

1 Corinthians

Gospel-Centered Living in a Sin-Centered World

Section 2: Purity and the Gospel

Purity in the Church

1 Corinthians 5:1-13

Introduction

ILLUS:

“The rise in sexual sins and sins of violence closely parallel the rise in humanistic education and amoral philosophy, and correspond to an increase in pride and self-satisfaction, and a decreased concern for the things of God.”

(MacArthur, 122)

Addressing Immorality (1-3)

Remember Paul’s last statement in verses 21:

1 Corinthians 4:21 (NKJV) — 21 What do you want?
Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit
of gentleness?

Well, he comes out swinging in the first verse of chapter 5.

“It is actually reported” is stronger language than it appears in English. It can mean “wholly” or “completely” noting that what Paul heard is “actually” widely known – a general knowledge – and a topic of discussion in Corinth and beyond – even to Paul in Ephesus.

“Sexual immorality” is the Greek term *porneia* which originally referred to prostitution but by this time in history, as we will see, had come to be a catchall term for all sexual activity outside of God’s design.

It is no secret that the Roman culture was one rife with sexual perversion.

“Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of the body, but wives to bear us legitimate children.” (quote in Fee, 215)

The city of Corinth had the dubious reputation of being a leader in such activity.

ILLUS: Las Vegas – sin city - The phrase "What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas" was a slogan introduced by the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority in 2003 to promote tourism.

For Paul, the greater problem, was not just that immorality was rampant in the culture but that the church was proud of it and sought to provide a theological argument in favor of such perversion that “is not even named among the Gentiles.”

We are not given the reason for their pride but what we do know is that several contributing factors such as a misunderstanding of Christian liberty and a distorted view of sexuality will be addressed later in this letter.

“The church in Corinth ... followed her own feelings and rationalizations rather than God’s Word, and found herself ignoring, and perhaps even justifying, flagrant sin in her midst.” (MacArthur 124)

“Like modern-day liberal Christians who carry about the name of Christ but tolerate lifestyles and behaviors in direct conflict with the Bible’s standards, the Corinthian church was proud of its hands-off approach to the sins of others.” (Swindoll, 77)

What was this perversion? – “that a man has his father’s wife.” A few things should be noted – the wording indicates that this was the man’s stepmother (we don’t know if this relationship led to the father’s divorce from the stepmother or if he was deceased – it had to be one or the other because the offense was incest not adultery). Either way, it didn’t matter because ...

Deuteronomy 22:30 (NKJV) — 30 “A man shall not take his father’s wife, nor uncover his father’s bed.

Further, “that a man has” is in the present tense meaning that this was an ongoing situation. And finally, the fact that the passage focuses on the man without implicating the woman, means that she herself was not part of the church and likely an unbeliever.

It should not shock us that people do immoral things – it is absolutely unconscionable that the church would not only condone but find pride in such actions rather than mourn.

Sin should break our hearts! Not only because it is sin, but especially when it is among our faith family that it takes our brothers and sisters from us.

Now, Paul referencing back to verse 18 in which he said ...

1 Corinthians 4:18 (NKJV) — 18 Now some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you.

... notes that he doesn't even have to be physically present to make a judgment on this because God through the Spirit has made it clear.

This is somewhat of an aside, but it is worth noting that contrary to cultural understanding and the consistent misuse of Jesus' words, as believers we are in fact to judge!

ILLUS: Our Non-judgmental Culture

1 John 4:8b (NKJV) — 8b ... God is love.

Matthew 7:1 (NKJV) — 1 "Judge not, that you be not judged.

"With this picture of God comes an ideal image of the loving, tolerant church that embraces all people regardless of their beliefs and practices." (Swindoll, 85)

"This church out-tolerated the tolerance of an obscene Roman culture." (Akin & Merritt, 104)

So open minded their brains fall out!

Matthew 7:3-5 (NKJV) — 3 And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? **4** Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? **5** Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Paul now moves from Addressing Immorality in the Church to Protecting Integrity of the Church.

Protecting Integrity (4-8)

This section moves into how God desires to protect the integrity of the church from such immorality.

