

## For the Sake of the Body

### 1 Corinthians 5

**Intro:** Our family enjoys the Olympics and we've been watching them each evening for the past two weeks. The children have questioned the fairness of staggered starts and it's been a challenge to explain that the runners all run the same distance even though some of them start from farther back.

This is true at Heritage, at every church and particularly at Corinth. We all start at different places, and this does help explain why we mature at different paces. This may often explain our sinfulness, but it can never defend it. As we grow, we must all define sin in the same way and work together to eliminate it from our lives.

Paul first visited Corinth four years before his first letter. Chloe, a church member, and the church leadership had written to him about some of the difficulties at Corinth and 1 Corinthians is his first reply.

We will look at in greater depth next year but for now, we should know that the Corinthian culture was not a conducive soil for spiritual growth.

**Map** - Because of its location on the four-mile-wide isthmus separating the Mediterranean Sea and the Aegean Sea, Corinth became an important transit point for trade between Europe and Asia. This attracted the world to Corinth.

- It is hard to build a church in a leisure culture. Wealth makes us feel like gods.
- Corinthians worshiped Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, beauty, pleasure, and procreation.
- It also hosted the bi-annual, Isthmus Games, an international athletic context, second only to the Olympics and dedicated to the Greek god, Poseidon (See 1 Cor 9:24-27).

When Paul arrived, Corinth was the largest city in Greece, comprised of Greeks, Jews, Romans, Phoenicians, Phrygians and more.

All these culture influences –

- glorifying wisdom,
- promiscuity
- eating sacrificial animals,
- celebrating ecstatic utterances,
- and the denial of bodily resurrection

all negatively affected the church and Paul addresses them directly.

Every chapter discusses a different problem, except 12-14 which addresses the abuse of spiritual gifts.

### **First: The Two Sides of This Story. 1-5**

#### a) The Scandalous Behavior. 1

- 1) A man has "his father's wife."
- 2) Probably a stepmother, since Paul does not refer to her as the man's mother
- 3) Not a church member since Paul tells the church to expel only the man and not her as well (v 5, 13)
- 4) As permissive as Corinth was, incest was taboo, even for them – 1b
- 5) The verb tense in "has his father's wife" suggests an ongoing relationship.

#### b) The Shocking Response. 2

Paul is not only shocked by the man's behavior but also by the church's reaction to it. For Paul, it is both, this man's sin, *along with the community's failure to discipline him* that surprises him.

#### 1) The church was more than tolerant and seemed to boast about it. 2a

Compassion and tolerance are admirable qualities, particularly when a person is sorrowful and evidencing repentance. But ongoing immoral behavior should not be enabled or celebrated. There is no freedom in Christ to sin.

Romans 6:1-2 - *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?* <sup>2</sup> *By no means!* How can we who died to sin still live in it?

*Me genoito* = KJV = "God forbid!" = A double negative, the strongest possible negative in the Greek

- "Of course not!"
- "May it never be!"
- "By no means!"
- "Away with the notion!"
- "Perish the thought!"

#### 2) Paul is shocked that they aren't grieving. 2b

#### 3) He demands that they remove the man from their membership. 2c

## Second: The Redemptive Action. 3-5

- 1) The man should be judged. 3

*Kreono = to pronounce an opinion; to decree, to separate*

- 2) *The church has the authority to do so. 4*

**Matthew 18:15-20** - *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. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.*

- 3) *Deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the body. 5a*

Paul does not always react so strongly to sinning Christians. For example, in Galatians 6:1 he advises mature believers to restore a sinning brother “*in a spirit of gentleness,*” rather than hand him over to Satan.

- a) You are to deliver this man to Satan. 5a – let him go his own way

**Romans 1:24** - *Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves...*

- b) For the destruction of the flesh. 5b - sin has its own consequences.

This situation, however, probably does not mean that he will die, as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), but that the Satanic impulses and fleshly desires will be put to death. (CG Leaders, see notes). This is implied in Paul’s next statement -

- c) The purpose is redemptive. 5c

## Third: Explaining the Expulsion. 6-9

Paul compares the tolerance for ongoing sin in the church to yeast working its way through an entire batch of dough.

In Israel, yeast was scarce, and leaven was the popular alternative. Leaven was just an old piece of dough that had begun to ferment. When added to a new batch of dough, it spread its

fermentation throughout the whole loaf, making the bread lighter so that it would rise. But the longer the process continued, the greater the danger that the dough would become spoiled and even poisonous. If that happened, it all needed to be thrown away.

V 6a – Boasting about sin is not good

V 6b – The church has underestimated the effect of sin

V 7 – The only remedy is to clean the kitchen of leaven

V 7b – A reminder about the first Passover

V 8 – He compares

- leaven to malice and evil and
- unleaven as sincerity and truth

**Exodus 12:14-17 & 39-** *This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast. <sup>15</sup>Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. <sup>16</sup>On the first day you shall hold a holy assembly, and on the seventh day a holy assembly. No work shall be done on those days. But what everyone needs to eat, that alone may be prepared by you. <sup>17</sup>And you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day, throughout your generations, as a statute forever.... And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had brought out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, because they were thrust out of Egypt and could not wait...*

### Conclusion:

1 - This man's sin, along with the community's failure to censure him, broke the church's covenant responsibilities (cf. Lev 20.11; Deut 27.20) and spoiled their reputation in the community.

2 - This man was committing a type of sexual sin that even pagans detested.

