

# High Peaks Bible Fellowship

## Failure to Deal With Sin in the Church 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

### Introduction

- First we must determine how this new subject is connected with the previous comments that Paul has made. There are several key words and concepts that appear in both sections. Specifically, the subjects of arrogance and boasting are continued in chapter five.
- In 1 Cor 4, Paul had just described the arrogance of the Corinthians which was a major component of their divisive spirit (1 Cor 4:6, 18, 19). Here Paul provides a specific instance of their arrogant attitude, in this case regarding the sin of one of their members.
- Also in 1 Cor 1:29, 31; 3:21; and 4:7 Paul spoke about their boasting – first in their own human achievements, then in the supposed superiority of their teachers or leaders, and now in 1 Cor 5:6 concerning their tolerance toward one of their members who was living in gross immorality.

### The Sin of One Believer (1 Cor 5:1)

- There may have been an antinomian element within one of the Corinthian sects or parties. They may have claimed Paul (the best advocate for Christian liberty) as their leader. But Paul would never have approved of taking Christian liberty to the extreme of justifying known sin (see Gal 5:13 for Paul's comments on liberty vs. license). Salvation brings freedom from sin, but not freedom to sin.
- The term antinomian comes from *anti* (against) and *nomos* (the law). It is the idea that since a Christian is saved by grace rather than by works, then he is free from all moral obligations and principles. It says that a believer can live any way he chooses because he has been forgiven by God.
- This antinomian attitude of license was practiced by many different philosophical sects. They believed there was a broad gulf between the physical and the spiritual, so the sensual desires could be freely indulged. In fact many sects encouraged this so that the spiritual would shine brighter by comparison. One later Gnostic leader said: "Give to the flesh the things of the flesh, and to the spirit the things of the spirit."
- But this is contrary to the NT admonitions to "live holy lives" (see 1 Pet 1:16), and it is exactly the type of antinomianism that Paul rejects here (as well as in Galatians and Romans).
- Literally he says, "It is generally or everywhere heard." The whole community (and possibly the whole region) would have heard about this situation, so the reputation of the entire Church was being affected.
- "There is immorality (*porneia*) among you" = a general term for forbidden sexual intercourse of several kinds. At the end of the verse Paul says that someone among the believers "has his father's wife" = literally, "for one to go on having (*echein*, present infinitive) a wife of his father." The present tense indicates this was not a single incident, but an on-going relationship. The phrase "father's wife" indicates that it was not his own mother.
- "Does not exist even among the Gentiles" = this type of sexual relationship was forbidden in the OT Scriptures (Lev 18:7-8), and it was also a violation of the laws of the pagan community. It is likely that the man's step-mother was not a believer, because the apostle Paul only addresses the sin of the Christian man who was involved.

### The Sin of the Church (1 Cor 5:2)

- Instead of mourning over this sin and excluding this brother from church fellowship until he repented, the Corinthians were "puffed up." Their toleration for this obvious sin was another example of their arrogant and boastful attitude, and it was probably directly related to the divisive spirit within the church.
- Even if an antinomian sect within the church was not actually boasting of its toleration of this sin, the church was continuing to be "puffed up" in spite of an obvious sin in their midst.
- The spiritually mature response to this situation would have been to grieve over this shameful situation. They should have mourned as over the dead, but they did not do this, nor had they taken any action to remove the sinner from their midst. In their prideful state, they saw nothing worthy of grief or correction.

## The Appropriate Corrective Action: For the Sinning Believer (1 Cor 5:3-5)

- This is a direct contrast with the previous verse: You may be puffed up, but I take a completely different view. Paul is absent from them physically (in body), but all of his spiritual and mental energy is focused on them and their problems.
- “Have already judged” (*krino*) = to pronounce an opinion concerning right and wrong; to pass a verdict in the case. Is this a contradiction with what Paul said in 1 Cor 4:5? In chapter four Paul was dealing with the Corinthians’ passing judgment on the leaders of the different divisions within the church, not in regard to any sin but in regard to their own personal opinions of their giftedness for leadership. There Paul stated that God alone is qualified to judge and reward a minister’s internal motives and his faithfulness to his assigned tasks. Here in chapter five the context makes it clear that the leaders of the church have the right and authority to make judgments in cases of obvious and outward sin in members of the church. The situations are very different in these two contexts.
- By the authority vested in him as an apostle, Paul pronounced his judgment regarding the sin of this believer, and he tells the church to enforce this judgment at their next meeting. Paul’s first concern is for the salvation of the erring member, as well as for the purity of the church.
- “Deliver such a one to Satan” = this is an unusually strong phrase if it was intended as a synonym for “put him out of your midst” (excommunication). There are two possible interpretations:
  1. It simply means excommunication from church fellowship. Since Satan rules in the sphere outside the church (see 1 Jn 5:19), then to be delivered to Satan is to be put out of the church into the realm where Satan rules.
  2. It involves the additional visitation of physical sickness or even death. Physical afflictions are sometimes attributed to Satan, and the spiritual benefits of such afflictions are sometimes described in Scripture. Simple excommunication would not seem to have the effect of destroying the flesh, so something more may be intended by this expression.
- “For the destruction of his flesh” (*sarx*) = typically means the fallen human nature. From Paul’s earlier reference (1 Cor 3:1-4) and our discussion of that passage, the destruction of the flesh will not happen until the time each believer receives an incorruptible resurrection body. So the flesh will not be destroyed in this life, indicating that Paul may be referring to the affliction of the physical body or the death of this individual. For example, in 1 Cor 11:28-30 Paul mentioned a discipline which leads to death, with the salvation of the individual as the ultimate goal there as well.
- The Purpose: the ultimate salvation of the sinning believer. We can also hope and pray for the repentance and restoration to fellowship of the sinning believer.

