

Sexual Purity & Church Discipline

1. Sexual sins have been reported in the Corinth Church.

“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!” 1 Corinthians 5:1

- a. The problem with which Paul deals in chapter 5 is not just sexual immorality, but an extraordinary case of immorality, one not common even among the Gentiles.
 - i. No details are given about her current relationship with the member’s father. Were they still married or divorced? Was the father dead? Had the stepson married this woman? Or were they just living together?
- b. Historically, Corinth is known, among other things, for its sexual corruption. Thus sexual immorality was part of the Corinthians' pre-Christian lifestyle:

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, **10** nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. **11** And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

- c. And this lifestyle seems to have found its way into the church:

“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make *them* members of a harlot? Certainly not! **16** Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body *with her*? For “the two,” He says, “shall become one flesh.” **18** Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. **19** Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?” 1 Corinthians 6:15, 16, 18, 19

“lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced.” 2 Corinthians 12:21

2. **Having been informed of the incestuous relationship (v. 1), Paul directs the church to put the man out of their fellowship (v. 2). This directive is repeated 4 times more in the passage (vv. 4, 5, 7, 13), indicating the gravity of the matter.**

“And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.” 1 Corinthians 5:2

“But those who are outside God judges. Therefore ‘put away from yourselves the evil person.’ ” 1 Corinthians 5:13

3. **The Church was not able to discern what was the right decision to make.**

- a. Perhaps they felt proud over their understanding, loving, and graceful attitude toward the sinner, but that was immature.

“And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.” 1 Corinthians 5:2

“Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” 1 Corinthians 5:6

- b. It is common today for churches to make a similar mistake. They often quote passages like the woman caught in adultery.

“She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said to her, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.’ ” John 8:11

- i. This man was someone that professed to be a member in good and regular standing, while that woman caught in adultery didn’t.
- ii. That woman stood before Jesus broken and regretful, while this man had not experienced repentance—he lived as a regular member of the church with the support of the church.
 - Jesus could read her heart and see the repentance just as he could read the sins of those who accused her.
- iii. She accepted the invitation to “go and sin no more,” whereas this man continued to live as though nothing had happened.

4. **Paul explains how to discipline.**

“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.” 1 Corinthians 5:4, 5

- a. The decision to discipline someone must be from the church body and not an individual or even a group of people.
- b. The expression “deliver such a one to Satan” in Greek is “paradidomi” and in some contexts it has the metaphorical meaning of rejection and abandonment.

- i. In this verse it has the meaning of rejecting in the sense of disfellowshipping.

“Then God turned and **gave them up** to worship the host of heaven...” Acts 7:42

“Therefore God also **gave them up** to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves.” Romans 1:24

“Note also that verse 13 forms an inclusio with verse 2. This is to say, that what verses 2 and 13 state literally, verses 5 and 7 state figuratively. In any case, the incestuous man must be expelled from fellowship. Christ rules within the church, and Satan rules outside the church. If the sinner is expelled from church fellowship, he automatically finds himself in the sphere of Satan's operation.” Daniel Bediako, *Implications of 1 Corinthians 5:5*

“of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom **I delivered to Satan** that they may learn not to blaspheme.” 1 Timothy 1:20

- c. Paul explains to the Corinthians that they should not associate themselves with members of the church that are in open sexual sin acting as though this is normal.

“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. **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.” 1 Corinthians 5:9-11

5. Paul explains the purpose to discipline the individual that practiced sexual sins that have become public.

“deliver such a one to Satan [1] **for the destruction of the flesh**, [2] **that his spirit may be saved** in the day of the Lord Jesus.” 1 Corinthians 5:5

- a. The flesh and the spirit both represent the two opposite experience that someone may experience in his/her life.

“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill **the lust of the flesh**. For the **flesh** lusts against the **Spirit**, and the Spirit against the flesh; and **these are contrary to one another**, so that you do not do the things that you wish.” Galatians 5:16, 17

“For to be **carnally minded** *is* death, but to be **spiritually minded** *is* life and peace. **7** Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. **8** So then, those **who are in the flesh** cannot please God.” Romans 8:6-8

“[P]neuma [spirit] should be understood as the man's new nature in Christ, resulting from the destruction of his sarx [flesh]. Both terms are figurative, each referring to the whole, undivided being. They also correspond to Paul's old nature/new nature antithesis (2 Cor. 5:17; cf. Eph. 4:22). [...] ‘Flesh’ refers to the person oriented away from God and ‘spirit’ to the person oriented towards God.” Daniel Bediako, *Implications of 1 Corinthians 5:5*

- b. The expression “Olethros” or “the destruction” of the flesh signifies the denial of the sinful impulses of the human nature. In the case of this man his sexual impulses must be destroyed.
 - i. Paul uses figurative languages for the destruction of the sinful nature in other epistles, and therefore we cannot take “olethros sarkos” as meaning physical death:

“And those *who are* Christ’s have **crucified the flesh** with its passions and desires.” Galatians 5:24

“Therefore **put to death your members** which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” Colossians 3:5

“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.” Romans 6:6

“of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that **they may learn not to blaspheme**.” 1 Timothy 1:20

6. Reconcile the repented individual.

“So that, on the contrary, you *ought* rather to forgive and comfort *him*, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm *your* love to him.” 2 Corinthians 2:6-8

7. Summary:

- a. Among other sins, the sexual immorality of a believer contaminates not only the person, but also the church, the temple of God (vv. 6-8). Therefore, the church must not entertain such people (vv. 9-11).
- b. When such a grave sin comes to the notice of the church, the appropriate action must be taken immediately. This may include disfellowship (vv. 2, 5, 13).
- c. Church discipline is primarily remedial. The idea is not to send away an erring believer from the church. Rather, by expelling such a person from fellowship, the person may realize the gravity of sin and repent from it.
- d. Church discipline also purifies the church as the temple of God and protects it against contamination (vv. 6-8).
- e. The church must responsibly discipline an erring believer (vv. 2-5, 13).

- f. Church discipline is to be carried out by the whole congregation under the leading of the Holy Spirit (vv. 4, 5). In this way, personal sentiments are guarded.

Conclusion: The Holy Spirit uses the church's attitude of withdrawing its support to the individual in open sexual sin (attitude described metaphorically as “deliver to Satan”) as the means to awaken his conscious, which otherwise wouldn't be awakened if the church had remained indifferent.