

## VIII. Evil Within the Church

January 8/10, 2013

1 Corinthians 5:1-13

**Aim:** To understand that while we live in the midst of the world, we cannot tolerate the world's moral corruption to enter the church; we must keep the church pure in both doctrine (wisdom) and conduct.

Here at chapter 5, the letter begins a new unit that runs through to the end of chapter 7. Much of the material is devoted to sexual behavior within the Corinthian congregation, beginning with a case of incest, where the church has failed to discipline the 'evil person' (5:13). With the exception of his comments on litigation (6:1-8), Paul's teaching on sexual practices forms the first part of his Christian 'Holiness Code.'

The unifying theme of these three chapters seems to be the nature of true Christian freedom. Paul uses what seems to have been one of the catch-phrases of the Corinthians, 'All things are lawful to me' (6:12); the teaching of these three chapters revolves his qualification of what that should mean in the practice of a godly life, shaped by the gospel of the cross.

There is here also, however, a strong connection with chapter 4. At the end of that chapter we saw the arrogant leaders of the separatist factions in Corinth denigrating Paul's authority and questioning his power. The apostle's response was to deny the validity of their judgment, and this he now further proves by demonstrating how totally inadequate is their response to the sexual immorality in their midst. Their actual weakness, spiritual poverty, and foolish wisdom, which were exposed by the biting irony of 4:8-13, are now revealed much more clearly and straightforwardly, as Paul shames their compromising behavior in these matters of sexual conduct.

All of 1 Corinthians 5 is devoted to the problem of immorality in the church, much of it specifically to sexual immorality. As serious as the immorality itself was the church's tolerance of it. From 1:10 to 4:21 Paul has been dealing with the more philosophical and psychological types of sin, the sins of intellect and attitude. Chapter 5, however, focuses primarily on sins of the flesh. Paul's thrust in this chapter is for discipline of persistently sinning church members.

### A. The Sin (1 Cor. 5:1-2)

Essentially, Paul is dealing with two problems in this section on discipline; the immorality of one of the members and the indifference of all the church. Paul must show them that the immorality was immorality and that it was serious and should not be tolerated—something they already should have known.

#### 1. Immorality (5:1)

*<sup>1</sup>It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife.*

We assume that the 'report' came from Chloe's people (1:11) or from Stephanas' party (16:17). What was the sin? It was 'sexual immorality' (*porneia*), a word used for all sexual activity outside marriage. Paul describes the *porneia* as 'of such a kind that does not even occur among the Gentiles.' This, he amplifies as, literally, 'a certain man has his father's wife' (*gynaika*, 'woman'). The present tense 'has' indicates an ongoing sexual union between them. It was not

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a one-time or short-term affair but was continuous and open. The case mentioned here is regarded as incest in the law of God. Paul is quoting from Leviticus 18:8 which prohibits sexual relationships with a ‘father’s wife.’ Thus Paul is speaking of a man’s ongoing sexual liaison with his stepmother; the woman was not his natural mother but had married his father after his mother had died or been divorced. It appears as if the woman was an unbeliever; if she was a member of the church, Paul would have mentioned it.

Most probably the man’s father is still alive, but we don’t know all the details. There was no need for Paul to supply any more details because everyone in the church knew exactly what he was talking about! In fact, everybody in the city of Corinth knew about the immorality in the church. The phrase ‘actually reported’ may also be translated ‘reported commonly.’ ‘Actually’ (*holōs*) also means ‘everywhere’ or ‘generally’ (as in our word ‘holistic’). The story had spread like wildfire. Not only did the citizens of Corinth know about the immorality within the church, they were shocked by it. This is quite a statement! This particular sin was so repulsive and vile it was not tolerated or practiced in a city that was as sex-obsessed as our own society.

A father and a son cohabiting with the same woman is not only condemned in the Bible (cp. Dt. 27:20), but was also deeply offensive in Greco-Roman eyes, despite generally lax attitudes to sexual practices. In that culture, however, where ‘shame’ and ‘loss of face’ were to be avoided at all costs, a sexual liaison between a younger man and his stepmother would have been a source of humiliation for the father and given rise to scandal and notoriety for the newly established church in Corinth.