## The Appropriate Corrective Action: For the Sinning Church (1 Cor 5:6-8)

- “Boasting” (*kauchema*) = not the act of boasting, but the subject or content of their boasting. They were boasting in their so-called exalted status as a church, their achievements and those of their favorite teachers – but there was a major blemish on their character and reputation.
- “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” = In Gal 5:9 Paul had quoted this as a proverb that was commonly known. But here in 1 Cor 5 Paul builds a more extensive illustration which draws pictures from the OT Jewish ritual of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
- This is simply an illustration Paul uses to make his point about the pervasiveness of sin. In no way is Paul saying that Christians should continue to observe these Jewish rituals. He is merely using this well-known OT practice as an analogy to illustrate his point.
- Even a little bit of yeast will permeate the entire lump of dough. A small virus can infect the entire body, causing illness and even death. Church discipline of sinning believers should be based on the same principle.
- Paul saw the Passover lamb as a picture of Christ’s sacrifice to accomplish our deliverance from sin. He draws a lesson from the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when for seven days the Jews ate nothing but unleavened bread. Their law required that they remove all fermenting agents from the entire household (see Deut 16:3-4). Leaven represents the overt sin which Paul had just described within the Corinthian church. In a manner similar to how the Jews cleansed their households, Paul commands the Corinthian church to remove the leaven (sinning believer) from their midst.
- “A new lump” = they are to make a fresh start as a new community with the contamination removed.
- This imperative is based on the indicative statement of fact: they are unleavened. The Lord has freed them from bondage to sin, and because this is an established fact, therefore they should strive to live in a way which will please their Lord.

- In position, they were unleavened – but their practice should correspond to their position. They should strive to be what they already are. The imperative (command) is impossible without the indicative (fact). The command could not be accomplished without the foundation of what the Lord Jesus Christ had already accomplished on our behalf.
- “Christ our Passover has been sacrificed” = Jesus already accomplished His work, so it is now possible for us to obey His commands. “The Lamb was already slain on Calvary, but yet you have not gotten rid of the leaven!”
- “Let us keep on keeping the feast” (present active subjunctive) = a perpetual feast; to continue keeping the feast.
- “Not with old leaven” = not under the influence of the corrupt nature. The word “leaven” is very expressive of our “old” condition, and it refers to the fallen and self-seeking passions of our old nature.
- “Malice (*kakias*, evil in general) and wickedness (*porneia*)” = all evil, and especially the specific case of the sinning believer in Corinth.
- “Sincerity and truth” = as opposed to evil, they should exhibit sincere purity. The Greek term literally means a thing which, when examined by the sun’s light, is found to be pure and unadulterated. Sincerity should be backed up with the truth of doctrine, discipline, and holy living.

### Chart Summarizing the Truths Taught in the Illustration

ILLUSTRATION	MEANING
A little leaven leavens the whole lump	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leaven = sin (especially the specific case of immorality Paul had mentioned)</li> <li>• One sin can contaminate the whole church in at least two areas:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. the reputation of the whole church</li> <li>2. the potential for this type of sinful behavior to spread and be increasingly tolerated</li> </ol> </li> </ul>
Clean out the old leaven	Remove the sinning believer from fellowship with the church
You may be a new lump	Restoring their reputation as an uncontaminated church
Just as you are in fact unleavened	Positionally, God already sees them as holy
Christ our Passover has been sacrificed	Jesus has already accomplished everything that was required to make it possible for the church to obey His commands and pursue holiness of life
Therefore let us celebrate the feast	Let the church live the Christian life in light of Christ’s finished work
Not with old leaven	Not under the influence of the old nature – not continuing to indulge the passions of the flesh (specifically malice & wickedness)
But with the unleavened (things)	With holiness of life that when held up to the light is found to be pure

### Paul Clarifies His Previous Instructions (1 Cor 5:9-13)

- Here we learn that Paul had written at least one previous letter to the church at Corinth. All we know of the content of that letter is contained here – Paul had instructed them not to associate with immoral people.
- “Not to associate” (*sunanamignumi*) = literally, “to mingle together up and down among.” It means not only close association, but continual or habitual contact. This was the same instruction Paul had given earlier to the Thessalonian church for how to deal with some insubordinate or unruly believers there (2 Th 3:14).
- “Immoral people” (*poneros*) = one who indulges in forbidden sexual intercourse.
- This phrase could mean not to associate with immoral people in *any* social interaction or specifically in the context of fellowship among believers within the church. Paul will now clarify which of these two options he intended, because they had obviously misunderstood him.

