

UNIT 7—Expel the Immoral Brother/1 Corinthians 5:1-13

TEXT

Expel the Immoral Brother!

5 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. ²And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? ³Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. ⁴When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, ⁵hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature^a may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.

⁶Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? ⁷Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.

⁹I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—¹⁰not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. ¹¹But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

¹²What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? ¹³God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."^b

^a5 Or *that his body*; or *that the flesh* ^b13 Deut. 17:7; 19:19; 22:21, 24; 24:7

STUDY

READ

First Reading/First Impressions

As the editor of the "Corinthian Enquirer" again, what juicy headline would you come up with for this situation?

Second Reading/Big Idea

In spite of the "sensational" nature of this situation, what verse highlights the main concern for Paul?

SEARCH

1. Although the facts of this situation are unclear to us (e.g., was the man's father still alive . . . and still married to the woman? Or was the man married to this woman, or co-habiting, or just having sex with her occasionally?), Paul is angry that the Corinthians are "proud" and "boastful" of this situation (vv. 2, 6). What might he mean by that? They are happy for the man. They think this is a legitimate expression of Christian freedom. They take pleasure in pushing back traditional standards. They just don't see it as a problem. _____ Why?

2. How would you paraphrase what Paul tells them to do about this situation? (vv. 4-5)

3. If you were a Corinthian church member, how would you explain to your next door (pagan) neighbor why this man had been expelled? (v. 5)

4. From the yeast imagery (vv. 6-8), what is Paul's concern if this situation is allowed to go on without discipline?

GROUP AGENDA

Divide into groups of 4 before you start to share. And follow the time recommendations.

TO BEGIN/10 Minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

When you were a child, what was the group that you ran around with (this can be an informal or more formal group)? What feelings does the word "expel" bring to mind? Did your parents ever forbid you to associate with someone? How did you feel at the time? How do you feel about this now? Did any parents ever forbid their children to associate with you? How did you feel about that? What did you put down for READ in the Bible study?

TO GO DEEPER/20 Minutes (Choose 2 or 3)

Share your Bible study under SEARCH first. From what is said in this passage, what do you think was going on in the church in Corinth? What does it mean to "hand over to Satan"? How do you reconcile Paul's teaching here with that in 4:3-5? What is the point in each? What is the spiritual principle in this passage on church discipline? Do you feel this principle still applies today? Case History: A man and a woman start coming to your church and like it. They love each other and have lived together for a year, yet are not married because the woman just wants some time to heal the emotional scars incurred by her failed marriage previously. How do you relate to them?

TO CLOSE/5-20 Minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

What did you put down for your position on spiritual discipline? Can you think of a time when you wish the church would have disciplined you? What spirit or attitude must be present in the person or group administering discipline for you to accept it? What would happen if the church took this passage seriously?

5. How is this consistent with the "new bread" they have become through Christ's sacrifice? (vv. 7-8)

6. How is the way a Christian relates to those outside the faith to be different than the way he or she relates to those professing faith? (vv. 9-11) Why?

APPLY

Compare this passage with Matthew 18:15-17, 1 John 5:16, 2 Corinthians 2:5-8, and Galatians 6:1-2. From these passages, write out a summary of the spirit, mechanics, and purpose of church discipline.

In your situation, do you tend to be overly judgmental of others or too permissive? Why?

NOTES ON 1 CORINTHIANS 5:1-13

Summary . . . Paul now tackles the second problem which has been reported to him: incest in the church. One of the members is sexually involved with his father's wife. Paul is concerned not just with this sin itself, but also with the reaction of the Corinthians to it. Instead of grieving over what has happened, they rather arrogantly accept the whole situation and do not discipline the man by putting him out of the church.

v. 1 **sexual immorality** . . . Literally "fornication." Since Paul does not label this "adultery," the man's father was probably either dead or divorced from his wife. For newly-converted pagans, this whole question of the relationship between the sexes was especially troublesome since the environment out of which they had been converted was notoriously lax when it came to sexual standards.

even among pagans . . . It was not that incest had never been practiced by pagans. Paul's point is that incest was also condemned by pagans (as well as by Jews: Leviticus 18:8; 20:11). Both Jew and Gentile were aghast at the idea of a father and a son having sexual relations with the same woman.

has . . . By this verb Paul indicates that the man in question was not just involved casually with this woman but was indeed living with her.

his father's wife . . . The way Paul has phrased this indicates that she was probably not the man's actual mother, but rather his stepmother. Furthermore, she is probably not a Christian since Paul does

not refer to her again. He only recommends discipline for the man (see vv. 12-13).

v. 2 **you are proud** . . . Paul may mean that they are proud *because* of the situation (it demonstrates their tolerance and their freedom. They are so "spiritual" they do not have to worry about "bodily" sins); or he may mean that they are proud *in spite of* such a situation, even though this of all things ought to have burst the bubble of their arrogance ("proud" is literally "puffed up").

shouldn't you rather . . . Paul points out that what they should have *felt* was grief (how could they be proud when such a thing was going on) and what they should have *done* was to discipline the offender.

grief . . . Literally "mourning"; their emotional response to what this man was doing ought to be the same as if he had died.

