

Sermon: How to Handle Immoral Members

Text: [I Corinthians 5:1-13 ESV](#)

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Introduction: I was thinking the other day about how distorted our world has viewed “love,” and I came up with this idea: “Love without commitment is a selfish transaction. Love with commitment is grace and a *no matter what*.” In our text this morning we are looking at different forms or expressions of love.

In our culture, today, Paul would have been viewed as intolerant and unloving because of his strict morality for the church. If you look at Jesus, he also required a high standard of conduct for those representing God. You might remember Jesus’ “cleansing of the temple” (**show slide**) and how those who represented God could not act with impropriety.

It is not that Jesus didn’t love sinners or that he would not forgive them. He simply had a code of conduct for those who would follow Him. Some might bring up the woman who was caught in adultery. [John 8:7-11 ESV](#) 7 And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” 8 And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. 9 But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. 10 Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” 11 She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”

Jesus did not say: I forgive you, so go ahead living life like you have been living. No, Jesus required a change in behavior, i.e., stop sinning. Also like in the story of the paralytic who used to spend his days at the Pool of Siloam, [John 5:14 ESV](#) 14 Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.” **There is something worse than poor physical health.**

Here in our text, we see:

I. The Church Situation Is Discussed (v. 1).

Some of us grew up in the 60s in a time of “free love” with no real rules or commitments, drugs and rock and roll. People dropped out of society and dropped acid to try and get in touch with the real universe and explore their minds. Conditions today have not gotten better. Conditions today are worse when you describe yourself not as a man or a woman but **LGBTQQIP2SAA**. The term stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, pansexual, two-spirit, asexual, and ally. “P” stands for pansexual: A term that describes a person who may have a physical, emotional, or romantic attraction to people of any gender. And our culture has 16 or more “gender” classifications. God has 2!

Illus. We have run out of letters in the alphabet to describe who people are and then we have no idea what they believe about God. Paul Williams - Paula Williams

We can't even watch the Grammys for fear of both seeing and hearing disgusting things. Every Disney movie should now be thoroughly vetted before letting those we love be exposed to terrible images, words and ideas.

In the context of the 1st century church, morals in that society were even worse than ours, yet here in our text, the church was held in low regard:

A. By the culture

I Corinthians 5:1 ESV ¹ It is actually reported (**Paul says, I have been hearing some bad reports**) 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.

The word "actually" in the **ESV** is "commonly" in the **KJV** and can also mean universally or everywhere. [Filkins, the community knew before the church knew that the minister was having an affair. 60 miles away in a casino is not far away enough to not get noticed. Dr. Henderson was over in Jerusalem and saw someone he knew being way too friendly with someone who was NOT his wife. Our witness, good or bad, is seen everywhere.

Sexual immorality is a broad term that comes from the word *porneia*, that is any kind of sexual act outside of legal marriage. Living together and not married is sexual immorality.

Here the city was put off by *a man who has his father's wife*. This is probably a step-mother who is not a member of the church. The man who is engaged in what is looked at as incest is the one who needs disciplined. "Has" is present tense which means they are currently living as husband and wife without the benefit of marriage. This would have been against OT law, rabbinic law, as well as Roman (civil) law. This was unseemly even to the pagans (ethnics, nations).

Here is a problem that needs to be corrected:

B. By the church

Within the church, *love* does not mean tolerance of immorality. In our text, what the church was intentionally allowing to happen was behavior the general population in Corinth thought was abhorrent and sickening even using their low standards.

"Barth rightly stresses that the accusation is not directed in a moralizing sense against the sins of the world, nor yet in a moralizing sense against particular individuals, but 'it is directed against the Church, as such, and runs: It..the Church...is not what it yet is in Christ.'" - Conzelmann, p. 95

We can do better, in other words, because our lives reflect on Christ, and spiritual leaders need to protect the image of not only Jesus, but His Bride, the Church as well.

II. Biblical Solutions for the Judgment (vv. 2-8)

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

Paul has some solutions:

A. Remove the sinning member.

Freedom in Christ is not an excuse for license and sinning without consequence.

Galatians 5:13 ESV ¹³For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

The word “arrogant” literally means *puffed up*, and is translated proud in the **NIV**. These leaders in the church were putting up with an immoral situation and were somehow proud of themselves, maybe for avoiding the internal fights. The man in question, who was living in sin may have been socially or economically important to the church in Corinth.

No matter what all the factors for their indecision, they needed to do what God wanted and what the Holy Spirit must have been already influencing them to do, personally painful or not.

There ought to have been a sadness over the condition of the witness of the church. They ought to have been grieving and mourning over the loss of the church’s beauty and reputation. They ought to have remember Paul’s previous warnings in a now lost letter. Paul said earlier in this letter we are studying: **I Corinthians 3:16-17 ESV** ¹⁶Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

I Corinthians 5:3-5 ESV ³For 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. ⁴When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵you 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 [Jesus].

This is a difficult text with multiple interpretations. Here is what I think: Paul was indicating his apostolic authority and responsibility for them (his children). They needed loved and also required discipline.

Another solution is to:

B. Turn the sinning member over to Satan.

There are many other places in Scripture that we could examine given the time about what to do with a sinful, unrepentant member, but here are two others: **I Timothy 1:19-20 ESV** 19 holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, 20 among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

Matthew 18:15-17 ESV 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.

We are always to love each other because love covers a multitude of sin, and we all sin, but when the individual is unrepentant and unwilling to correct his/her sinful behavior, the church must act.

What does it mean: **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 [Jesus].**

This sinner is being handed over or turned over, it is to give up a person as a technical term of police and courts, hand over to the custody of, in this case, Satan.

