

1Cor. 5:1 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.*

In this letter to the Corinthians Paul first addressed the issue of pride due to association with individuals and reminded them that every believer in the body of Christ is important only as one who speaks and lives by the truth of Christ and who should glory only in the fact that they know Christ. He also focused on the wisdom of God vs. the wisdom of men and how we should be dependent upon the Spirit for teaching and discernment. He challenged them with the fact that they were still “babes in Christ” as reflected in their actions and attitudes (envying, strife, and divisions). He reminded them that believers are accountable to God for their participation in “God’s building.” God expects us to be faithful stewards in whatever area He has placed us for service.

It would seem that once we succumb to the deception of pride and begin to reason with the wisdom of men, if left unchecked, we will soon find ourselves in other areas of sin because we have taken Christ off the throne and installed self in His place.

Things had deteriorated to such a point in the church at Corinth, that they were allowing blatant sin to be practiced in the church. It wasn’t a minor offense that affected only a few—it was a commonly known fact in the community—a man was having sexual relations with his father’s wife, his stepmother. This act of fornication was not even accepted among the Gentiles (the heathen).

This reminds me so much of the condition of the church in America today. The spiritual leaders of the church have become so caught up in their own wisdom that they feel they can ignore the teaching of the whole scripture and can focus only on what makes their congregation feel comfortable. Some feel that they can twist the interpretation of scripture to accommodate the desires of society rather than drawing a distinct difference between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of men. We have taken God off the throne and replaced Him with man.

1Cor. 5:2 *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 members of this church had become so deceived by pride that they weren’t even grieved at how this was affecting the body of Christ, the testimony of the church. They didn’t even consider expelling the offending member from the church. We have a mentality today that wants to make excuses for the sinner. Our correct response is to be grieved, to be sorrowful.

“puffed up” – Again, it describes the church in America today as a whole. It is full of men (and women) who are caught up in their own wisdom. They expound a God of love with no wrath, a God of mercy and compassion with no judgment.

1Cor. 5:3 *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,*

1Cor. 5:4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,

1Cor. 5:5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Paul, on the other hand, even though he is absent in body, he is connected to this body of believers in spirit. He has a vested interest in this body of believers. He is quick to identify the actions of this man as sin. He has the ability to make a clear-cut judgment based on the truth of the Word of God. The scripture over and over identifies *fornication* as sin and as unacceptable behavior before God.

In a position of spiritual authority, Paul is instructing the body of believers to gather together in the name of “our Lord Jesus Christ.” This would imply with unity of spirit. This would also be a declaration of their submission to Jesus Christ as Lord (Greek – supreme in authority). Once gathered, they are to deliver the fornicator “unto Satan”—kick him out of the church.

This effectively removes the person from fellowship and thrusts him into the uninhibited influence of the enemy. It’s easy to look from today’s perspective and understand that the destruction of the flesh could involve developing venereal disease or Aids. As I continued to focus on the rest of the verse, it would seem that the emphasis is on the condition of the spirit. When the flesh is in control, you are in bondage to the flesh and you can no longer experience the freedom found in service to God that results in peace and fulfillment. This would serve to bring a true believer to his knees in repentance before Almighty God. It was interesting to see the Greek for the word *saved*; the words that stood out to me were “heal, make whole.” The punishment is exacted in order to bring about spiritual healing.

1Cor. 5:6 Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?

Again, Paul started this letter addressing the matter of “spiritual boasting.” It is not *good*. The Greek for *good* referenced *honest* and *worthy* among other things. Their boasting is a dishonest representation that is not worthy of their position “in Christ.”

After pointing out the necessity of judgment for the good of the sinner, Paul goes on to warn of the danger to the church in allowing sin to go without discipline. He used a common illustration that is employed consistently throughout scripture—“A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.” Just as a little leaven will permeate the whole loaf of bread, a little sin left unchecked will spread throughout the whole church.

Church discipline is almost a non-factor in the church today. This has enabled Satan to establish false prophets and teachers in the body of believers more easily and to greater effect. I think we have lost sight of the fact that the purpose of the assembly of the church is to build up, edify, and equip the body for ministry—at all levels, from babe in Christ to those mature in Christ. New believers are brought into the church by believers. They may come to know Christ at a church service, but that is not the main purpose for the assembling together of believers.

Eph. 4:11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

Eph. 4:12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

Eph. 4:13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

Eph. 4:14 That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

Eph. 4:15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ:

Eph. 4:16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

1Cor. 5:7 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:

1Cor. 5:8 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.

By getting rid of those who blatantly practice sin in disregard of the Word of God, the body of believers cleanses itself. We are a new creation in Christ as believers; we have been declared righteous in Christ. By getting rid of the *leaven*, the church again correctly reflects its position in Christ.

