

Lesson 3 16 February 2014

Maintaining Church Purity

Lesson Scope: [1 Corinthians 5](#)

Lesson Focus

In the first four chapters, Paul, with exhortations and warnings, encouraged the Corinthian church leaders to build on Jesus, the only foundation, and to deal with sin in the church and in their own lives. Chapter 4 ends with a threefold question regarding the manner and methods of administering discipline to the offender.

In today's lesson, Paul, using that question as a springboard, confronted them concerning the sin of immorality known in their midst and clearly outlined the results if they failed to deal with it properly. Sin unchecked spreads like ripples on the surface of water; it grows like leaven (yeast) which permeates a whole lump of dough. The Corinthian church's toleration of immorality could well have been the result of failing to deal with the pride and emulation among the leaders themselves (1 Corinthians 5:2, 6).

Tolerating sinful practices or attitudes in the body of Christ defiles its members and dishonors its Head. Therefore all known sin must be purged out of the church.

We are not sinners because we sin, but we sin because we are sinners. But since we are saved by grace, we do not practice sin that grace may abound, and neither are we to condone sin in the church. To every church the call of Jesus is "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins" (Revelation 18:4). The churches in Revelation were to deal with the sin in their midst lest Jesus remove their candlesticks from their places. God alone knows how many churches in our day have their candlesticks removed. History is replete with the records of churches that failed to deal with sin and of the decline in spirituality that resulted among their constituents. The call of Christ has always been to reprove and rebuke and exhort with all authority. This is especially important in these last days. Will He find us faithful when He comes?

Lesson Aim: To study principles for maintaining Scriptural church purity.

Theme Verses: [2 Thessalonians 3:14-15](#). And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

Lesson Text

The Responsibility

[1 Corinthians 5:1-2](#) ¹It is reported commonly *that there is* fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. ² And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.

The Remedy

[1 Corinthians 5:3-8](#) ³For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, *concerning* him that hath so done this deed, ⁴In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁵ To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ Your glorying *is* not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? ⁷ Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: ⁸ Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth.

The Sin

[1 Corinthians 5:9-13](#) ⁹I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: ¹⁰ Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. ¹¹ But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner;

with such an one no not to eat. ¹² For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? ¹³ But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.

Questions for Study

The Sin

1. Is the sin named in verse 1 greater than the sin named in verse 2? Explain.
2. On what basis should sorrow for sin be considered genuine?

The Remedy

3. What provisions in Christ has God made effective as a remedy for sin?
4. Using leaven as a type of sin, define these terms: "a little leaven," "the old leaven," "the leaven of malice and wickedness," "a new lump," and "the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."
5. Explain the meaning and the purpose of delivering "such an one unto Satan."

The Responsibility

6. Explain the phrase "with such an one no not to eat."
7. How should members relate to those who are out of fellowship?

Analyzing the Passage

Reported commonly (1 Corinthians 5:1) means "spread abroad or widely known." "Not so much as named" means that this sin in the Corinthian church was seldom heard of even in Gentile circles. That the church was puffed up (1 Corinthians 5:2), or proud about such actions, was indeed shameful and sinful.

"To deliver such an one unto Satan" (1 Corinthians 5:5), meaning "excommunication," is a figure of speech along with the term rod (1 Corinthians 4:21). It concurs with verse 13, where the injunction is to "put away from among yourselves that wicked person." "The destruction of the flesh" (1 Corinthians 5:5) refers to destroying the carnal nature and not the natural body.

A little leaven (5:6) is that insidious, small seed of sin that, left unchecked, permeates the whole life or group involved. The old leaven (1 Corinthians 5:7-8), or the sin nature in general, we need to purge out

(5:7), or crucify, along with specific, besetting sins, such as the "leaven of malice and wickedness" (5:8). The new lump is the result of being unleavened (1 Corinthians 5:7) or cleansed from sin by the blood of "Christ our passover." The "unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:8) is the fruit of the new lump, in which the practice of sin has no place.

The command "with such an one no not to eat" (1 Corinthians 5:11) includes the Communion ordinance, also called "the feast" (1 Corinthians 5:8). The teachings given in verses 1 Corinthians 9-13 show that in the daily duties of life, we relate to the ungodly only out of necessity. God is the Judge of their deeds, but in the spiritual brotherhood, the principle of close Communion governs the membership. Permitting members to commune with known sin in their lives violates this principle. Since God alone has the right to judge the sinner, the Scriptural church judges known sin among its members only by its criteria for membership—the principles and applications of the Holy Scriptures. This makes excommunication very important and serious. By placing the offender outside the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 5:13), he is judged of God, Communion is kept close, and the purity of the bride of Christ is guarded and maintained.

