

## Chapter Five

### THE PROBLEM OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

(5:1-13)

#### IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. What was the immorality being practiced in this instance in the Corinthian church?
2. How could Christians be arrogant about that?
3. Wasn't Paul's instruction too severe to do any good for the sinners?
4. Does all sin in the church act like leaven?
5. What should the Christian's relationship be to immoral people outside the church?

#### SECTION 1

##### Atrocious Sin (5:1-2)

**5** It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife. <sup>2</sup>And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

**5:1 Aberration:** Abruptly Paul brings up the subject of the grossest immorality being practiced in the Corinthian brotherhood by one of the church members. It had *actually* (Gr. *holos*, most assuredly, incontrovertibly) been established and reported that there was *immorality* (Gr. *porneia*, sexual unchastity) among Christians in Corinth. The Greek word *porneia* does not indicate the specific form this immorality had taken because the word is used as a synonym for adultery (Matt. 5:32; 19:9) and for illicit sexual intercourse in the unmarried (I Cor. 6:9) while in classical Greek and the book of Revelation the word is used for prostitution (Rev. 17:2, 4; 18:3, 9). In fact, *porneia* often means, in the New Testament, illicit sexual intercourse in general. But Paul specifies the sexual immorality in Corinth as a form of *incest*, (*incest*, from Latin *incestus* and French *incastus*, meaning simply, "not chaste"). Paul does not use the word incest but simply describes the case as "a man living with his father's wife." Some commentators assume that the guilty man's father had died and the son was living with one of the father's wives. Most do not think it

## FIRST CORINTHIANS

was the guilty man's own mother, but a second wife of his father after divorce or death. Other commentators think the father may have been still living and was the "one who suffered the wrong" mentioned in II Corinthians 7:12. Whatever the status of the guilty man's father, the crime of incestuous sexual intercourse is severe enough to warrant the death penalty in the Mosaic covenant (cf. Lev. 18:6-18; 20:10-21; Deut. 27:20). The possibility of genetic deformities in the offspring of incestuous relationships is not relevant to scriptural prohibition. God decrees against incest because it destroys the divinely decreed order of human hierarchy in marriage and thus is destructive of the social order itself.

Paul describes this sin with shock as, "such immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles." Paul was speaking hyperbolically to emphasize the seriousness of the crime. Incest *was* practiced among a few of the more depraved Gentiles. Some of the ancient Egyptians (Cleopatra II, with her brother, Cleopatra VII with Ptolemy XIII, her brother) practiced incest; Herod Antipas was married to Herodias, his niece-sister-in-law; some of the Roman emperors were accused by Suetonius in his *Lives of The Twelve Caesars* of practicing incest (Nero with his mother; Caligula with his sisters); Cicero, citing the case of the woman Sassia's marriage to her son-in-law, Melinus, says, "Oh, incredible wickedness, and—except in this woman's case—unheard of in all experience." There is also the case of a man named Callias, cited by Andocides in Greece in 400 B.C., who married his wife's mother! But Andocides asks whether among the Greeks such a thing had ever been done before. Even some Jews practiced incest in the days of Ezekiel (cf. Ezek. 22:11). So, even though some of the more depraved practiced it, the crime of incest was generally abhorrent to the pagan. Even modern day anthropologists and sociologists find incest a crime considered immoral, aberrant and destructive in all ages and cultures:

Cross-cultural studies of morality have typically remarked on the complexity and diversity of values to be found across time and space. One commentator has been led to conclude that "There is scarcely one norm or standard of good conduct that, in another time and place, does not serve to mark bad conduct." One possible exception to this conclusion is the universality of the incest taboo. (*Moral Development and Behavior*, pg. 70, Thomas Lickona, Editor, pub. Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1976)

True, Corinth was Corinth—one of the fleshpots of the ancient world—but for all their obsessions with sin, the pagan Corinthians

themselves had certain limits! It is hard to believe that a sin which even the pagans shunned had invaded the Church! Carnality (concentration on worldliness) plays funny tricks. It often turns truth upside down, or as Isaiah the prophet put it, "calling evil good and good evil" (Isa. 5:20).