This form of incest was regarded as an obscenity even among ‘the nations’ (or ‘Gentiles’ – *ethnoi*). He rebukes the church because in this respect they have fallen beneath the normally very low standards of society. Cicero (106-43 BC) comments disparagingly about Sassia, mother of one of his clients and a woman who had married a son-in-law. The lawyer assumes a mantle of righteous indignation: ‘Oh! To think of the woman’s sin, unbelievable, unheard of ... in all experience, save for this single instance!’

### 2. Indifference (5:2)

*<sup>2</sup>And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.*

But this is not the only problem. More shocking to Paul than the sin itself was the church’s toleration of it. Paul’s use of the emphatic pronoun ‘you’ which he places at the beginning of a series of questions serves to express his utter amazement at the Corinthian behavior: ‘And *you* are puffed up? Their endorsement of this sin is as bad as the sin itself. Perhaps they looked on the incest as an expression of their Christian liberty, or perhaps they looked on their toleration of it as an expression of Christian love. In any case their arrogance blinded them to the clear truth of God’s standards.

The reaction of those who are following a crucified Savior should be sorrow and then separation, if the offender shows no repentance. But in vain did Paul look for these two reactions within the Corinthian congregation.

Why does this outrageous sinful behavior seem to have been tolerated, and even justified, by the members of the church? There must have been some spurious spiritual reasoning going on which effectively blinded the Corinthian Christians to the reality of the situation. Perhaps it was the combination of a wrong understanding of their freedom from the Old Testament law through

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the justifying grace of the gospel, together with something of their old Greek thinking about the dualism of soul and body. If the pure spirit was all that really mattered in eternal terms, then perhaps it was of no significance what was done in the body. A combination of a wrong understanding of freedom from the Law and a wrong view of the importance of the body might have produced this careless attitude. Of course, there may well have been disagreement within the church over how to deal with the problem, but in fact nothing had been done, and so they were effectively turning a blind eye to a gross scandal against the name of Christ – and this is the church that had boasted about its superior spirituality!

The appropriate response of the Christian to sin is to feel grief about it. The Corinthians, however, were not mourning. Instead, they were ‘puffed up.’ Their pride had desensitized them to the enormity of sin. We know there was a group in the church who considered themselves to be the spiritual elite. One of the ‘insights’ these people claimed was a doctrine of Christian ‘freedom.’ They believed Christ’s salvation had set them free from the law to such an extent that they could disregard even the Ten Commandments. When this particular episode of sin was brought to their attention they probably said something like this: ‘If this brother feels free to live this way, that’s his business. I wouldn’t choose to live this way myself, but I believe we have no right to judge him.’ In the church of Corinth, then, the flagrant act of one was tolerated because of the flippant attitude of many.

Christians are not to tolerate sin within the church any more than they are to tolerate it within their own lives. It is the responsibility of all church members, not simply the pastor and other leaders, to expose sinful practices in the fellowship. Without being self-righteous or prying, we are required to be continually on the lookout for any sort of immorality or sin that threatens the purity of our Lord’s body, the church. We must recognize the need for identifying and cleansing sin within the church. When it is found we should be in spiritual mourning until it is cleansed.

Easily missed in verses 1&2 is the idea of evil ‘among them’ which is not even found ‘among the Gentiles’ and which must be removed ‘from among’ the congregation. This echoes the language of Deuteronomy where Moses repeatedly calls for the purging of evil from the midst of Israel (cp. Dt. 17:7; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21, 22, 24; 24:7). Clearly, the church is the ‘new Israel’ and like ‘Israel according to the flesh’ is to be purified by the removal of moral evil from within. This would be accomplished by the removal of the offender from the church (vv. 3-5) in contrast to Israel where the offender was often put to death.