Important Teachings

1. The purity of the church is the purity of each member (1 Corinthians 5:1).
2. Recognizing sin is essential to maintaining church purity (1 Corinthians 5:1-2).
3. Sorrow for sin is essential for dealing with it in the brotherhood (1 Corinthians 5:2).
4. The purity of the church is maintained when the leaders are on guard against sin and are willing to face it (1 Corinthians 5:1-3).
5. The desire to honor Christ motivates the maintenance of purity (1 Corinthians 5:4).
6. The church maintains its purity through Christ's authority and power (1 Corinthians 5:4).
7. Church discipline is to be redemptive (1 Corinthians 5:5).
8. Church discipline maintains purity and checks the spread of the influence of sin in the brotherhood (1 Corinthians 5:5-7).

9. Separation from the world is a vital aid to maintaining church purity (1 Corinthians 5:9-11).

10. God has given the church the responsibility of judging its members by His Word (1 Corinthians 5:12-13).

Additional Teaching

Glorying in individual or brotherhood achievements and spiritual life endangers purity (1 Corinthians 5:6).

Principles and Applications

The Sin

1. The purity of the church is the purity of each member (1 Corinthians 5:1). As a member, what I am in thought will translate into actions that influence the whole body. "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (1 Corinthians 12:27). "Keep thyself pure" (1 Timothy 5:22).

2. Recognizing sin is essential to maintaining church purity (1 Corinthians 5:1-2). Proper analysis of sin in seed form aids in dealing with it. The flashes of evil that cross the mind must be countered immediately by the Word of God, lest insidious thought processes lead to unholy imaginations. If unchecked there, they will result in actions. However, the sins of the spirit (Colossians 3:8) are as exceedingly sinful as the sins of the flesh (Colossians 3:5). God does not measure sin by degrees, and neither should we!

3. Sorrow for sin is essential for dealing with it in the brotherhood (1 Corinthians 5:2). Genuine sorrow responds to the conviction of the Holy Spirit of God with or without the help of the brotherhood. Sorrow that is expressed because one's covert intentions are revealed indicates a pretentious spirit. True sorrow is a sorrow not to be repented of (2 Corinthians 7:9-11). Even when repentance is genuine, a time of proving is proper to help the offender truly realize the seriousness of sin. How God dealt with Miriam is a Biblical example of this practice (Numbers 12:14).

The Remedy

4. The purity of the church is maintained when the leaders are on guard against sin and are willing to face it (1 Corinthians 5:1-3). Nehemiah dealt with the sin in Israel at Jerusalem by calling for a separation from

those who were involved in sinful actions and relationships (Nehemiah 13). Church history documents the results of leaders' failing to deal with plain violation of the Scriptures. "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear" (1 Timothy 5:20).

5. The desire to honor Christ motivates the maintenance of purity (1 Corinthians 5:4). Joseph chose to honor his relationship with God above the desires of the flesh. "Not I, but Christ" expresses the right desire to exalt and honor His Name. Only the pure in heart will see God! "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as [Christ] is pure" (1 John 3:3). "Holy, holy, holy, all the saints adore Thee, / ... Perfect in pow'r, in love, in purity."

6. The church maintains its purity through Christ's authority and power (1 Corinthians 5:4). In Matthew 18:15-18, Jesus outlined for the church the explicit procedure for dealing with offenses. Personal offenses shall be addressed first one to one, then two to one, then the church to one. Finally excommunication must follow if the offender does not respond properly. Regarding binding and loosing, the church does not have absolute authority. Jesus gives the church the authority to ratify what Heaven has already established. Much prayer, careful deliberation, and divine wisdom are needed to determine these things.

7. Church discipline is to be redemptive (1 Corinthians 5:5). "Speak gently to the erring ones: / Ye know not all the pow'r / With which the dark temptation came, / In some unguarded hour." "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). Gentleness, meekness, and love keep the way open for reconciliation if the erring one realizes his need. Sin hurts everyone involved. The flesh needs to be destroyed so that the spirit can be saved. The congregation also suffers when excommunication is necessary. Above all, God is displeased with sin, but He is also ready to forgive the repentant (Psalm 130).

8. Church discipline maintains purity and checks the spread of the influence of sin in the brotherhood (1 Corinthians 5:5-7). The proper administration of church discipline helps keep fresh in our minds the seriousness of voluntary membership commitments and baptismal vows. Proper discipline also keeps in sharp focus that to violate those commitments is to forfeit one's privilege to be part of the body of Christ.

Laxness in administering church discipline is often understood as permissiveness; it potentially propels churches rapidly toward the world.

The Responsibility

9. Separation from the world is a vital aid to maintaining church purity (1 Corinthians 5:9-11). We are in the world but not of the world. We must relate to the ungodly evangelistically but guardedly and must limit our association primarily to necessary business. We likewise relate to members under censure in a way that both they and we are aware that sin has brought a change to the relationship. The principle of close Communion should guard our relationship with those who are out of fellowship. Yet we must keep nothing back that is profitable for their "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). But sympathy for wrong thinking and unscriptural practices violates the Bible way of separation and puts the sympathizer in question.

10. God has given the church the responsibility of judging its members by His Word (1 Corinthians 5:12-13). This becomes necessary when we as individual members fail to judge ourselves by God's Word. The Bible standards of purity in life and conduct are the criteria for membership. If the church fails to excommunicate the sinning member, she fails in her God-given responsibility, and the whole body suffers. Power for victory is lost, and greater spiritual heights cannot be gained. Israel at Ai is a prime example of this.

