

After rebuking the Corinthians for the divisions and pride that resulted from their idolizing preachers (1 Cor. 1:10-4:21), Paul now addresses the lack of disciplinary action concerning the sin of fornication that was occurring within the church. He will explain the dangers of tolerating sin in the church and instruct them in how they should deal with unrepentant believers in the church.

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1 It is reported commonly *that there is* fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife.

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**“It is reported commonly [wholly; altogether; universally] that there is fornication [sexual immorality] among you”** – Paul had become aware that it was common knowledge that there was sexual immorality being committed within the Corinthian church. How widely this report had gone is unclear, but obviously it had reached Paul, who may have been writing this epistle from Ephesus. Obviously, unbelievers all around Corinth were aware that this sin was present in the church.

**“and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles”** – Any type of fornication would have been bad enough, but the particular form of sexual immorality that was occurring was so egregious that even the Gentiles, whose moral behavior was unrestrained by God’s law, found it offensive. Paul described this sin as being “not so much as named among the Gentiles,” which implies that it was rare, if not unheard of, for even a Gentile to commit such an immoral act.

**“that one should have [to own; possess] his father's wife”** – What was this sin? That a man should “have” his father’s wife. It’s unclear if the word “have” meant that this man had married the woman who had been married (perhaps the widow) to his father, or if they were merely sleeping together. Whichever the case, this couple had crossed a moral line that Jews and Gentiles alike understood should never be crossed.

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2 And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.

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The Greek word translated “puffed up” means “to inflate” and has the metaphorical meaning of being proud. Paul says that their pride was preventing them from mourning over the sin being committed within their ranks. The Corinthians were proud of their supposed spirituality and did not want to admit that there was such a serious problem within the church. Their pride had motivated them to ignore the problem instead of being broken hearted over the sin, which would have motivated them to deal with the sin and its perpetrator. They valued their pride more than purity within the church.

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3 For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, *concerning* him that hath so done this deed,

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**“For I verily [truly], as absent in body, but present in spirit”** – Even though he is not physically present, Paul is about to instruct the Corinthians in what should be done concerning the man guilty of this egregious sin of fornication. He is “present in spirit,” making the same decision from a distance that he would have if he were there in person, because his heart is still with the Corinthians.

**“have judged [to make a determination between right and wrong] already, as though I were present”** – This judgment is not a violation of what Jesus said (**Matt. 7:1** “Judge not, that ye be not judged”), where Jesus was speaking of judging the motives of men’s hearts. Here, Paul is judging actions, which Jesus instructed us to do (**Matt. 7:20** “Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them”). Fornication is obviously wrong, especially when it is as extreme as in this case, and Paul had already made the determination of what should be done.

**“concerning him that hath so done this deed”** – The man was obviously guilty and the sin was extreme. It was giving the church a bad reputation, particularly since the Corinthians’ inaction gave the appearance that they were condoning this behavior.

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4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

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**“In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”** – This disciplinary action was being done under the authority and approval of the Lord Jesus Christ. Church discipline should always be done in accordance with scripture.

**“when ye are gathered together”** – This particular sin had public implications and so the disciplinary action was not to be done in secret. It was to be carried out publicly before the whole church.

**“and my spirit, with the power [dunamis: miraculous power] of our Lord Jesus Christ”** – In addition to the presence of the Corinthian believers, Paul would also be present in spirit, as well as the Lord Jesus Christ. Although the Greek word for “power” indicates miraculous power, the authority of Christ seems to be what is meant. The presence of Paul, Christ and the Corinthians implied the authority and approval of all parties, and was accomplished by the miraculous power of Jesus Christ.

**“To deliver [to hand over custody] such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh”** – The Greek word for “deliver” carries the idea of a judicial sentencing. When the guilty party was delivered to Satan, he would be removed from the protection of God so that Satan could destroy his physical body and life. This man, who was apparently unrepentant, was allowed to pursue his sin into the inevitable destruction that sin eventually causes.

**“that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus”** – Sometimes the most loving thing we can do for others is to allow them to reap the consequences of their sin. Always rescuing our children from the consequences of their actions deprives them of the opportunity to learn from their mistakes. Paul is instructing the Corinthians to allow this man to reap the consequences of his sin so that eventually those consequences might drive him to repentance. The day of the Lord Jesus refers to the judgment seat of Christ and this man would benefit on this day if he repented before he died. The disciplinary action instructed by Paul was not meant to destroy the man but to help him. Church discipline should always be an act of love and correction, not punishment.