**5:2 Arrogance:** The Christians in Corinth divided when they were supposed to be united—and united when they were supposed to be dividing! Is there ever a time when Christians are supposed to divide? Certainly not over song books, church buildings or human leaders, or any other frivolous matter. But immorality of any kind is never a frivolous matter. Apparently, from this text and others, God expects Christians to keep themselves separated from anyone who calls himself a brother and is continuing to practice immorality. The RSV says the guilty man was "living" with his father's wife; the Greek text uses the word *echein* which is a present infinitive and means literally, "to keep on having." This immorality was flagrant and continuous. Some of these Corinthian Christians had formerly been fornicators, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, drunkards and robbers as well as idolaters (I Cor. 6:10) but they had overcome these sins. Even at the time this epistle was being written they were having difficulty resolving the problems of sexuality and marriage (I Cor. ch. 7). Indeed, even those called "saints" are faced with such problems. It is not a guarantee against temptation to be a Christian. Temptations are sure to come (Matt. 18:7). But Christians must not give in to temptations. Forty years later, the Christians of Asia Minor were still having problems with immorality in their congregations (see Revelation, ch. 2-3).

They were *puffed up* (Gr. *pephusiomenoi*, perfect tense verb, meaning, having been puffed up in the past, they were continuing to be puffed up). Paul was shocked about the incestuous relationship in this Christian, but he was *more shocked* at the attitude of the congregation toward it! The congregation had puffed itself up with self-importance and worldly wisdom. It was more interested in maintaining its cliques and parties and its "image" with the worldly-wise than in righteousness. They were concentrating on patterning the church after human institutions and worldly structures of leadership. Perhaps they were so puffed up about their image they did not want to admit this problem existed among them. If they took the drastic action taught by Christ and the apostles, they might be stigmatized as "prudish" by the pagan society of Corinth and their image of sophistication would be destroyed. It does not seem they were proud of the immoral conduct on the part of this brother, but their sin lay

## FIRST CORINTHIANS

in the fact that they failed to do what God required and remove the immoral person from their fellowship. Perhaps the elders of the church were afraid their fellow Christians might accuse them of being "judgmental" had they taken the action required by the gospel. These are the very reasons some Christian congregations and leaders do not exercise New Testament guidance today in disciplining church members guilty of flagrant, aberrant and continuous immorality. Another reason it has become difficult today to apply discipline that would lead to repentance is the fact that a Christian disfellowshipped from one congregation may find sympathetic indulgence and reception in another congregation, often within the same city or locality.

Paul suggests that the only proper attitude for the congregation toward this disgraceful immorality is that of *mourning*. Incidentally, Paul's suggestion furnishes a classic illustration of what Jesus meant in the second Beatitude (Matt. 5:4), "Blessed are those who *mourn* for they shall be strengthened." The Bible pronounces a blessing on those who mourn over the *cause* of sin which is rebellion and disgrace toward God. Most people selfishly mourn because they are suffering the consequences of their sin—they are not concerned that sin has brought shame and hurt to God. The Greek syntax of 5:2 is instructive! Literally it would be translated, "And you, having become puffed up continue to be, rather than having mourned about this circumstance *in order that* (Gr. *hina*) the one having done this deed might be removed from among you." In other words, true Christian mourning about sin *does* something about the sin. Mourning is not satisfied simply with regret. Paul advised, "Let him who has done this be *removed* (Gr. *arthe*, be driven out) from among you."

The Corinthian congregation was not mourning—they were *boasting* (see 5:6). What had they to boast about in this situation? Obviously, they were not bragging about how immoral the congregation was. Their pride undoubtedly centered in their concept of "sophistication" or "broadmindedness." The elders and leaders of the different factions may have rationalized, "What our brother does in his private life is entirely his affair. Our obligation is to continue to love him; we dare not be judgmental toward these people." Perhaps they justified their approach to the circumstances by saying to themselves, "When you live in Corinth, you have to adapt somewhat to the culture. Besides, morals change with the times and we should feel a certain obligation to 'loosen up' ourselves, become less bigoted and more liberal." This same carnal attitude of boasting about "broadmindedness," especially in the area of sexual promiscuity, is sweeping our nation in high and low places—and even in some churches.