### **B. The Judgment (1 Cor. 5:3-5)**

Paul’s remedy for the situation consists of one long sentence in the original, running from verse 3 to verse 5. From this passage and also from Second Corinthians we are able to glean some idea of the disciplinary process in the early church. First, an assembly must be held (v. 4a), whether at a regular meeting of the congregation or one specially convened. Second, charges must be made by at least two witnesses (2 Cor. 13:1; cp. Dt. 19:15). ‘Due process’ must be observed; persons are not to be dealt with on the basis of hearsay or gossip. Third, a judgment must be made according to the facts (v. 3a), based on the verdict of a ‘majority’ (2 Cor. 2:6). Fourth, the punishment of exclusion from the assembly is executed, though not mechanically, as it were, but ‘in the power of our Lord Jesus’ (v. 4b). By this the offender is ‘handed over to Satan,’ which is a matter of grief and mourning (v. 2b; 2 Cor. 12:21) and like a spiritual funeral to him. Fifth, this act of consigning the offender to Satan’s realm has a positive intention, ‘the destruction of the

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flesh that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord (v. 5). Sixth, the restoration of a penitent was the ultimate purpose of the discipline (2 Cor. 2:7, 10).

Israel was to purge the evil from their midst by putting to death the evil-doers. There was no provision for forgiveness of the gross sexual or other sins in question nor for the restoration of the offender at his repentance. By contrast, discipline under the New covenant is redemptive in intent, consistent with the full and final revelation of God's salvation in the death and resurrection of Jesus, which was only foreshadowed in the redemption of Israel from Egypt. However, this does not imply any lack of seriousness for discipline in the New Covenant. If unrepentant, the wrongdoer must be excluded 'from the midst of' the congregation.

### 1. The Pronouncement of Judgment (5:3)

<sup>3</sup>*For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing.*

Paul begins by affirming his involvement with them in this issue, even though he is not present in Corinth. There may have been some detractors who assumed that his absence meant that he was no longer interested in them, but the whole letter is a denial of that view. Paul called on the Corinthian church to acknowledge with him the seriousness of the offense, to recognize the need for discipline, and to take appropriate action—as Paul had already done as if he were there.

Paul asks his readers to imagine him as being in a sense present with them at Corinth (cp. Col. 2:5). In his absence, and before informing him about the matter, the church should have expelled the offender, but did not. Now having been told all, Paul is unprepared to take the burden from their shoulders: they must bear their responsibility and show revulsion by exercising discipline as if he was with them in person.

Secondly, Paul has no doubt about the guilt of the sinner. Such behavior is a sin against God and against man, and the apostle has already judged it as such. That is the responsibility of godly leadership in a local congregation. This is not a matter of personality differences, or of a power bid on behalf of the apostles, but of using Scripture to form a judgment – an action that the church had manifestly failed to perform.

### 2. The Process of Judgment (5:4)

<sup>4</sup>*When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus...*

Verse 4 indicates the action that needed to be taken. The church must meet together, and could be assured not only of Paul's spiritual support, but, more importantly, of the presence and power of the Lord Jesus with them (cp. Mt. 18:20, which is a promise in the context of church discipline). They were to come together to do what they knew to be Christ's will in the matter, to do what He would do if He were there.

### 3. The Purpose of Judgment (5:5)

<sup>5</sup>*...you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.*

Verse 5 seems to indicate that what is required is expulsion from the church fellowship. The difficult phrase, 'deliver this man to Satan,' probably indicates that the realm outside the

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fellowship of the church is regarded as Satan's sphere, and the immoral man must be consigned to that by a solemn action of the congregation. His membership is forfeited.

Satan is the ruler of this world, and turning a believer over to Satan, therefore, thrusts the believer back into the world on his own, apart from the care and support of Christian fellowship. That person has forfeited his right to participation in the church of Jesus Christ, which He intends to keep pure at all costs. The word 'deliver' (*paradidōmi*) is a strong term indicating the judicial act of sentencing, of handing over for punishment. The result of such discipline is 'the destruction of the flesh.' 'Destruction' (*olethros*) is used frequently in connection with divine judgment on sin.

