

Paul had been addressing the Corinthians immaturity in forming factions over who was the best teacher. He told them to stop boasting in men and quit deceiving themselves as to their spiritual status. While thinking they were wise, they were needing to abandon worldly wisdom and become fools in the eyes of the world by following Jesus and His wisdom. He addressed those issues first but then moved on to a shocking example of their lack of true wisdom. They were condoning behavior that was hurting the witness of the church to the city of Corinth. Their behavior in several areas was not Christ like.

¹ 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. 1 Corinthians 5:1 One reason many people claim they will not be a part of a local church is from an experience when something obviously evil was not dealt with. This sets up the accusation of hypocrisy. They say, "They preach one thing but don't act on it themselves." The hypocrisy may stem from a false concept of grace. It can also come from a fear of legal action. Or it may develop because the leaders do not want to bother confronting people, especially over their personal behavior.

We accept discipline in education. If you cheat, you will probably fail. We accept discipline in the workplace. If you steal or don't do your job, you are fired. But when it comes to the church, most churches shy away from discipline. After all, most of our world seems negotiable. Jonathan Leeman says, "*for the average person in Western culture today: every attachment is negotiable. We are all free agents, and every relationship and life station is a contract that can be renegotiated or canceled, whether we are dealing with the prince, the parents, the spouse, the salesman, the boss, the ballot box, the courtroom judge, or, of course, the local church. I am principally obligated to myself and maximizing my life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness... I retain power to veto everything.*"ⁱ But in fact, we understand that discipline is healthy and necessary. Paul will give us the situations that must be disciplined, the reason why, and the desired outcome.

The situation was that a man was sleeping with his stepmother. The tense of the verb implies it was not a one-time affair but an ongoing habitual relationship. It became public knowledge which is implied by the Greek adverb translated as "actually." It might be better translated as "wholly" or "completely." The church was refusing to deal with an issue that was so vile that even the pagans acknowledged it was evil. This act was specifically forbidden in Leviticus 18:8ⁱⁱ. Corinth, being the sexually deviant city that it was, stirred the passions of young men. The father may have married a woman who was near the age of his son. If the culture acknowledges a law of God is good, they are testifying that in some cases their conscience aligns with the Word of God. In other words, God put His moral laws within us. Even if we do not have the Word of God, we are without excuse, for He has given us a conscience (Romans 2:15ⁱⁱⁱ).

I imagine that when these verses were read, the congregation got very quiet. "Oh no! He found out." "*The report of incest, 'in short,' knocks the props out from under their grandiosity (4:18^{iv}). It betrays that they are not wise, that they should not be held in honor (4:10^v), and that he needs to come to them like an irate paidagogos, rod in hand, to punish them (4:21^{vi}). But what is even more egregious in Paul's mind is the church's tolerance of blatant sin.*"^{vii}

² And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. 1 Corinthians 5:2 We should note that the emphasis here is not on the sin but on the church's tolerance of the sin. The church apparently thought nothing should be done about it. There was no confrontation or repentance. Perhaps some argued that salvation has paid for all sin and the man must be under the grace of God (Romans 6:1,2^{viii}). In fact, they were proud of it. They may have thought, "Look how gracious we are!" But Paul tells them they were arrogant and should rather be mourning such a sin in their midst. It was a horrible example to the city. It may indicate the young man was not truly born-again. The family would never be the same. Paul commanded that the man be removed from fellowship, which is the spiritual covering that is the church. **A church that does not mourn over sin in its midst is in trouble!**

The church's inaction indicated a deeper problem. It was a problem similar to the factionalism that was taking place. They were acting like the world, and in this case even worse than the world. "Look how tolerant we are! We trust in God's grace." This is happening in many churches today. The Methodist denomination advertises their tolerance of sinful lifestyles. Inviting everyone to hear the Gospel is a good thing but failing to teach about the damage sin does to one's life and to the community is failing to share what the results of receiving the Gospel should look like. It destroys the witness to the observing world. It affects the attitudes of those within the congregation toward that sin. Tolerating blatant, ongoing sin is like telling the congregation it is fine to drink a little poison. Sin will not only harm the person committing the sin but will also tempt those who are seeing them continue in it without apparent repercussions.

