

INTRODUCTION

*Few subjects are more distasteful to modern Christians than the one Paul deals with in this chapter. The subject in question is not sexual immorality but church discipline!*

*In other words, here in these 13 verses, Paul had to confront two sins in the church @ Corinth: sexual immorality of one member and spiritual indifference of other members. The tragic situation then was that the flagrant act of one professing believer was tolerated because of the flippant attitude of other professing believers!*

THE CHRISTIAN'S SIN & THE CHURCH'S SIN(A) *The Christian's Sin*

What is it? *It is sexual immorality (verse 1). To be specific, a believer in the church has his father's wife. The word 'has' conveys the message of more than just have sexual relations with. It probably also means 'have as wife'.*

*A possible scenario is that this man has married the wife of his father. In saying it is the wife of his father, it is clear that the woman in question is not his mother, but likely to be the second wife of the father. Also, the fact that Paul talks about the man but not the woman, it would appear that the woman is not a member of the church, hence not a believer.*

*Whatever the precise nature of their relationship, it is clear that an illicit union of a particular unsavoury kind has been contracted. It is possibly one of being unequally yoked with an unbeliever as well as an illicit fornicatory relationship equivalent to incest.*

*Leviticus 18:8 and Deuteronomy 22:30 clearly forbids such relationships.*

What else can we say about it?

*It is clear that this is a "lifestyle" matter that Paul is talking about here, meaning this wrong relationship has gone on for some time already. It is now part and parcel of that man's life.*

*It is also clear that this is something that is public – the church knows about it, and even those outside the church knows about it, and is talking about it! “It is actually reported that . . . .”*

*The “is not even named among the Gentiles” indicate that this sin is even frowned upon by the unbelievers. When we recall what kind of a place is Corinth == a sex-crazed city, it gives us an indication of just how bad this sin is! Even the highly immoral Corinthians would not sink so low into depravity!!*

(B) *The Church’s Sin*

*What is it? It is spiritual indifference. The church knew the sin of this person and did nothing about it! In fact, verse 2 says that they were puffed up, instead of mourning; verse 6 says that they were glorying!*

*It is unbelievable that the church @ Corinth would be so indifferent to such a horrible abomination, and even more shocking that they would be boasting and glorying in it!!*

*Why? The reason for their boasting and glorying could be due to their mistaken of just how spiritual they were that no matter what happens to the body, it does not affect their soul! Or it could be that they were boasting and glorying in how liberal-minded they were in handling such matters, in tolerating such conduct!*

THE APOSTLE’S RESPONSE & DEMAND

(A) *The Apostle’s Response (V3)*

*What is it? Though Paul was far away, yet he could not remain indifferent. He stated his stand very clearly: He is against it and he would act to declare this person’s profession of faith as no longer credible!*

What message (s) does it convey?

(1) *Paul is here writing as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Hence his response is a reflection of Christ’s response. Jesus Christ the Head of the Church is against this act and He will act to deal with it. He is not indifferent to it!*

(2) *Like Paul, we too must not be indifferent to the sins of others when God exposed them to us. Paul did not turn to look the other side. Paul did not plead 'distance' as reason for his non-involvement. In fact, Paul got stuck in because he loves them.*

(B) *The Apostle's Demand (V4-5)*

What is it? *He wants the church to expel that person from the membership!*

What does it entail?

V2: *be taken away from among you*

V5: *deliver to Satan*

V7: *purge out*

V11: *not to keep company . . . not to eat*

V13: *put away from yourselves*

*It is to remove the person from the church membership, to expel him from Christian fellowship, no longer (even) having social contact with him, but making a declaring that because of the way he lives his life now, it cannot be believed that he is a Christian.*

*Beneath this act is the understanding that the world is divided into two realms: in the world under the rule of Satan, and in the church under Christ. To deliver one to Satan means to move him out of the category of being in the church and to the category of being in the world.*

How should it be done?

V4: *To be done solemnly, to be done as a church, to be done with the authority of Christ.*

V13: *To be done corporately; the church as a church must do it.*

Why bother to do it?

- (i) *As an act of love to the person being disciplined.*

*It is not done as a vengeful, punitive act, but as a curative and restorative act. His body is to be delivered to Satan that his spirit may be saved in the Day of our Lord Jesus. The ultimate aim is still his spiritual and eternal wellbeing, if he is a true believer. And it is governed by a view of the Day of Judgement. Christ will return. This world will end. Hence, we must live with this truth in view.*

- (ii) *As an act of protection for the church.*

*While his sin is a serious infection, by doing nothing in response, by being indifferent, it is a complete failure of the immune system. Tolerance of this sin will lead to tolerance of many other sins and before long the church of Jesus Christ will become a synagogue of the devil.*

*Paul used the analogy of leaven and the Passover. Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us. This is our identity and status. We must keep (present continuous) the feast of the unleavened bread, meaning we must keep expelling leaven (picture of sin) whenever we find it. In the Old Testament, the feast only last for 7 days but for New Testament believers, the feast is to last forever. Hence we keep on expelling leaven from ourselves, we keep on feasting on the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

*Note that Paul did not say purge out the leaven that you may be unleavened. He says you are already unleavened (status, identity). But purge out leaven whenever and wherever you find it, so that you will continue to be a new lump.*

*In other words, Paul is saying that they must expel that person from the church so that the church will be holy and continue to be holy.*

- (iii) *As an act of obedience to Christ.*

*This is what Jesus wants you to do.*

*As disciples/followers of Jesus, can we say 'No' to Him and go our own way? Are we not then declaring that we are our Master instead of Jesus?*

*As a church of Jesus Christ, can we ignore His revealed will? If we do, are we not saying that He is not our Head. If so, then who is our Head?*

### A CRITICAL DISTINCTION TO MAKE

*Verse 9-13 lay out the broader principle on which the earlier 8 verses are based. Everyone alive is divided into two realms: the world and the church.*

*When we see sin in the world, what must we do? We do not condone it, but we also do not and should not cut ourselves off from the world. The church's relationship with the world is like the boat and the sea. The boat must be in the water, but the water must not be in the boat! Some may want to take the boat out of the water, but that is wrong. Others get so lovey-dovey with the water that they didn't realise their boat has water in it and will soon sink to the bottom of the sea. We engage the world, but we do not belong to the world. As salt, we need to be in touch with the meat, else we don't function as we ought. As light, we need to confront darkness, else we fail our duty.*

*When we see sin in the church, what must we do? We must act! We must admonish privately and when needed, discipline publicly. We must do it because we must be different from the world, we must bear a testimony to Christ, we must love the one sinning and we must keep ourselves in the most holy faith.*

### SOME APPLICATIONS & REFLECTIONS

*\*\* It is possible for a professing Christians to fall into very grievous sin!*

*\*\* It is possible for an apostolic church to become spiritually indifferent!*

*Are both possibilities realities in us right now?*