Answers to Questions

1. Is the sin named in verse 1 greater than the sin named in verse 2? Explain.

No! God does not measure sin by degrees. The sin of pride (1 Corinthians 5:2) is just as sinful as the sin of immorality (1 Corinthians 5:1). "But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:9, 10). Immorality is the act of sin: the result of pride and lust left in the heart will grow to outward fruitage.

2. On what basis should sorrow for sin be considered genuine?

Genuine sorrow responds to the conviction of the Holy Spirit with or without the help of the brotherhood. Sorrow that is expressed because

one is sorry he got caught gives evidence of a pretentious spirit and is usually discernable by a Scriptural brotherhood. 2 Corinthians 7:9-11 gives a catalog of responses that characterize a sorrow "not to be repented of."

3. What provisions in Christ has God made effective as a remedy for sin?

a. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us (1 Corinthians 5:7). The type of the unblemished lamb chosen at Passover time was fulfilled in the antitype "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

b. The Name and power of the Lord Jesus Christ are the remedy for sin and a deterrent against sin, when appropriated in one's personal life. His Name and power also aid the church to discern sin and to keep herself pure (Matthew 18:15-18).

4. Using leaven as a type of sin, define these terms: "a little leaven," "the old leaven," "the leaven of malice and wickedness," "a new lump," and "the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

"A little leaven" (1 Corinthians 5:6) is the insidious beginning seed of sin, deemed by man as insignificantly small, yet sin nevertheless in God's sight. Left unchecked, it permeates the whole life or group involved. "The old leaven" (1 Corinthians 5:7-8) is the old life, the result of the sin nature that needs to be purged out, including specific besetting sins ("the leaven of malice and wickedness" was particularly in focus in the Corinthian church). "A new lump" is the result of being unleavened, or cleansed, from sin by the blood of "Christ our passover" (1 Corinthians 5:7). "The unleavened [without the practice of sin] bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:8) is the fruit of the new lump.

5. Explain the meaning and the purpose of delivering "such an one unto Satan."

"To deliver such an one unto Satan" (1 Corinthians 5:5), meaning "excommunication," is a figure of speech along with the term rod (1 Corinthians 4:21); it concurs with 1 Corinthians 5:13 where the injunction is to "put away from among yourselves that wicked person."

The purpose of excommunication is at least threefold. It serves as a Scriptural means given to the church by Jesus to expel from its midst all members who have forfeited their right to be members (Matthew 18:17). It also serves as an example and a warning to others to examine

their lives by introspection. "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear" (1 Timothy 5:20). Thirdly, by excommunication the offender is excluded from the privileges of close Communion. This exclusion in turn should be that which is redemptive—for the purpose of restoring the close relationship that was severed by sin. The degree to which excommunication is redemptive depends largely on the offender's response to the administered discipline. Also the attitudes of the administrative body toward the offender are important. Gentleness, meekness, and love in administering discipline will keep the way open for the offender who has a true sorrow for sin.

6. Explain the phrase "with such an one no not to eat."

The command "with such an one no not to eat" (1 Corinthians 5:11) includes the Communion ordinance, also called "the feast" (1 Corinthians 5:8). The teaching given in 1 Corinthians 9-13 shows that the Christian, in his daily duties of life, limits his relationship with the ungodly. But in the spiritual brotherhood, the principle of close Communion governs the membership. Permitting members to commune with known sin in their lives violates this principle. Since God alone has the right to judge the sinner, the Scriptural church judges known sin among its members only on the basis of its criteria for membership—the principles and applications of the Scriptures. This makes excommunication very important and serious. By placing the offender outside the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 5:13), he is judged of God, Communion is kept close, and the purity of the body of Christ is guarded and maintained.

7. How should members relate to those who are out of fellowship?

We should relate to the brother or sister under censure with a degree of reserve so that we and he or she know that the relationship has changed because of sin. Yet we must keep nothing back that is profitable for his or her "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). A firm handshake, an encouraging word, and the promise of prayer on his or her behalf indicate sincerity rather than total avoidance. But sympathy for wrong thinking and unscriptural practices violates the principle of separation, and it not only fails to be redemptive but also places the sympathizer in question

Summarizing the Lesson

More holiness give me,
More strivings within; ...
More patience in suff'ring,
More sorrow for sin;
More faith in my Saviour,
More sense of His care;
More joy in His service,
More purpose in prayer.

More purity give me,
More strength to o'ercome; ...
More freedom from earth stains,
More longings for home;
More fit for the kingdom,
More used would I be;
More blessed and holy,
More, Saviour, like Thee.
—P P. Bliss

Research Guide

1. Read the message of Jesus to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, noticing how often He emphasizes the need for repentance and cleansing to be accounted worthy of inclusion in the promises to overcomers.
2. Read Joshua 7 in regard to the serious consequences of sin and God's faithfulness in revealing it to those who are serious about their responsibility to deal with it.