one lengthy, difficult sentence, which reveals Paul's inner tension and agitation toward this situation.

3 For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present.

3 For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present.

3 Even though I am away from you physically, I am with you in spirit. I have already passed judgment on the man who did this, as though I were present with you.

3 For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed,

- Paul spoke earlier about not judging the motives of others (4:1-5). That kind of judging had to do with one's degree of faithfulness to the Lord.

— Here, the issue is blatant immorality, which needed to be dealt with. The case was so clear that he didn't need to be present to know the man was guilty of a serious offense, and needed to be dealt with strongly.

4 **In the name of our Lord Jesus**, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus,

4 In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus,

4 In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are gathered together (and I am there in spirit), and the power of our Lord Jesus is there, too,

4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,

- "In the name of our Lord Jesus" - a prepositional phrase that modifies "turn such a person over to Satan" (v5)

— Paul wanted the Corinthians to know that it was the Lord's will that they discipline the man. Therefore, when they assembled, and Paul with them in spirit, they needed to remove the man from their midst (excommunication).

— He assured them that God would back the ruling up with His power as they enforced the discipline

5 *I have decided to turn such a person over to Satan* for the **destruction of his body, so that his spirit may be saved** on the day of the Lord.

5 *I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

5 turn this man over to Satan for the destruction of his body, so that his spirit may be saved on the Day of the Lord.

5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the [his] spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

- "...turn such a person over to Satan" - Paul's "judgment" was to deliver the man out of the church and into the authority and control of Satan, the ruler of this world (Cf. John 12:31; 2 Cor 4:4)

— This "turning over to Satan" could result in the destruction of this man's physical flesh by means of suffering, illness, and possibly physical death, if he does not repent

— This deliverance may result in a person's premature death, but that is not implied here by Paul's use of "destruction of his body" (see note on Heb 2:15 about Satan's power over the death of believers and unbelievers)

— If this man was an unbeliever, Paul's admonishment would've been to evangelize him, not excommunicate him

— Paul passed similar judgment on Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim 1:20); in that case, he simply "delivered them to Satan," but did not mention anything about the "destruction of the flesh"

- "...destruction of his body" - *sark*, typically used by Paul to describe the sin nature, but here likely means his physical body/flesh because it is contrasted to "spirit"
- Premature death was the fate of Ananias and Sapphira, though the text does not say that they were first "delivered to Satan" for the destruction of their flesh (Acts 5:1-11; Cf. Acts 13:8-11). God also brought premature death on other Corinthians for their improper conduct during the Lord's Supper (11:30; Cf. 1 John 5:16).
- "...so that" - the purpose of "turning him over to Satan" was so that his spirit may be saved. Restoration is always the focus: to seek and to save that which is lost.
- "...his spirit may be saved" - the clause on the destruction of the flesh is subordinate to this main purpose clause. Paul clearly confirmed that the man's salvation/justification is still intact, despite his sin.
- Believers are safe in the hand of God, from which no one, not even Satan, can snatch them (John 10:28-29). Satan can attack only that which God allows (Job 2:4-6; 2 Cor 12:7).
- Did Paul's prescription here work? — Yes, the man eventually repented, was forgiven, and restored! (Cf. 2 Cor 2:6-8; 7:11)
- It's amazing how some Christians are unwilling to accept a brother's restoration because they don't agree with his sin. The only security we have is in the Lord Jesus Himself: He will not let us go. It is the Shepherd that keeps the sheep, not the sheep.

(b) Passover analogy (5:6-8)

6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?

6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?

6 Your boasting is not good. You know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough, don't you?

6 Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?

- Paul argues that the man should be removed from the church fellowship, and the fact that they had not already done this indicated that they were arrogant

— Arrogance to the point of tolerating sin is not a good place to be because like leaven/yeast, sin will spread throughout the church (Cf. Rev 2:20)

— Paul scolds them for being proud of their moral permissiveness

- "...Do you not know" - the second of 10x Paul asks the Corinthians this question in this epistle (Cf. 3:13). Each time, the answer should be obvious to them.

- "...a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough" - throughout Scripture, leaven/yeast is a "type" of sin: it corrupts by puffing up (the term is always evil in Scripture, Cf. Ex 12:15; 13:7; Lev 2:11; 6:17; 10:12; Matt 16:6,11; Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1; 13:21; 1 Cor 5:6-8; Gal 5:7-9)

— Eventually the whole moral fabric of the congregation would suffer if the believers did not remove this sin.