Whatever the excuse for their boasting, it was improper—in fact it was sinful!

## SECTION 2

**Apostolic Summons (5:3-8)**

3 For though absent in body I am present in spirit, and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment <sup>4</sup>in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled, and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, <sup>5</sup>you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? <sup>7</sup>Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. <sup>8</sup>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.

**5:3-5 Chastening:** This advice that the immoral man should be expelled from the church comes with full apostolic authority. It is advice from the Holy Spirit of God speaking through the instrumentality of an apostle. There is no human guesswork involved here. Christ's bride (the church) is to keep herself sanctified, cleansed, in splendor, without spot or wrinkle, that she might be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:21-27). Immorality and all impurity must not even be *named* among the saints (Eph. 5:3). The church is to take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them, for it is a shame even to  *speak* of the things that they do in secret (Eph. 5:11-12).

Although the apostle was absent from their presence, and could not be there to speak with them face to face, he had already *made judgment* from the moment he received the report (Gr. *kekrika*, perfect tense verb), and his judgment continued to be, "deliver such a one to Satan." Note the qualifying statements Paul makes about his judgment:

- a. It is in the name of (by the authority of) the Lord Jesus.
- b. It is by apostolic epistle—the apostle being absent in body.
- c. It is to be done by the assembled church.
- d. It is for the purpose of putting to death worldly-mindedness in the guilty man in order to save his spirit for God.

## FIRST CORINTHIANS

Paul's bodily absence from these brethren did not mean his spirit (will) could not be present among them. His spirit would be actualized among them through his letter to them. His letter expressed his will—his spirit—his personality. As a matter of fact, it is through the written word of the Holy Spirit (the Bible) that God actualizes the Spirit of Christ in the heart and soul of every believer (see John 14:21, 23; 15:7, 10, 11; I John 2:5-6; 2:24; 3:24). And, of course, Paul's written word carried with it "the power of our Lord Jesus."

The apostolic order is to "deliver this man to Satan." The Greek word is *paradounai*, which means, "give over, abandon, deliver up." What is it to abandon someone to Satan? It is the same as, "Let him become to you as a Gentile and a publican" (Matt. 18:17); it is the same as "having nothing to do with him" (II Thess. 3:6, 14, 15). To deliver, or abandon, a church member to Satan is to declare him a non-covenant person. Those of the Old Testament dispensation who were "cut off from the congregation" were to be considered no longer members of Israel and severed from all rights and privileges of the covenant! They could not offer sacrifices at the temple, they could not associate with God's people, and they were considered unclean. They were no longer able to be reconciled to God. The same is true in the case of a Christian excommunicated from the church. Such a one is unreconciled to God, a rebel, and not a member of God's redeemed community *until* he repents and seeks forgiveness. Delivering an immoral impenitent to Satan is really only an acknowledgment by the church of that which the sinner has already done to himself! It gets the church's position straightened out on sin as much as it gets the sinner's attitude straightened out on it!

Excommunication does not mean that the church has given up on the sinner and wishes him to be lost forever. In fact, it means just the opposite. It means the church really cares that the sinner is jeopardizing his eternal salvation by continuing in his sin, and the church is jealous for his salvation and fellowship, but the church must also fear God and keep his commandments concerning "sin in the camp."

This is precisely why Paul qualified his order to deliver the man to Satan with the words, ". . . for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." The church was not to destroy the man, but to reclaim the man for Christ. As he was, living in contemptuous rebellion against Christ's rule over him, he was giving allegiance to Satan. The church must understand this is where the man is, admit the man belongs to Satan and not to Christ, and take unpleasant but affirmative action that might move the man to return to Christ's lordship in his life.