vv. 4-6 . . . Paul is quite clear about what ought to be done. The church must meet together and formally exclude the erring member from its fellowship; not so much as a punitive measure, but in order that on the Day of Judgment his spirit might be saved. The aim of this action is salvation, not destruction.

v. 5 . . . "The thought may be that the devil must be given his due, but can claim no more; if he has the flesh, he has no right to the spirit, even of the sinner. The thought may be simply that of 3:15: the man's essential self will be saved with the loss not only of his work but of his flesh" (Barrett).

when you are assembled . . . Such excommunication is done not by Paul nor by the leaders of the church but by the *whole* church, gathered together in the power of Jesus.

hand the man over to Satan . . . "To be excluded from the sphere in which Christ's work was operative was to be thrust back into that in which Satan still exercised authority . . . This authority, however, was limited. If a man was handed over to Satan it was not that Satan might have his way with him, but with a view to his ultimate salvation. Satan, in fact, was being used as a tool in the intents of Christ and the church" (Barrett).

that the sinful nature may be destroyed . . . It is not clear what Paul has in mind here, though probably he does not envision the man's death. Instead he hopes that by exclusion from the church he may see clearly the enormity of his loss and so repent of his sin and return (see 1 Timothy 1:20).

vv. 6-8 . . . While Paul's first concern is for the ultimate welfare of the erring brother (vv. 4-6), he is also concerned about the welfare of the church. He uses first the image of yeast as a corrupting agent and then refers to the (related) idea of the Passover.

v. 6 **yeast** . . . This word is literally "leaven," i.e., a piece of dough which had been kept out from the previous baking. This dough then fermented and was used in the next batch of bread to cause it to rise. Jews associated fermenting with rotting and so leaven became a symbol of evil. On the day before the Passover Feast all the old

COMMENTS

leaven was tossed out of the house as a symbol of cleansing and purification—an apt image, given the situation in the Corinthian Church.

the whole batch . . . Paul's point is that just as a small amount of yeast penetrates the whole batch of dough, so too one member given over to this sort of gross evil will affect the whole church and corrupt it. Just as leaven is tossed out prior to Passover, so too this evil must be put out of the church.

v. 7 **get rid of . . . that you may be . . .** As he often does, here Paul speaks in the indicative ("Do this") and then the imperative ("Be what you already are"). Christians have been set free from the bondage of sin, and so they must live out this reality in their daily lives. Both the indicative and the imperative are vital. "The imperative is unthinkable without the indicative, which makes the otherwise impossible obedience possible; the indicative is emasculated if the imperative, which gives it moral bite, is wanting" (Barrett).

Passover . . . The Jewish Festival celebrating the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt during which lambs were sacrificed in the Temple as an offering for sin (see Exodus 12:1-36). Christ became the final and ultimate sin offering. Thus Christians have been freed from sin and so must avoid sin.

v. 9 **I have written . . .** Paul refers to a previous (and now lost) letter which he had written to them.

Incest Laws

Originally incest laws were developed in order to define who was too closely related to be married. Incest laws were designed to prevent intramarriage. Law alone, of course, was insufficient to prevent such things from happening, and so the Bible records instances of incest: Genesis 19:30-36; 35:22; 49:1-4; 2 Samuel 13:1-22; Ezekiel 22:10-11; as well as 1 Corinthians 5.

The laws regulating marriage are found primarily in the Pentateuch. In Leviticus 18:6-16 sexual intercourse is prohibited with the following women: one's mother or any other wife of one's father (this was the prohibition violated in Corinth); a sister; the daughter of a son or daughter; the daughter of the father's wife; the sister of one's father or mother; an aunt; a daughter-in-law, or a sister-in-law. Deuteronomy 27:23 adds that one is not allowed to marry one's mother-in-law. The penalty for breaking such prohibitions is childlessness (Leviticus 20:21) or death

(Leviticus 20:11-13). Such offenders were ordered to be "cut off from their people" (Leviticus 18:29). To be without tribe or family was an especially odious penalty in Old Testament times. The severity of the penalties indicates the seriousness with which this offense was regarded.

It seems that all societies have some form of taboo against incest. The reply by an Arapesh (a New Guinea tribesman) to Margaret Mead (the anthropologist) sheds an interesting insight on the social and economic implications of intramarriage:

What, you would like to marry your sister! What is the matter with you any way? Don't you want a brother-in-law? Don't you realize that if you marry another man's sister and another man marries your sister, you will have at least two brothers-in-law, while if you marry your own sister you will have none? With whom will you hunt, with whom will you garden, whom will you go to visit?

v. 10 . . . Paul makes it quite plain that he is *not* calling for total withdrawal from the world into an exclusive cult-like existence.

v. 11 . . . On the other hand, he does call for withdrawal *from fellow Christians* who are involved in open sin.

do not even eat . . . This is the practical outworking of excommunication. All contact is severed.

v. 12 **judge those inside . . .** The aim of such judgment is not punitive but redemptive; Paul is calling for discipline, not punishment.

v. 13 **God will judge . . .** On the last day.

"Expel the wicked . . ." . . . For the fifth time (see also vv. 2, 5, 7, 11) Paul tells them to excommunicate this man, here quoting from the Old Testament. At times drastic measures are necessary to safeguard the body of Christ. This was especially true as the new church in Corinth faced pressures from paganism which threatened to corrupt it into something quite different from what God intended.