

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians

(SB_1Cor_chp5)

1 Corinthians 5

After having dealt with sectarianism as a manifestation of the arrogance of old-man thinking within the church at Corinth (chapters 1-4), Paul turns to another manifestation of arrogance by the believers in Corinth – tolerance and virtual promotion of sexual immorality. Both of these manifestations of arrogance by the believers in Corinth have a context that is culture specific.

Sectarianism (chapters 1-4) reflected a crisis of authority in the local church (1:10; 4:21). The Corinthians were manifesting their arrogance with a culturally influenced form of old-man thinking that valued a worldly concept of power. This carnal, old-man thinking had produced the three problems that Paul proceeded to deal with next: immoral sexual relations inside a family unit or “incest” (chp. 5), litigation (chp. 6), and sexual relations outside of marriage (chp. 7) in the church.¹

As we have noted in the introduction to our study of 1 Corinthians, Corinth was well-known for its culture of sexual promiscuity and licentiousness. You may recall that Aristophanes coined the verb *korinthiazomai* to refer to fornication. Also, the worship of the goddess Aprodite was prominent and it was headquartered in the temple situated on top of the Acrocorinthus – a large rock or small mountain that rises to about 1900 feet above the plain below where Corinth is situated which, with its almost inexhaustible water supply, made it a citadel to the citizens of Corinth. You may also recall that it is estimated that as many as 1000 temple prostitutes were affiliated with the worship rituals surrounding Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love (the Roman counterpart – Venus).

In chapter 5, Paul condemns the sin of incest, which he calls *porneia* (Gr. πορνεία) which is a term referring to a broad range of inappropriate sexual activity of any kind outside of marriage. Paul rebukes the believers in Corinth for their arrogance in the matter and their failure to excommunicate the violator--something on which Paul insists (vv. 1-5). Paul draws an analogy between the care that should be taken by the local church to guard its reputation as pure and non-hypocritical and the efforts expended to remove leaven from everything associated with the Passover feast celebrated by Jews during the Age of Israel. After all, as Paul notes, Jesus fulfilled all elements of the Mosaic Law and believers of the present age or dispensation should live out our position in Christ.²

Later (vv. 9-13), Paul provides instruction regarding how the church should address sexual immorality among its members. We will note that Paul is careful to draw a distinction between the responsibility of the local church toward fellow believers and the unbelieving community outside of the local church.

¹ I use the phrase “immoral sexual relations inside the family unit” since, as we shall see, the situation that gave rise to Paul’s address in chapter 5 is one involving two individuals who were only legally related, not genetically related. Such a situation does fit the definition of incest; but, given the fact that there are so many mixed family units in our society today, I wanted to highlight the greater applicability of Paul’s teaching in this pericope.

² As noted in the previous session, it is important for us to have a holistic understanding of some Pauline based concepts regarding our unique position and privileges as members of the Body of Christ along with the ramifications of that understanding in regard to our daily spiritual walk as taught by Paul in order to fully appreciate Paul’s instruction and teaching in any specific passage. Examples, as previously noted, include the concept of the believer’s sanctification in all three phases of the believer’s existence and the distinction between divine viewpoint, human viewpoint, old man thinking, new man thinking, etc.

IMMORALITY DEFILES THE CHURCH AND DISCREDITS ITS WITNESS (5:1-8)

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

As noted in the introduction to this session, the word translated “fornication” (KJV) is the word *porneia* (Gr. πορνεία). Since the word actually conveys the idea of extramarital sexual relations of any kind (e.g. fornication, adultery, prostitution, etc.), the translation in the NKJV and the NIV of “sexual immorality” is best.³ Even as sexually promiscuous as were the Greeks of Corinth given the prominence of the temple prostitutes in their midst, they viewed incest with abhorrence.

