

THE CHURCH THAT CHANGED A CONTINENT AND THE MAN WHO LED IT
FIRST CORINTHIANS

STUDY NUMBER 5
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I Corinthians Chapter 5
“Ecclesiastical Spring-Cleaning The House Of God”

“It has been said that our one security against sin lies in our being shocked at it.”

WILLIAM BARCLAY

1 Cor. 5:1-13 [The Message]

I also received a report of scandalous sex within your church family, a kind that wouldn't be tolerated even outside the church: One of your men is sleeping with his stepmother. [2] And you're so above it all that it doesn't even faze you! Shouldn't this break your hearts? Shouldn't it bring you to your knees in tears? Shouldn't this person and his conduct be confronted and dealt with?

[3] I'll tell you what I would do. Even though I'm not there in person, consider me right there with you, because I can fully see what's going on. I'm telling you that this is wrong. You must not simply look the other way and hope it goes away on its own. Bring it out in the open and deal with it in the authority of Jesus our Master. [4] Assemble the community—I'll be present in spirit with you and our Master Jesus will be present in power. [5] Hold this man's conduct up to public scrutiny. Let him defend it if he can! But if he can't, then out with him! It will be totally devastating to him, of course, and embarrassing to you. But better devastation and embarrassment than damnation. You want him on his feet and forgiven before the Master on the Day of Judgment.

[6] Your flip and callous arrogance in these things bothers me. You pass it off as a small thing, but it's anything but that. Yeast, too, is a "small thing," but it works its way through a whole batch of bread dough pretty fast. [7] So get rid of this "yeast." Our true identity is flat and plain, not puffed up with the wrong kind of ingredient. The Messiah, our Passover Lamb, has already been sacrificed for the Passover meal, and we are the Unraised Bread part of the Feast. [8] So let's live out our part in the Feast, not as raised bread swollen with the yeast of evil, but as flat bread—simple, genuine, unpretentious.

[9] I wrote you in my earlier letter that you shouldn't make yourselves at home among the sexually promiscuous. [10] I didn't mean that you should have nothing at all to do with outsiders of that sort. Or with crooks, whether blue- or white-collar. Or with spiritual phonies, for that matter. You'd have to leave the world entirely to do that! [11] But I am saying that you shouldn't act as if everything is just fine when one of your Christian

companions is promiscuous or crooked, is flip with God or rude to friends, gets drunk or becomes greedy and predatory. You can't just go along with this, treating it as acceptable behavior. [12] I'm not responsible for what the outsiders do, but don't we have some responsibility for those within our community of believers? [13] God decides on the outsiders, but we need to decide when our brothers and sisters are out of line and, if necessary, clean house.

The church of Jesus Christ has come a long, long way since "the early days" that I can well remember when virtually anything that was "enjoyable" was considered wicked or spiritually impudent. In those days, God help you if you were (1) caught in a swimming pool, (2) at a family film in a theater, (3) enjoying the Benny Goodman band, or (4) playing a board game with dice. You were pretty much considered "lost." Yes, we have come light years from that time.

BUT HAVE WE COME TOO FAR? There can be no question about the answer:

Y E S !

Holiness is a virtue, not a handicap. Holiness is moral, mental, social and spiritual health! But today not only is the world sick, but all-too-often the church is sick as well.

That's the issue Paul confronts in this 5th chapter of I Corinthians. He learned that a fellow in the church at Corinth was sexually involved with his father's wife, his step-mother. Paul had two reactions:

- 1) He was shocked at the sin. He wrote that it was such a monstrous breach of morality that even the heathen would not endorse such a thing. Scriptures were very clear about the issue: (Leviticus 18:8) **The nakedness of thy father's wife shalt thou not uncover: it is thy father's nakedness.**
- 2) He was even more shocked at the blase attitude of the church people. Paul believed the people should have been grief-stricken because of the man's transgression; instead they were complacently accepting of it.

I am not an anti-TV preacher (I love ESPN and the History Channel); however, there can be little denial that "the tube" has lowered the morality of America substantially. Sex is flagrant, not only showing people sexually involved in bed together, but even trucks and most vehicles are sold on the basis of sex. On talk shows, people openly boast of "bedding down" other people. I heard one athlete boast of taking over a thousand women to bed. Whether he actually did it or not, only God knows; but the idea that

someone would even “brag” about such depravity is mind-numbing. No Christian person can take a blase, ease-going view of the very thing that killed Jesus - and that was the sinfulness of mankind.

Now, wrote Paul, something has to be done about this transgressor among you. He has to be excommunicated from the church. Was this a vindictive order from Paul? No, not really. What the Apostle had in mind was the conviction of sin to become operative in the sinner’s heart and thus he would be returned to Christ. Some has written, “It was discipline, not exercised solely to punish, but rather to awaken; and was a verdict to be carried out, not with cold, sadistic cruelty, but rather in sorrow as for one who had died.”

The purpose of church-Christian discipline is never to “break” a person, but rather to “make” a person to be conformed to the image of Christ.