Satan, of course, would not personally offer any assistance to the guilty man to destroy his carnal-mindedness. Satan would use every opportunity and circumstance to deceive the man into involving himself ever deeper into carnality. God alone, through his word and Spirit in our hearts, destroys fleshly-mindedness. Paul did not mean the physical body of the man was to be destroyed—he meant the destruction of an attitude! The apostle wanted to slay a certain mind-set, a philosophy of life, which the man had accepted and allowed to turn him away from godliness. Paul himself had to fight and conquer (by God's grace) this same mind-set (cf. Rom. 7:13-25; I Cor. 9:24-27). There is this same struggle in every Christian (see Gal. 5:17).

Apparently Paul believed this man would learn something by being excommunicated and given over to some realm where Satan is allowed by God to function which might motivate the man to draw near to Christ. Paul "delivered to Satan" two of his co-workers, Hymenaeus and Alexander, that they might learn "not to blaspheme." How did he expect them to *learn* this? How did God teach Job to depend more on God's grace than on his own self-righteousness? God "delivered" Job to Satan (see Job 2:6-7). How was Paul, the apostle, taught that he should not boast in having received revelations from God that no other human had received? How did Paul learn that God's grace was sufficient and that he should not rely on himself? God "delivered" Paul to Satan and sent Paul through the school of affliction (see II Cor. 12:1-10; II Cor. 1:3-11, respectively). Jesus "delivered" Peter to Satan "to be sifted as wheat" (Luke 22:31-32). Evidently Paul believed that when this man was cast out of the brotherhood of believers, he would suffer affliction (which the devil would gladly inflict because the devil's total ambition is to hurt both God and man) which God would allow the devil to inflict, and this might produce repentance in the man. Since Satan is the great accuser, the man's torment might be such a burden of guilt he would be moved to shame (see II Thess. 3:14-15) and turn to Christ for grace and forgiveness which would demand that he "put to death the deeds done in the body." When God "gave up" the heathen society Paul wrote about in chapter one of Romans, to whom and to what did he give them up? He gave them up to the prince of darkness! When God allowed a strong delusion to come upon those who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness, to whom did he deliver them? He delivered them to the "activity of Satan" (II Thess. 2:1-15). We must always remember, however, that Biblical religion is not a form of dualism like the religions of ancient Babylon

## FIRST CORINTHIANS

and Persia. God's word never presents a picture of two kingdoms (light and darkness; good and evil) with *equal* power! In the Bible we learn that Jehovah is without beginning and end and is all powerful forever. Satan has only such power as is relegated to him and is constantly subject to the control of Almighty God (see our comments on Revelation, ch. 20, in *Twenty-Six Lessons on Revelation, Part Two*, pgs. 95-121, pub. College Press).

If this guilty man, delivered to Satan, puts to death his attitude that this world and physical things are man's ultimate purpose and goal, his spirit will be saved. Paul, of course, does not mean to infer that man is only spirit and that the physical body is evil, *per se*. That was the deception taught by the Gnostics to justify their depravities. Paul was well aware that at the resurrection man will be raised with a new body. But it will be a body different from the one he inhabits in this cosmic order. Man's new body will be celestial, immortal and incorruptible (cf. I Cor. 15:35-58). Therefore, what Paul means by the saving of man's spirit is the saving of the *whole* man. Man is not whole until he is "spiritual." It is the holy spiritual essence of man that is eternal and if controlled by the love of Christ (cf. II Cor. 4:16—5:21), will be clothed with immortality at Christ's "day" (his second coming). Scandalous and impenitent immorality in any congregation must be dealt with. There is no option except discipline. It is the Lord's command. However, in view of the awesome responsibility of having to "deliver . . . a man (or woman) to Satan for the destruction of the flesh" it must be done with compassionate love, with strict adherence to the divine guidelines of the New Testament, and with reclamation of a penitent brother as its only goal. When such a case demands attention by the congregation and its leadership, it must be done with firmness, without partiality and as quickly as love allows. "Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil" (Eccl. 8:11; see also Isa. 26:9-10). The action of delivering a member of a congregation to Satan (or excommunication) must never be done on the basis of hearsay. The evidence of immorality must be clear and actual—not merely rumored.