6 Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? 7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:

**“Your glorying [boasting] is not good”** – Because of their pride (v. 2) the Corinthians were apparently boasting in their supposed spirituality. Ignoring the situation because they were too proud to admit that a problem existed was not a good course of action.

**“Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?”** – Leaven was a form of yeast that was allowed to ferment for a period of time and then mixed into fresh bread dough to enable it to rise when baked. It did not take a large amount of leaven to ferment the entire lump of dough, and so leaven is often used in the Bible as a picture of sin. Paul warns the Corinthians that the influence of even a small amount of sin can spread throughout the entire church.

**“Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump”** – Paul urges the Corinthians to remove this sin and its influence from their midst so that the church could be a “new lump” (a fresh lump of dough without leaven).

**“as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us”** – Christ’s intention for the church is that they be “unleavened” (without sin). The passover lamb, which was to be eaten with unleavened bread, was a picture of Christ’s sacrifice for us. When celebrating the Passover, the Jews were to remove all leaven from their houses, symbolizing the removal of sin. Since Christ is our passover lamb, we are to perpetually purge sin from our lives in celebration of the fact that He bore our sins on the cross.

8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

**“Therefore let us keep the feast”** – The OT Jews celebrated the Passover feast once a year, but the church should celebrate Christ our Passover continually, keeping the “feast” in a figurative sense.

**“not with old leaven”** – Not with the sins of our old life before we came to Jesus Christ for salvation. “Old leaven” may also refer to sin in general (v. 7) since “old leaven” was older than fresh dough due to being allowed to ferment for a period of time.

**“neither with the leaven of malice [ill-will] and wickedness [evil purposes and desires]”** – Not with ill-will toward each other (likely a reference to their pride and divisions over which preacher was their favorite – 1 Cor. 1:10-12). Neither with evil purposes and desires in their heart, perhaps also a reference to the divisions and strife within the church.

**“but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth”** – Genuine and honest expressions of God’s love for one another.

9 I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: 10 Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world.

**“I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators”** – Paul had written a prior letter to the Corinthians that we do not have, which God obviously did not want that letter included in our Bible. In this letter, Paul had advised the Corinthians to limit the amount of time they spent around fornicators so that they would not be influenced by their sin.

**“Yet not altogether [not at all] with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters”** – No doubt the Corinthian believers must have been surrounded by such people because the city was known for its immoral nature. After reading Paul’s first letter to them, the Corinthians apparently had misunderstood and begun avoiding contact with unsaved people.

**“for then must ye needs go out of the world”** – Paul points out the impracticality of that practice and informs them that avoiding contact with the unsaved was not what he meant since the only way to avoid all contact with sinful unsaved people would be to leave the earth completely. God has left the church in the world in order to spread the gospel to the unsaved, not to segregate ourselves like monks in a monastery.

11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.

Paul clarifies the instruction from his previous letter, stating that the instruction was concerning those who claimed to be a brother in Christ and yet had unrepentant sins in their life, such as fornication, covetousness (greed), idolatry, being a railer (reviler), drunkenness, or extortion (to steal by violence). Even eating a meal with such people implied fellowship, acceptance and that their behavior was condoned. The Corinthians were to avoid any appearance that such sins were acceptable within the church.

12 For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? 13 But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.

**“For what have I to do to judge them also that are without [outside]?”** – To support his assertion that his previous letter did not say that they should avoid unsaved people, Paul asks rhetorically what authority did he have to judge people who are outside of the church?

**“do not ye judge them that are within?”** – The church also did not have the authority to judge the unsaved, but they were authorized to judge those within the church. They have the authority and the duty to protect the purity of the church by withholding fellowship from those who are unrepentant of their sin.

**“But them that are without God judgeth”** – The church has no authority to discipline those outside the church nor can we judge their hearts. God alone has the authority to judge these people and they are accountable only to Him.

**“Therefore put away [remove] from among yourselves that wicked person”** – Paul quotes from Deut. 17:7, a passage describing the stoning of people who had committed a capital offense in order to purge the sin from Israel (“The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put the evil away from among you”). Paul is not advocating the stoning of the man mentioned in vs. 1-5, but rather the removal of the man from their fellowship until such time that he repents. Most commentators believe that 2 Cor. 2:1-10 refers to this man’s repentance, where Paul urges the Corinthians to forgive the man and receive him back into their fellowship.