Note it is to be addressed when the church is “gathered together” but Paul gives three specific descriptors: “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,” “along with my spirit,” and “with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This is without a doubt referring to a specific gathering of the church that Jesus Himself taught us about.

Matthew 18:15–20 (NKJV) — 15 “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. **16** 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.’ **17** 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. **18** “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. **19** “Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. **20** For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

“Discipline is not inconsistent with love. It is lack of discipline, in fact, that is inconsistent with love.”
(MacArthur, 125)

“Church discipline ... is a group of brokenhearted brothers and sisters seeking to restore an erring member of the family.” (Wiersbe, 586)

Galatians 6:1–2 (NKJV) — 1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. **2** Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

“Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh.”

Satan is the ruler of this world, and this is in effect saying to let that person continue the dead-end of the flesh.

ILLUS: Adam and Eve kicked out of the Garden of Eden.

There is a sin unto death – (1 John 5)

“That his spirit may be saved”

“Excluding someone from fellowship may seem harsh, but it is aimed at bringing the person to their senses, so that their flesh – their sinful nature, their illicit desires, their rebellion, and immorality – may be destroyed, and they may reach a point of repentance and so find salvation.” (Wilson, 48)

ILLUS: Brylcreem – “A little dab’ll do ya!”

ILLUS: Leaven and the Lump

Chemical (baking soda or baking powder), Physical (air or steam churning butter), Biological (yeast – a fungus – carbon dioxide and alcohol - fermentation)

Only 1% of flower weight is needed of dried yeast for the leavening process.

Galatians 5:9 (NKJV) — 9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

“Do you not know”

1 Corinthians 3:16 (NKJV) — 16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

“Christ our Passover” and “let us keep the feast” identifies this special gathering as the church gathering to partake in the Lord’s Supper.

ILLUS: The search for the leaven

Exodus 12:15 (NKJV) — 15 Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.

“Christ had died for us not simply to give us passage to heaven but to re-create us in his own image, so that both individually and corporately we may express the character of God by the way we love in the world.” (Fee, 240-241)

Engaging Intentionally (9-13)

Paul had written a previous letter that was obviously misunderstood.

The Corinthians had taken it to mean isolation from the world. But Paul here notes that not only is that impossible, it is contrary to God's will for His people.

John 17:15–16 (NKJV) — 15 I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. **16** They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

“We should be insulated from the morally corrupting influences of our times but not isolated from the people of the world.” (Swindoll, 77)

It is worthy to note that Paul doesn't limit the sin to sexual immorality – covetous, extortioners, idolaters, etc.

However, when it comes to one “named a brother.” Read “a so-called brother” noting that the actions of the person bring into question the genuineness of his conversion. But one who claims to be a Christian and acts in such a way – we are not to associate within the church.

In context, “not even to eat with such a person” is referencing the observance of The Lord's Supper.

It is both an act of discipline and grace.

1 Corinthians 11:30 (NKJV) — 30 For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.

Otherwise, we are to engage them as Jesus noted in Matthew 18 “as a heathen and tax collector” and Paul has just specifically addressed what that looks like.

As Christians, it is not our job to judge those outside of the church. That is God’s job.

“If people don’t follow Jesus, then it’s no surprise that they don’t live by his rules, and it isn’t our business to judge them.” (Wilson, 51)

However, He has given us the responsibility to judge “those who are inside.”

“We are not called to force our biblical standards of righteousness on those outside the church ... Instead, we are called to hold one another accountable.” (Swindoll, 84)

Note – the terms “outside,” “inside,” and “to put away” means that he first had to be a part. Church membership is not only biblical but expected and is to mean something among those who are a part of a local family of faith.

“It is not the ones who recognize their sin and hunger for righteousness who are to be put out of fellowship, but those who persistently and unrepentantly continue in a pattern of sin about which they have been counseled and warned. We should continue to love them and pray for them that they repent and return to a pure life.”
(MacArthur, 133)

Conclusion

2 Corinthians 2:6–11 (NKJV) — 6 This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, **7**

so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. **8** Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him. **9** For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. **10** Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, **11** lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.