



A Study of Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians

Lesson 8: Cast Out the Wicked Man... 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

It has been a few weeks since we last met and discussed Paul's letter to the Corinthians, so I thought it might be a good idea to review a bit before we pressed ahead in the text.

I would like to remind you that Corinth was very important to Paul's master plan to evangelize Greece and Asia Minor. Corinth had a wonderful geographic location. Really and truly...it had just about the best location of any church in the ancient world. In modern terms, it was at the junction of two super highways.¹



It was a narrow peninsula, separating northern Greece from southern Greece. The peninsula that Corinth was built on was only four and a half miles wide.

Two and a half miles to the west was the Ionian Sea and the water passage that led to Rome. Two miles to the east was the Aegean Sea and the water passage that led to Athens and on to Ephesus and the vast, untapped riches of the Orient. Directly to the north was Greece proper and to the northeast was the gulf that led around to Thessalonica, Philippi, and Troas. To the south was the cape that led to the southernmost tip of Greece and though it was only two hundred extra miles, it was an extraordinarily difficult sail...especially in winter. It was a bit like later sailors would encounter trying to round South Africa and the Cape of Good Hope.²

My point is that Corinth enjoyed a wonderful, geographic location.

Rather than sailors trying to traverse the difficult trip around the cape, they would simply dock on one side of Corinth, unload their ships, cart their wares four and half miles across the narrow peninsula and reload a waiting ship on the other side.

Such things required an enormous amount of labor...and involved multiple tolls and taxes making Corinth a bustling center for trade and an economic boomtown.

But location was not the only thing Corinth had going for it. It also hosted the magnificent Isthmian Games, second only to the Olympian Games of Athens. They were celebrated every two years and they attracted thousands, even tens of thousands, of spectators. Paul, himself used imagery from the games in his letter to the Corinthians.

Corinth also had a booming, economy and a vital entertainment industry. It was the ancient equivalent of a cross between a dirty, harbor town, and Disney World. It had all the vices that money could buy and it had all the entertainment anyone could want. In fact, when we started our study I read the famous proverb quoted by the ancient historian Strabo (63 BC-21 AD) which warned ancient travelers about Corinth and its vices:

"Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth."³

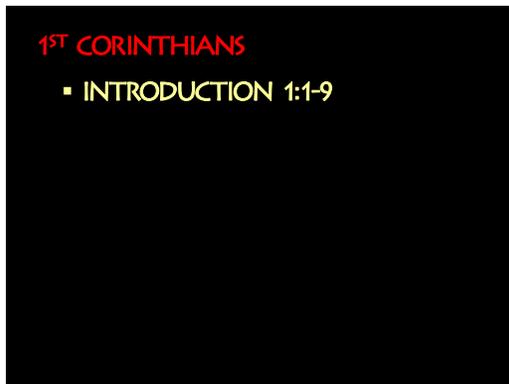
Now, I don't want you to get the idea that Corinth was simply a seaport brothel. It certainly provided for the sailors that came through but it was more than that. It was also a very religious city...it provided for religious needs in the same way it provided for physical urges.

The point is, and I think this is pretty easy to see, that Corinth was a mixture of a great many things...it was sophisticated and bawdy...it was intellectual and superstitious...it was carnal and religious. All of this evidence together suggests that Paul's Corinth was at same time the Cambridge Massachusetts, New York, and Las Vegas of the ancient world.

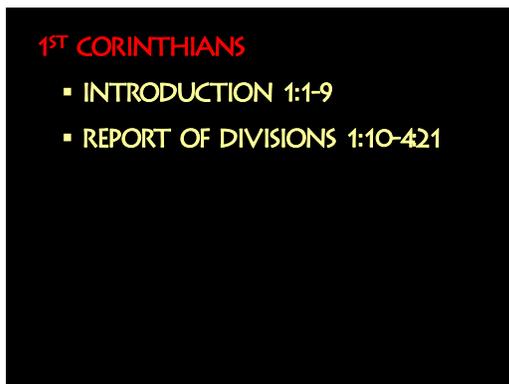
Now I said that Corinth was important to Paul's overall plan of evangelism. The reason that was true was because so many people passed through Corinth. I think Paul believed that planting a strong church at Corinth would mean inadvertently that the gospel would be extended to the whole known world because of those passing through.