*"Cicero substantiates Paul on this point, "And so mother-in-law marries son-in-law, with none to bless, none to sanction the union, and amid naught but general foreboding. Oh! to think of the woman's sin, unbelievable, unheard of in all experience save for this single instance!"*

- Quoted in South, *Disciplinary Practices*, 29. See 29-30 for more similar examples from Roman and Greek literature. Raymond Collins calls incest "the most universally recognized sexual tabu" (sic). *First Corinthians Sacra Pagina*. Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1999), 209.

3 – The man's sin and church's failure brought to the surface many of the deeper problems plaguing the church in Corinth. Paul quickly turns his attention to the fact that instead of mourning this man's sin and removing him from fellowship, they were "puffed up" with

pride—they had “an exaggerated self-conception” and their worldly wisdom that gave them a misunderstanding of the doctrine of the body and Christian sanctification.

**Application:**

- 1 - Sin is to be grieved over, and repented of, not celebrated.
- 2 – The church has the right and responsibility to effect discipline
- 3 - Discipline is to be redemptive, not punitive

**Community Groups:**

- 1 – Read the passage.
- 2 – What do you know about the Corinthian church?
- 3 – Talk about the population of Corinth and the population of the church
- 4 – Discuss some aspects of Corinthian culture.
- 5 – How had the culture infiltrated the church?
- 6 – What is Paul so surprised about in this passage?
- 7 – Talk about the man’s adultery/incest
- 8 – Discuss the church’s poor response
- 9 – What does Paul tell the church to do about this man and his sin?
- 10 – How do you define “Deliver this man to Satan”?
- 11 – How do you define “for the destruction of the body”?
- 12 – How do you define “so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord”?
- 13 – What is the point of Paul’s command?
- 14 – What is the purpose of Paul’s command?
- 15 – Do you know of a church or churches who practice this kind of discipline?
- 16 – How do you think such discipline effects church members?
- 17 – How do you think such discipline effects the church’s testimony?

### CG Leader Notes:

#### What is the Destruction of the Flesh?

What of the effects of “handing such a one over to Satan”? εἰς ὀλεθρον τῆς σαρκος immediately follows this injunction, which means “for (the) destruction of the flesh.” This phrase indicates the (at least hoped for) result of handing him over. The first of two basic interpretive options is a position many claim as the majority: Paul envisions this man’s literal death, or at least some type of physical suffering or harm. There are four arguments in favor of such a reading (which is often, though not always, linked to the curse interpretation of “hand such a one over to Satan”).

- 1 - it takes ὀλεθρος in its normal sense of destruction, ruin, or death.
- 2 - according to the Old Testament, this man (along with his mother-in-law) must be put to death (Lev 20.11), a penalty often associated with the expulsion injunction Paul quotes in verse 13 (cf. Deut 17.7).
- 3 - Satan is quite often associated with sickness and death, perhaps most notably in the case of Job (in Job 2.6, God allows Satan a measure of influence in Job’s life, which Satan exploits by, among other things, causing him physical pain).
- 4 - proponents of this approach point to important parallels: 1 Corinthians 11.30-32, where Paul sees some members’ sickness and death as consequences of misusing the Lord’s Table; 2 Corinthians 12.7, where a messenger of Satan tormented Paul via a “thorn in the flesh”; Acts 5.1-11, where God (apparently) strikes Ananias and Sapphira dead for lying to the church and testing the Spirit (Satan is said to have filled Ananias’s heart; 5.3). These instances produce a pattern wherein Satan is associated with physical suffering and death. In this case σαρξ (“flesh”) would refer to the man’s physical body, which is by no means out of the question lexically, for σαρξ enjoys a wide variety of possible meanings (for this one, cf. Gal 6.13). Even the instances where σαρξ (“flesh”) and πνευμα (“spirit”) are contrasted evidence a range of meaning rather than a standard usage from which Paul never deviates.

The second interpretive option understands εἰς ὀλεθρον τῆς σαρκος as referring to the destruction of this man’s sinfulness or, as Witherington puts it, his “sinful inclinations.” In this sense σαρξ refers not to the physical part of the man (as opposed to the immaterial), but “the whole self as perceived in terms of a specific aspect. Hence its ‘destruction’ can refer to the destruction of the particular aspects or qualities which the term denotes.” In this regard Anthony Thiselton calls attention to the difference between terms that are merely descriptive (“That dog is *big*.”) and terms that are both descriptive and evaluative (“That dog is *scary*.”). Words in the latter category not only describe a thing, but also offer a value judgment from a specific point of view (such as one’s fear of large dogs). As often in Paul, here σαρξ functions in this sense as an evaluative term: it refers to the whole man as he stands in relation to God, namely, as a rebellious sinner. This flesh is “man himself, in so far as he gives himself up to his own aims in opposition to God.” It is a colorful way of talking about eliminating sin.

How might this perspective answer the arguments of the physical suffering or death interpretation noted above?

1 - while *ολεθρος* normally refers to literal destruction, if Paul can speak of the flesh's *crucifixion* without having in mind a person's actual death (cf. Gal 5.24), there is no reason why he cannot similarly speak of its *destruction*. Moreover, according to the second interpretation the man is still in a real sense destroyed, just not in a physical sense.

2 - Jewish communities in Paul's day often reinterpreted OT death penalty injunctions along less severe lines.

3 - while Satan's association with physical suffering and/or death is prominent, it is by no means universal. Among other pursuits, Paul often identifies Satan with attempts to break down the church's unity and mutual pursuit of holiness (cf. 1 Cor 7.5; 2 Cor 2.11; 1 Thess 2.18).

4 - the "parallels" are too dissimilar to merit interpretive influence on this text. While Acts 5.1-11 and 1 Corinthians 11.30-32 are similar in that "people receive capital punishment for spiritual offences," in neither is there "any hint of a curse or solemn act of the assembled church."