

1 Corinthians 5 – “Dealing With Sin”

Church is a whole lot of fun. Being together should be a whole lot of fun. But there are times where the church needs to do the hard things. Times where sin will want to creep in and infect as many people as possible. Which is why we need to deal severely with sin. Because if sin is left untouched, it will bring destruction. Some spiritual surgery is needed at times.

Illustration: Two little kids are in a hospital lying on stretchers next to each other outside the operating room.

The first kid leans over and asks, "What are you in here for?"

The second kid says, "I'm in here to get my tonsils out, and I'm a little nervous."

The first kid says, "You've got nothing to worry about. I had that done when I was four. They put you to sleep and when you wake up they give you lots of Jell-O and ice cream. It's a breeze!"

The second kid then asks, "What are you in for?"

The first kid says, "a circumcision."

The second kid says, "Whoa! I had that done when I was born. I couldn't walk for a year!"

I trust you will all be walking out of here just fine today after the sermon. But when it comes to matters of sin (and more so living in sin), your walk is going to be compromised, and it affects the church as a whole.

This is why we're instructed to deal with sin. And in 1 Corinthians 5, Paul takes time to deal with a very specific sin here in the church at Corinth.

1. Paul's Confrontation to Sin – 1-3
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1. Paul's Confrontation Regarding Sin – 1-3

5:1 - *It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife!*

...**sexual immorality** is the Greek word *porneia*. It speaks of any unlawful or unnatural sexual relationship (any sex outside of marriage is unlawful and unnatural).

David Hocking said: *“Related Greek forms of the word appear 65 times in the NT. The total makes sexual sin the number one mentioned sin in the Bible. In the Torah, God’s law, the list of sexual sins includes: Incest, Adultery, Homosexuality, Bestiality, Sex before marriage, and Rape. The penalty for most cases was death by stoning.”*

- Often times fornication would be mentioned first when a list of sin was given in the Scriptures. Much of that had to do with the overwhelming influence of sexual deviance within the culture at this time. It was integrated into temple worship of gods and goddesses, and sexual immorality was simply an acceptable part of life in Greek culture.
- This obviously went to the extreme opposite of what sex was created for. Sex is not bad. It has been given as a gift from God to be enjoyed between husband and wife. It is God’s method of pro-creating, but also for the husband and wife to experience intimacy and oneness together.
- But anytime it’s taken out of the context of what God intended it for, it will lead to harm and hurt. And lives have been destroyed by abusing this precious gift designed to promote life, not pollute it.

a man has his father's wife! A man to take his father’s wife in this way was strictly prohibited in the law.

- **Leviticus 18:8**, *“The nakedness of your father's wife you shall not uncover; it is your father's nakedness.”*
- **Leviticus 20:11**, *“The man who lies with his father’s wife has uncovered his father’s nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them.”*

This wasn’t something being done secretly or privately; it was open and public. The KJV says it’s *reported commonly*, meaning it was being talked about.

Now it’s believed that this was actually his step-mom. This doesn’t excuse it at all because it was still an unthinkable thing to be engaging in. Paul even says it’s ***not even named among the Gentiles***. When the pagans of the world look with disgust at what you are doing, you better believe it’s not good.

- Roman law forbade incest. They saw the crime and error in this, yet sadly, the Corinthian church wasn’t getting it.

5:2 - *And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.*

The church knew this sin was happening and rather than grieving it, they grandstanded in it. They were prideful in this when they should have felt shame.

Why were they so proud of such an offense? Perhaps they had a warped understanding of the grace of God and justified this sin as a means to show God's grace.

Whatever the reason, the Corinthians were happy to show that they were able to tolerate this sin.

- Sadly we see this same sort of reaction to sin in churches today. Many Christians today look to tolerate sin in the name of love. *We don't want people to think we're looking down on them or are being judgmental. We're not going to confront people on areas of sin, we'll just love them.*
- Well, I've got news for you – that's not love. If I see my kids practicing for the Olympics by doing long jump off the roof of my house, I'm going to say, *no way!* They might say, *aw Dad you're too restricting, you're trying to rob us of fun.* No, I'm trying to rob you of death.
- The world loves to think of the church as restricting and a fun robber. And sadly, the church tries to cater to this bias by erring in tolerance. *Well, we don't want the world to think they're right, so we'll accept that homosexual, we won't say anything about that couple living in sin.*

My friends, we're not called to be people of **tolerance**, we're called to be people of **truth**. And sometimes we need to speak the truth in love. *Hey brother, that thing you're doing is not right in God's eyes according to His Word. Hey sister, that area you're compromising in is only going to hurt you in the end because it's not God's ideal for you.* Speaking the truth in love will lead to us taking a stand on absolutes and confronting sin.

We cannot love people rightly if we're not against sin. We've seemed to twist that around today in our church culture to where we don't want to address sin for fear of not appearing loving to the world. Your job as Christians is not to make the world like you, your job as Christians is to speak the truth in love.

