BUILT DIFFERENT

LESSON FIVE

COMMENTARY

COMMENTARY NOTES

1 CORINTHIANS 5:1-8

In the *Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, Thomas Schriener gives context to the issue of sexual immorality plaguing the church at Corinth:

1. Verse 1 begins with outrage: the first word is *actually* (*holos*), and Paul informs the Corinthians about a report he has heard regarding *sexual immorality* in the congregation. Apparently, they had not posed a question about the man committing incest (cf. 7:1)! The word *porneia* (*sexual immorality*) is a broad term designating sexual sin, and the context specifies the nature of the sexual sin in question. This verse functions as an excellent example of such, for it is apparent that the sin in question is incest. The man *is sleeping* (lit. 'has')—that is, is having sexual relations with—*his father's wife*. The present tense suggests that it is a continuing sin. Paul does not say the man is having sex with his mother, so his biological mother almost certainly is not in view. Most commentators agree that the man's stepmother is intended, and this fits with Leviticus 18:8: 'Do not have sexual relations with your father's wife' (cf. also Deut. 22:30; 27:20). Paul is shocked because even *pagans* thought such behaviour was outrageous, yet the Corinthians are tolerating such sin. Cicero records (Clu. 6.14–15) an instance of incest, and how shocking it was:

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.

The word translated *pagans* is also rendered 'Gentiles' (*ethnesin*, csb). The use of the term 'Gentiles' for unbelievers is fascinating since the Corinthians were mainly Gentiles. Paul no longer conceives of them as Gentiles, but as sons and daughters of Abraham (Rom. 4:9–17; Gal. 3:6–9, 14), as true Jews and the true circumcision (Rom. 2:28–29), as members of 'the Israel of God' (Gal. 6:16).

2. To Paul's amazement, the Corinthians are still *proud*; the word used here, which literally means 'inflated' or 'puffed up', is one we have already encountered, and it is clearly one of Paul's favourite words for describing the Corinthians (4:6, 18, 19; 8:1; 13:4). Possibly they are proud because of a perverted view of grace and tolerance, such that they think that any reproof of behaviour would contradict the free grace in Christ. It is difficult to believe, however, that the Corinthians defended the rightness of the man's action, especially in the case of a sin that was frowned upon in the society in which they lived; thus Paul probably points out how incompatible it is for pride to exist when there is such blatant sin in the church. Paul does not give arguments against incest, which suggests that the Corinthians also agreed that it was wrong. Still, they are tolerating and accepting the sin in their congregation. Instead of arrogance, there should be profound grief and sadness that such a thing is happening in the church (cf. Ezra. 10:6). Furthermore, the grief should lead to action so that the one involved in incest is removed from the congregation. Perhaps, as some scholars have suggested, the Corinthians did not act against the man because he was from the upper class socially. He may have been a patron, and some of them may have been his clients. Such a stance would fit with the Corinthians' preoccupation with honour and status.

3–4. The syntax of verses 3–4 is complicated and controversial, but fortunately the main point of the verses is clear enough. Paul has already determined what the church should do, and he calls upon the church to gather together and to deliver the sinning person over to Satan. The different ways of understanding the syntax are apparent by comparing the niv with the csb. The niv reads,

For my part, even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. As one who is present with you in this way, I have already passed judgment in the name of our Lord Jesus on the one who has been doing this. So when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present …

Alternatively, the csb translates,

> Even though I am absent in the body, I am present in spirit. As one who is present with you in this way, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who has been doing such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus, and I am with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus …

Does the phrase *in the name of our Lord Jesus* belong with *passed judgment* (so niv) or with 'assembled' (so csb)? Both are possible syntactically, but the latter is to be preferred, for two reasons. First, *in the name of our Lord Jesus* is closer in the Greek text to the word 'assembled' than it is to the word *passed judgment*, and though word order is not decisive in Greek, it does play some role. Second, there is probably an allusion to the teaching of Jesus on church discipline in Matthew 18:15–20, where Jesus speaks of 'two or three … gathered together in my name' (Matt. 18:20, csb; see also Deut. 19:16–20). The subject matter of the two texts is the same, and there are actually many more allusions to Jesus' teaching in the Pauline letters than some scholars in the past have acknowledged.