The word *porneia* ('sexual immorality') in the Greek world simply mean 'prostitution,' in the sense of going to the prostitutes and paying for sexual pleasure. The Greeks were ambivalent on that matter, depending on whether one went openly to the brothels or was more discreet and went with a paramour. But the word had been picked up in Hellenistic Judaism, always pejoratively, to cover all extramarital sexual sins and aberrations, including homosexuality. It could also refer to any of these sins specifically, as it does here. In the NT the word is thus used to refer to that particular blight on Greco-Roman culture, which was almost universally countenanced, except among the Stoics. That is why *porneia* appears so often as the first item in the NT vice lists, not because Christians were sexually 'hung up,' nor because they considered this the primary sin, the 'scarlet letter,' as it were. It is the result of its prevalence in the culture and the difficulty the early church experienced with its Gentile converts breaking with their former ways, which they did not consider immoral.⁴

The word translated “reported” is the present, passive, indicative of *akouo* (Gr. ακουω). The present tense indicates that this situation was continuously being made known and the story was spreading.

The word translated “wife” (NASV) is the Greek word *gunaika* (from Gr. γυνή) which is literally “woman.” The expression “has his father’s wife” seems to indicate that the two had actually married since the phrase elsewhere in the New Testament “to have a woman” means that a man has married a woman (cf. Matt 14:4; 22:28 [Greek]; 1Cor 7:2, 29). Evidently, the woman and the man’s father had either divorced or the father had died. Since the man, not the

³ See Frank E. Gaebelin, *Expositor's Bible Commentary, New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972-1992), electronic edition.

⁴ Gordan D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament series (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 199-200 cited in Thomas B. Constable's "Notes on 1 Corinthians" at www.soniclight.com

woman, is the object of Paul's censure, the woman was likely an unbeliever and not a part of the local assembly of believers as was the man.

The influence of the Mosaic Law and Jewish tradition upon Paul's teaching – Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, provides believers with instruction regarding conduct expected among members of the Body of Christ. Paul's teaching in this regard is an example of an area in which we find similarity between principles that are applicable to the Jew living during the Age of the Law or the Age of Israel and the present dispensation. If Paul had been advocating a life under the Mosaic Law for believers of the present dispensation, then death for the offender would have been the consequence (see Lev 18:8, 29).

Such a marriage was strictly forbidden according to Leviticus 18:8 and Deuteronomy 22:30 and carried with it a curse (Deut 27:20). Rabbinic law in the main seems to have allowed such a marriage when a proselyte married his stepmother, since his becoming a proselyte broke all bonds of relationship. (See Strack-Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum N.T. aus Talmud und Midrasch* [Munich: Beck, 1922-1961], 3:343-358.) It is possible that some in the Corinthian church who may have come from the synagogue there could have known of this allowance. Part of an inscription indicating the presence of such a synagogue has been found. (See J. Finegan, *Light From the Ancient Past* [Princeton, NJ., Princeton University Press, 1959], pp. 361, 362; see also page 177 above in this commentary.) Though as a Pharisee (cf. Philippians 3:5), Paul knew the system of Jewish law with its varying interpretations, he applies the OT law and the teaching on marriage quite strictly.⁵

In verse 2, Paul highlights the real issue or concern – his real concern was the cavalier manner in which the believers in Corinth were approaching this issue. It is very obvious that their culture had made them insensitive to this sin. Their backgrounds and the influence of their culture had shaped their conscience (a subject Paul will address at greater length in chapter 8) and they had not grown spiritually enough to have their conscience and every other facet of their soul changed into Christ-likeness. They had not “internalized” (Rom 6:6, 11 – “know” and “reckon” or “consider”) spiritual truth that they had been taught and they had not “actualized” (Rom 6:13 – “yield” or “present”) it into their experience. They were still thinking and acting based upon human viewpoint and old-man thinking that had been shaped by their cultural context and they were not sensitive to the need to set themselves apart from the world in thought and actions so as to demonstrate their “position” in Christ.

Principle: The new believer (or the believer who has never understood and exercised the principles found in Romans 6) will display old-man thinking and actions (function) that is culturally influenced.

Principle: The new believer (or the believer who has never understood and exercised the principles found in Romans 6) will become sensitive to and more acutely aware of the manner in which his or her culture has affected his or her soul (i.e. conscience, self-consciousness, mentality, emotions, volition) as spiritual growth through “internalization” and “actualization” (Rom 6) of spiritual truth occurs.

Passage: Paul teaches this reality relative to the experiential dimension of the believer's spiritual life in such passages as Ephesians 4:17-24.

