

FIRST CORINTHIANS

Chapter 5

Sexual Immorality Defiles the Church

5 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. 2 And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. 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. 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.”

After his critique of factionalism (chapters 1–4), Paul seems at first sight to be making an abrupt transition to an entirely new problem, a case of sexual immorality. However, there is a close link between the Corinthians' factionalism and their tolerance of immorality, as two Greek words help make plain. The first is *πεφουσιωμένοι* (“you are puffed up”) in 5:2. Just as the root of the faction-fighting lay in their tendency to boast in people (3:21) and become “puffed up” (4:6, 18, 19), so this extraordinary case of immorality had flared up and continued to fester because of the same tendency. It cried out for the application of the fatherly rod (4:21). Again, as Paul had said about factionalism in chapter 1–4, healing could come only through the word of the cross (5:7b). (CC)

The second linking word is *δύναμις*, “power,” in 5:4. Paul had chided the Corinthians for their love of empty talk, and their failure to live by the power of the Gospel. The kingdom of God is characterized by power, not talk. Now he calls on them to let “the *power* of our Lord Jesus” be demonstrated in their midst (5:4) through the proper exercise of church discipline.(CC)

Whether the apostle's impending visit to Corinth will be with a stick or with love (4:21) will depend in part on the Corinthians' response to his demand for appropriate action. It seems he has already written to them about their associations with immoral people (5:9), so it is high time they responded in “obedience of faith” (Rom 1:5; 16:26; cf. 2 Cor 7:15; 10:5–6) with actions befitting those who had been “sanctified in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 1:2). (CC)

Ch 5 “Truly Christian excommunication, is this: Open and hard-hearted sinners are not admitted to the Sacrament and other communion of the Church until they amend their lives and avoid sin” (SA III IX). (TLSB)

The case of the incestuous man may have been brought to Paul’s attention by Chloe’s people, who were the source of his information about the factions (1:11). But if so, it is unlikely they were his only informants; the case seems to have become notorious, even in a culture accustomed to rampant immorality. (CC)

5:1 *actually*. ὅλως—According to BAGD, the adverb ὅλως can mean “generally speaking,” “actually,” or “everywhere.” The related adjective, ὅλος, means “whole, entire, complete” (BAGD). The adverb occurs four times in the NT. In Mt 5:34, with the negative μή, it means “not at all” (“do not swear at all”). Apparently, the abuses at Corinth were an open secret.” This is also the understanding of KJV, “It is reported commonly,” and the Living Bible, “Everyone is talking about the terrible thing that has happened. (CC)

reported – Perhaps from Chloe’s people (1:11). The sudden change in tone and topic suggests the report has just been received. (TLSB)

It is noteworthy that Paul does not begin by excoriating the offender. What concerns him even more than the individual’s sin is the congregation’s attitude to it. Thus he indicts the congregation as a whole: “It is commonly reported that there is sexual immorality among *you*” (“you,” ὑμῖν, is plural, 5:1) and *you*, instead of acting to stop this cancer from spreading, are “puffed up” (5:2) and boastful (5:6). His chief concern, clearly, is for the whole body of Christ in Corinth. If all parts of the body had shown proper concern for one another (12:25), they would not have let this matter fester. (CC)

The sexual immorality which had now come “inside” the congregation was, of course, endemic in the Greco-Roman world “outside.” (Paul will have more to say on the subject in 1 Cor 6:9–20.) Demosthenes could say, “Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of the body, but wives to bear us legitimate children.” The word πορνεία, “sexual immorality” (5:1), included all kinds of extramarital sins, including homosexuality. Whereas the Jewish people, following the OT, condemned adultery, fornication, homosexuality, and other sexual aberrations, the pagan world, and in particular the Greeks, were known for their laxity. Thus Paul had to pay special attention to this issue in his letters to Gentile churches (cf. Eph 5:3–13; Col 3:5–7; 1 Thess 4:1–8). πορνεία, “sexual immorality,” is the first among “the works of the flesh” listed in Gal 5:19–21, not because Paul was obsessed with the sexual problems in the churches, but because those problems were so endemic. Our epistle testifies that in Corinth the believers had come out of a pagan background characterized by πορνεία, and that many were tempted to revert to former patterns. (CC)

Sexual immorality. πορνεία—The words πορνεία, πορνεύω, πόρνη, πόρνος were derived from πέρνημι, “to sell,” especially of slaves. A πόρνη is a “harlot for hire,” a “prostitute.” (CC)

not ... even among pagans. The Roman orator Cicero states that incest was practically unheard of in Roman society. (CSB)

has. ἔχειν—Literally, the present infinitive means “to keep having.” This is not a “one-night stand,” but an ongoing sexual relationship. The relationship would be sinful even if it were a one-time event, but the prolonged duration aggravates the damage to the church and its reputation among unbelievers. (CC)

But as accustomed as they were to sexual transgressions, even pagans would have been horrified by the kind of sin being perpetrated in Corinth. The Roman statesman Cicero commented on the marriage of a woman with her son-in-law:

And so mother-in-law marries son-in-law, with none to bless, none to sanction the union, and amid nought but general foreboding. Oh! to think of the woman's sin, unbelievable, unheard of in all experience save for this single instance! To think of her wicked passion, unbridled, untamed! To think that she did not quail, if not before the vengeance of Heaven, or the scandal among men, at least before the night itself with its wedding torches. (CC)

Greco-Roman law as laid down in the Institutes of Gaius (1.63) stipulated: "Neither can I marry her who has aforesaid been my mother-in-law or step-mother, or daughter-in-law or step-daughter." The standard punishment was *relegatio ad insulam* ("banishment to an island"). (CC)

The Torah also regarded sexual relations with the wife of one's father as obscene ("uncovering nakedness," לְגִלוֹת עֶרְוָה, Lev 18:6), adding that both parties were to be executed. The Mishnah laid down that the sentence was to be carried out by stoning. (CC)

The Corinthian case involved a member of the congregation who was living with a woman who apparently was his stepmother. He may have been a man of high social status, which made the congregation hesitant to correct him.³⁷ Whether he was seducing her under his father's nose, or whether the father was dead or divorced, is not known to us. Presumably the woman was not a Christian, or Paul would have commanded her expulsion as well. This is apparent from chapter 7, where his instructions on marriage matters are given to men and women alike. (CC)

Paul sharply rebukes the church for tolerating the incestuous relationship. "And you are puffed up!" he exclaims (5:2). It seems the Corinthians were priding themselves on their openness, broadmindedness, and tolerance (their "inclusiveness," in modern parlance), and specifically with regard to this case. They thought they were practicing and celebrating their Christian freedom in the Spirit; after all, they reasoned, "all things are in my power" (6:12). Hays draws the connection to the modern church scene:

In our time, too, we have within the church people claiming that their newly attained enlightenment or wisdom sets them free *precisely as Christians* to disregard the teachings of Scripture and tradition on moral issues (not just sexual conduct but other matters as well, such as possessions and the use of violence). They boast in their liberated transgression of what they regard as outmoded norms. (CC)

But the Corinthians' behavior was totally inappropriate. Rather than being puffed up, this sorry development should have sent them into mourning (5:2). Rather than taking the attitude that the man's sin was within Christian liberty, or was his private business, they should have called for congregation-wide contrition and confession, along the lines of the prayers of national confession in Ezra 9, Nehemiah 9, and Daniel 9: "O Lord, ... we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly. ... To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us belongs the shame of face" (Dan 9:4-5, 7). For it was as if one of their number had died. His faith had suffered a complete shipwreck, and the congregation should mourn his loss and their shared responsibility for his loss. (CC)

Furthermore, their grief should have led "to corresponding action": they should have removed the man from their fellowship. But the congregation had succumbed to a superficial, secular view of the Christian faith, without a sufficient sense of the enormity of sin, the need for repentance, and the holiness of God. They had failed to grasp that the Gospel of Christ's crucifixion for their sins teaches Christians to crucify their proud egos (Gal 5:24), leave behind their former way of life, and, as people "sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor 1:2), follow him in the way of the cross. (CC)

his father's wife. That this expression was used rather than “his mother” suggests that the woman was his stepmother. The OT prohibited such a marriage (Lev 18:8; Dt 22:30; 27:20). (CSB)

Probably not incest, because she is not referred to as his mother, but relations with a stepmother, forbidden in Lv 18:8. Greek and Roman culture also rejected the practice, specifically in the Institutes of Gaius 1.63. (TLSB)

γυναῖκα ... τοῦ πατρός—This expression refers to a woman other than the offending person's mother, a second or later wife of his father. Cf. Lev 18:8. If the woman was the man's mother, most likely Paul would have described her as such. (CC)

5:2 *arrogant.* Evidently proud of their liberty, which became license—a distortion of grace. (CSB)

The same verb as “puffed up” in 4:6. Conceit was to openly flaunt shameful behavior. (TLSB)

rather to mourn - As over spiritual death. (TLSB)

removed from among you.. Excommunicated from the church (cf. Jn 9:22). (CSB)

Excommunicated. The sinner has damaged the Church's fellowship. He must be removed. (Cf Mt 18:8.). (TLSB)

With an emphatic ἐγώ (“I”), Paul contrasts himself with the Corinthians—“you” who are “puffed up” (5:2). “Regardless of your attitude,” he is saying, “it is obvious to me that the incestuous man should have been removed.” Although physically absent from Corinth, their spiritual father (4:14–15) is still present among them in spirit and demands a hearing (cf. Col 2:5). In saying he is present in spirit, Paul does not mean merely that his thoughts are with them. Rather, in the power of the Spirit he is actually present among them (see further below). And, “as one who is present” (1 Cor 5:3), he has already rendered his decision concerning the guilty man. (CC)

5:3 *absent in body I am present in the spirit* – Paul still presides at Corinth. His authority and pastoral concern are undiminished. (TLSB)

pronounced judgment – This is a practical decision about immoral behavior. Only God can condemn the sinner eternally. (TLSB)

κέκρικα—The perfect tense indicates that Paul has already judged the case and issued the verdict. (CC p. 163)

5:4 *assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus.* The Corinthians are to pass judgment on the man by the authority of the Lord Jesus. (CSB)