Despite Paul being absent *physically*, he is with them in spirit. Paul informs them about his decision, as if he were present with them. He has *already passed judgment* (*kekrika*) on the offender, and the notion of judgment anticipates the responsibility of the saints to judge, which is also expressed in verse 12. The judgment, as verse 5 indicates, is that the man should be turned over to Satan, that is, expelled from the church. Paul also indicates the circumstances in which this decision is to be carried out. The church is to assemble (*synago*) in Jesus' name, when, Paul assures them, he will be with them *in spirit*, and the *power* of Jesus will be operative. It is noteworthy that Paul does not call upon the leaders of the church to make the decision about excommunicating the offender. Instead, the entire church is to render a judgment to exclude him.

5. The church, with Paul's full support and approval, is to *hand this man over to Satan*. The purpose is remedial and salvific, not punitive, for the hope is that the offender will *be saved* on the final day. Handing over to Satan echoes the trials of Job when the Lord permitted Satan to afflict him (Job 1:8–12; 2:1–7), though the circumstances are quite different since Job was righteous and the man in this case was enslaved to evil. The handing over of Hymanaeus and Alexander to Satan is a clear parallel (1 Tim. 1:20). The desire, as in 1 Corinthians, is that these two men will repent and will learn 'not to blaspheme'. Delivering a person over to Satan is another way of saying that he or she is expelled from the church; all unbelievers are in Satan's sphere since he works in all who are disobedient (Eph. 2:2) and is 'the god of this age' (2 Cor. 4:4).

The purpose for the expulsion is *the destruction of the flesh* (cf. Exod. 12:23). Some take the *flesh* to be the body, and think the penalty is death. If so, there is a parallel to 1 Corinthians 11:29–32, where we are told that some of the Corinthians were struck with sickness and death for partaking of the Lord's Supper unworthily. Those who died suffered such a fate so that they would 'not be … condemned with the world' (1 Cor. 11:32). Though the parallel is possible, it seems more likely that Paul conceives of the *flesh* here as the sin-principle which rules over those who do not have the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 7:5; 8:5–13; Gal. 5:24; Col. 2:13). Indeed, Paul does not envision the man's death since he forbids the church to eat with him (1 Cor. 5:11). Furthermore, it is difficult to see how the man's death would save his spirit. If this is the case, Paul does not hope for his physical death but the defeat of the rule of sin in his life. Exclusion from the church will, it is hoped, spur the man to repentance, so that he renounces his sin and turns afresh to righteousness. If he acts in such a way, his *spirit* will be *saved on the day of the Lord*. The *day of the Lord* is the final day of judgment and salvation. Paul does not promise or guarantee that the man will be saved, for his salvation is contingent upon his repentance.

6. What concerns Paul is the arrogance and *boasting* present in the church, (cf. 1:29, 31; 3:21; 4:6, 7, 18, 19; 5:2). Such boasting is more than a little ironic since they are tolerating obvious transgression in the church. In verses 6–8 Paul lays down from the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread an Old Testament foundation for his perspective. Here he picks up the notion that all leaven was to be removed from houses during Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread and that nothing leavened

should be eaten (Exod. 12:14–20; 13:6–7). Hence, leaven stands for what is evil and corrupting, and if one allows *a little yeast* (lit. 'a little leaven', csb) in a lump of dough, it will pervade the whole (so also Gal. 5:9; cf. Matt. 16:6). Paul's main concern, then, is not the individual offender but the potential for sin to spread in the church.

7. Since Christ has been offered as a Passover sacrifice, the Corinthians should cleanse out the old leaven and live as a new and pure people. The verse begins with the call to *get rid of the old yeast* ('Clean out the old leaven', csb), and Paul again draws on the Old Testament instructions to remove all leaven from houses during Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread (Exod. 12:19; 13:7). Removing the old yeast at the very least means expelling the evil person from the congregation, though in verse 8 removal of leaven includes dispensing with 'malice and wickedness'. The offender is to be excommunicated *so that you may be a new unleavened batch*. The evil permeating the congregation will be removed, and the batch of dough will be new and pure.