Now...as to the structure of 1 Corinthians...it is divided up into four sections. I mentioned this many times in our previous study but I think it might be helpful to remind you again. The letter starts off with a fairly typical Pauline introduction. That is because he was writing to a church that he knew very well. Paul had spent over a year and a half living with the Corinthians.

Now he begins the letter with a commendation...commending the Corinthians for their faith and their knowledge and their giftedness.

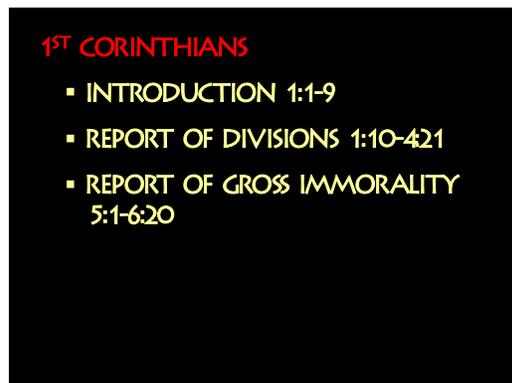


And I don't think Paul says those things sarcastically. The Corinthians were gifted and blessed...there faith was real. Still the Corinthians had problems. Now after the introduction, Paul turns to those problems. He does that by bringing up the topic of two reports that he had received about the Corinthian church.



The first report concerned the divisions at the church in Corinth. That section extends from 1 Corinthians 1:10 all the way to the end of chapter four. Now in our last study we spent a great deal of time talking about why the Corinthians had divisions and why their divisions were so painful and wrong and how Paul's admonition to the Corinthians might be applied to our church and situation today. If you want to review any of those lessons, they are posted on our website.

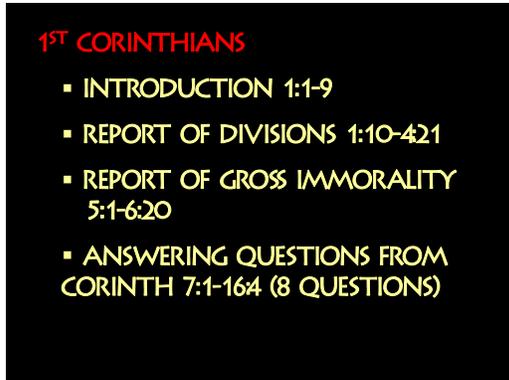
Now the second report, the place where we are picking up our study this morning concerned a case of notorious immorality in the church. Paul deals with that report in chapters five and six.



After that Paul begins to address eight specific questions put to him by the Corinthians. Those questions had apparently come to him in the form of a letter and his answers to their questions really constitute the bulk of his letter.

Now those questions deal with a wide range of topics covering things as diverse spiritual gifts and head coverings for women all the way to their collection for the beleaguered saints at Rome and the importance of the resurrection.

Paul's answers to the questions raised by the Corinthians start at the beginning of chapter seven and extend to the last chapter of the book.



Now, it will be a while before we get to those particular questions...nevertheless I think it is important for you to keep the structure of the book in mind so you will know where you are in Paul's overall argument.

Now as I said, we are focusing this morning on the second report Paul had received. There is no way to know who had given the report to Paul...it may have been one of the two people mentioned earlier, Chloe or Stephanus, or it may have been a third source...

