

## 1 Corinthians 5

- Ball State’s favorite talk show host admits to numerous affairs with staffers – and the public seems to enjoy it, turning it into a joke.
- The French Minister of Culture, who is openly gay, admits to paying for “sex with boys” in Thailand and has refused to resign despite the growing scandal.
- An Oscar-winning director is arrested in Switzerland 31 years after he fled California to escape sentencing for having unlawful sex with a minor. Many in Hollywood rallied to his defense, responding with indignation – as if the Swiss and American authorities are doing something terribly, unbearably wrong.

This is the world we have lived in over the last week or two, and the moral standards have not been exceedingly high. This is the world in which we as a church are called to exist, yet the standards of the Bible are clearly much more rigid than the standards of the world. They are also much less open to debate and interpretation. The world can easily argue over the right response to open immorality within its ranks. How are we to respond as a church when standards are blatantly violated? In this chapter Paul begins to deal with the some of the flagrant sexual sin in Corinth and offers some helpful counsel for those times when sexual sin begins to corrupt the church.

### **We live in an immoral world, but as a church we need to be pure and uncorrupted.**

- I. Sexual sin cannot be tolerated within the church. 5:1-5
  - II. Sexual sin can corrupt the church. 5:6-8
  - III. Sexual sin cannot be avoided out in the world. 5:9-13
- I. Sexual sin cannot be tolerated within the church. 5:1-8

- A. 5:1 **sexual immorality** *porneia* a general term used to describe all sexual activity other than that between a man and woman married to one another.

**As is not even named among the Gentiles** Not only was such a relationship illicit by OT Law (Lev. 18:8), but it was also forbidden in Roman law, as stated in the Institutes of Gaius. Yet this immoral sexual relationship, scandalous in the eyes of Jew and Gentile alike, was ignored by the leaders of the early church. (Victor Bible Background Commentary)

**A man has his father’s wife** The verb form “has” ... indicates a continuing immoral affair – not an isolated act or a past condition. This would indicate the father of the man was now somehow out of the picture. (Victor Bible Background Commentary, also Robertson and Vincent)

- B. 5:5 **to deliver such an one unto Satan** The only other NT use of this phrase occurs in 1 Timothy 1:20. There Paul mentions “Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.”

The expression seems to refer to the process of excommunication. Since Satan rules all aspects of the world outside of the church body, being turned out of the church involves being sent defenseless into Satan’s territory. (See *New Commentary on the Whole Bible*)

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II. Sexual sin can corrupt the church. 5:6-8

A. 5:6 **your glorying is not good ... a little leaven** One and possibly two things seem to have been true in Corinth:

- i. Certainly, they were really proud of their spiritual state. They really seemed to think they had it all together. And yet this kind of thing was going on unchecked within their ranks.
- ii. Possibly, their pride and their tolerance of sin were connected. They may have thought themselves very sophisticated, very progressive, in their moral or sexual views. They may have thought they had a very advanced understanding of the grace of God. They certainly were not legalistic or judgmental in this area. No ignorant, backward fundamentalism going on here in Corinth, that's for sure.

B. 5:7 **Purge out the old leaven** The picture comes from great care the Jews took in removing every bit of leaven from their homes in preparation for Passover (see Deut. 16:3, 4). Paul is making a connection between the forbidden leaven (representing sin or corruption) and the actual sin within the Corinthian congregation. He then identifies Christ with the sacrificial lamb (vv. 6-8 assume familiarity with the Jewish Passover celebration, described in Deut. 16:1-8).

**that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened** The Corinthians need to maintain their spiritual position of being a new, unleavened lump – a new creation – by rejecting the leaven – the evil influence.

**Christ our Passover [lamb] was sacrificed for us** Christ fulfilled the true meaning of the Jewish sacrifice of the Passover lamb when He died on the cross.