The eschatological tension in Paul's theology surfaces in his next comment. He has just said that the offender must be cleaned out like leaven so that the church will be a new batch. He immediately adds, however, that they 'really are unleavened' (esv, nrsv). If the church is truly 'unleavened', why do they have to remove leaven to be a new batch? The danger exegetically and theologically is to remove either side of this tension in Paul, which is often called the indicative—imperative tension. On the one hand, believers are truly unleavened—pure and holy before God—by virtue of Christ's Passover sacrifice. On the other hand, if believers do not expel the evident sin from their midst, they will be corrupted and defiled. In Christ, they are perfect and holy (indicative), but they must live out that truth by removing sin from their midst (the imperative). At the conclusion of the verse Paul provides the fundamental reason why the believers are truly unleavened before God: *Christ has been sacrificed as the Passover Lamb*. When Israel was freed from Egypt, the blood on the houses of Israelites ensured that the Lord would pass over them so that their firstborn would be spared death in the punishment of the destroyer (Exod. 12:13, 22–23, 27). So, too, the blood of Christ liberates believers from divine judgment and purifies them from sin so that they are a pure batch before God. The call to remove leaven, then, is grounded in Christ's redeeming work, and thus grace precedes demand.

8. In the Old Testament Israel is called upon to observe the feast of Passover (Exod. 12:14, *heortasete*, celebrate) and the festival of Unleavened Bread (Exod. 23:14, 15). Here believers are to *keep the Festival* (*heortazomen*), since Christ has been sacrificed as the Passover Lamb. Following the pattern of Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread, believers keep the feast by not allowing what is leavened to infect the community. In other words, *malice and wickedness* must be removed, and the virtues of *sincerity and truth* should mark the congregation.[1]

1 CORINTHIANS 5:9-13

In the *Pillar New Testament Commentary*, Roy Ciampa explains Paul's call to separate:

5:9 In vv. 9–11 we get some insight into the situation Paul is addressing in chapter 5: *I wrote to you in my letter*. Paul had sent a letter to the Corinthians prior to 1 Corinthians. It seems that the Corinthians had misunderstood and/or disagreed with Paul's teaching in this letter on several counts, some of which probably crop up in chapters 7–16. In response, they had written a letter back to him (see 7:1) and he had received some reports orally. In this particular instance Paul's first letter should have been enough to prevent the current fiasco of the church's ignoring the presence of a seriously sinning member ever occurring; Paul had already told them in his previous letter *not to associate* [or mix] *with sexually immoral people*."

When Paul received a report on the situation orally, perhaps from Chloe (1:11) or Stephanas (16:15), along with disturbing news of divisions in the church, he also learned that his teaching on not associating with the immoral in the church had not been followed. The Corinthians had taken Paul

[1] Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), 108–114.

to mean disassociation from all immoral people, both inside and outside the church, and, it seems, concluded that such teaching was too harsh and impractical; they had no intention of cutting off all ties with those outside the church. It is possible that this was a deliberate misinterpretation designed to ridicule Paul, although a genuine misunderstanding cannot be ruled out. The church was divided internally, and many of them opposed Paul. Perhaps part of their boasting (vv. 2, 6) consisted in the fact that some of them claimed their independence from and superiority to the apostle. To remove any obstacle from before the church's way in excluding the incestuous man, Paul makes his meaning perfectly clear, both in terms of what he meant and what he did not mean.

The verb "to associate with" (cf. v. 11) means to enjoy close social intercourse. Its use in 2 Thessalonians 3:14 concerns the discipline of idle busy-bodies who have paid no attention to a second warning (cf. 1 Thess. 4:11–12; 5:14). Interestingly, in that context the one being disciplined is not to be treated "as an enemy." Rather the action is designed to "warn him as a brother" (2 Thess. 3:15), evidently in the hope that he will repent and be restored to full fellowship. Paul's instructions may thus be compared with that in Matthew 18:17, "treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector."

5:10 Verses 10–11 bring the needed clarification: *not at all meaning the people of this world*. These words state clearly that his instruction in the letter was not concerned with having associations with outsiders. There are of course some forms of social intercourse with unbelievers that Paul would not allow, such as dining with them in an idolatrous temple (see 10:14–22), but that is not his point here.

Paul lists four examples of people with whom social contact in the world is not to be avoided: *the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters*. Then in v. 11 he gives a representative list of six kinds of sinners whom the church is to judge by withdrawing from social integration with them. He then states what he takes to be obvious: it would be wrong for the Corinthian Christians *to leave the world*, that is, to be cut off from contact with non-Christians. Paul takes it for granted that believers take full part in the community and society in which they live. As Blomberg states: "Christian fellowship should be a periodic retreat from and revitalization of our regular involvement with the immoral and unbelieving in our world, and not vice versa."