The second half of verse 5 indicates that the purpose is not punitive but restorative. In view of the day of the Lord, is it not more loving to send this man out of the fellowship, that he might be brought to his senses, rather than to tolerate his sin and cause his eternal loss? The necessity of church discipline is therefore an act of love, since its aim is not to punish but to restore and to heal. Paul wanted this man to be renewed in his spirit, so he could again be useful to the Lord.

In fact, when we come to Paul's second letter, we discover that this is exactly what happened (cp. 2 Cor. 2:6-7, assuming this is referring to the situation in 1 Cor. 5, rather than another situation, e.g., arising out of Paul's 'sorrowful' visit). But that would never have happened had not the discipline been exercised as Paul instructed.

### C. The Principle (1 Cor. 5:6-8)

#### 1. Unleavened Bread (5:6-7a)

<sup>6</sup>Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

<sup>7</sup>Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened.

Earlier Paul said they were 'puffed up' over this matter (v. 2). Now another unsatisfactory facet of their behavior emerges. 'Your *boasting* is not good,' he adds. Their misplaced pride was also expressed in spoken *words*. In effect, he is saying, 'Look where your arrogance and your boasting have brought you. Because you still love human wisdom and human recognition and the things of this world, you are completely blinded to the blatant sin that will destroy your church if you don't remove it.'

To bolster further his instruction, Paul sets out to show the church why failure in this area would be disastrous for their future. Reminding them that they have nothing to boast about, he uses an everyday illustration to make a powerful, spiritual point. In the same way that leaven works, sin tolerated in one member may soon spread to others. Already they are sinning by boasting that they are so spiritual and yet tolerating this gross evil, and Paul is therefore deeply concerned that the whole church is beginning to be infected.

In verses 3-5 Paul's concern was for the salvation of the *offender*. Now in verses 6-8 he turns to consider the welfare of the *church*. This he does by an appeal to a proverb about the potent effects of even a tiny quantity of leaven in a lump of dough (cp. Gal. 5:9; Mk. 8:15). In a more modern figure he was saying, 'Don't you know that one rotten apple can spoil the whole barrel?' Paul's metaphor teaches that the church is at risk in that one man's sin can infect them all. Paul's concern was that this evil in their midst would corrupt the whole, just as one rotten apple, if left, quickly rots the whole barrel.

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‘Leaven’ in Paul’s illustration, as throughout Scripture, represents influence. Usually it refers to the influence of evil, though in Matthew 13:33 it represents the good influence of the kingdom of heaven. In this case, however, evil influence is in view. ‘The whole lump of dough’ is here the local church. If given opportunity, sin will permeate a whole church just as leaven permeates a whole loaf. Sin’s nature is to ferment, corrupt, and spread.

At this point, Paul links the imagery of yeast to the Old Testament picture of the Passover. Though predominantly a Gentile church, the Corinthians will have known from the Old Testament the origins of the Jewish practice (Ex. 12:15). Before the Passover feast, within the seven-day period called the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a Jewish household would search out and remove from the house every scrap of leaven. The leaven represented the old life—the way of Egypt, the way of the world—which was to be left entirely behind. Unleavened bread was therefore a symbol of the new life of separation to God, into which God had brought His people.

‘Clean out’ is expressed with the use of a compound word (*ekkathairō*, ‘to purge or cleanse thoroughly’) to emphasize the completeness of cleansing. Just as in the Passover cleansing of leaven, we are to remove everything from the old life that would taint and permeate the new. As Israel was set free from Egypt as a result of the Passover and was to make a clean break with that oppressor, so the believer is totally separated from his old life, with its sinful attitudes, standards, and habits.

The Passover signaled a new beginning and, therefore, none of the old leaven was to be left around to contaminate the new lump. The leaven represented the life they were leaving behind in Egypt, and the new lump represented their new life of freedom. Paul applies all of this to the Christian. The Christian is not just someone who has turned over a new leaf, or an old relic who has been painted and patched up. He is completely new. He is not just reformed but transformed. And make no mistake here, this newness is all due to the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. The Israelites were spared from the sentence of death on the land of Egypt by placing the blood of a lamb on their doors. The angel of death passed over all the houses marked by that blood. So the Christian is saved from God’s sentence of eternal death through Jesus Christ, who is the Passover Lamb. Because of Christ, the Christian is freed from slavery to sin and Satan is made new.