EXPLANATION OF THE LEAVEN - VERSES 6 - 8

For the most part, “leaven” in the Old Testament represented an evil influence. It was dough that had perhaps been kept over from some previous baking experience and in the interim had fermented with putrefaction. It was considered a corrupting element.

The early Jews were fastidiously obedient to these Old Testament directives:

Exodus 12:15

Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel.

Exodus 13:7

Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days; and there shall no leavened bread be seen with thee, neither shall there be leaven seen with thee in all thy quarters.

In those days, as the Passover Feast came closer, Jews could be seen lighting candles and searching their houses for any kind of “leaven” and, if found, removed immediately from their homes. Paul is teaching here that any kind of moral leaven must be removed from our spiritual homes - personal or collective - that would hinder God’s presence among us. Zeph. 1:12 **And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.**

It is interesting - at least to me - that Passover came about in the spring of the year. So

one might observe that the Jews were required to do some SPRING CLEANING. So it should always be in our lives - that all the cleaning should be done on an on-going basis and that we keep our spiritual houses clean and tidy before the Lord.

It is essential to all church leaders, at whatever level, not to allow evil influence in the church. If we do allow it, such negligence can corrupt the whole society (even as leaven corrupts the whole lump of dough).

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Our local church Constitution and By-laws provides for this, although I must report we have only had to deal with such issues a couple of times in my over a quarter-of-a-century here. This is covered in our bylaws under Article III Members: SECTION III. DISCIPLINE

a. Discipline shall be exercised by the Church Council. Those members under charges of misconduct, or who may have fallen under condemnation through sinful or worldly practices, shall meet with the Church Council and those charges shall be settled by definite and prompt action

Any judgments shall be presented personally and in writing. Some grounds for exercising discipline or expulsion from the assembly shall include the following:

1. Absence from the services of the assembly for a period greater than ninety days without reasonable cause. Hebrews 10:24-25 **And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: [25] Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.**

(Each year we contact those who have absented themselves for long periods of time and ask them for their input as to their continuing relationship with First Assembly. Many times the issue is that folks have moved to another location of residence. Sadly, every year there are those whose names are dropped, for reasons of absence, from the church membership list. I am happy to report that as the years have gone by, that number of folks has diminished regularly.)

2. Failure to tithe. Malachi 3:10 **Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.**

1 Cor. 9:6-9

Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working? [7] Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? [8] Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? [9] For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen?

3. Living an immoral and sinful life. Ephes. 5:3-7 But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; [4] Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. [5] For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. [6] Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. [7] Be not ye therefore partakers with them.

2 Thes. 3:6-10

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. [7] For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; [8] Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: [9] Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. [10] For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.

Galatians 5:19-21

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, [20] Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, [21] Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

4. Propagation of erroneous, inconsistent and false doctrine. Romans 16:17

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.

1 Tim. 6:4-5 He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, [5] Perverse

disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.

2 Tim. 1:13 Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

Just as a good parent does not want his or her children subjected to anything that could cause them harm, so church leaders should so love the congregation that they try their best to keep the “wolves of sin” away from “the flock.”

I CORINTHIANS CHAPTER SIX The Follower of Jesus Christ And The Folly of Law Courts

I have often been asked for my reason (and on the Internet taken to task) for my response to a situation in the church some time ago in which we refused to take legal action (in civil court). The response is simple and clear: the Scriptures forbid taking another church member to court. Issues involving Christ's church members are to be resolved within the Body of Christ, not before civil court. Now....we either accept the Word as our divine authority or we do not. The issue in question was handled adequately within our church governing authority (which is the Church Council - the board), our legal counsel within the Church, the Peninsular Florida District Council, our District Superintendent and District Presbytery board, and the national governing office at Assemblies of God headquarters in Springfield. The issue was not allowed to be dragged through the muck of news media. Our private hearing before this local Church body (closed to the outside public, those not members of this Church), in which I was informed that well over a thousand persons attended, was adequate, lengthy, and those with questions were free to express them. We do not - and will not - allow the Name of Christ to be profaned if it can be avoided properly, legally, morally and adequately.

Such is the teaching of I Corinthians 6:

1 Cor. 6:1-8

And how dare you take each other to court! When you think you have been wronged, does it make any sense to go before a court that knows nothing of God's ways instead of a family of Christians? [2] The day is coming when the world is going to stand before a jury made up of Christians. If someday you are going to rule on the world's fate, wouldn't it be a good idea to practice on some of these smaller cases? [3] Why, we're even going to judge angels! So why not these everyday affairs? [4] As these disagreements and wrongs surface, why would you ever entrust them to the judgment of people you don't trust in any other way?

[5] I say this as bluntly as I can to wake you up to the stupidity of what you're doing. Is it possible that there isn't one levelheaded person among you who can make fair decisions when disagreements and disputes come up? I don't believe it. [6] And here you are taking each other to court before people who don't even believe in God! How can they render justice if they don't believe in the God of justice?