5:11 Paul then states his position explicitly (*But now I am writing to you*), so as to avoid any further misunderstanding. Close association is to be withheld from six types of professing Christians. The representative list of sinners whom the church is to judge (5:12b) is in one sense a list of covenantal norms which, when broken, automatically exclude the offender. Paul lists "sexual immorality" first, since that is the issue at hand. However, what governs his choice of the next five vices in the catalogue? Paul gives a clue in v. 13b; the sins to which the Deuteronomic formula quoted by Paul ("Expel the wicked person from among you") is connected form a remarkable parallel to the particular sins mentioned in v. 11:

1 Corinthians 5:11	**Deuteronomy**
Sexually immoral	promiscuity, adultery (22:21–22, 30)
Greedy	(no parallel, but paired with "swindlers" in 1 Cor. 5:9)
Idolaters	idolatry (13:1–5; 17:2–7)
Slanderers	malicious false testimony (19:16–19)
Drunkards	rebellious, drunken son (21:18–21)
Swindlers	kidnapping, slave-trading (24:7; LXX uses the noun "thief")

Thus, the only item in Paul's list without such a conceptual precedent is the "greedy," which is linked with "swindlers" as one class in 5:10. The five correspondences are difficult to pass off as coincidental. As Peter Zaas observes, there is usually very little overlap between any two of Paul's vice lists. Nor is

there overlap between any one of Paul's lists and any list extant in ancient literature.

The fact that sexual immorality, idolatry, and greed are present and prominent in all three vice lists of 1 Corinthians 5–6 gives further support to the idea that the first two vices, if not all three, are Paul's major concerns in the letter. The three vices make up three of the four vices in 5:9, are the first three items in 5:11, and the first, second, and seventh in 6:9–10. Thus each occurs three times in the vice lists of 1 Corinthians, a dubious honor otherwise only accorded to "swindlers," which is related to "greed."

With such persons do not even eat explains further the prohibition of close "association." Such people are to be excluded from the Lord's Table and other meals when the church gathers for fellowship. It is less certain that the church as individuals is to refuse to eat with them. The parallel teaching in 2 Thessalonians 3:15 implies that exclusion does not extend that far. However, the case of the incestuous man may be more serious than that of idle busybodies, and the words "not even" point to private meals also. If Paul had meant only the Lord's Supper, there would not have been any need for these words. Titus 3:10 says to have "nothing to do" with "a divisive person," another very serious offense, after a second warning.

As Holmberg points out, that "eating together conveys a message to participants and onlookers" is "the common (and cross-cultural) perspective of cultural anthropology." Who eats with whom is a powerful way of defining a social group and differentiating it from other groups. In first-century Judaism eating together was of paramount significance (e.g., Gal. 2:12). It is not surprising that Paul bans the sinner from community meals since in vv. 7–8 he has just referred to the Passover, the most nonaccessible Jewish meal, which defined the people of God for Jews (cf. Exod. 12:48). To eat or not to eat with certain people is the question again in 10:1–22.

What effect would such withdrawal of fellowship have on the immoral man? He could not simply attend another church in town. "The church of God in Corinth" was his only option. The purpose of the discipline was, as 2 Thessalonians 3:14 indicates, "in order that he may feel ashamed." Honor and praise were important values in the Roman world. Whereas honor was generally bestowed on males in the form of the giving of gifts, the arranging of marriages, the buying and selling of property, and *the invitation to meals*, shame was confined to the so-called inferior members of society. Social equals in Corinthian society competed for honor, and public acclaim was regularly bestowed via inscriptions, proclamations, and celebrations. To be shunned by one's club or society was a severe disgrace, and legal proceedings were one way of shaming people in the culture (see 6:1–11). The Corinthians' reluctance to discipline the man may have been in part due to his high social standing. It was most uncommon for social inferiors to shame their superior. Paul redefines social status in the church: "let him who boasts boast in the Lord" (1:31). "For Paul it is God, not society, that can bestow real honor and disperse lasting shame." Whereas for the sake of unity or of keeping a "respected" member some churches would counsel a compromise, Paul rates the purity of the church above any such consideration.

