

Immorality in the Church

1 CORINTHIANS 5

Intro: We are now back to I Cor and looking at how Paul deals with the second problem that had been reported to him: **immorality in the church** and the refusal of the leaders to deal with the offender. Not only was there sin, but the sin was open and "**commonly reported**" and because of it the testimony of the church destroyed!

The city of Corinth in Paul's day was like much of our society today. People were strongly intent on having their own ways. This showed up mainly in the area of physical desires. The boundaries that God established were dismissed and generally ignored. All of which impacted the church and its members, to say nothing of what outsiders thought of the church.

All of 1 Cor 5 is devoted to the problem of immorality in the church. As serious as the immorality itself was **the church's tolerance of it was a greater problem**. Certainly the Corinthian culture promoted this behavior, but that is expected by those who do not know the Lord or the Scriptures. What is not expected is for the believers **to accept and join in the wrong life style of the culture around them**. In this case the leaders of the Corinthian church refused to take any action; which probably was the greater sin in this case. In fact they became arrogant about the matter (v. 2), even though they were not participating in the wrong behavior, they were not upset over it. It is clear that the offenders were not interested in hiding their actions and even worse the church had no sorrow over the sinful behavior. The chapter is not directed at the believers, or "so-called" believers (v. 11), who were committing the sins but at the rest of the church who stood by doing nothing about it — in fact, arrogantly refusing to do anything about it. The danger at this point is to over react and do more harm than good. Many attempts at church discipline have compounded the problem, resulting in deep resentment by those involved.

The question is why would Christians choose to sin rather than choose what they know God wants them to do? **Four answers are commonly given today.**

1. Some would point to Romans 8:16 and explain that Christians who willfully sin have forgotten their true identity as "children of God." While it is true that Christians can forget who they are and sin as a result, Christians can also be well aware of who they are and sin anyway.
2. Some say Christians choose to sin because they have lost sight of what God has done for them. 2 Peter 1:9 indicates that Christians can be "blind or short-sighted, having forgotten [their] purification from [their] former sins."
3. Some wisely state that Christians consciously choose to sin because they have forgotten that God will severely discipline disobedient believers.
4. Some have said that Christians who consciously sin have lost their focus on the future. These Christians have forgotten that God will reward in heaven only those who have lived faithfully for Him here on earth (1 Cor 9:24). Christians who fail to keep eternity in mind often sin in the here and now.

J.Kirk Johnston, Why Christians Sin, Discovery House, 1992, p. 31

The fact is we all sin and need to make sure we handle it in a way that brings about forgiveness and restoration.

T.S. Paul gave three reasons why the church had to exercise loving but firm discipline and deal with the offending member.

I. For the Good of the Offender (5:1-5)

1. The first and critical desire is for restoration. Discipline is not to be punitive but action similar of a caring parent to a disobedient child.
 2. The issue here is blessing or judgment; God says He will judge all unrighteousness and will bless obedience.
 3. For the church to refuse to act indicates a willingness for the offender to simply be judged by God. If we really loved the individual we would want to spare them that pain.
 4. This particular member apparently was involved with his stepmother (see Lev 18:8) in an immoral relationship. The woman was apparently not a part of the church family, otherwise Paul would have had the church deal with her as well.
 5. The church was "puffed up" and boasting about its "liberal attitude." Paul told them that they should be mourning, and the Gk. word he used means "to mourn over the dead." (Later on he compares their sin to leaven, and leaven always "puffs up" whatever it infects.)
 6. Their "broad-minded attitude" toward sin was only hurting the offender and the church, not to speak of the sorrow it was causing Paul and the Lord Himself.
 7. Paul makes it clear what the church should do; dismiss him from the fellowship.
 8. This is the reason many will not join a church body; they do not want to be subject to personal discipline by the church.
 9. "But doesn't Jesus tell us not to judge?" referring to Matt 7. Yes, he does; but this is a situation that God has already judged and in this passage has given the church clear instructions on how to deal with it.
 10. We cannot judge another believer's motives (which is what Matt 7 refers to), but we can and must judge the actions of God's people where God has already said it is unacceptable.
 11. The action was not to be done by the leaders of the church but by the church collectively (v. 4).
 12. The matter was known publicly, so it had to be dealt with publicly. If the man refused to repent, he was to be dismissed from fellowship.
 13. To "**deliver a man to Satan**" (v. 5) does not mean to send him to hell, for no church can do that. Rather, it means to cut him off from church fellowship so that he must live in the world, which is controlled by Satan (John 12:31 and Col 1:13). The purpose of such discipline is not to lose a member, but rather to bring the sinner to the place of repentance that he might be saved from loss of reward on the day of judgment.
 14. Church discipline is a forgotten ministry in many churches these days. Yet, if we really love one another, and if the pastor really loves his flock, he will see to it that wandering ones are warned and disciplined for their own good.
- T.S. This is not something that any pastor would enjoy and is difficult even to talk about. It is very uncomfortable to be discussing this or to hear it.