- Here we learn that the reader of Scripture cannot determine his own meaning for the text. Paul had a specific meaning in mind, and he goes to great lengths to clear up any misunderstanding. Scripture should be carefully interpreted in order to ensure that the author's intended meaning is the one we assign to it.
- Negatively, Paul did not mean that they should not associate with *any* "immoral person." He uses the word *poneros* to indicate those engaging in forbidden sexual intercourse. Then he adds several other categories of sinful behavior to show that his prohibition was not just limited to the sexually immoral. Covetous (those who are greedy for gain, especially that which belongs to others); Swindlers (extortioners, robbers, hijackers); Idolaters (those who worship or sacrifice to false gods – see 1 John 5:21).
- Paul says that a Christian would have to leave this world in order to avoid any association with sinful people. Evidently the Corinthians had taken Paul's instruction to mean they should have no association with any immoral or wicked person – either inside or outside of the church. Since they thought this was an impossible assignment they simply ignored it and considered Paul's teaching to be ridiculous.
- Positively, Paul did intend to communicate that they should not associate with any fellow believer who is engaging in any of these sinful practices.
- "If any man that is named a brother" = any person that is being named as a believer (a professing Christian within the church fellowship). This is a third-class conditional clause, which indicates there is a *probability* of it being true. It is neither definitely true nor definitely false, but it is probable that this situation could occur. A believer could possibly engage in the kinds of sinful activities that are mentioned in this verse.
- Paul repeats immoral, covetous, swindler, and idolater. He also adds reviler (one who is verbally abusive) and drunkard (one addicted to alcoholic drink).
- "Not even to eat with such a one" = to take food in company with someone (*sunesthio*).
- Paul's instructions clearly differentiate between the believers' contact with the unsaved in the world *vs.* the believers' contact with those who are part of the church fellowship (but who act like unbelievers). The unsaved have only the old, sinful, fallen nature – but believers have the new, spiritual nature that exists alongside their old nature. They have the potential to live in such a way as to please their Lord, even though they sometimes do not do this. Paul's instructions imply that a believer who lives like an unbeliever is a contradiction – there is something wrong in that situation, and it should be dealt with accordingly. If a believer acts like a non-Christian, he should no longer be treated as a Christian.
- This may seem as though we are to treat sinning believers more harshly than we are to treat the sinners of the world, but this is because a believer who lives in habitual sin is a contradiction – and this contradiction must be dealt with differently. A true believer must be admonished to live in keeping with his new nature, rather than his old nature. The church has a responsibility to help fellow-believers realize this fact.
- "Judging outsiders" (*krino*) = to pass a sentence of condemnation. The leaders of the church have no jurisdiction over the sinners of the world – they are not meant to sit in judgment on the unsaved in this world. The "rules" of the church apply only to those who are within the church.
- "Do you not judge those within?" The church has a responsibility to judge those inside their fellowship in order to protect the reputation and purity of the church.
- "God judges those outside" = Those who are not within the church fellowship are under the direct government of God. They are sinners who deserve punishment, but God will do that.
- "Remove the wicked man from among yourselves" = *exairo*, to put out away from. This command seems to echo several OT commands to "purge the evil from your midst" (see Deut 17:7; 19:19; 22:21, 24; 24:7).

### Points of Application:

- This passage teaches us the proper method and attitude for church discipline. It should not be done with harshness, bitterness, revenge, or superiority. Rather, it should be done with tenderness toward the offender, with deep grief that the reputation of the church has been affected, and with the hope that it will lead to the repentance of the believer.
- This chapter also explains the danger of indulging our old nature and participating in sin. Our Savior was pure, and He desires that those who belong to Him might be holy.
- We also learn how believers are to respond to those outside the church. This is a difficult issue, and Christians often feel they are in danger of being contaminated by the world. In reaction, they often want to withdraw almost entirely from the world. Here Paul tells us that we are not to withdraw from the world. We are to live in the world, but we are not to be worldly. We should act righteously toward every person, but we are not to give the impression that we belong to the world. This is a fine line to walk as a believer.
- This chapter also tells us that the world outside the church will ultimately give an account to God. They are constantly moving toward His courtroom, and He will pronounce their doom. This should motivate us to share the

gospel with those outside the church as if we are throwing them a life preserver.

- Today we should use this lesson as a “wake up call” – taking it as an opportunity to do a little self-examination and “house cleaning” in our own lives. Where are the areas of your life that the old leaven has accumulated? What activities are you involved in that could be viewed as less than holy? What changes do you need to make in order to live in a way that is more pleasing to the Lord?

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**High Peaks Bible Fellowship**

**Our primary purpose is to uphold the truths of the Word of God.**

I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:15)

**Our primary responsibility is to equip the saints for the work of ministry.**

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-12)