At worship, where the Lord promises to be present (Mt 18:20). This is a gathering of all members, not just a household congregation, because worship is the activity of the whole Church. (TLSB)

The apostle states his verdict: “In the name of our Lord Jesus ... to hand over such a fellow to Satan” (5:4–5). As argued in the textual note, the phrase “in the name of our Lord Jesus” is linked grammatically to the infinitive at the beginning of 5:5a, “to hand over.” The congregation will be taking a powerful step, not by any arbitrary exercise of authority, but in the name of the Lord of the church, who is present among them (Mt 18:15–20; cf. Titus 3:10). (CC)

the power of our Lord Jesus is present. Jesus' power is present through his word and sacraments, the means by which the Holy Spirit works. (CSB)

Under the authority of the One named. (TLSB)

Paul now sets out the circumstances under which this step is to be taken: the congregation is to assemble, and Paul's spirit will be with them together with the power of the Lord Jesus. And all this is to take place "in the name of our Lord Jesus" (1 Cor 5:4a). While this prepositional phrase may not seem to have a direct grammatical link with the rest of 5:4 (the genitive absolute), by virtue of its position it indicates that everything which follows—their assembling, the presence of Paul's spirit with the power of Jesus, and the decision to hand the man over to Satan—will happen in Jesus' name. (CC)

my spirit is present. Representatives can carry out his administrative duties; therefore, Paul is with them in spirit. (TLSB)

As the authorized representative of the Lord Jesus, and on the basis of the OT Scriptures, Paul has already made his pastoral decision. But he does not proceed unilaterally; he enlists the full participation and cooperation of the local church. The congregation is to be fully instructed and of one mind with the apostle so as to carry out his decision. Thus pastor and people are to act in concert. (CC)

Presiding in the congregational gathering will be Paul's own spirit "with the power of our Lord Jesus" (5:4). Paul's spirit is now under the powerful influence of the Spirit of Jesus. The Holy Spirit inspired the OT Scriptures, and that same Spirit is now inspiring Paul as he follows the OT Scriptures and composes a book of the NT Scriptures. The directive he is writing to the Corinthians is not just his own opinion; it is the will of God. When his epistle is read to the assembled congregation, the Spirit, who inspired Paul's writing, will be at work "with the power of our Lord Jesus" (5:4; cf. Rom 1:1–5, which connects the sacred Scriptures, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the power of the Spirit, and the apostle's ministry). Paul would, of course, expect his whole letter to be read to the congregation in due course. But on the day they assembled to hear this case, he probably deemed it sufficient for the lector to read chapter 5. Thus they would be hearing Paul's voice. His spirit would truly be present with them, speaking with the apostolic authority the Lord Jesus had vested in him. The power of the risen Lord Jesus will be brought to bear on the congregation and its problem through the reading of the dominical and apostolic Word. (CC)

5:5 *hand this man over to Satan.* Abandon this sinful man to the devil that he may afflict the man as he pleases. This abandonment to Satan was to be accomplished, not by some magical incantation, but by expelling the man from the church (see v. 13; also vv. 2, 7, 11). To expel him was to put him out in the devil's territory, severed from any connection with God's people. (CSB)

Paul's verdict is that the man should be delivered to Satan (cf. 1 Tim 1:20). Since the man's attitude has been thoroughly worldly, it is only fitting that he return to the world, which lies in the grip of the evil one (1 Jn 5:19; cf. Eph 2:12; Col 1:13). He will not be permitted to mingle with the saints, eat with them, or receive the Lord's Supper with them. (CC)

the destruction of the flesh. So that being officially ostracized from the church will cause the man such anguish that he will repent and forsake his wicked way. For an alternative interpretation see NIV text note. In the latter view, Satan is allowed to bring physical affliction on the man, which would bring him to repentance. (CSB)

By this drastic measure, the apostle hopes to bring about "the destruction of the flesh" (5:5). Since at least Tertullian (ca. A.D. 150–220) and Chrysostom (ca. 345–407), many scholars have understood this

“destruction” as some form of physical punishment. The reference to Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:5–10) in the margin of NA²⁷ assumes such an interpretation. Scholars have also appealed to 1 Cor 11:29–32 (where some of the Corinthians suffered sickness and even death because of their failure to discern the Lord’s body in the Lord’s Supper); Acts 13:8–11 (the blinding of Elymas); 2 Cor 12:7 (Paul’s thorn in the flesh—“a messenger of Satan”); and Job 2:6–7 (where Satan is permitted to harm Job’s body). (CC)

However, it is by no means obvious that Paul has physical punishment in mind. The Ananias and Sapphira story can hardly be relevant. If the incestuous man were to die suddenly, that would preclude any opportunity for him to be led to repentance and salvation, which is the apostle’s ultimate purpose. The afflictions of those who despised the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:29–32) may, at first glance, seem to be a closer parallel. But one significant difference is that Paul deals with the incestuous man as an unbeliever, while the Corinthians who partook of the Lord’s Supper were Christians who needed to examine themselves, but who were not to be excluded from the Supper. Another difference is that whereas in the case of the incestuous man Paul is giving directions for future congregational action and indicating what he hopes this will do for the ultimate welfare of the congregation and the man himself, in the case of the Lord’s Supper he is analyzing the Lord’s judgments “after the fact.” (CC)