[7] These court cases are an ugly blot on your community. Wouldn't it be far better to just take it, to let yourselves be wronged and forget it? [8] All you're doing is providing fuel for more wrong, more injustice, bringing more hurt to the people of your own spiritual family.

It is very sad to me that there are some outside folks who would take this church and our church council to task for simply obeying that Scripture explicitly teaches.

Remember the Corinthians were a Greek-influenced culture. *“Paul is dealing with a problem which specifically affected the Greeks. The Jews did not ordinarily go to law in the public courts at all; they settled things before the elders of the village or the elders of the synagogue; to them justice was far more a thing to be settled in a family spirit than in a legal spirit. In fact the Jewish law expressly forbade a Jew to go to law at all in a non-Jewish court; to do so was considered blasphemy against the divine law of God. It was far otherwise with the Greeks; they were characteristically a litigious people. The law courts were one of their chief entertainments.”*

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Consider the irony of Christians going to court against each other: in the golden age of the Millennium, we saints will be magistrates of justice. God will appoint us as judges over the nations and we will have dominion over the people. If God believes that His people have that kind of sense, we who are to have redeemed minds and hearts, why in the world would we go to civil courts over issues that we can solve ourselves? It is ironic to me that we have so little understanding of who we are in Christ and what He expects (no, DEMANDS) OF US.

However, it must be said that one of the results of this scriptural ruling is that we will often be insulted by the world system - or often religious people who either don't know what the Bible says, or worse, don't care what it says. Christ's follower would rather suffer insult and loss and injury than try to inflict them on someone else - especially if that person is a brother or sister in Christ.

THE QUICKSAND FROM WHICH JESUS RESCUED US

1 Cor. 6:9-11

Don't you realize that this is not the way to live? Unjust people who don't care about God will not be joining in his kingdom. Those who use and abuse each other, use and abuse sex, [10] use and abuse the earth and everything in it, don't qualify as citizens in God's kingdom. [11] A number of you know from experience what I'm talking about, for not so long ago you were on that list. Since then, you've been cleaned up and given a fresh start by Jesus, our Master, our Messiah, and by our God present in us, the Spirit.

It is interesting to note how God considered the Corinthians culture. They thought they (the non-redeemed) were an advanced civilization, but God thought they were:

- fornicators and adulterers
- idolaters
- sensualists (those who gave up standards for personal pleasures)
- thieves and robbers
- drunkards
- sexually-perverted

Those who know Roman history know the story of Emperor Nero - as perverted and twisted a human being as ever disgraced society. He found a young boy named Sporus and had him castrated. Then Nero married the boy with full ceremony and took him home in procession to his palace and lived with him as wife. Then he married a fellow named Pythagoras and called him his husband. Other emperors followed the same immoral pursuits. It is considered by most astute historians that one of the main causes for the collapse of Rome was its degeneracy – pretty much the same journey America finds itself in at the moment. Frightening thought!

Now, writes Paul, you Christians need to remember from “whence you came.” For many of you followed the same despicable lifestyle before coming to Jesus. **IT WAS ONLY THE SAVING POWER OF THE BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST THAT CAUSED SUCH MAJOR CHANGE IN THE LIVES OF THESE EARLY BELIEVERS.**

THE REDEEMED LIFE

This chapter closes with an impassioned cry from the great Apostle Paul to live lives that are beyond reproach:

1 Cor. 6:12-20

Just because something is technically legal doesn't mean that it's spiritually appropriate. If I went around doing whatever I thought I could get by with, I'd be a slave to my whims.

[13] You know the old saying, "First you eat to live, and then you live to eat"? Well, it may be true that the body is only a temporary thing, but that's no excuse for stuffing your body with food, or indulging it with sex. Since the Master honors you with a body, honor him with your body!

[14] God honored the Master's body by raising it from the grave. He'll treat yours with the same resurrection power. [15] Until that time, remember that your bodies are created with the same dignity as the Master's body. You wouldn't take the Master's body off to a whorehouse, would you? I should hope not.

[16] There's more to sex than mere skin on skin. Sex is as much spiritual mystery as physical fact. As written in Scripture, "The two become one." [17] Since we want to become spiritually one with the Master, we must not pursue the kind of sex that avoids commitment and intimacy, leaving us more lonely than ever—the kind of sex that can never "become one." [18] There is a sense in which sexual sins are different from all others. In sexual sin we violate the sacredness of our own bodies, these bodies that were made for God-given and God-modeled love, for "becoming one" with another. [19] Or didn't you realize that your body is a sacred place, the place of the Holy Spirit? Don't you see that you can't live however you please, squandering what God paid such a high price for? The physical part of you is not some piece of property belonging to the spiritual part of you. [20] God owns the whole works. So let people see God in and through your body.

Simply put: Glorify God with your earthly body. Your body belongs to God, not to you. We do not have the right to do with our bodies just anything we wish.

Next week we enter chapter 7 in which Paul deals with a major subject: **MARRIAGE!**