And while it's true that the Christian family is one of enjoying fellowship, there are times when it becomes like a funeral. We grieve over those that have fallen in sin. But this church wasn't! They've ***not rather mourned***.

This should have brought on a reaction that moved them to action. The action was to confront and correct!

And with that Paul says that ***he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you***. Now does that seem kind of harsh to you? Maybe you're thinking right now, I did an ungodly deed last week, am I to be put away – basically excommunicated?

- Now while it's true that we all fall in sin, it is an entirely different thing to be engaging in sin. This was not a one-time thing that Paul was overreacting on, it was an ongoing relationship that no one was repenting of. When Paul said in vs. 1 that a ***man has his father's wife***, it speaks of an ongoing relationship.
- And this begins to help us out a bit when we look at bringing correction into matters like this. We don't act this strongly over areas of weakness or momentary stumble. *What's that, you lost your temper at another driver on the way to church? Sorry, you're not welcome to fellowship with us today.* I mean, that is not what we're talking about. Paul is dealing with one who was willfully remaining in this area of sin, with no desire to repent and make it right.

We'll look more in the next few verses as to Paul's reason for putting such a one away from among them.

Also, we are dealing with those who are professing believers. These areas of correction by the church come only for those who are Christian. Notice only the man is being mentioned. It's believed that the woman was not a believer and so these things did not apply to her. Though she was still in error and sin, there was a higher standard for the believer.

“They should have understood that the true glory of the Christian church consists not in the eloquence and gifts of its great teachers, but in the moral purity and the exemplary lives of its members.”^{11 1}

5:3 - For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed.

¹¹ Erdman, *First Corinthians*, p. 55.

¹ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* (A. Farstad, Ed.; p. 1759). Thomas Nelson.

Though Paul wasn't there physically, he's come to know the details and there was cause to take action.

Paul says he has ***already judged him who has so done this deed***. Now some people may be up in arms at such boldness. Paul had just said in **1 Corinthians 4:5**, "...to judge nothing before the time..." Is he being a hypocrite now?

People love to quote **Matthew 7:1**, "Judge not, that you be not judged." But this was dealing with people who were passing judgment hypocritically. They weren't applying the same standard of judgment to their own lives. And Jesus would go on to say in that same chapter that we are to be examining the fruit of people's lives, to know those that are of Christ and those who are not. So judging is not prohibited, it is simply to be done with a Biblical standard.

- "While Christians are not to judge one another's motives (Matt. 7:1–5) or ministries (1 Cor. 4:5), we are certainly expected to be honest about each other's conduct." ²

There are times where it's just a blatant contradiction to Scripture by which we should call a fellow believer out in their sin. If you see someone from church stealing something at the mall, you don't need to sit there and wonder, 'Well I really don't know their heart here in this. Maybe there's a good reason?' No, it's wrong! The Bible tells us so. That's something to judge.

This issue with this man and his father's wife was no gray issue. This was strictly forbidden in God's Word (Leviticus 18:8; 20:11; Deuteronomy 27:20).

- Paul was correct to call this out. I think we've become a little soft in the church today by not calling out issues of sin. We want to give people the benefit of the doubt, we want to walk in grace, but there are times we need to address the issues that God has already addressed. Church discipline is a needed thing for a healthy and growing church. So I actually have a list of some people that I need to talk with after the service...

Paul had no problem passing judgment because it was what was needed to ultimately help this brother. And so Paul goes on to give his counsel of how to handle this sin.

2. Paul's Counsel Regarding Sin – 4-5

² Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 586). Victor Books.

5:4-5 - *In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁵ deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

First of all, notice Paul gives some good criterion for judging: be in harmony with the body (***gathered together***), have a Biblical standard (***along with my spirit***) and do it through the power of Jesus Christ. He also said, ***in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ***. This means that you are doing it according to His nature and character. We're not leaning on our own wisdom, or acting in any way out of selfish motives or pride. We're confronting an area because it represents God's heart towards it. And in the same way, we don't come down hard on someone. We reflect the Lord's heart in the way He would deal with it. Judging in the power of Jesus is to remove our human tendencies from the equation.

- Illustration: Moses being told to speak to the rock. He got angry and struck it, and misrepresented the Lord. A serious thing.
- Same with judging or disciplining our kids. We need to have the heart of the Lord and do it in the power of Jesus Christ.

Now ***to deliver such a one to Satan*** seems kind of harsh. But Paul's purpose is restoration. *What! How do you restore someone by handing them over to Satan?* Within the church there is a wonderful protection and power that comes from this Christian community. Sometimes we are spared from harm and attack because of the protection brought by the body. And Paul understands that this man will not experience this same protection if he is isolated from the body. In other words, he will be an open target to the enemy.