More important, in interpreting Paul’s theology one is not bound to interpret the word “*flesh*” in physical terms in every instance. As BAGD, s.v. σάρξ, 7, says, “in Paul’s thought esp[ecially], the *flesh* is the willing instrument of sin. . . . the bearer of sinful feelings and desires.” Our flesh has its “works,” the first being sexual immorality (πορνεία), then “impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like” (Gal 5:19–21). Christian people are expected to “crucify the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal 5:24). This was what the incestuous man had not done. Paul hoped that the man’s expulsion from the community would be such a shock to his fleshly pride (1 Cor 5:2; cf. 2 Thess 3:14) that, like the prodigal son (Lk 15:11–32), he would come to his senses and seek God’s grace and forgiveness. Then the apostle’s purpose would have been achieved: the man’s spirit would be saved on the Last Day. This restoration of the sinner will always be the chief purpose of the evangelical practice of church discipline. (CC)

his spirit may be saved. Cf. 3:15. The reason he is expelled is that he might repent and be saved. (CSB)

The Law and guilt will drive this man to repentance. (TL SB)

day of the Lord. When Christ returns (see 1:7). (CSB)

Judgment Day. (TL SB)

5:6 The congregation should have been ashamed of the incestuous relationship in their midst (1 Cor 5:1), instead of crowing about it. Their pride in their openness and tolerance was “not good” (5:6). It was not edifying or constructive, not conducive to the church’s welfare. Proud as they were of their knowledge, they should have known better. They needed to be reminded of the proverb, “a little leaven leavens the whole batch” (5:6). In Galatians (5:9) Paul uses the same proverb to warn a church that has been infiltrated by the leaven of the Judaizers that a little legalism can completely overthrow the Gospel. Here his concern again is with a failure to understand the Gospel of Christ crucified and with the arrogance to which such ignorance leads. Allowing this man to continue in the congregation’s midst was like allowing a boil or ulcer to keep festering and poisoning the body. Later Paul will quote the poet Menander, “Evil associations corrupt good habits” (15:33). The congregation needs to come to its senses. Its present conduct indicates a lack of knowledge of God (15:34). (CC)

In a telling manner, Hays draws the implications for the contemporary church:

We have somehow deluded ourselves into believing that the “caring” thing to do is to be infinitely nonjudgmental and inclusive. This is quite simply a demonic lie, for it allows terrible cancerous abuses to continue unchecked in the community. Do we not know that a little cancer corrupts the whole body? Surgery is necessary; clean out the cancer so that the body may be whole. (CC)

a little leaven... the whole lump. To illustrate Christian holiness and discipline, Paul alludes to the prohibition against the use of leaven (or yeast) in the bread eaten in the Passover Feast (see Ex 12:15). Leaven in Scripture usually symbolizes evil or sin, and the church here is called on to get rid of the yeast of sin (v. 8) because they are an unleavened batch of dough—new creations in Christ (2Co 5:17). (CSB)

A small amount of leavened dough was mixed with new dough so the yeast could spread. Cf Mk 8:15. (TLSB)

In a culture in which bread was the staple food, everyone knew how a little leaven (fermented dough, “sourdough”) would permeate a batch of flour, causing it to swell and rise, ready for baking (cf. Mt 13:33). At the same time, this powerful ingredient, so useful in baking, also came to symbolize evils which had the power to spread. Jesus used the word “leaven” to characterize the teaching and practices of Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herod Antipas, which threatened to corrupt the body of believers (Mt 16:6, 11–12; Mk 8:15). It is this negative sense that the term carries in the present context. Perhaps there is a connection between Paul’s accusation that some in the church had become “puffed up” (φουσιόω, 1 Cor 4:6, 18–19; 5:2) and the image of bread rising and expanding as it fills with small bubbles. (CC)

The symbol of leaven as infectious evil probably is rooted in the exodus deliverance of Israel from Egypt, when the Israelites ate unleavened bread by necessity (Ex 12:34–39). God commanded that they celebrate their redemption by eating only unleavened bread at the Passover meal. They were to throw out all leaven, so that no leaven could be found in their houses during the time of the Passover and the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Ex 12:8–20; 13:3–7; Deut 16:3–4). This was such a vital part of membership in the people of God that disobedience would lead a person to be “cut off” from Israel (Ex 12:15, 19). Paul’s command to expel the immoral man from God’s people and hand him over to Satan (1 Cor 5:5) should be understood with that OT background. Significant too is that God commanded that certain sacrifices and offerings to him must not include yeast or leaven or leavened bread. (CC)

5:7 *cleanse out the old leaven.* Perhaps refers to the Passover custom of sweeping all the (leavened) bread crumbs out of one’s house before preparing the Passover meal. (CSB)

Jesus removed all traces of leaven (sin) at Passover, so the congregation must remove all vestiges of the old carnal world (v 8). (TLSB)