II. For the Good of the Church (5:6-8)

1. How foolish for a church to say it is "open-minded" and willing to accept any and all members, no matter how they live!

2. Would you open the door of your home to all who want to enter? Then why should we allow any and all who want to enter to come into the fellowship of the church? It is harder to join many worldly organizations than it is to unite with the average local church!

3. "**Your glorying is not good,**" warns Paul. "Don't you realize that one member living in open sin can defile the entire church?" (see v. 6).

4. Paul used the Passover supper to illustrate his point; see Ex 12:15. Leaven to the Jews was always a symbol of sin and corruption; so, before Passover, they always went thru their houses to remove all the leaven.

5. We really need the same attitude about sin; we simply cannot allow sin to grow openly in the church.

6. Christ died for us, not to make us like the world, but to make us like God. "**Be holy for I am holy**" (1 Peter 1:16).

7. This does not mean that church leaders are to be "cc spiritual detectives" who pry into the lives of the members. But it does mean that each church member must see to it that the leaven of sin is not growing in his or her life. And, if sin becomes open and public, the church body must take steps to protect the spiritual welfare of the church.

T.S. If we will take an honest look at this picture we will see that wrong behavior impacts the individual, the church, and even the world around us.

III. For the Good of the World (5:9-13)

1. We cannot impact the world we live in if we cannot show the unsaved a different lifestyle.

2. The church cannot change the world, if the church is like the world.

3. It is clear that Paul is not suggesting everyone falls under these instructions.

4. Read these verses carefully and note that Paul makes a distinction between sin in the lives of Christians and sin in the life of unbelievers.

5. Sin in the lives of believers is worse! Paul had commanded them in a previous letter not to fellowship with Christians and church members who had sinful reputations, or idolaters. He did not tell them to stay away from all sinners of this kind, otherwise they would have to leave the world!

6. We expect the unsaved man to live in sin, but even the world expects the Christian to be different.

Conclusion: One reason the church today has so little influence in the world is because the world has too much influence in the church.

Faithful Christians are not even to eat with church members who have ruined their testimony by open sin and have never made things right with the church and the Lord. This is a part of the discipline outlined in v. 5. If a faithful church member fellowships in a friendly way with a Christian living in sin, that member is condoning his sin and disobeying the Word of God.

It shocks some Christians when they realize that God expects us to exercise spiritual judgment in the church. We are not to judge the outsiders; God will do that. But we are to limit church fellowship with any Christian who will not confess sin and make things right. This is not to be done hastily; all parties involved must be permitted to state their case. There must be prayer and the ministry of the Word.

There must be sincere Christian love. The very act of church discipline is a testimony to the world and a warning to the church, and especially to new believers, that God expects His children to be different from the world. To condone sin is to deny the very cross of Christ!