But Paul's sudden shift at the beginning of chapter five to this new report...is pretty dramatic. In fact, the sudden shift has led some commentators (F.F. Bruce as well as others) to the conclusion that the report caught Paul just as he was about to finish his letter to the Corinthians...and that when he received this new report he immediately turned to the issue that it raised and continued on for another twelve chapters.⁴ Now I don't personally think that is what happened. I do not think that Paul suddenly changed from writing one thing with one train of thought and then suddenly switched to a whole new idea...⁵ Nor do I believe

that he was just about through with the letter and a new report fired him up sufficiently

Still I can see why some commentators may have thought that. Let me read 1 Corinthians 5:1...and I think you will get a sense of why they think they may have been what happened.

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 5:1**...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.

Now that word translated "actually" in the ESV and the NAS, is translated in other versions like the KJV as "commonly." If the KJV understanding is right, it means that everyone pretty much everywhere had heard about what was going on in Corinth and stunned by it. But if the ESV and NAS are right, and I think they are, it would mean that Paul was turning at last to a second report...a shocking report and that he is trying to emphasize the lunacy of such behavior.

Now, I have to tell you I think that is what was happening...I think Paul is trying to shame the Corinthians...

But the report about divisions and the report about immorality are linked in another way. They are linked by the common assessment by Paul...that common word $\phi\upsilon\sigma\iota\acute{o}\omega$...which means "puffed up".

You see, when Paul evaluates the first reports he tells the Corinthians...

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 4:6**...I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another.

When he evaluates the second report, the one concerning the outrageous case of immorality in their midst, he concludes exactly the same thing he did in his first assessment.

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 5:2**...And you are arrogant! (This is the same word φουσιόω...”puffed up”) Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

And the same word is repeated again in chapter 8:1.

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 8:1**...Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." This "knowledge" puffs up(φουσιόω),, but love builds up.

Now on that basis, I think you can see that the three sections all contain a common thread...and that that thread is the idea of spiritual pride and arrogance manifesting itself in different ways...the first was divisions...the second was their extraordinary tolerance of particularly grievous sin...and the third was a spiritual triumphalism that demonstrated itself both in lawsuits and in spiritual pride regarding a number of particular questions faced by the church.⁶ Their pride was the root or fountain of all their problems.

Now having said all that let's turn to 1 Corinthians 5:1.

ESV 1 Corinthians 5:1...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.

Now, it is a bit sad that it is only at this point that many of us finally get interested in the book of 1 Corinthians. We are so conditioned by the pervasive notion of sex in our own culture that we have to hear something startling before we are awakened from our own spiritual slumber.

Now the next two chapters, chapters five and six, Paul will address the issue of sexual sin. And I have to tell you there is a part of me that dreads the topic, not because I'm afraid of the issue. It certainly needs to be addressed and probably a lot more often than we do ...rather I am a bit nervous about bringing it up because I am afraid I might not get you to see that this particular issue, the issue of sexual immorality, was secondary with Paul.

You see, the particular sexual sin involved was dreadful...it was dreadful and needed to be addressed. It was so wicked that even the heathen in Corinth were shocked by it. But in saying that, it is easy to overlook the fact that Paul apparently thought the sin of division was even worse. To be sure, the sin of sexual immorality had an impact on the life and witness of the church...but it was something easily fixed. All that had to do was to turn the guilty sinner out... to hand him over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh...and we'll talk more about what that means later. But Paul has already told the Corinthians that God Himself had promised to intervene and to destroy anyone who destroyed His church through divisiveness.

Now if you will keep that point in mind I will be able to talk rather plainly about this particular sin. Now look at the verse again.

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 5:1**...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.

According to this verse, this particular case of sexual sin was well known...that is, it was notorious and it was public. Now the word Paul uses to describe this sin is the Greek word πορνεία...it's the word from which the English word "**pornographic**" is derived. Now the word technically means "**fornication**" that is, any particular type of illicit or forbidden sexual relationship. But fornication was not really all that shocking in Corinth-remember, it was a city known for sexual immorality.