Paul moves naturally from the proverb about leaven to imagery from Israel’s great Passover history. The imperative ἐκκαθάρατε, “clean out” (1 Cor 5:7), emphasizes the need for decisive action in removing every last bit of the old leaven of sin from the community, just as the Israelites cleansed their homes of leaven on Passover Eve. Failure to obey the injunction to clean out the leaven carried the penalty of excommunication (Ex 12:15, 19). The thoroughness with which the Jews of his day carried this out was described by Chrysostom: “They so carefully clear their houses of leaven, and pry into mouse-holes.” (CC)

Removal of the old leaven will make it possible for the Corinthians to be a fresh, new batch of dough. Paul’s call for renewal of the congregation has parallels in his appeal to Christians to put off the old man and, by the renewal of their minds (Rom 12:1–2), to put on the new (2 Cor 5:17; Eph 4:22–24). In other words, he is instructing the Corinthian church: “Manifest the holiness of your new life in Christ! As

people living under the cross, don't shrink from the painful task of drawing a line of separation between yourselves and someone hardened in unrepentance! Clean out from your fellowship this man who refuses to grieve over—and turn from—his sin!" The imperative and the following subjunctive ("*Clean out* the old leaven, so that *you may be* a new batch") rest on the Gospel indicative "just as *you are* unleavened" (1 Cor 5:7). Harrisville queries the appropriateness of the "age-old discussion of the 'imperative' as 'growing out of' the indicative." Since "Corinth had been made new," he argues, "it had been seized by a dynamic which would inevitably hasten toward its goal." But, if that were true, why would the immoral situation have arisen in the church, and why would Paul need to issue his command to remedy the problem? Harrisville's approach deprives the imperative ἐκκαθάρατε ("clean out") of any meaning. Certainly, the Christian, insofar as he is a new person in Christ, is led by the Spirit to do what is right. But he remains *simul justus et peccator*, "simultaneously saint and sinner," and his sinful nature still needs to hear the imperative. Also, the new person in Christ needs the instruction of the Word to be led by the Spirit, since the Spirit works through the Word to guide the Christian's life. (CC)

Complacency about sin is incompatible with the Gospel. The purity of the Corinthian community in the future, as in the past, results from the work of God, whose commands and promises lead to repentance, faith in the forgiveness of sins, and the new life in Christ. The immoral man cannot be part of God's community until he is led to repentance, faith, and new life. By a deeper appreciation of what God has done for them in Christ, making them "unleavened" (5:7) by the power of the Gospel, they will recognize that "leaven" (5:6–7) is foreign to them and must be expelled. Their community life will be renewed "by the power of our Lord Jesus" (5:4), and their walk and ways (cf. 4:16–17) will better reflect who they *are* by grace: "God's saints," his holy temple, the dwelling-place of his Spirit (1:2; 3:16–17; 6:11). (CC)

new lump – New creation in Christ (2Co 5:17). (TLSB)

Paul proceeds to lay out the Gospel basis for their standing as a new community, cleansed from "the old leaven" (5:7). This came about as a result of God fulfilling his promise to send Jesus, the Passover Lamb, to be sacrificed on Calvary. The NT portrays Jesus as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29, 36; see also the "Lamb having been slain" in Rev 5:6, 12; 13:8). In a similar fashion to Paul, Peter in his first epistle grounds an appeal to "be holy in all your conduct" on the Gospel of redemption "by the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Pet 1:14–19). Trust in "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2; see also 1:23) had made the Corinthians a community of repentant sinners who lived under the cross. They had "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb" (Rev 7:14). Such a community could not tolerate in its fellowship an arrogant person who showed open contempt for the Gospel by his unwillingness to repent and look for forgiveness to Christ crucified. The man's "puffed up" (1 Cor 5:2) indifference to the gravity of his offense and its effect on the community was incompatible with his status as a new man in Christ. (CC)

The crucified Christ, then, is the basis for the congregation's holiness. With the fulfilled Passover now in effect through the death of the Lamb of God, "no uncleanness dare interrupt the already inaugurated worship. The significance of this point for Paul's argument is crucial—when the lamb has been *etuthe* (sacrificed), then a new order, a new state of affairs exists, which dare not be contravened." (CC)

you really are unleavened. They were a new batch, already sanctified in God's sight (see 1:2; 6:11), but Paul calls on them to become holy also in conduct. (CSB)

Christ, our Passover lamb. In his death on the cross, Christ fulfilled the true meaning of the Jewish sacrifice of the Passover lamb (Isa 53:7; Jn 1:29). Christ, the Lamb of God, was crucified on Passover day, a celebration that began the evening before when the Passover meal was eaten (cf. Ex 12:8). (CSB)

has been sacrificed – Christ's sacrifice delivered His people from death. (TLSB)

5:8 *let us...celebrate the Festival.* Keeping the Feast of Unleavened Bread (which followed Passover) symbolizes living the Christian life in holy dedication to God (cf. Ro 12:1–2; 1Pe 2:5) and not getting involved in such sins as malice and wickedness and incestuous marriages. (CSB)

Not the annual Passover, but every Eucharist that proclaims the Lord’s death (11:26). (TLSB)