Because he is a new ‘lump’ in Christ, he is to leave behind the remnants of the old life. The sins of the old life are not to be reintroduced into the new life. This is precisely what the church of Corinth was in danger of doing. By tolerating the sin of this incestuous member they were allowing leaven from their old lives to exist in their church. Just as a little leaven soon leavens a whole lump of dough, so the sin of one soon influences and corrupts the whole church. When Paul tells them to purge the leaven from their midst, then, he is telling them to remove this incestuous member from their church via excommunication.

### 2. Passover Lamb (5:7b-8)

*For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. <sup>8</sup>Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

Paul calls Jesus ‘our Passover...sacrificed,’ an image evocative of the slaughtered lamb whose blood smeared on the door posts sheltered the people inside when the angel of death passed over

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Egypt killing all firstborn of people and animals. The role of Jesus as the Passover Lamb is repeated throughout the New Testament (cp. Jn. 1:29, 35-40; 1 Pe. 1:19; Rev. 5:6, 9).

When we consider the identity of our Passover Lamb, compared with the animal sacrificed in Egypt, how much greater is our responsibility to put away sin! Christians are no longer to serve sin, but to become a purified and holy people. We are to keep the Festival by living Christian lives that are defined by ‘sincerity and truth.’ Sincerity is the attitude of genuine honesty and integrity, from which truth results. In this sense, the whole Christian life is one of ‘unleavened bread.’

What of the indifference of the members themselves? How does Paul doctor this? He does so by continuing to use the Passover theme. He implores them to ‘keep the feast.’ In other words, they were to rejoice in their deliverance from sin, just as the Jewish people rejoiced in their deliverance from Egypt. The Jewish Passover lasted for seven days, but Paul is calling upon the church to continually celebrate their deliverance from sin through Christ who is our Passover. If the church of Corinth had been adequately celebrating the salvation provided by Christ, they could not possibly have tolerated the sin that was besmirching the name of Christ in the eyes of the whole city. If they had been properly worshipping Christ, they might have seen this incestuous member repent before church discipline was needed.

Because the Passover lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed, His people are to ‘keep the feast,’ that is, of unleavened bread. This is an image for the radical new style of behavior to be followed by the people of the Messiah, not just for seven days annually, but for every day, permanently, from the time of Christ’s sacrifice onwards. The leaven of the old life, that is, of ‘malice and evil,’ must find no place in the midst of the congregation of Christ’s people. ‘Malice’ (*krakia*) suggests an evil nature, disposition, or heart that feeds on hatred, this leading to overt ‘evil’ (*ponēria*).

Whenever sin attacks the church, it tests all the members. This may not be evidenced by a gross moral evil, like the incest of this chapter, but ‘the leaven of malice and evil’ is always present with us and part of our Christian discipleship is the work of rooting it out constantly, admitting our guilt, and returning to our Passover Lamb for His fresh forgiveness. Sin, tolerated in the church, remains one of the major hindrances to the spread of the gospel. The greatest contribution that we can make to evangelism in our generation is to live lives of sincerity and truth that confirm and illustrate the reality of the message we speak.

### D. The Purge (1 Cor. 5:9-13)

What is Paul’s teaching in this passage? What it amounts to is this: maintain purity in the church and contact with the world. A good way to understand this teaching is to think of the church as a boat and the world as water. It is fine for the boat to be in the water, but it is disastrous for the water to be in the boat!

#### 1. The Church Must Live in the World (5:9-10)

<sup>9</sup>*I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—* <sup>10</sup>*...not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.*

This is not the first occasion Paul has written to the Corinthians on the subject of ‘sexual immorality.’ In an earlier letter, lost to us, Paul had written on the same matter, calling for them not to ‘mix with’ the ‘sexually immoral’ (*pornois*). ‘Associate with’ translates *sunanamignumi*,

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which literally means ‘to mix up with.’ In this compound form it is more intense and means ‘to keep intimate, close company with.’