**5:6-8 Cleansing:** It seems incredible that the Corinthian Christians would be boasting about such an abhorrent sin in their midst. Perhaps they were boasting about their graciousness and tolerance in not having judged the man (see comments on verse 2). Whatever the case, the apostle is as appalled at their attitude as he is at the sin. By their tolerance of this perversion they are leaving the whole congregation to be infected with sin. Leaven (yeast) is commonly used



in the Bible to symbolize the penetrating power of a small matter so as to permeate and influence the greater, for either good or evil. The context always determines how the symbol is being used. It is clear that Paul is using leaven here as a figure of evil influence. Every one knows that just a little leaven will reproduce itself in a large lump of bread-dough. It is also true that one sin may infect a whole congregation, reproducing evil throughout the whole body. And how much more deadly would be the influence of such sin if the congregation was proud of its toleration of the evil.

Paul commands the church to *cleanse* itself. The Greek text has the word *ekkatharate* (aorist imperative). This is an order, not a suggestion. The Greek word is a compound word with a prepositional prefix meaning, "clean out, purge out, eliminate." It is the word from which we have the English word *catharsis* which means to purify.

Should anyone think the apostle is too severe in his demands or his language he has only to read the Old Testament law concerning punishment for sins of seemingly lesser perversion. In the law of Moses Israelites were to be put to death for rebelling against parents, for bowing down to an image, for practicing witchcraft, and many other sins. Surely Christians are never to get the idea that God is more tolerant of sin in the New dispensation (see Heb. 2:1-4; Matt. 5:27-30). Jesus cursed a fig tree and withered it simply because it gave signs of fruit but produced none. Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead by the Holy Spirit for lying about what they gave to the church; Elymas was struck blind by the Holy Spirit trying to turn Sergius Paulus away from faith in Jesus (Acts 13:8ff.). God is serious about sin!

All the symbolism of Jewish history and God's redemptive program for man is applied here to the Christian experience. The Christian covenant is God's ultimate feast. Jesus spoke often (parabolically) of his new kingdom (the church) as a "feast." Paul is not referring to the Lord's Supper, *per se*, in these verses. He is using the same figure of speech Jesus used in his parables. Paul is likening the *whole* Christian life to a festival or holy-day. Of course, the best symbol to illustrate that is the Jewish Passover feast. The Christian's *Passover* is Christ (Gr. *pascha*). Christ is the absolute passover—the perfect passover. He is the fulfillment of that which all the Jewish feasts typified and prophesied. The Old Testament passover specifically celebrated God's redemption of Israel and sanctification or separation from bondage into a people called out for God's glory and purpose. All the festivals or holy-days ordained by God in the law of Moses were celebrations of righteousness, love, truth and goodness. They

## FIRST CORINTHIANS

were holy dedications acknowledging man's reconciliation to the will of God through sacrificial, vicarious atonement.

At the Jewish passover, specifically, all Jewish homes had to be searched with minute care for leaven and any that was found was to be put out of the house (see Exod. 12:14-20). If anyone disobeyed this commandment they were to be "cut off" from the congregation of Israel! Leaven, in the matter of the Jewish passover, symbolized the old life of bondage in Egypt, which, in turn, symbolizes sin. In the Jewish passover the old leaven had to be thrown out before the slaying of the sacrificial lamb and the observance of the festival. In the Corinthian antitype their lamb had already been sacrificed and they were trying to celebrate the festival (the Christian's life) with the old leaven still remaining in their "house."