7 **Clean out the old leaven** so that you may be **a new lump**, just as you are *in fact* unleavened. **For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.**

7 Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are *in fact* unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.

7 Get rid of the old yeast so that you may be a new batch of dough, since you are to be free from yeast. For the Messiah, our Passover, has been sacrificed.

7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:

— "Clean out the old leaven" - Paul is calling for the guilty man to be excommunicated from the church

— This is what the Corinthians needed to do, as a church, so they could worship God acceptably

— "...a new lump" - holy, set apart in their experience with the Lord

— "...For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed" - believers have a perfect position in Christ, but our experience does not always align with our position. Nevertheless, the goal of the believer's life is for it to align with their position (Gal 5:25; Eph 5:8).

— Paul's statement that Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed signifies that Christ's sacrifice provided the basis for the believer's perfectly sinless position

— Believers now have a perfectly sinless position. The death of Christ ratified the new covenant and fulfilled the old Mosaic covenant. Believers now serve by the Spirit rather than by the letter of commandments. The Corinthians were not taking advantage of the Spirit's work in their lives.

While the Church is *distinct* from Israel throughout Scripture, it is not *divorced* from Israel. We must be careful not to make a complete distinction between the two, since in many cases they are closely related. Some examples include:

1. Salvation is of the Jews, and the church is composed of both Jews and Gentiles (John 4:22)
2. The church began on the Jewish feast day of Pentecost (Acts 2)
3. Christ is the fulfillment of Passover for the church (1 Cor 5:7-8)
4. The church's communion grew out of Israel's Passover (1 Cor 11:23-27)
5. The 12 apostles will reign on 12 thrones ruling over 12 tribes of Israel in the kingdom (Matt 19:28)

8 Therefore let's celebrate the feast, not with **oldleaven**, nor with the leaven of **maliceandwickedness**, but with the unleavened bread of **sincerity and truth**.

8 Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

8 So let's keep celebrating the festival, neither with old yeast nor with yeast that is evil and wicked, but with yeast-free bread that is both sincere and true.

8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

- Immediately following Passover was the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which lasted for another seven days. This feast signified that the believer's experience should no longer involve sin.

— Paul applied the significance of this feast to the Corinthians in that they should gather to worship, not with "old leaven" (sin) in their midst

— "...old leaven" - the sins that marked the Corinthians before their conversion

— "...malice and wickedness" - sins of motive and action

— "...sincerity and truth" - the proper motive and action with which we should worship God

— "sincerity" - *elikrineia*, means "to be free of dissimulation" which means free from hiding under false pretenses (i.e. to have pure motives). With a sexually immoral brother hidden among them, their gathering was not in sincerity. It was a blemish upon the church.

— The two word pairs contrast with one another: malice is the opposite of sincerity and wickedness is the opposite of truth

(c) Believer's relation to fornicators (5:9-13)

9 I wrote to you in **myletter** not to associate with **sexually immoral** people;

9 I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people;

9 I wrote to you in my letter to stop associating with people who are sexually immoral—

9 I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators:

— "...my letter" - while in Ephesus on his third journey, Paul heard concerning news about immorality in the Corinthian church. He wrote a (former) letter urging the believers not to tolerate such conduct in their midst.

— In view of the instruction in Paul's former letter, the current toleration (and "pride") of this man's sin was especially serious

— This letter apparently perished. Some believe it is preserved as 2 Cor 6:14—7:1.

— "...sexually immoral" - *pornos*, same word used in v1 to describe the man's sin

— Corinth was a place consumed in sexual vice (Cf. 6:9-10; 6:12ff; 8:1—11:1)

10 I *did* not at all *mean* with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the greedy and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to leave the world.

10 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.

10 not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, greedy, robbers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world.

10 Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world.

- The Corinthians must have misunderstood Paul's earlier instructions (in his former letter), so he clarifies it here: he makes a clear distinction between people inside the church (believers) and outside the church (unbelievers)

— He did not instruct them to avoid contact with unbelievers who engaged in sin. That type of extreme isolationism would have required that they stop living in the real world. This approach to life is both unrealistic and unfaithful to God, who has called us to be salt and light in the world (Matt 5:13-16; 28:19-20).