Although we do not know the details, the Corinthians (or a group among them) took Paul to mean some kind of total withdrawal from society, from ‘the sexually immoral *of this world*.’ To that group Paul adds others: ‘extortioners, robbers, idolaters.’ These four offenders have two things in common. Their behavior is evil and it is open. Paul is not speaking here of secret sins done in private, nor of wrong attitudes, but of active breaches of the ten Commandments which are unambiguous and whose occurrence is public and beyond dispute.

Paul’s teaching on sexual ethics in his former (and now lost) letter had been wrongly, and perhaps deliberately, interpreted. When he had instructed them ‘not to associate with sexually immoral people,’ he was not advocating the setting up of a Christian ghetto in Corinth, which would have no point of contact with the pagan culture. Such a policy *has* sometimes been advocated by sincere, but misguided, Christians, but, as Paul bluntly says, ‘then you would need to go out of the world.’

Some Christians want to take the boat out of the water. It is easy to see how appealing this idea would have been to the Christians in Corinth. Their city was a very intimidating place to practice the Christian faith. The city was overrun with the sexually immoral, the covetous, extortioners, and idolaters. Don’t think for a moment these were the only things going on in Corinth! Paul just mentions these to indicate what type of city it was.

Any Christian who lives in the fallen world, as God intends, will inevitably rub shoulders with the ‘sexually immoral...or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters.’ That is what the world is like, but God has not yet removed His church from it. On the contrary, because all authority belongs to the risen Christ, we are commanded to go into all the world and make disciples, through the preaching of the gospel (Mt. 28:19). We are not to become moral hermits, or, like the Pharisees, to separate ourselves from all others, in a sense of imagined spiritual superiority. Such an attitude reveals how little we have actually learned of the love that the cross exemplifies.

Other generations of early Christians found society to be equally intimidating, and they actually retreated from it by spending their lives in monasteries. However, one doesn’t have to go to the mountains or the woods to become monastic. It is possible to make monasteries out of our own churches and not really have any substantial contact with the world. The grand assumption behind all forms of monasticism is that Christianity cannot prosper in the rough and tumble of the godless world; it is so delicate it will perish when it comes into contact with wickedness. So we are to do exactly what Jesus prayed for us to do; be in the world but not of it (John 17:14-15).

Paul’s brief remark and his example speak eloquently against the understandable inclination to remove oneself from the wickedness and corruption of society into some kind of separatist Christian enclave. Paul does not in any way encourage such an attitude *even in Corinth*; in fact his words discourage it. This is the more remarkable in the light of Paul’s background as a Pharisee and zealot (Gal. 1:13; Phil. 3:5-6; Acts 22:3).

### 2. The World Must Not Live in the Church (5:11)

<sup>11</sup>*But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.*

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Paul now clarifies their misunderstanding. ‘But now I have written’ points to the present letter, the one we know as 1 Corinthians, and not to the lost document mentioned in 5:9. The nub of the argument is expressed in verse 11. It is the erring fellow-Christian (*adelphos* – ‘brother [or sister]’), the fellow-member of the family of God in the congregation, with whom the people are ‘not to mix.’ This was what Paul had originally intended them to understand by his previous prohibition. To those mentioned in verse 10 Paul has added, by way of example, the ‘reviler’ and the ‘drunkard.’ Like the other practices, these sins are unambiguously evil and unquestionably open.

We should expect the world to be characterized by unbridled sin, but not the church. Paul is not claiming that Christians never fall or fail, but the terminology refers to persistent and unrepentant behavior, a way of sinful living that is becoming, or has become, habitual.

Being in contact with paganism every day has a way of dulling spiritual senses. It is the old story: let the camel get his nose in the tent, and you will soon find you have a whole camel in the tent! The camel was definitely in the tent of the church of Corinth. They had learned to accept sin in the church as readily as they did in their community. In avoiding the ditch on the one side of the road (separation from the world), they drove off into the ditch on the other side (contamination by the world). Instead of keeping the boat in the water, they brought the water into the boat and were about to sink! So Paul essentially says that, while they could not expect to eliminate the immorality of the world, they could and should eliminate it in the church.