Paul draws his conclusion (5:8). He exhorts the Corinthians to keep celebrating the fulfilled Passover inaugurated by Christ’s crucifixion. Every day is now an Easter! The best commentary comes from Chrysostom: “It is festival, therefore, the whole time in which we live. ... [Paul is] pointing out that the whole of time is a festival unto Christians, because of the excellency of the good things which have been given.”¹⁷ With heartfelt thankfulness we will continually celebrate God’s forgiveness and respond to his grace by holy living. (CC)

ἐορτάζωμεν—The present subjunctive implies ongoing celebration. (CC p. 172)

sincerity and truth – Morally pure character, brought about by repentance and forgiveness. (TLSB)

As it celebrates the new life in Christ, the church should no longer be infected by “the old leaven” (5:7–8) of arrogance. Nor should it feature “malice and wickedness” (5:8), two generic words for all kinds of sin, including sexual immorality, greed, idolatry, and the other sins listed in 5:10–11. Rather, the new life in Christ should feature the fresh, unleavened bread “of sincerity and truth” (5:8). For the Corinthians this would mean not only a greater appreciation for sincere and truthful preaching and teaching, rather than being impressed by style (a major issue in chapters 1–4), but also a greater concern for sincere and truthful living—the chief issue here. (CC)

In 5:9–11 Paul is concerned first of all with sexual immorality. As he will explain in 6:18 sexual sins are especially serious because they involve one’s own body in such an intimate way. For that reason, sexual sins are sins against one’s own body (6:18). A person thereby degrades and defiles himself. Paul states in the strongest possible terms that the sexually immoral, including adulterers and homosexuals, simply will not inherit the kingdom of God (6:9–11; see further the commentary there). Sexual promiscuity and perversion constitute spiritual harlotry, and a person who persists in defiling himself or herself in this manner cannot remain part of the church, which is the pure, virgin bride of Christ. Such a person is “outside” the kingdom (5:12–13; see further below). (CC)

5:9 *I have written you in my letter.* Paul here may be clarifying a previous letter (one not preserved) which the Corinthians mistook to mean that, on separating from sin, they should disassociate themselves from all immoral persons, including non-Christian people. Or this verse may begin, “I am writing you,” since the Greek verb here is the same as in v. 11, where it is so translated (and there would be no previous letter, now lost). In either case Paul means that they should separate from immoral persons in the church who claimed to be Christian brothers (vv. 10–11). (CSB)

Earlier, unknown correspondence. (TLSB)

associate – Gathering in congregational fellowship. (TLSB)

5:10 Immoral company, especially evident in Corinth, could not be avoided. Members could still carry on business relations. (TLSB)

Paul hastens to add some clarification (5:10). It is not unlikely that the Corinthians had disregarded or misinterpreted the instructions of the previous epistle. When something is stated briefly in a letter, there is

always the danger of misinterpretation, especially when the recipients are not well-disposed toward the writer.¹⁵ In this case, we can imagine that the Corinthians argued that Paul’s directions were unrealistic: “How can we live in the real world and not have anything to do with sexually immoral people? How can we avoid them altogether in the marketplace, the workshop, and the sports arena?” Paul explains that “by no means” (5:10) was it his intention to forbid Christians from *all* contact and associations with the sexually immoral people *in this world*—nor, for that matter, “the greedy and rapacious” nor the “idolaters” (5:10) in this world. Of course he understood that it was impossible in a fallen world to avoid associating with such people. When he wrote that previous epistle, it was not at all his intention to urge withdrawal into a ghetto or hermitage. He realized that if the Corinthians were not to associate *at all* with sexually immoral, greedy, and idolatrous people, they “would have to go out of the world” (5:10). Rather, his stricture applies to fellowship *within the church*. People whose public lifestyles are contrary to the will of God are to be removed from the church’s fellowship. (CC)

Greedy...By “the greedy” (τοῖς πλεονέκταις) Paul means those who are covetous, who continually want to have (ἔχω) more (πλέον) than they have. Jesus had warned his disciples to beware of all covetousness (Lk 12:15). Covetousness was and is one of the main characteristics of the pagan world. Likewise, “the rapacious” (or “swindlers”) belonged together with the “unrighteous” and the “adulterous” people of this world (Lk 18:11); they would not inherit God’s kingdom (1 Cor 6:10). Jesus called false prophets “rapacious” wolves (Mt 7:15). (CC)

Finally, Paul mentions “the idolaters” (1 Cor 5:10), with whom this world is filled. These too will not inherit the kingdom (6:9). This reference to idolaters prepares the way for the detailed discussion of idolatry and idol-food in chapters 8–10 and the Lord’s Supper in chapters 10–11. (CC)

We may note that these three kinds of sins (sexual immorality, greed/rapaciousness, and idolatry) are to some extent related to one another. The first on the list, sexual immorality, is a form of the second sin, greed/rapaciousness/covetousness. Sexual immorality involves a lack of contentment with one’s sexual state, which leads to cheating or robbing another person by taking what is not rightfully yours. Compare the Tenth Commandment, which includes the words “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife” (Ex 20:17; Deut 5:21). The use of the verb πλεονεκτέω, “be greedy, take advantage of,” in 1 Thess 4:6 could be relevant here, depending on whether one interprets the verse to mean wronging a brother by sexual immorality or by improper conduct in business. Then the sin of greed, in its turn, is associated a number of times with idolatry (Eph 5:5; Col 3:5: “covetousness, which is idolatry”). Covetousness involves misplaced trust in money and possessions rather than in the true God. However, Paul’s concept of idolatry at this point should be understood broadly to include all forms of false worship. (CC)