When the Passover was established, emphasis was made to clean the houses of leaven and to eat only unleavened bread for the duration of the feast week. Christ is our Passover Lamb; He is the sacrifice that provides our deliverance. The feast week is actually applicable to our lives as believers. We are to get rid of the leaven in our lives—the leaven of malice (badness, depravity, evil) and wickedness (depravity, hurtful, evil, degenerate, harmful). Instead, we should live a life of sincerity (clearness, purity, genuine) and truth (not concealing, faithful).

1Cor. 5:9 I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators:

Evidently, Paul had written at least one previous letter to this church that was not meant to be included in the scriptures. In that letter he had told them specifically not to keep company with *fornicators*. The context of this chapter makes it clear that Paul is addressing the physical sin.

1Cor. 5:10 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.

Now Paul feels the need to clarify the previous statement. Obviously, the body of believers could not totally avoid contact with those who were fornicators, or were covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters. To do so would be impossible. Besides that, you can't share the gospel without associating with the lost. We are

to be “in the world, but not of it.” The key is avoiding intimate fellowship that would begin to work as leaven in your own life and/or the body of believers.

“covetous” = holding (desiring) more, i.e. eager for gain (avaricious, hence a defrauder)

“extortioners” = rapacious, to take by force; Webster = the act or practice of wresting anything from a person by force, by threats, or by any undue exercise of power; undue exaction; overcharge.

“idolaters” = image worshippers (in practice or in heart)

These must be some of the more common sins associated with the city of Corinth. They all reflect a desire to gratify the flesh no matter the cost. That made the sin being addressed in the chapter all the more serious regarding the testimony of those claiming to be servants of the Lord. The people of the city would look on and see an obviously hypocritical commitment to the Lord they claimed to serve. If they would tolerate such action in one of their own, they should be able to tolerate the same action, or any other for that matter, in others. After all, right and wrong are relative—right?

We are meant to be salt and light in this world. Those who are lost should be able to look at our lives and see a distinct difference in how we live vs. the rest of the world. They should see a peace and joy reflected in our lives that only obedience to the Lord can produce. They should see a humble, servant spirit in the heart of those who claim Jesus as Lord.

1Cor. 5:11 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 idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.

Now Paul gets more specific. You are not to even share a meal with one who claims to be a brother in the faith if you know that person is a “fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner.” Two other categories were added to this admonishment in comparison to the previous one—railers and drunkards.

“railer” = abusive, blackguard

Paul raises the standard for those who claim to be believers. If people claim to be believers and their lives exemplify these traits, you aren’t even to eat in the company of that person (a sign of intimate fellowship).

As I continued to look at this section, I couldn’t help but perceive a difference in the admonishment of verses 9-10 with this verse. Why would Paul even have to make a difference? Corinth was a city with a very worldly culture—much like many of our large cities today. The temptations and opportunities for sin were numerous. Interaction with unbelievers was unavoidable and in fact necessary to the spread of the gospel. To have close fellowship with those who claim to be believers, but their lives do not prove their belief, is to set yourself up for a fall. That is the whole purpose regarding the teaching of the leaven. My friend Dixie

worded it like this: Until the leaven is mixed with the flour, it is powerless. It's one thing to be a witness to those who are outside the body, and quite another to accept one who is corrupt as part of the body.

1Cor. 5:12 For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?

1Cor. 5:13 But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.

Paul is basically saying that he has no authority to pass judgment on those who are not a part of the body of Christ; however, we are expected to guard against allowing those who practice sin to become or remain part of the body.

God is the only one with the authority to judge another person with condemnation. The same Greek word is used for the word *judge/judgeth* in both of these verses. It carries a wide variety of meanings.

“judge” - to distinguish, i.e. decide (mentally or judicially); by implication, to try, condemn, punish:—avenge, conclude, condemn, damn, decree, determine, esteem, judge, go to (sue at the) law, ordain, call in question, sentence to, think.

Based on the context of this chapter in 1Corinthians it makes sense to understand the first “judge” in verse 12 to reference condemnation and the word “judgeth” in verse 13 to reference judgment with condemnation or punishment. The second use of “judge” in verse 12 would reference making a determination of the need for spiritual discipline. When sin is the dominant feature of someone's life, we are to separate them from the body and the privileges associated with fellowship in order to allow God to condemn or bring to a position of repentance. That is His work—not ours. Our job is to nurture the body of Christ and provoke one another to love and good works, to serve as light and salt in this world by how we live, and to share the gospel with those who are lost.

Heb. 10:24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:

Matt. 5:14 Ye are the light of the world.

Matt. 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Matt. 5:13 Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

Matt. 28:19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

Matt. 28:20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.