17 So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; 19 and they, having become

⁵ See Gaebelein, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*.

callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. 20 But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. (Eph 4:17-24)

Principle: The necessity for growth in spiritual Truth by the believer is absolutely paramount if the believer is to have effect in Phase 2 of his existence.

Verses 3-5 – “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. 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, 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.”

In these verses, Paul is indicating that he has already evaluated or judged (Gr. κρινω) this man as if he were physically present with them. He has done so in the interest of and under the authority of Jesus. It was the unbelieving world’s perception of and understanding of Jesus that was at stake since it was the local assembly of believers in Corinth that testified to Jesus as the Christ to the rest of the unbelieving world. Paul is highlighting the one upon whose authority all local church discipline is to be exercised – Jesus Christ.

What did Paul mean by delivery of this man over “to Satan for the destruction of his flesh so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus?” The passage is not entirely clear on exactly what Paul may have meant; however, it is my opinion that Paul was urging excommunication from the local assembly in order to encourage repentance on the man’s part. If the man did not repent (i.e. acknowledge the wrong thinking that led to his actions), then it is likely that Satan, working through his influence upon unbelievers who considered this man’s actions to be wrong, would destroy this man. One can easily imagine how such an odd ball might be treated by unbelievers who held higher standards than those by which this man was living, yet this man was associated with Christ and supposedly “saved.” In their own form of judgment of such hypocrisy on the part of an unrepentant, they could have easily been inspired to kill him.

On the other hand, if he repented as a result of the excommunication, his immaterial portion would not face as severe a judgment at the bema seat judgment of Christ for believers that occurs after the Rapture.

There are other occasions among the Corinthians where God brought premature death. For instance, among the Corinthians themselves, some had died who had improperly participated in the Lord’s Remembrance (1 Cor 11:30 cf. 1 Jn 5:16). Paul would also pass similar judgment upon Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim 1:20).

29For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. 30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. (1 Cor 11:30)

If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. (1 Jn 5:16)

19 keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. 20 Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme. (1 Tim 1:20)

Evidently, the man did repent since in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians, Paul encourages a restoration of him to the fellowship (see 2 Cor 2:6-7; 7:9-12).

In verses 6-8, Paul illustrates Christian holiness by comparing it to the principle of leaven in regard to the observance of the Passover feast as specified by the Mosaic Law. If the church should allow such sin as that in the Corinthian church to go undisciplined would affect the attitude of the entire Christian community toward sin--"a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." Paul's point – the command is to get rid of such sin individually and in the church, for the believing community is an unleavened batch of dough, a new creation in Christ, who has been sacrificed as our Passover lamb in fulfillment of the Mosaic Law. Paul is highlighting that we as believers of this new dispensation should in like manner demonstrate lives that are consistent with Christ's life. As we do so, we celebrate and commemorate Christ's fulfillment of the Law in our lives.

The leaven in Paul's illustration was the old man thinking that still permeated the thinking and attitudes of the believers in Corinth. It needed to be swept and cleaned out of every aspect of their lives so that their lives might demonstrate all that Christ accomplished as the Passover Lamb.

IMMORALITY IN THE LOCAL CHURCH MUST BE ADDRESSED (5:9-13)

9 I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; 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. 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. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? 13 But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES. (1 Cor 5:1-13)

Evidently, Paul had written a prior letter to the Corinthians that we do not possess. Since sexual immorality was so prevalent in Corinth, the Corinthians had evidently misunderstood some prior correspondence on the matter to mean that they were to separate from everyone – including unbelievers. This would have affected their ability to live since they had to have contact with these people through business, family relationships and everyday social contact. Paul expands his instruction to include other examples of immoral and sinful activity that should not be practiced by believers, yet which would have been prevalent among unbelievers (i.e. covetous, swindlers, idolaters) – all in the interest of greater clarity regarding the concept.

Paul's greater point here is instructional for us today in particular. Paul is indicating that while believers in the local church assembly should not allow the practice of anything that would discredit our Lord, it is not the responsibility of the Christian to judge the unbelievers of the world – to clean up the world of immorality. Believers in the local church should not "eat" or fellowship with other believers who practice such behavior and who would thereby bring discredit upon Jesus Christ.