I make that point because in 1 Corinthians 5 Paul explains that the type of fornication practiced by this man at Corinth was so grievous that not even the heathen Gentiles condoned it. What he is talking about...is incest. That's what Paul means when he says that "**one should have his father's wife.**" The phrase "**your father's wife**" is a technical phrase for one's stepmother. And the word translated "**to have**" is a present tense durative which means that it is an action that is continual. In this case it either means that this particular man had either married his step-mother or he had moved in with his step-mother.⁷

Now, the Old Testament places sexual relations between a man and his stepmother in the same category as relations between a man and his natural mother or as a sexual relationship between two men. The law of God forbade such relationships and required capital punishment for violators.

The prohibition of this particular act is found in Leviticus.

^{ESV} **Leviticus 18:8**...You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife; it is your father's nakedness.

It was the sin that caused Reuben, Jacob's firstborn to lose his birthright.

Now Paul makes the point that such behavior was not only forbidden among God's people...it was something that even the pagans were able to discern was wrong from natural revelation. The Roman historian Cicero wrote about this particular sin:

"Oh! To think of the woman's sin, unbelievable, unheard of in all experience save for this single instance!"⁸

You see, even the pagans forbade the kind of relationship this Corinthian man had with his step-mother. And that was Paul's point. You see what Paul was saying was, **"Look even the pagans know better than this."**

To make it as plain as I can...one of the men in the church...was having an illicit sexual relationship with his stepmother. Now we do not know anything about the woman who was involved in this sin...probably because she was not a believer and hence not a member of the church at Corinth.

I think that is why Paul gave no instruction regarding her censure.

She may have been the widow of the man's father...or perhaps she and the man's father were divorced. The point is that the church at Corinth had one of its

members maintaining a continuous, illicit sexual relationship with his stepmother; which for all practical purposes...constitutes incest.

Now, I think two things ought to be said at this point. First of all, Paul believed that the moral prohibition found in Old Testament passages like the ones I read earlier from Leviticus were binding for New Testament Gentiles.

You see, we know that because no other New Testament passages mention such marriages...nevertheless, Paul has no qualms whatsoever about applying the commands from Leviticus in this situation. The Old Testament principle regarding the sinfulness of uncovering a father's nakedness was not abrogated in the New Testament. Christ's atonement may have done away with Old Testament ceremonial law but God's moral law remained valid for the Corinthian church. That was true because it is a reflection of God's perfect moral character; it does not change.

Secondly, it seems obvious to me that Paul was at least as concerned, if not more concerned, with the church's toleration of the sin than he was with the actual sin itself. I think that comes across pretty clearly in 1 Corinthians 5:2:

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 5:2**...And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

You Paul felt that the Corinthians should have been grieving over the fact that such a sin occurred in their midst. But they were not. In fact, Paul says they were proud...that is, they were **“puffed up”**

Now it is obvious here that spiritual pride is the fountain of almost all of the sin of Corinthian church. But you know...this particular charge is hard for us to understand. I mean, we can understand that they should have been grieving and should have been heart-broken. But Paul says they were **“puffed up.”** What on earth could he have meant by that?

Some commentators think the Corinthians possessed an over-realized eschatology... that is, they thought that they had already arrived spiritually and were in such an advanced state of spirituality that temporal issues like **“sexual immorality”** and the like were no longer of any consequence. Commentators that hold this view, point out the fact that Paul accuses the Corinthians of viewing themselves as already **“reigning like kings”** and the idea is that they spiritually above such struggles. You can see how that kind of thinking could lead to an almost complete state of **“lawlessness.”**

Paul says that they should have mourned when they discovered this sin and he fleshes out the kind of mourning they should have had.

Paul uses the word **“πενθέω”** which is the word that is used for mourning for the dead; it is perhaps the deepest and most painful kind of personal sorrow possible...the kind of sorrow someone experiences when they lose a child.

You see, we ought to be deeply grieved about sin among believers but today we often fairly ambivalent about sin. That's what the Corinthians were...ambivalent and Paul thought that the Corinthian church's reaction to the fornication in their midst was as bad as or perhaps even worse than the sin itself. They were

proud...puffed up...they should have been grieving. They thought their toleration was a sign of their maturity, but it was a sign of just the opposite.