- The purpose is not to destroy the person, but to destroy the flesh. Again, not the physical body but the desires and lusts of the flesh.
- Paul wrote in **Galatians 5:24**, *"And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."* Sadly, some Christians need a little help with that. And so Paul's desire was to have the flesh beat out of them to bring them to their knees and expose the error of their ways.
- I think of the Prodigal Son. He left the comforts and protection of home to experience a life of sin. But in the end it left him wallowing in the mud in a pigpen. He saw through his experience that he forfeited protection and blessing for loose living that only left him broke and in despair. We know how that story turned out. And it's what Paul has in mind for this sinning brother.

- The goal of church discipline is always restoration. It is never to be done out of condemnation, but with a desire to see the person ultimately saved. Which is exactly what Paul says here.

3. Pauls' Correction Regarding Sin – 6-8

5:6 - *Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?*

Again, Paul says, *why would you glory in this? What do you have to boast about?* There was nothing good in this.

We've talked about the Christian community providing protection for one another, but that community can be compromised when there is sin in the camp.

- Paul talks about **leaven**, which in Scripture has become a type for sin.
- Leaven (or yeast as we call it today) works its way through a batch of dough to cause the bread to rise or become puffed up. And it only takes a little leaven to work its way through the whole batch or lump.
- What happens in this process is actually a rotting effect. The dough rises as the leaven ferments and releases gases that cause the bread to rise.

And as leaven speaks of sin, we know that sin has a rotting effect among the body. It just takes a little bit of sin within the body to begin to work its way through in a corrupting way.

- Case and point: Achan's sin (Joshua 7).
- We need to look at sin like cancer. We don't turn a blind eye to cancer and think we're being kind not to confront it. No! We would do anything to get rid of it.

5:7 - *Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.*

Paul now is going to tie in the feast of Passover and look how the traditions and practices from that observance relate to our Christian walk.

Purge out the old leaven , that you may be a new lump. The feast of Passover took place on the 14th day of Nisan, it was to be their beginning of the year (Exodus 12). Now the 15th of Nisan was to be the feast of Unleavened bread, where they were to rid their homes of leaven and eat only unleavened bread.

- Now of course this spoke of their days in Egypt and how God was to deliver them from the bondage they were in when the angel would pass over their

homes and spare their first born son if they had the blood of a lamb on their doorposts.

- And the unleavened bread spoke of the haste they were to make in getting out of Egypt. See in this day the leaven was a piece of dough leftover from the old batch. It would only take a pinch of it to make the new dough rise up. This is how sourdough bread is made.
- So at Passover the Israelites were to put away all leaven from their homes and make haste getting out of Egypt. This marked a new era. They were being delivered – set free. There was to be a fresh start.

And yet it's the same for the believer. We're no longer to be holding on to those things that were a mark of the old self. No longer getting entangled by the sin nature. Put that away and be a new lump. The Bible says, *"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new"* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

And Paul says, ***you truly are unleavened***. Don't live to become a new creation, live it because you are a new creation. Half the battle is in realizing who we are in Christ. ***You are unleavened***. How? Because ***Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us***. Just as the Israelites would be delivered by applying the blood of the lamb, so too, Jesus died for us, that by His blood we could be forgiven, cleansed, and set free.

- **Romans 6:6–7**, *"knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. ⁷ For he who has died has been freed from sin."*
- In other words, be a new lump, for you are!

5:8 - *Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

This is not a feast now for us that we celebrate just one week of the year. This is to be an ongoing celebration as we rejoice in this new life we have in Christ. And so our practise in life should match our position in Christ. Your life should demonstrate this change Jesus has brought.

4. Pauls' Clarification Regarding Sin – 9-13

5:9-10 - *I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. ¹⁰ Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral*

people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.

Paul had written a previous letter, one we do not have nor needed.

In His previous letter, his message was the same one he's giving in this chapter: don't ***keep company with sexually immoral people.***

Paul is not speaking of isolation but separation. This is an area many Christians have erred in. They feel that to be truly holy and pure they must isolate themselves from the world. It's how we got the monastic movement from the early or medieval church, as well as other movements through church history. If this is what we were to do Paul says we would have to leave the world.

5:11 - But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.

Paul defines this thought and says it's towards the brother that you are to take such action. We are to take a stand for things that are out of line within the body of Christ. We don't bring the world under this same standard because they're not in Christ. The world isn't our target of judgment, they're our target of the gospel.

5:12-13 - For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? ¹³ But those who are outside God judges. Therefore “put away from yourselves the evil person.

We are to deal with matters that pertain to the church. Already we see the danger when we don't (it corrupts the whole).

But in dealing with people who are outside the church, we leave that to God.

Now before we leave and start looking around for people to confront, we must be careful that we don't have a witch-hunt mentality. We are to walk in love one for another.

“Church discipline is not a group of “pious policemen” out to catch a criminal. Rather, it is a group of brokenhearted brothers and sisters seeking to restore an erring member of the family.” ³

³ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 586). Victor Books.