Is it not striking that, just like the Corinthians, we often ignore this duty of necessary separation but are prepared to pursue an unnecessary withdrawal from the world? Paul refers to any perpetrator as one ‘who bears the name of brother,’ suggesting that no one could possibly be a true child of God and still indulge their sinful appetites in such ways. The New Testament always places a large question mark over any profession of Christian faith that is belied by an unreformed lifestyle. Acknowledging Christ as Lord is incompatible with the behavior described in verse 11.

Action must therefore be taken. Eating a meal together was a sign of friendship and acceptability, a mark of genuine fellowship. To refuse to eat with an unfaithful ‘brother’ would amount to a very powerful signal of the rejection of his sinful behavior by his fellow believers. Paul has in mind not only the Remembrance Meal instituted by Jesus within the congregation, but also meals at home.

Of course, Paul is still addressing the grievous specific situation which has been reported to him (v. 1) concerning the sexually immoral man who is a *known* brother. That person, and others whose sins are a matter of public knowledge, have no place in the midst of the Lord’s assembly. By remaining, the offender is under no moral or spiritual pressure to repent. Furthermore, that evil leaven will, in time, corrupt the whole community.

Paul wanted the church to be living proof that Christianity makes a radical difference. If someone professed faith in Christ and didn’t demonstrate this radical difference, Paul wanted the world at least to see that the other members of the church didn’t approve. Christianity is a distinct and definable reality, and when someone takes the name of Christ but refuses to live up to the standards, he should not be treated as a brother in Christ. If we were to put this approach into practice, we would not only show the world Christianity makes a difference, but would also bring many a backslider to repentance.

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### 3. Judge the Church, Not the World (5:12-13)

<sup>12</sup>For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? <sup>13</sup>God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”

It is not Paul’s role, but God’s, to judge those who are ‘outside’ in the world, including those whose public lifestyle is blatantly evil. But it is Paul’s part and the Corinthians’ and ours as believers to judge those who are ‘inside,’ that is, the *known* brother and sister whose evil is explicit, extreme, and overt. This is not a matter of being judgmental, but of merely being aware of the moral reality within our churches.

The church is not to judge those who are on the outside. God Himself will take care of that in due time. The church is, however, to discipline those who fail to walk in a manner worthy of, and consistent with, the faith they profess to hold.

Today’s church seems to be as guilty of this inversion as the Corinthians. She is quick and eager to denounce the sins of society without realizing that such denunciations really amount to a denial of her gospel. If unregenerate people are capable of living righteous lives they don’t need the life-changing power of the gospel. In other words, we shouldn’t expect Christian living from those who are not Christians, but we should expect it from those who claim to be Christians.

Church discipline is most often avoided or ignored today because it is construed as an unloving response to moral failure. Paul would completely disagree. The church has a responsibility to judge ‘those inside the church.’ When the sin is clear and the sinner unrepentant, expulsion, by withdrawal of table-fellowship and other forms of social friendship, may be the most loving response that can be made, in view of the eternal dangers involved. There were plenty of precedents for such action in the Old Testament law code (e.g., Dt. 13:5; 22:21, 24).

Paul cites from the Old Testament in order to hammer home his counsel: ‘drive out the evil person from among you’ (cp. Dt. 17:7). According to Moses’ law, idolaters, slanderers, and adulterers were to be removed from Israel by death. Although the sanction was punitive as well as a deterrent, that prescribed by Paul is remedial (see 2 Cor. 2:6-7), it being implied yet again that the Corinthians are within the Messianic Israel.

The Christian is certainly not to condone sin in society, but he must maintain contact with society. The Christian himself is, however, to be so committed to holiness and purity that he refuses to maintain contact with any professing Christian who is not living a pure life. The Christian, then, is to keep the boat in the water without letting the water into the boat.

For next time: Read 1 Corinthians 6:1-11.