Implicitly, I think, Paul is questioning the Corinthians' love for the Lord because they didn't seem to hate evil. God takes the purity of His church seriously, and He commands His children to take it equally seriously. Christians are not to tolerate sin within the church any more than they are to tolerate it within their own lives. That is what he means when he brings up the issue in Ephesians 5...

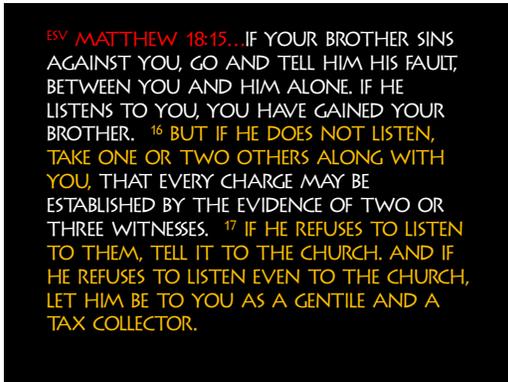
^{ESV} **Ephesians 5:3...** But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. ⁴ Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. ⁵ For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

You see they should have taken this man's sin seriously. They should have renounced this man's sin openly but instead they were bragging about their tolerance.

Now, Paul says that this incestuous man was to be expelled from among them...that is, excommunicated.

Now what does it mean to excommunicate a believer? To be sure excommunication means the official exclusion of an individual from participating in communion...that is, the Lord's Supper. But it seems to include much more than that here in Corinthians. From the rest of the chapter, I think it is safe to say that excommunication includes putting the individual out of the meetings of the church and breaking fellowship with him.

Now excommunication is not the first action in church discipline; it is actually the fourth step in a very specific process. Turn to Matthew 18:15-17 where our Lord lays out the principles of church discipline.



^{ESV} **MATTHEW 18:15...** IF YOUR BROTHER SINS AGAINST YOU, GO AND TELL HIM HIS FAULT, BETWEEN YOU AND HIM ALONE. IF HE LISTENS TO YOU, YOU HAVE GAINED YOUR BROTHER. ¹⁶ **BUT IF HE DOES NOT LISTEN, TAKE ONE OR TWO OTHERS ALONG WITH YOU, THAT EVERY CHARGE MAY BE ESTABLISHED BY THE EVIDENCE OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES. ¹⁷ IF HE REFUSES TO LISTEN TO THEM, TELL IT TO THE CHURCH. AND IF HE REFUSES TO LISTEN EVEN TO THE CHURCH, LET HIM BE TO YOU AS A GENTILE AND A TAX COLLECTOR.**

^{RSV} **Matthew 18:15...**"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.

Matthew 18:15 says the sinning believer is to be given a private rebuke: that is the first step. Most believers seem to think that this means go tell the elders and let them deal with it, or tell someone with the gift of confrontation. That's not what it says. If you know another believer is in sin, you are to go to him alone with the purpose of turning him from his sin. You are not share it with others...or seek their counsel...you are to go to him alone.

^{ESV} **Matthew 18:16...**But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

The second step after the private rebuke is to take another person with you: this is a plural rebuke. If he will not hear you then go to step three:

^{ESV} **Matthew 18:17a**...If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.

This is the third step: the church is to be made aware of the sin and to try to turn the individual from his sin. It is a public rebuke before the entire congregation. And then finally comes excommunication...look at the last half of verse 17.

^{ESV} **Matthew 18:17b**... And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

You see it's the fourth step: the unrepentant sinner is to be treated as a heathen or a publican. In other words, he is to be put out of the fellowship of the local church...he is to be excommunicated. This is not seen too often today, but this is how the church is to deal with sin. Discipline is not inconsistent with love; in fact, a lack of discipline is inconsistent with love.