Are we talking about the man literally dying here as a result of his excommunication? Probably not. It appears it is more to learn a lesson of how dangerous it is to live in Satan’s realm - the world. It gives him an opportunity to long for the Christian fellowship he is being deprived of and cause him to miss it and then return.

I Corinthians 5:6-8 ESV 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.

C. The “why” of judging a fellow member

It is ultimately to save the rest of the community that belongs to Christ. **Purity and holiness as it relates to Jesus and His Bride are of the utmost importance.**

Illus. It is like the idea of “one bad apple can spoil the bunch (barrel).” Dairy milk has to be checked before being mixed with other milk in a silo. Also if Kay was making one of her pecan pies, how many grams of cat feces would be OK to add to the ingredients?

The example given here is the idea of leaven. Leaven is not a good or bad thing by itself, but here it *is* a negative condition. It is about being clean and free of contamination. Does Paul really think the Corinthians really are clean and free of the world’s negative effects? Only ideally because of their relationship “in Christ.” They certainly are not all acting like what they were called to be - “HOLY!” “Holiness is not the goal of conduct, but its presumption.” - Conzelmann, p. 98

Our relationship with God through Christ in the new covenant is a reality to be celebrated. In **v.8**, *celebrating* is an activity that is to be continually practiced (morning, noon and night), while the old leaven is defined by malice and evil.

Malice (κακίας) is “the vicious disposition... and wickedness is the active exercise of it” (Lightfoot, Notes) - Rienecker, p. 400

The word translated “wickedness” (πονηρία) is a general word that is found in **Matthew 6:13 ESV** ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.[a]

Footnotes: [a] Matthew 6:13 Or the evil one; some manuscripts add **For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen**

Malice and wickedness are contrasted to the positive traits expected by God’s people, but one needs to be careful also in evaluating sincerity and truth.

Q. Does sincerity guarantee truth?

A. Of course not! One might be misinformed by a trusted teacher or friend.

Q. Can truth be spoken in a non-Christian way?

A. Yes! The gospel can be presented in a non-loving way and even from wrong motives!

Craig Blomberg, p. 109 - “In other words, sincerity and truth are not of equal value. If only one can be preserved, then we must cling to the truth.”

There are two spheres of spiritual existence open to everyone. You are either in (of) the world or “in Christ.” You are an insider or an outsider in relationship to the Church. The Church is to be a model of holy behavior for the world, but we are not to try to impose it! Imposition of values is the way of the world. Law is the old system; grace is the composition of the new!

III. Biblical Judgment Is Clarified (vv. 9-13).

I Corinthians 5:9-13 ESV 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.”

A. Withdraw fellowship from Christians who are unrepentant.

There are many reasons, in addition to our text, to not associate (lit. *mix together*) with those who call themselves Christians, but are not acting like a follower of Christ.

II Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15 ESV 6 Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. 14 If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. 15 Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

Titus 3:10 ESV 10 As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him,

True repentance can change everything. It can provide grace, forgiveness, and restoration. It would be very easy to try and impose our values on the world, but Paul makes it clear that is not our objective. He also makes it clear that all sin against God and His standards are not just about sexual mores. Any contact with the world should be carefully guarded to make sure we are a positive effect on them, rather than the other way around.

Gordon Fee may be right when he concludes that, "Paul's concern throughout does not seem to be that the church as individual members disassociate from the incestuous man, but that he be excluded from the community as it gathers for worship and instruction."

This disfellowshipping of a brother or sister is to prevent all intimate, close socialization to try and shock the offending person into understanding that what they are doing is serious and has eternal consequences for them and will not be approved of by the church. This break from fellowship would include social meals and even the Lord's Supper which was also connected to a common meal.

B. Whom are we to judge?

Well, certainly, we are not to judge the world. Those are outsiders and that is God's responsibility. God has never asked us to do His job. Rabbis would describe outsiders by those who practiced another religion.

The outside world does not, in fact cannot, represent Christ and are not His Bride certainly. This is the Church's responsibility. And where the Church fails in this, there must be a concerted effort to correct the flaw/sin and even Her image.

Steven Cole - The Church must practice biblical discipline toward professing Christians who persist in known sin. Perhaps no verse is so taken out of context and misapplied as **Matthew 7:1**, 1 "Judge not, that you be not judged." If you keep reading, in **verse 6** Jesus says, 6 "Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you." In **verse 15** He adds, 15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. To obey those verses, you must make some fairly astute judgments! You must judge that a person is a dog or a swine or a wolf in sheep's clothing. Furthermore, in **I Corinthians 5:12**, Paul tells the church that they are responsible to judge those within the church. Practicing biblical church discipline does not violate Jesus' command, "Judge not."

The church and her shepherds and leaders have every right, and are expected to do their job - judging those for whom they are responsible. **13 God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."**

Excommunication should always be the last resort, but also must be done if we are to obey God. The word purge (ἐξαιρῶ, *expel*, NIV) means to exclude, to remove, to drive away. The prep. in compound makes the verb effective, 'to put out completely.' - see **Rienecker, p. 401**. The person so judged becomes one "on the outside." When this does not happen, further hurt and division occur like in SSM. **Describe situation.**

Conclusion: How important is Christ's reputation? How important is the Church's reputation? and ours?

Discipline is critical in many areas. You can see this principle in a family. If the parents do not consistently and impartially discipline a defiant child, very soon the other children learn that there are no consequences if they disobey their parents. The sin of the first child spreads to the others. The same thing happens in a classroom with a teacher who does not enforce discipline. Soon, the entire class is out of control. On the government level, if the authorities do not enforce the laws, the whole country soon devolves into anarchy.

The purpose of any Church discipline should be to help save and restore the person to Christ and His Church. Let's always be good examples for Jesus, the Head of the Church.