³ 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. ⁴ When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ 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. ^{6a} Your boasting is not good. 1 Corinthians 5:3-6a Excommunication! The purpose is to bring the man to full repentance and salvation (2 Corinthians 3:6-8^{ix}, James 5:19,20^x). While out from the covering of the church, the enemy will be able to afflict the person emotionally and perhaps even physically, but God will use this to help him see how sinful his act was and bring him to repentance. This is the goal of putting someone out of fellowship: salvation of their soul and protection of the church while avoiding the appearance of hypocrisy. It was an action taken before the whole congregation, not to harm the man, but to help him. That not only warns others of the consequences of sin but shows the blessing of the covering of the church and presents a consistent witness to the community.

It is my understanding that Paul's expression "my spirit is present" is similar to how we say, "I am with you in spirit." In other words, we are of one mind in this decision. Or it may be that as Elisha witnessed in spirit Gehazi's covetous action with Naaman, so Paul also witnessed the church's reaction to this sin (2 Kings 5:25-27). In Greek it is difficult to determine to what "in the name of the Lord Jesus" and "with the power of our Lord Jesus" is applied, but I believe the ESV has it right. The phrases apply to the those assembled. They gather in Jesus' name with His power.

The Lord Jesus Christ did not die on the cross of Calvary in order to give His people license to sin (Romans 6:1,2^{xi}). God does not condemn sin in the sinner and then condone it in the saint. "Judgment must begin at the house of God" (1 Peter 4:17^{xii}).^{xiii}

What a frightening expression, to be delivered over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. It reminds us Satan's liberty to afflict Job. If you recall, God gave Satan freedom to afflict Job's body, but he could not take Job's life (Job 2:6^{xiv}). I believe Paul is invoking that situation. The believers who worship together have a covering of protection around them from Satan's assaults (John 17:15^{xv}; 2 Thessalonians 3:3^{xvi}). But as in this case, blatant sin can take us out from under that protection for the purpose of disciplining us (1 Timothy 1:20^{xvii}).

How many today take their participation in a church lightly, merely as a thing they do once a week? Is there a covering protecting them from Satan in that case? Can we expect the same if we visit a church once a week and have no commitment to a group of believers? What is necessary for true fellowship that comes with that covering? What is missed when you don't have it? Here are few of the benefits: communal worship, prayer for one another, the sharing of burdens, the meeting of needs, the oneness in Christ - his body, sharing the joys and griefs, a united mission, a common understanding, encouragement and building one another up. If we are not receiving and giving these, we are not truly in fellowship and wouldn't miss it if we were excommunicated.

Because many churches lack these qualities, the concept of excommunication is meaningless. It is rarely enforced, and if it is, the person simply finds another church to their liking. They don't miss anything because they didn't have anything to be missed. What would you miss about the above-mentioned benefits if you were put out of your church? If those qualities aren't there now, how can you help to bring them about?

It is important to note that sins that are not public but brought to the attention of leadership should be dealt with privately. If there is repentance, then there must be forgiveness and acceptance (1 John 1:9^{xviii}). If immoral sins continue, the elders should consider whether it is important to protect the congregation and for the offender's salvation to put them out of the church. The sin in this passage was known to the church and tolerated by it.

^{6b} Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? ⁷ Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. 1 Corinthians 5:6b,7 When there is blatant sin or destructive false teaching in the church, church discipline is required. Matthew 18 can be followed (though that is a pattern for personal offenses), unless, like this case, an immoral act becomes known to the whole congregation. If nothing is done, the message will appear to be that such sin is tolerated. Inaction declares that salvation doesn't need to change our behavior. Discipline must be done in love and with the hope of restoration. We should not be morality police acting on gossip or unsubstantiated accusations. This has to do with sins of a grossly immoral nature that all become aware of.

We recently had a case of someone who thought they were aware of sins within the church that were being ignored. They didn't know that the individuals involved had repented. Most of the congregation was unaware of the situations and did not need to know. Nor should the elders' share confidential conversations. Who would want to confess their sins if they knew the elders were going to tell everyone about it? Each situation must be dealt with considering the restoration of the person caught in sin and the welfare of the church body.