What Paul would have the Corinthians learn was to live among these people—in the world—without becoming “of the world” (Jn 17:14–16). But as long as they continued to be puffed up and entangled in fellowship with a man who would not repent, they were in danger of succumbing themselves to “the spirit of the world” (1 Cor 2:12). (CC)

5:11 But now—“Now” does not express *time*, but “*the case being so*,” namely, that to avoid fornicators, &c., *of the world*, you would have to leave the world altogether, which would be absurd. So “now” is used in Heb 11:16. Thus we avoid making the apostle *now* retract a command which he had before given. (CC)

I have written—that is, my meaning in the letter I wrote was “not to keep company,” &c. (CC)

To leave no further room for misunderstanding, Paul clarifies what he meant in his previous letter. His strictures against mixing with immoral people were not meant to forbid the Christians in Corinth from

any secular contact with the immoral people of this world (5:10). What he specifically had in mind was to warn them against associating *in Christian fellowship* with “anyone called a ‘brother’ ” (5:11) who persisted in the unrighteousness characteristic of an unbeliever. Such a person’s profession of faith was belied by his behavior—his arrogant refusal to let his life “be one of repentance” and trust in Christ crucified. In a similar manner both Jesus and Paul censure those who profess to be Christians but are not. (CC)

name of brother – One who claims to be a fellow Christian. (TLSB)

With such a hypocritical “brother” the Christian should not even eat. The congregation is to make a radical break with him. There can be little doubt Paul has in mind both the sharing of ordinary meals (cf. 2 Jn 10) and—a fortiori—participation in the Lord’s Supper. In other words, the man is to be excommunicated. (CC)

For many Christians at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the word “excommunication” sounds intolerably punitive. The spirit of the age urges toleration, compromise, and permissiveness. But Paul saw excommunication as an action to be carried out in loving concern for the sinner’s ultimate salvation. The person to be excommunicated is to be handed over to Satan, with the goal that he repent and his soul be saved on the Lord’s Day (5:5). The evil, influential yeast must not be allowed to permeate God’s loaf (5:6–8). (CC)

Moreover, the proper evangelical guidelines are laid down by the Scriptures themselves: “If anyone does not obey our word through the epistle [2 Thessalonians], mark this person so as not to associate [μὴ συναναμίγνυσθαι, as in 1 Cor 5:9] with him, that he may be ashamed” (2 Thess 3:14). Paul establishes the Scriptures as the basis for church fellowship. If a person or group refuses to comply with God’s Word, fellowship is to be terminated. (CC)

Two rhetorical questions and two short statements conclude the argument. The first question picks up the Corinthians’ misinterpretation of Paul’s previous letter to mean that the apostle was forbidding *any* contact with immoral people. Paul says it is none of his business “to judge those outside” (1 Cor 5:12). The expression “those outside” derives from the OT. The earliest parallel is the expulsion of Adam from the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:23–24). Later, in Israel’s communal life, persons who became unclean were expelled “outside the camp” until such time as they might be cleansed, and then they could return (Lev 13:46; 14:3, 8; Num 12:14–15). Compare also Lev 24:14, 23; Num 15:35–36, where those who violated the Torah were put to death “outside the camp.” The rabbis distinguished Jewish believers from those “outside” the Jewish faith. Jesus also distinguished his disciples, who had access to the mysteries of the kingdom, from those “outside” (Mk 4:11; cf. Col 4:5; 1 Thess 4:12; 1 Tim 3:7). In the new heaven and earth, God’s saints will dwell in the new Jerusalem, the virgin bride of Christ (Rev 21:2), but those condemned to hell will be “outside”: “outside are the dogs [homosexuals; see 1 Cor 6:9] and the sorcerers and the sexually immoral [πόρνοι, the same word as in 1 Cor 5:9–11; 6:9; cf. πορνεία and πορνεύω in 1 Cor 6:18] and the murderers and the idolaters and every person who loves and does what is false” (Rev 22:15). (CC)

That God will judge the whole world, believers and unbelievers, living and dead, is axiomatic in Scripture. God is the one “who judges the whole earth” (Gen 18:25, including Sodom and Gomorrah). Paul could be provoked to anger when confronted by the world’s gross idolatry (Acts 17:16), but it was not his mission to engage in a crusade against unbelievers, nor to pronounce judgment “before the time” (1 Cor 4:5). (CC)

With the second rhetorical question, Paul reminds the Corinthians of their responsibilities: “But isn’t it for *you* to judge those on *the inside*?” (5:12). It may be asked how Paul’s question comports with our Lord’s

command: “Judge not, that you be not judged” (Mt 7:1). Torn from its context (e.g., Mt 7:15!), Mt 7:1 has been misused in modern churches in the interests of an “anything goes” attitude which tolerates blatant sin and false teaching. Jesus’ words, however, apply to a carping, censorious spirit which delights in finding fault with other people and ignores one’s own sin. Paul was on the receiving end of such treatment from some of the Corinthians (1 Cor 4:3). But the apostle’s present concern is the church’s toleration of persistent immorality in its midst, and how that toleration erodes its confession of Christ and the Gospel. (CC)