— Many Christians today struggle with an unbiblical view of separation that tends more toward isolationism than sanctification

— Distinction: we have fellowship in the church; acquaintances in the world. We were never intended to lead a "monastic" existence, but rather a life of testimony.

11 But actually, I wrote to you not **to associate** with any **so-called** brother if he is a sexually immoral person, or a greedy person, or an idolater, or is verbally abusive, or habitually drunk, or a swindler—**not even to eat** with such a person.

11 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.

11 But now I am writing to you to stop associating with any so-called brother if he is sexually immoral, greedy, an idolater, a slanderer, a drunk, or a robber. You must even stop eating with someone like that.

11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.

— "...to associate" - *synanamignymi*, to keep company with; to be intimate with. Same word used in 2 Thess 3:14 where Paul says to not associate with those who do not obey his instruction.

— The purpose for Paul's instruction (2 Thess 3:14) to not associate with those who didn't obey his instruction was to put them to shame. But Paul qualified this and said not to regard that person as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

— This is the idea of ecclesiastical separation (see note: **Ecclesiastical Separation** on 2 Thess 3:6).

- "...so-called" - *onomazō*, gives the impression that this man was just a professing believer and not a genuine believer. However, the man could very well be a believer.
- The word *onomazō* can mean "called or named" as in a member, or "known" in the sense of being known as a brother. The context of disciplining those inside the church but not those outside the church argues that Paul is assuming the man is a Christian.
- This word is never used with a sense of doubt in any other context (Cf. Mark 3:14; Acts 19:13; Rom 15:20; Eph 3:15; 5:3; 2 Tim 2:19)
- Christians should not live sexually immoral lives any more than they should be covetous, idolaters, revilers, drunks, or swindlers, but they will live this way if they do not walk by the Spirit, but according to the flesh (Gal 5:19-21; 1 Cor 6:8-11).
- This should not be surprising considering the situation at Corinth and what Paul has already addressed (Cf. 3:3)
- "...not even to eat" - assures that the person was to be shunned from fellowship, not only from the assembly, but also from eating together, which was the most common form of fellowship in the early church (Acts 2:46-47; 6:1)
- In the ancient near eastern society, to eat with one was to "become one with him." To not offer food to a relative, friend, or guest could be interpreted as a declaration of war (Cf. Luke 11:5-8).
- This exclusion was a strong form of discipline that is designed to confront the offender with their behavior and encourage them to repent
- Jesus often ate with tax collectors and other sinners (Matt 11:19; Luke 15:2). What's the difference? The integrity of the church (Matt 18:17; 2 Peter 2:13; Jude 12).

12 For what business of mine is it to judge outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within *the church*?

12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within *the church*?

12 After all, is it my business to judge outsiders? You are to judge those who are in the community, aren't you?

12 For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?

— "...what business of mine is it to judge outsiders" - Paul had already judged the man (v3), and (by the authority of the Lord Jesus) commanded the Corinthians to judge him as well (v4-5)

— But Paul didn't have anything to do with judging "outsiders" (unbelievers), proving that Paul considered this man a believer

— Paul's authority as an apostle did not extend to judging and prescribing discipline on unbelievers for their sins. His disciplining ministry, and that of other Christians, took place

only within the church.

- Paul was agitated in Athens (Acts 17:16), but lacked the authority to judge outside the church
- "...Do you not judge those who are within *the church*?" - a rhetorical question that should be answered in the affirmative. God has given judgment within the church, not outside the church.
- The problem in Corinth is that they were tolerating sin rather than judging it. They were allowing leaven (sin) to corrupt the holiness of the assembly.

13 But **those who are outside**, God judges. REMOVE THE EVIL PERSON FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.

13 But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.

13 God will judge outsiders. "Expel that wicked man."

13 But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.

- "...those who are outside" - unbelievers; the world
- Paul says the church in Corinth needed to obey Deut 21:21 in this matter. This would effectively be purging out the leaven.

— When the church tolerates sin the church becomes unholy. A further consequence is that the testimony of Christ to the world is destroyed (Cf. v1).

- Judging unbelievers is God's work. This does not mean that Christians should be aloof when justice needs maintaining in the world.

— God delegated human government as His vice-regents; we should exercise discipline in church life beyond what is their responsibility in civil life