In verse 7, Paul uses the shadow of the Passover to show the reality it pictured. Before Jews celebrated Passover, the leaven (which is a picture of sin) was carefully

cleansed from the entire house. Jesus is the reality of the Passover lamb. We are to be that house swept clean of leaven before we take communion (11:28-30^{xix}). Paul may be playing on the Greek word translated arrogant in verse 2. It literally means puffed up, which is what leaven does to a lump of dough.

I have witnessed immorality infect a congregation when the pastor's sin became known with an attempted cover up. Divorce after divorce followed as people felt their sin of unfaithfulness could be excused. The leaven was not quickly removed and so it spread. Paul's concern and emphasis in this passage is the arrogance of the congregation's attitude toward the sin because the damage that attitude can bring will be devastating to the church.

The unleavened lump is a church where we gently, and lovingly correct one another. If we truly love one another can we do any less? And when we do, we may find we misinterpreted the situation or that the person has already repented. **A healthy church looks out for one another.** This means informing the entire church that we are cutting someone off from fellowship will be a rare event. Such action is for those who do not care that they are sinning and don't care how it affects the church. They see no need to change and resent the suggestion that they are sinning. Most cases receive correction with humility and a request for prayer to be free of the sin that has captured them. We submit to one another in love and reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:21^{xx}).

Pastor Um wrote, *"Speaking the truth in love is admittedly uncomfortable in our cultural context, but it's absolutely necessary. In fact, it is the only way to truthfully love. In a healthy community you will rarely see formal discipline because there is a self-correcting ecosystem of regular, gracious, informal discipline happening all the time."*^{xxi}

⁸ 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. 1 Corinthians 3:8 Celebrate communion, the new covenant Passover, (or perhaps they were celebrating Passover with the revealed truth in mind John 1:29^{xxii}) not as a ritual while still hating others and clinging to evil in our hearts, or even allowing blatant sin in the loaf that is the church, but rather with the sincerity of accepting what Jesus has done for us and being truthful before God. Just as the Jews cleanse their homes of leaven, so we must be sure habitual sin is not allowed to remain in the house of God. Communion is a time of soul searching to make sure the leaven is gone.

⁹ I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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. ¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? 1 Corinthians 5:9-12 There is a missing letter of Paul that was written before this one warning them of this potential problem. Corrupt company tends to corrupt us. The Greek word translated here as associate implies "to keep intimate close company." "Not to eat with such a one" may be referring to the communion meal referred to in verse 8. The early church gathered for a full meal which was called a love feast. During the meal they would remember that Jesus gave Himself as the bread of life and His blood was shed for our redemption. Just as the meal and wine nourished their bodies, so Jesus' sacrifice nourishes our souls.

When we come to the communion celebration, we must examine our hearts first and see that we not harboring a hardness against God or our fellow man. If we find we cannot relinquish that hardness by repentance, we should not take communion. If we recognize our sin and repent, then the communion meal reminds us that the grace of God will help us change and make amends to anyone we have harbored anger toward.

This passage tells us that we can associate with sinners in the world to lead them to Christ. But if someone is sexually immoral, greedy, a swindler, drunkard, reviler, or an idolater and calls themselves a brother yet refuses to change, we are to separate them from the church fellowship. I believe we can add to this list, those who teach false doctrines to exalt themselves - ulterior motives to gain followers after themselves or some outside group. We disassociate for that person's sake, for the testimony of the church, and to protect the babes in Christ from their influence (2 Peter 2:1-3^{xxiii}).

New Testament commentator David Garland said that from these two words (greed and swindler) the reader is supposed to “get the picture of those who enrich themselves unfairly, the rapacious, the grasping, the have-mores whose insatiable hankering after more causes them to disregard completely the have-nots, to kick them down the ladder and to trample their rights and ignore their needs in order to advance upward at any price. The church has more readily condemned those guilty of sexual sin, but Paul regards this kind of unjust acquisitiveness to be no less nefarious, to be in the same boat.”^{xxiv}

13 God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.” 1

Corinthians 5:13 Paul was addressing the church's reaction to open, unrepentant sin. The man's sin was a secondary issue. We are quick to condemn sin in the world around us, but what do we do about blatant sin within the church? What do we do about habitual sex outside of marriage when it becomes known throughout the church body and does not change after being confronted? Are there examples of greed hurting others within the church? This is not about struggling with past sinful patterns while seeking help to become victorious, but rather an “I don't care what you think” attitude toward publicly known sin. How serious are we about holiness and our testimony to the community?