^{ESV} **Hebrews 12:6**...For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

In 1 Corinthians 5:3-5, Paul outline the procedure for implementing discipline. These three verses are one long sentence in the Greek:

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 5:3**...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.

Paul said that he had judged this man as if he were present with them and he had delivered him to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. Next, Paul wanted the church to publicly eliminate this evil from its midst. When the local church acts

in Jesus' name...that is, according to His Word...they can be sure they are acting in His power. It was in the context of teaching about church discipline that our Lord said:

^{ESV} **Matthew 18:19**...Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

Finally, Paul tells the Corinthian believers to "**deliver such a one to Satan**". What does that mean? The word "**deliver**" is the Greek word παραδίδωμι which means to hand over to judgment or punishment. I think it is Paul's way of telling them to put him out from under the protection of the local church. I think what Paul was saying was that putting the man out of the church meant that the man would be exposed to physical assault by Satan...that is, that his body might be destroyed. But there was purpose in that. Paul's purpose in delivering the sinning believer to Satan was ultimately that the man's spirit might be saved in the day of Jesus Christ. Paul believed that the physical evils that Satan would inflict to this man's physical body might bring him to a place of repentance and restoration. The whole purpose of discipline was remedial: it was to restore the person to fellowship.

These verses suggest some principles concerning the procedure for excommunication. First of all, it is to be done in relation to moral evil. Secondly, it is only to be done after the sinner fails to respond to a private, plural, and public rebuke. Third, it is to be done publicly by the church. Fourth, it is to exclude him from all church fellowship. Fifth, it is applied by the church as a whole. Sixth, it is done in order to bring him to repentance so that he will be restored.

Listen to Calvin:

THERE ARE THREE ENDS TO WHICH THE CHURCH HAS RESPECT IN THUS CORRECTING AND EXCOMMUNICATING.

THE FIRST IS, THAT GOD MAY NOT BE INSULTED BY THE NAME OF CHRISTIANS BEING GIVEN TO THOSE WHO LEAD SHAMEFUL AND FLAGITOUS LIVES, AS IF HIS HOLY CHURCH WERE A COMBINATION OF THE WICKED AND ABANDONED...AND HERE, ALSO, REGARD MUST BE HAD TO THE LORD'S SUPPER, WHICH MIGHT BE PROFANED BY A PROMISCUOUS ADMISSION. FOR IT IS MOST TRUE, THAT HE WHO IS ENTRUSTED WITH THE DISPENSATION OF IT, IF HE KNOWINGLY AND WILLINGLY ADMITS ANY UNWORTHY PERSON WHOM HE OUGHT AND IS ABLE TO REPEL, IS AS GUILTY OF SACRILEGE AS IF HE HAD CAST THE LORD'S BODY TO DOGS.

There are three ends to which the Church has respect in thus correcting and excommunicating. The first is, that God may not be insulted by the name of Christians being given to those who lead shameful and flagitious lives, as if his holy Church were a combination of the wicked and abandoned...And here, also, regard must be had to the Lord's Supper, which might be profaned by a promiscuous admission. For it is most true, that he who is entrusted with the dispensation of it, if he knowingly and willingly admits any unworthy person whom he ought and is able to repel, is as guilty of sacrilege as if he had cast the Lord's body to dogs.

A SECOND END OF DISCIPLINE IS, THAT THE GOOD MAY NOT, AS USUALLY HAPPENS, BE CORRUPTED BY CONSTANT COMMUNICATION WITH THE WICKED: FOR SUCH IS OUR PRONENESS TO GO ASTRAY THAT NOTHING IS EASIER THAN TO SEDUCE US FROM THE RIGHT COURSE BY BAD EXAMPLE. TO THIS USE OF DISCIPLINE THE APOSTLE REFERRED WHEN HE COMMANDED THE CORINTHIANS TO DISCARD THE INGESTUOUS MAN FROM THEIR SOCIETY *BECAUSE "A LITTLE LEAVEN LEAVENETH THE WHOLE LUMP,"*

