

Do Not Associate

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You Asked It 2026 / 1 Corinthians 5:11–13

In light of this verse should we refuse to associate with anyone that participates in the sins listed?

Sometimes as you read the Bible, you'll come across things that make you do a double take. Have you ever been there? All over Scripture we find verses that are difficult, hard to swallow, even offensive.

- Imprecatory psalms: Dashing little ones against the rock.
- Commands in the OT for God's people to go and wipe out the nations.

They're all over the place.

Well, as we continue our You Asked It series today, we're going to address a question that was asked about one of these difficult, hard to swallow, even offensive passages. We'll read the verse, then I'll share the question that was asked, and we'll spend the rest of our time trying to flesh out an answer.

The verse is [1 Corinthians 5:11](#). Turn there with me. (read)

It's a tough verse. Well, here's the question that was asked about it. "In light of [1 Cor. 5:11](#), should we refuse to associate with anyone that participates in the sins listed?"

It's a good question, and here's how I want to address it. We're going to look at [1 Corinthians 5:11](#) *in context*. If this verse is saying what it looks like it's saying...the implications are huge, so we can't take this verse by itself. This morning we're going to talk through the whole of chapter 5, but for right now let's just begin with this final paragraph of the chapter in which we find our verse.

[1 Cor 5:9-13](#).

These are hard verses, but they give us a fuller picture of what Paul is really getting at. So Paul mentions a former letter (one we don't have) in which he told the Corinthian church not to associate with sexually immoral people. And he qualifies this here, saying he did not intend for the Church to distance itself from sexually immoral people out in the world (and he adds the greedy, swindlers, and idolaters). They would have to totally separate themselves from the world, if that was his intention.

These are exactly the kind of people Jesus hung out with: sinners, tax collectors...Paul is NOT saying that Christians should just insulate themselves from the sinful culture and leave it to its own devices.

Paul reiterates his initial direction to the Corinthians that they shouldn't associate with anyone *who bears the name of brother* (someone who calls himself/herself a Christian) if he's guilty of sexual immorality, greed, or if he's an idolater (worshipping false idols), a reviler (slanderer, verbally abusive), a drunkard, or a swindler (someone who profits from dishonest gain, extortion, theft). Paul says not to even eat with someone like this. In verse 13 he goes so far as to command that they *purge* this evil person from among them.

So as we begin to work at an answer to this question, Paul IS saying that there are certain people who engage in these sins that Christians *should* distance themselves from. Who are they? People who bear the name of brother (So, called Christians) who are guilty of these sins. They call themselves Christians, but they're not living anything like Christ.

Now, I don't think Paul is saying that we should refuse to associate with ANY Christian who EVER falls into any of these sins or who is fighting to break free from them. It appears to me in this context that he's talking about someone who is *given over* to these sins. Sure they go to church and might even know their Bible really well, but when they walk out the doors of the church they're living in blatant and unrepentant sin. With their words they claim to follow Jesus, but their lives tell a totally different story. THIS is the kind of person Paul says, "Don't associate with them. Don't even eat with them."

6x in this chapter Paul will tell his readers in different ways not to associate with such people! His point is, we can't let people who aren't true followers of Christ believe they're part of the Body of Christ and operate like they are.

Don't associate with them. Purge the evil person from among you! In no uncertain terms, Cut them off! Don't allow them to exercise influence in the church.

Well but, that sounds so unloving! That sounds so judgy, we're not supposed to judge are we? (In a certain sense, but we are still supposed to exercise discernment) Why would we do that? Why would Paul tell the Corinthians to do this? Better yet, why would *God* inspire Paul to write instructions like this? It seems so harsh! Everything in us wants to recoil and find another way of interpreting these verses!

Why would God want us to be so harsh toward unrepentant sin in the church? I'm going to give an answer to that question now, but I don't want you to hear this and then stop listening. After I say this next sentence, I'm going to spend the rest of our time fleshing out what it means, and how I came to this answer. So, please stick with me to the end!

God loves people too much to be nice to us about our sin.

God understands how eternally dangerous sin is, left unchecked in our lives, and he loves us *way* too much to be nice about the very thing that may kill us if we don't get it out of our lives.

And so, if we zoom out a little more in our passage, we'll see that God's heart of love for people is why he wants us to take sin so seriously that we would even refuse to associate with an unrepentant "brother" or "sister." So let's go back to the beginning of the chapter.

[1 Corinthians 5:1-2:](#)

- Situation in the Corinthian church
- Not tolerated among Pagans
- arrogance
- "Let him who has done this be removed from among you."
- God's heart
 - He doesn't want the church's witness to the world to be damaged by sin!

God wants to reach the world too much to let sin hurt the church's witness.

If we just let unrepentant sin go on in the church without addressing it, *that's* the risk we take, that people might drive past Castine Church and say, "Hey, have you heard the kind of messed up stuff they let go on in there?"