The whole Christian experience is said to be a festival or a feast. The Old Testament prophets often predicted the messianic age in the figure of a feast (Isa. 25:6-9; 55:1-2; Zech. 14:16-19, etc.). Jesus used the figure of a feast to predict his messianic kingdom (Luke 14:1ff.; Matt. 22:1-14; 25:1-13; John 6:35-63; Luke 15:22-32). The apostles frequently spoke of the Christian life as feasting (cf. Heb. 6:1ff.; 12:22-23; I Cor. 3:2; Heb. 5:12-14; I Peter 2:2-3; Eph. 5:18; see also John 4:34; Matt. 5:6; Isa. 65:13). So, when Paul says here, "Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival . . ." (Gr. *heortazomen*, feast) he is not limiting the need for cleansing to partaking of the Lord's Supper. The church must purge itself of the sin within it in order to be considered as being a participant of the whole Christian experience!

And the sin within the church is not only the man living with his father's wife! The translation of the Greek word *kakias* by the English word *malice* is not sufficiently precise to give the clear meaning of the sentence. The word *kakias* means "badness in quality." It may have the connotation of maliciousness if the context demands it, but that does not seem to be the case here. The word *kakias* refers more to disposition or attitude (bad attitude) than it does to deeds. The next word in the sentence, *evil* (Gr. *ponerias*), has to do with deeds. It would seem, therefore, that Paul was urging the Corinthian church to purge itself of its bad attitude or disposition (arrogance and worldly sophistication) as well as the incestuous relationship of the man with his father's wife.

So long as the church was of the attitude to see itself as sophisticated by allowing the sinful couple to continue in its fellowship, they could not possibly be living the Christian life ("keeping the festival with the unleavened bread") of sincerity and truth. The word *eilikrineias* is translated *sincerity* and is from two Greek words which mean *sun*

and *judge*. The idea is that a life lived in *sincerity* is a life that is not lived in darkness or shadows, but one that is lived in the undimmed, brilliance of pure truth.

### SECTION 3

#### Affiliations Sorted (5:9-13)

9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral men; <sup>10</sup>not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. <sup>11</sup>But rather I wrote to you not to associate with any one who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber—not even to eat with such a one. <sup>12</sup>For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? <sup>13</sup>God judges those outside. “Drive out the wicked person from among you.”

**5:9-10 Associating with Heathen:** We learn from verse 9 that Paul wrote at least three letters to the Corinthian church. It is clear from his statement, “I wrote to you in my letter . . .,” that he had written to Corinth prior to the epistle now before us, and, of course, he wrote at least one (Second Corinthians) afterward. In the non-extant letter Paul had exhorted them “not to associate with immoral men.” The Greek word *sunanamignusthai* is a compound of three words and literally means, *mix up with*, and is translated *associate with* (RSV) and *company with* (KJV). The same Greek word is used in II Thessalonians 3:14, and is translated “*have nothing to do with him.*” In his previous letter Paul intended his exhortation about dissociation from immoral people to be applied in its strictest sense to any fellow Christian who was continuing, impenitently, in an immoral sexual relationship. That would probably apply specifically, as we shall observe later, to grossly impenitent and perverted sexual sinners in the heathen society as well. It seems, however, that the Corinthians inadvertently (or perhaps deliberately) misunderstood Paul. They assumed he meant they were to withdraw *completely* from *any* associations with their heathen neighbors. The RSV translation, *not at all*, of the Greek words *ou pantos* seems to make Paul mean that Christians should have no reservations *at all* about *mixing* or *mingling* with the immoral around them. Such an idea would make the inspired apostle contradict himself since in II Corinthians 6:14—7:1 Paul

## FIRST CORINTHIANS

pointedly commands Christians not to share in heathen depravity! The Greek words *ou pantos* are better translated, *not meaning altogether*. Thus Paul is saying, "I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral men; not meaning that you must dissociate yourself *altogether* (or completely) from the immoral of this world. . . ." The apostle categorizes the heathen into those who sin against their bodies (immoral, Gr. *pornois*, sexual sins), those who sin against society (greedy and robbers), and those who sin against God (idolaters, Gr. *eidololatrais*, image worshipers).