The verb "to eat" appears in LXX Psalm 100 in a similar context. In Psalm 101:5, as Michael Newton observes, "banishment is equivalent to [exclusion from] table fellowship" in comparable fashion to v. 11: "He who slanders his neighbors secretly, he is banished; he who is of haughty looks and of a greedy heart, with him food is not shared." In both 1 Corinthians 5 and Psalm 101 (in the LXX) the faithful are not to eat with those guilty of slander, arrogance, and greed. In Psalm 101:7 the presence of God in the temple and evil are said to be incompatible, supplying a further link with the temple theme in 1 Corinthians 5: "He who practices deceit shall not dwell in my house; he who speaks falsehood shall not maintain his position before me." Psalm 101 again demonstrates the Old Testament roots of Paul's instructions about exclusion from the people of God.

5:12 Paul explains why judgment must fall on those within the church with two rhetorical questions. The reason is (cf. "for" at the beginning of the verse; omitted by TNIV) that it is not the church's responsibility to judge outsiders, in the sense of censuring their behavior and undertaking discipline to change them. By "outsiders" he simply means non-Christians (Col. 4:5; 1 Thess. 4:12). The second

question, which expects a positive response and puts the emphasis on "you" (plural) in the Greek, stresses their true responsibility: "those inside." The church is responsible to love, encourage, nurture, *and to discipline* those within its care.

5:13 If the church judges insiders, whose responsibility is it to judge outsiders? *God will judge those outside* is the answer, according to the TNIV. A present tense verb is, however, more likely (as in KJV, RSV): "God judges those outside."135 The sin of unbelievers will not go unchecked. God will sovereignly discipline unbelievers in the present (cf. Rom. 1:18–27), just as the church is to be a channel through which believers are called to account for high-handed sin.

Verse 13b is the quotation of a recurring expression in the LXX of Deuteronomy, where it is used on six occasions to signal the execution of a variety of offenders (13:5; 17:7; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21; 24:7; cf. Judg. 20:13). The texts are identical, apart from the verb, changing from a singular future indicative to a plural aorist imperative, presumably to suit the epistolary context. Furthermore, "expel" occurs only here in the New Testament, suggesting Paul's intentional and explicit use of the formula from Deuteronomy. Paul's failure to introduce the quotation in v. 13, with "as it is written" or the like, may be explicable on rhetorical grounds; the lack of connection suits the chapter's emotionally charged atmosphere. The command, as frightening and drastic as it is, is frequent in the Bible. It closes Paul's instructions on the case of the incestuous man in an unambiguous and uncompromising way.

Why must the sinner be expelled in 1 Corinthians 5? Paul Minear concedes that "it may be easy to grasp the commands Paul gave, but it is far from easy to grasp the reasoning that lay behind these commands." This commentary has held the mirror of the Old Testament up to this question and discovered three answers, each reflecting a motif of Pentateuchal community exclusion: first, the man must be removed because he is guilty of covenant disloyalty; secondly, because while he remains, the church is implicated in his sin; and thirdly, because the community is the temple of the Holy Spirit. In short, he must be driven out for the sake of the church. A fourth reason for his expulsion is that he must be ejected for his own sake. This may well be the distinctively Christian and "new" element in Paul's understanding of exclusion. However, to state the purpose of church discipline only in terms of motivating the repentance and restoration of the sinner is to miss much of Paul's (and his Bible's) teaching and seriously to truncate his ecclesiology.

In all of Paul's letters no instruction speaks more forcefully about the seriousness of sin, the holiness of God's people, and their corporate standing before him than this passage, which is the longest text in the New Testament on the subject of church discipline. The church must expel the wicked man in the hope of regaining him and, above all, to protect its standing before God and the world.

The practice of church discipline today varies widely, from a complete absence and ignorance of the concept to a terrible abuse of it in cruel and harmful ways. The church must avoid being censorious and unrealistic, for people's growth in holiness is not uniform and at most the Bible calls for exclusion as a last resort in only the most serious cases (where a lifestyle of open rebellion threatens to destroy the church) and with the explicit goal of restoration. At the very least, 1 Corinthians 5 challenges us to build churches which foster not only networks of support but also a measure of accountability.[2]

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Mark A. Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, New American Commentary
Gordon Fee, *1 Corinthians*, New International Commentary of the New Testament (NICNT)
Anthony Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (NIGTC)
Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary
Alan F. Johnson, *1 Corinthians*, IVP New Testament Commentary
David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, The Bible Speaks Today
William Baker, *1 Corinthians*, Cornerstone Bible Commentary
Paul Ellingwroth and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on 1 Corinthians*, UBSH

[2] Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 216–221.