Part of the problem is that the local church isn't that tight-knit community of believers it was in the first century. It has become a place where you bring the unbeliever to hear the gospel because we are uncomfortable sharing it. Most churches would be hard pressed to even attempt to follow Paul's advice in this passage. If they did enforce this type of discipline, would the guilty person even care?

It comes back to the need to become **what church is meant to be: a group of people who have come out of the world to belong to Jesus and therefore to one another.** We meet to build one another up and encourage one another. We are a family, led by the Word of God, praying together for one another's needs, gently correcting one another in love, sacrificing for one another. Certainly, there will be those who attend who don't have that commitment and dedication, but if they see it in action, they will want to be a part of it. See the description in Ephesians 4:1-16 for what we should be to make up that kind of church. Each attribute could be a sermon. If we were like that, a person committing such an act would be loved enough to put them out in hopes they could become a part of such a body. Such egregious sins are evidence that they are not surrendered to Jesus.

How can we become even more united in the Spirit and love so that a person would be brought to repentance if they were cut off? It is up to each of us individually by

the help of the Holy Spirit to move toward that dedication and commitment. I see it in developing in many of you.

I would suggest that each of us ask ourselves what we need to do to reach that level of dedication and commitment. As living stones that make up this place of worship, how and where do I fit? What is my part? Am I being selfish in some area so that it is keeping this church from being what it is meant to be? What needs to change in me? Only when we become that loving and caring body that constantly meets one another's needs can discipline serve this purpose of bringing a person to repentance.

Questions:

- 1 What was the main problem Paul was addressing?
- 2 What was the deeper problem?
- 3 What is the goal of barring someone from fellowship?
- 4 What are the benefits of being a part of a church community?
- 5 In what manner should we partake in communion?
- 6 Why must leaven be removed?
- 7 Why is this discipline rare in a healthy church?
- 8 How do we prepare ourselves for communion?
- 9 What do the words greedy and swindler imply?
- 10 How serious are we about holiness and our testimony to the community?

ⁱ Um, S. T. (2015). [*1 Corinthians: The Word of the Cross*](#) (R. K. Hughes, Ed.; p. 91). Crossway.

ⁱⁱ **Leviticus 18:8 (ESV)**

⁸ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife; it is your father's nakedness.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Romans 2:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them

^{iv} **1 Corinthians 4:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you.

^v **1 Corinthians 4:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute.

^{vi} **1 Corinthians 4:21 (ESV)**

²¹ What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?

^{vii} ¹ Taylor, M. (2014). [*1 Corinthians*](#) (E. R. Clendenen, Ed.; Vol. 28, p. 132). B&H Publishing Group.

^{viii} **Romans 6:1-2 (ESV)**

¹ What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

^{ix} **2 Corinthians 2:6-8 (ESV)**

⁶ For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough,

⁷ so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.

⁸ So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him.

^x **James 5:19-20 (ESV)**

¹⁹ My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, ²⁰ let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

^{xi} **Romans 6:1-2 (ESV)**

¹ What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

^{xii} **1 Peter 4:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

^{xiii} Phillips, J. (2009). [Exploring 1 Corinthians: An Expository Commentary](#) (1 Co 5:1–6:20). Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp.

^{xiv} **Job 2:6 (ESV)**

⁶ And the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life.”

^{xv} **John 17:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.

^{xvi} **2 Thessalonians 3:3 (ESV)**

³ But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.

^{xvii} **1 Timothy 1:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

^{xviii} **1 John 1:9 (ESV)**

⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

^{xix} **1 Corinthians 11:28-30 (ESV)**

²⁸ Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

³⁰ That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.

^{xx} **Ephesians 5:21 (ESV)**

²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

^{xxi} Um, S. T. (2015). [1 Corinthians: The Word of the Cross](#) (R. K. Hughes, Ed.; p. 98). Crossway.

^{xxii} **John 1:29 (ESV)**

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

^{xxiii} **2 Peter 2:1-3 (ESV)**

¹ But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. ² And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.

³ And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

^{xxiv} ¹ Um, S. T. (2015). [1 Corinthians: The Word of the Cross](#) (R. K. Hughes, Ed.; p. 95). Crossway.