A THIRD END OF DISCIPLINE IS, THAT THE SINNER MAY BE ASHAMED, AND BEGIN TO REPENT OF HIS TURPITUDE...*THAT THEY MIGHT NOT BECOME EVEN MORE OBSTINATE...*

A second end of discipline is, that the good may not, as usually happens, be corrupted by constant communication with the wicked. For such is our proneness to go astray, that nothing is easier than to seduce us from the right course by bad example. To this use of discipline the apostle referred when he commanded the Corinthians to discard the incestuous man from their society *because "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump,"*

A third end of discipline is, that the sinner may be ashamed, and begin to repent of his turpitude...*that they might not become even more obstinate...*⁹

Do you see what Calvin is saying? It is for the honor of God...for the benefit of the body and for the benefit of the sinner.

Now in verse 6-13, Paul again turns to the Old Testament with an illustration about yeast or leaven.

^W^S^V **1 Corinthians 5:6**...Your boasting is not good. 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. 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. 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? ¹³ God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."

Now you can see that Paul finally focuses on a particular reason the Corinthians should expel this unrepentant sinner. It is because of the impact he will have on the holiness of the body. It is not that they are to disassociate from all sinners. For Paul, the exclusion of sinners from our presence of all sinners would mean we would have to go out of the world altogether. But if there are serious sins in the church, sins for which there is no repentance, we are obligated to separate from such individuals.

Paul makes that as clear as it can be at the end of verse 13.

"Purge the evil person from among you."

Now I am not saying that such actions are easy. We need to be careful...we need to be certain...but I trust that that does not mean we are to be too cowardly to do what the Bible demands. Still when we do what it says I think we can expect a negative response from the world...that we can expect the same kind of response that the London times offered when a thrice-convicted pedophile was asked to no longer attend church services.¹⁰

Let me set the scene for you for a moment. Michael Cope was 49 and he was a convicted pedophile. In his last appearance in the Crown Court he admitted that he was addicted to children. He had already served several sentences of imprisonment as a result of sexual assaults on young boys and he moved in church circles. In May, 1998, Sheffield Cathedral asked him...told him not to attend any further services. The London Times led with this banner, "**Cathedral Bars Pedophile.**" This is what the editorialist wrote:¹¹

The leper's bell tolls over Sheffield Cathedral. Its superstition towards the unclean is as medieval as its 15th-century stones. The decision to bar the convicted sex offender **Michael Cope** from churches in the South Yorkshire diocese is illogical, intolerant and unchristian. In the name of security, as protection against the dangerous outsider, a moral panic has been encouraged.

There are shades of Salem in this persecution.

The doors of God's house should be barred to no man, the redemptive power of his Gospel denied no one, however grievous his sin. Jesus chose to associate with outcasts to emphasize that His Father loved all men without distinction. It is the sin that is abhorrent, not the sinner. But that message seems lost on the Sheffield Pharisees.¹²

Now that is what the world thinks...that is that the only sin really grievous...is the sin of intolerance. The question is...whose opinion do we value most? Let's us pray to God that we judge the opinion of God more than the opinion of men.

¹ Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing: Grand Rapids, 1975), 15.

² Joseph A. Callaway, "Corinth" in *Review and Expositor* 57.04, 382.

³ Strabo, *Geography* (eds. H.C. Hamilton, Esq., W. Falconer, M.A.) 8.6.20.

⁴ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* in Baker Exegetical Commentary on the NT series (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, 2003), 155.