C. 5:8 **sincerity and truth** The “sincerity” refers to purity of motive, and “truth” to purity of action (See *New Commentary*). It is “that moral condition which is conformed to the law and character of God.” (Hodge)

- As the standards of society change, some churches respond by embracing the views of the society. Many churches now, for example, wink at unmarried couples who are sexually active, embrace pro-choice policies regarding abortion, or will readily ordain ministers living in openly homosexual relationships. Are they right in so doing? One of two explanations are usually given:
  - The church needs to keep in step with the times – to be more progressive. The older, stricter views are now archaic.
  - (This one is especially clever.) The older views were wrong. They were based on a misunderstanding of Scripture or an overly conservative bias.
- The problem is truth doesn't change. And nowhere in the Bible from beginning to end do we see an easing of standards for sexual conduct.

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III. Sexual sin cannot be avoided out in the world. 5:9-13

- A. 5:9 **I wrote you** We don't have the letter that Paul mentions here.
- B. 5:10 **not ... people of this world** In Corinth, to avoid people who were immoral would have meant virtually no contact at all with unbelievers. The same is almost true here in Indianapolis. The Christian is supposed to live among the non-Christian people of the world without copying behavior patterns which are contrary to God's nature.

*John 17:15-18 NKJV* <sup>15</sup>*I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.* <sup>16</sup>*They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.* <sup>17</sup>*Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.* <sup>18</sup>*As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.*

- C. 5:11 **anyone named a brother** The standards of the world are not our standards. Therefore:
  - i. We are not concerned with bitterly attacking the world's immorality.
  - ii. We are very concerned, however, if a Christian refuses to accept biblical standards for sexual conduct.
  - iii. It's not our job to change or reinterpret the Bible. It's our job to know and understand the Scriptures and then allow them to change us. Our views and behavior need to conform to what God says is right and wrong.

*Matt 5:13-16 NKJV* <sup>13</sup>*"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.* <sup>14</sup>*"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.* <sup>15</sup>*Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.* <sup>16</sup>*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*

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## Conclusions: Dealing with Moral Failure in the Church

- The first and most important issue is identifying the nature of the problem. In this chapter, Paul is dealing with the persistent practice of something that is unquestionably immoral as defined by Scripture.
  - He is not dealing with sin in a person's past, when the sinful behavior has now stopped.
  - He is not dealing with an isolated act of sin, which may need to be confronted, but would not yet require the serious response that Paul is giving.
  - He is not dealing with a person who is struggling against sin, but at present losing the struggle. Some sinful behaviors – and sexual sins are among these – have an addictive quality, which does not excuse the sin, but that the person needs to recognize or else the sin will almost certainly be repeated. Greater accountability may be in order.
- The second issue is instruction. Since we live in a society with radically different standards from our own, many people who first come into the church have no idea how to distinguish right from wrong. They need to be taught.
  - Once they are clearly informed as to what is right and what is wrong they need to accept the standards of the Bible.
  - If they repent of the sin, their repentance is to be accepted as genuine.
  - If they refuse to repent, that is, they refuse to acknowledge that the Bible is right and they are wrong, then church discipline is in order, meaning that the person is not to be considered part of the church.
- Church discipline is not mean-spirited. The goal is not punishment, but restoring the brother or sister to fellowship with God and the church. In the case of the Corinthian brother, it actually seems his expulsion led to repentance and full restoration to fellowship (2 Cor. 2:6-8).
- Most believe that what we see in this passage is a final rather than first step in seeking to restore a sinning brother, and look to Matt. 18:15-17 to develop a step-by-step process.

**Matt 18:15-17 NKJV** <sup>15</sup>*“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. <sup>16</sup>But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. <sup>17</sup>And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.*

- There is a vast difference between the ‘judging’ involved in this exercise of church discipline and the judgmental attitude we see reflected in passages that warn against judging others. In the case of church discipline the Christian does not make an independent determination of right and wrong, but rather agrees with God in His judgment of a particular practice as sin.
- Finally, underlying the teaching of this passage is the conviction that the church of Jesus Christ is, and must be, holy. There is no room in our fellowships for a lax attitude toward sin. In some ways the purity of the church is related to its power. We need total commitment on the part of God's people to both personal and corporate holiness. (See *Victor Bible Background Commentary*)