Having said in 5:12 that it is none of his business to judge those outside the church, Paul states in 5:13 whose business it is: “Those on the outside *God* will judge.” Then, with a quotation from Deuteronomy, he wraps up his argument: “Remove the wicked person from among yourselves!” (1 Cor 5:13). Thus the excommunicated man is to become an “outsider,” someone the community regards as “a Gentile and a tax collector” (Mt 18:17). This means he is facing God’s eternal wrath and, like all “outsiders,” stands in need of the church’s prayer, testimony, and love. (CC)

The judgment Paul has now pronounced is not a matter of personal vagary; it is a decision taken in his capacity as an apostle and ambassador of the Lord Jesus, supported by his power (5:4) and backed by the testimony of God in the OT Scriptures. Thus the judgment begins with God and is conveyed through his apostle to his community—and must be completed by their action. (CC)

There may, indeed, be evidence in Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians that the congregation did take the appropriate action and that this action bore good fruit. Paul writes:

If anyone has caused grief, he caused it not to me, but in part—so that I do not exaggerate—to all of you. This punishment by most [of you] is sufficient for such a person; so now instead you should forgive and console him, so that he may not be overwhelmed by excessive grief. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him. I wrote for this reason: that I might know your testedness, whether you are obedient in everything. Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ. And we do this so that we may not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his intentions. (2 Cor 2:5–11) (CC)

Whether Paul is speaking of the restoration of the incestuous man or of another person, this text is a powerful reminder of the pastor’s and congregation’s duty to forgive and restore the repentant sinner. That restoration is the ultimate goal of all church discipline. (CC)

not even eat with such a one. Calling oneself a Christian while continuing to live an immoral life is reprehensible and degrading, and gives a false testimony to Christ. If the true Christian has intimate association with someone who does this, the non-Christian world may assume that the church approves such immoral, ungodly living and thus the name of Christ would be dishonored. Questions could arise concerning the true character of the Christian’s own testimony (cf. Ro 16:17–18; 2Th 3:6, 14–15). (CSB)

Table fellowship implied a shared lifestyle or values (cf 2Jn 10). Persistent, unrepentant sinners were excommunicated. “Others, who are not such callous and wicked people, and who desire to be godly, must not absent themselves. This is true even though otherwise they are feeble and full of infirmities. For St. Hilary also has said, ‘If anyone has not committed sin for which he can rightly be put out of the congregation and be considered no Christian, he ought not stay away from the Sacrament, lest he should deprive himself of life’ ” (LC V 59). (TLSB)

The apostle proceeds to list six lifestyles which are incompatible with the Christian faith (1 Cor 5:11). Four of them—sexual immorality, greed, idolatry, rapaciousness—were mentioned in 5:10. Now he adds

two more. “Abusive” refers to someone given to various forms of verbal abuse, a slanderer. Scripture often warns against the propensity of slanderous tongues to wreak havoc. A “drunkard” is someone enslaved to alcohol. This sinful orientation is sometimes associated with other sins “of the night.” (CC)

Any Christian may on occasion fall prey to these sins, and then admit his sin, grieve over it, and seek, by the power of the Spirit, to amend his life and avoid that sin in the future. Paul is concerned here with those who surrender themselves to sin as a way of life. In other words, they “let sin *rule*” over themselves (Rom 6:12). In Romans 7, for example, Paul portrays the drama of his own personal struggle against sin. His old sinful nature wars against the new person in Christ. Sometimes he succumbs (Rom 7:19). But he continues the fight, by the power of the Spirit, to put to death the deeds of the flesh. The person in 1 Corinthians 5 whom Paul commands the church to expel has given up that battle; he has laid down his weapons and has surrendered to the enemy. Although he goes by the name of a Christian “brother,” he has instead earned for himself the reputation of one characterized by a particular sin. He now carries the designation “*sexually immoral*” (5:11). (CC)

5:12 *judging outsiders* – Those not of the household of faith. (TLSB)

those inside the church...are to judge. The church is to exercise spiritual discipline over the professing believers in the church (cf. Mt 18:15–18), but it is not to attempt to judge the unsaved world. There are governing authorities to do that (Ro 13:1–5), and the ultimate judgment of the world is to be left to God (v. 13; cf. Rev 20:11–15).(CSB)

As in v 3, Paul does not condone petty complaints, cliques, and judgmentalism. He refers to formal congregational discipline based on Law and Gospel. (TLSB)

Ch 5 Sins such as sexual immorality are out of place among the people of God. Christ, our Passover Lamb, has taken our sins upon Himself. Through repentance and absolution, He renews us as His undefiled creation. • Forgive our waywardness and make our hearts pure, dear Maker and Redeemer. Lead us to call one another to repentance so our congregations enjoy true peaceful fellowship at Your Holy Supper. Amen. (TLSB)