⁵ F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (The Attic Press, Inc.: Greenwood, S. C., 1971), 53-3. Bruce writes: "These references to Timothy's forthcoming visit, to be followed by one from himself, would be appropriate for the end of a letter. It is probable that Paul was indeed about to conclude this letter and dispatch it by the hand of a messenger when further news from Corinth arrived and made it necessary to dictate much more. This news, was brought, probably, by the bearers of the letter to which he replies in 7:1ff"

⁶ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC). (William B. Eerdmans Publishing: Grand Rapids, 2000), 381. He writes, "Although we enter a new major section of this epistle, a link readily emerges with 1:10-4:21 because "the man who committed the act of *πορνεία* in chapter 5 has contributed to community divisiveness (5:2, 6). The issue of his expulsion might serve to restore unity, although it also raises questions about community boundaries. However surprising it may seem in our more cerebral age, Paul appears more ready to tolerate "a mixed church" which includes those who have doctrinal problems about the resurrection (15:33-35 is addressed to people within the congregation) than to allow persistent immorality of a notorious kind to compromise the corporate identity of the community (5:5, 7, 13) Further, just as Mitchell identifies a continuing thread from 1 Corinthians 1-4 in terms of the welfare of the community and its unity, so Fee, followed by South, regards 5:1-13 and 6:1-20 as test cases for Paul's authority as it has been implicitly entailed in the allusions to apostleship, fatherhood, planting, coordinating building, and providing a model of cruciform gospel proclamation. In an earlier study I argued for a third link namely, between the "boasting" which was associated with "freedom from the law" and the realized eschatology of 4:5 and 8: 13,~ From a compositional point of view, various continuities of theme and argument emerge.

On the other hand, this chapter begins a second main block (or a third, if we count 1:1-9 as a block of material) or topic. Chapters 5 and 6 expound what for Paul constitute clear-cut moral and ethical issues. In this respect this main block stands in contrast to the material in 7:1–11:1, which no less concerns matter of ethics, hut in the latter case "grey areas" where much depends on situations and circumstances If 7:1–11:1 legitimate some form of "situation ethics," 5:1–6:20 demonstrate that certain moral principles stand above and be situational variables."

⁷ Thistleton, 388-9.

⁸ Cicero, (Loeb, Cluent. 61,237).

⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes* 4:12:3:2

¹⁰ I first learned about this particular situation from listening to an mp3 sermon by the Reverend David Turner of All Soul's, London May 1998. (All Soul's is the church where John Stott spent so many years). Rev. Turner preached a sermon on this passage entitled, "Where Do We Draw the Line?" As with most of the things at All Souls it is first-rate.

¹¹ This paragraph is virtually verbatim from Rev. Turner's sermon. I could not improve upon his words...nor did I wish to try.

¹² *The London Times*, May 8, 1998. The article continues, "The cathedral authorities are right to want to safeguard those children over whom they exercise a duty of care. Mr. Cope has sexually assaulted choirboys before, and every reasonable step should be taken to prevent any repetition of the offence. But must his name be anathematized in public and he be barred from every church in South Yorkshire? Might it not have been wiser to deal with this concern quietly by encouraging this man to attend the cathedral regularly? Priests who knew him could see that he did not offend again and might even lead him to redemption. Instead of ensuring that he could be kept out of trouble by good shepherds, the diocese is now considering circulating his particulars to other churches in neighboring dioceses. What could be better designed to cause parents fear, unsettle children and unbalance Mr. Cope?"

It is important, for the maintenance of the rule of law, that citizens feel the justice system ensures their security. If it is not seen to operate effectively and consistently, then respect for authority declines and vigilantism follows. Crimes which horrify, such as sexual offences against children, demand exemplary sentencing. But vigilantism is not only a consequence of authority abrogated, it can also be a consequence of authority irresponsibly exercised. For those with authority to demonize certain classes of criminal, and suggest that they, rather than their offences, are intrinsically repulsive, is to license witch-finders.

The fear of the unknown child abductor has a long history. The story of the Pied Piper and the demonization of Jews and Gypsies who snatched Christian babies from their parents attest to the depth of the fear. It is because that fear is so powerful that sensitivity is required in safeguarding children from sexual offenders. But the majority of sexual offences against children are committed by family members or close friends, not strangers. The security of children is not enhanced by engendering a climate of fear."