God loves the lost people outside our church, who he's called us to reach with the Gospel, too much to let unrepentant sin go unchecked inside these walls that might turn them away!

We have a mission, church. And that mission is to reach the world around us with the good news of Jesus! We're called to witness to the world, and lead lost people to the place of saving faith in Jesus! So, we have to take sin seriously! We can't just let it go. We risk compromising our witness if we do!

So, God says, "Let him be removed from among you." He loves the lost too much to be nice about unrepentant sin.

Paul continues to address the sin of this man in verse 3. Buckle up...this one's a little rough.

[1 Corinthians 5:3-5](#)

Paul isn't physically present with the Corinthians, but as though he was present, he pronounces judgment on this man who has been sleeping with his step mother. And he gives the Corinthians clear instructions as to what they are to do about him and why.

- Verse 5, "*you are to deliver this man to Satan.*" What does that mean?
 - Who is the head of the Church? Jesus
 - And who does the Bible say is the ruler of this world in the present? Satan

- This man was acting like he was under the authority of Jesus. He would say he was a Christian. But, his lifestyle (i.e. sleeping with his step mom) showed him to be living under the authority and leadership, not of Jesus, but of Satan. So what Paul is saying when he tells the Corinthians to deliver him to Satan is basically this. “You want to live like Satan’s world, then go do it. If you’re going to live like Satan’s your Lord, go be part of his world. You don’t get to be in the Body of Christ if that’s how you live.”
- It’s another way of saying, “don’t associate with someone who bears the name of brother if he’s guilty of sexual immorality.” (v.11)
- But again, I want you to notice the heart of God behind these harsh instructions. As you read on you’ll see that Paul doesn’t say, “He’s just too far gone, let him do what he wants.” He doesn’t say, “You did all you could, he’s chosen his path.” When Paul tells his readers to turn this man over to Satan, it’s not because Paul is throwing his hands up and giving up on the man!
- No, listen to the end goal Paul has in mind. “you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit might be saved.”
 - What’s Paul saying? He may be saying that in turning this man over to Satan, there will be consequences in his physical body that will put him in such a desperate situation that he *finally* repents and comes to a true saving faith in Jesus.
 - It could also be that Paul means that as this man is released to live fully into his sin, he would eventually reach the realization of how empty and futile this pursuit was. That eventually his flesh, his worldly desires, would weaken to the point of submission to Jesus and he’d reach a saving faith.
 - Either way you take it, the end goal of turning this unrepentant sinner over to Satan remains the same. The goal is that he would eventually turn from his sin, be saved, and spend eternity in the presence of the God who loves him!
 - So, refusing to associate with an unrepentant isn’t about giving up on the person. It isn’t about hating them and saying they’re too far gone...It’s actually just the opposite. It’s about loving them enough not to let them stay comfortable in the sin that separates them from God. Are you seeing the love of God behind this now?
 - See, God calls us to take such a harsh stance against sin because...

God loves sinners in the church too much to leave them comfortably condemned.

Church, we need to take sin seriously. Those, like this man in 1 Corinthians, who are living in unrepentant sin are condemned, they’re bound for an eternity apart from the God who loves them! Eternity is at stake. So, when they’re in the church, we’re called to love them enough not to let them stay comfortable in their sin.

See, it's because of God's love for sinners that he calls us to deal harshly with unrepentant sin.

[1 Corinthians 5:6-8](#)

- Paul uses another image here for how we should deal with sin in the church. He likens it to leaven in a lump of dough.
- Now, I'm not much of a baker, but my understanding is that just a little bit of leaven will work its way through the whole lump of dough and make it rise. Paul is making the point that a little bit of sin left unchecked in the church will spread and effect the whole church. You let one person's sin go and before long there's unchecked sin all over the place. And that sin will do what sin does; it will lead people away from God and into a life that's bound for hell.
- That's one of the dangers if sin is left unchecked in the church, and so God inspired Paul to tell the Corinthians, "Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump." It's another way of saying "don't associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of" these things.
- Do you see God's heart in this? Do you see the love of God that would call us to be kind of harsh toward sin in the church? I hope you're starting to see that God's harsh directions to us regarding how we deal with unrepentant sin in the church is anything but unloving, or unkind. No, we see here another reason why God calls us to handle sin this way.

God loves his church too much to just let it be poisoned by sin.

God loves people too much to be nice to us about our sin.

He loves the people we're called to reach, he loves lost people in the church, and he loves those in the church who are his people...he loves us all too much to let unrepentant sin hurt our witness, or to let people be comfortable while they stand condemned, or to let his own be led astray!

So yes, he calls us to refuse to associate with unrepentant sinners in the church, to be a little harsh. But he does so in the hope that that person would eventually make their way back, and come to true saving faith in Jesus. He does so to preserve our witness to the world, and to keep us safely in his fold.

Make no mistake, sin is serious. And if we won't handle it the way God says to, eternities are at stake. Do you believe that? Then, will you love lost people enough to stop being nice about their sin?

Pray