Since all the citizens of Corinth, except the Christians and Jews, would be idolaters, and many of them would be guilty of sexual sins and/or greedy, it would have been nearly impossible for the Christians to reject *all* associations with the heathen. They could have made no purchases in the markets, made no appeals for civil justice, visited no neighbors and relatives, and made no evangelistic contacts with the lost. The only way they could have had no associations at all, theoretically, would be to move away from the city of Corinth into the uninhabited mountains and forests and formed monasteries or communes which were completely self-sustaining and self-governing. Total dissociation would have precluded any possibility of the Corinthian Christians carrying out the Great Commission (cf. Matt. 28:18-20). Neither Jesus nor the apostles ever advocated asceticism or monasticism. New Testament Christianity is to be lived out in the midst of a sinful society so it may have a leavening (in the good sense) influence (cf. Matt. 13:33; Luke 13:20-21). Christians are the "salt of the earth" and "light of the world" (Matt. 5:13-16). Christians are to be "in the world but not of the world" (John 17:15-19). As one writer has put it, Paul's admonition here concerning the immoral of this world did not prohibit *contact*, but it did prohibit *conformity*.

But Paul's admonition concerning an impenitent, immoral person who bears the name of brother, is, "not even to eat with such a one." This does not refer to the Lord's Supper, but to dining together socially. Being a guest for dinner in another person's home was considered in the ancient world to be a sign that the host was intimately associated with the guest and that he agreed with his philosophical stand and his life-style. The Pharisees were shocked that Jesus would eat with publicans and sinners (cf. Matt. 9:10-11; 11:19; Luke 19:7). It would be dangerous to both the faithful Christian and the impenitent brother for the faithful Christian to *socialize* with the impenitent (see II Thess. 3:6, 14; Titus 3:10-11; II Peter 2:1-22; II John 10-11). First, it would give the impenitent brother the impression that he would be acceptable in the Christian fellowship whether he repented

or not; second, it would expose the faithful brother to temptations in a seductive atmosphere of geniality and acceptability; third, it would make possible certain unwarranted conclusions from both the Christian community and the pagan society that the Church was not much different than the world in the matter of immorality.

The church is not charged with the responsibility of disciplining ("judging") outsiders. Paul expected the Corinthian church to know that. As far as the unchurched sinners of society was concerned, the apostle allows for such contact as was necessary for the ongoing of life in the world. But he permitted no contact (complete withdrawal) at even the social level with a sinning brother.

On the other hand, the church is most specifically charged with the responsibility for disciplining ("judging") members of the church. For the church to fail in this *duty* is to dilute the spiritual quality of the congregation, and thus destroy its purpose as a "city set on a hill"! This does not mean that all church members must be sinless. It does not mean that every church member who commits an unwitting sin or falls into a temptation, must be excommunicated. The crucial issue is flagrant, shameful, continued sin for which there is no apparent repentance (including a change of mind issuing in a change of conduct). When such impenitence is reported and has been established by due scriptural process, discipline involving *driving out* (Gr. *exareite*, expel, take out, removed from) the *evil one* (Gr. *poneron*) from the fellowship of the church is demanded. It is the word of the Lord!

### APPLICATIONS:

1. Church membership and association with Christian people does not necessarily guarantee immunity from the grossest and most perverted forms of sin.
2. There are sins so destructive of social fibre that even the heathen are appalled at them.
3. What is even more appalling is that the church may take an attitude of sophisticated arrogance or indifference toward the sins which heathens abhor!
4. The proper attitude of church members toward flagrant and perverted sin by one of its members is *not* arrogance, indifference, gossip, titillation or self-righteous apathy, but mournful discipline.
5. The spiritual authority of the apostolic revelation to guide the church in matters of discipline is as equally viable in the New Testament epistles as it would be if the apostles were present in the body.

## FIRST CORINTHIANS

6. God may allow Satan to hurt those whom the church excommunicates in order to motivate them, if possible, to repent (destroy the flesh).
7. Impenitent sin is like yeast. It permeates and influences the whole community of the redeemed unless it is purged out of the church.
8. The whole Christian life is symbolized by the holy-days and feasts of the Mosaic covenant—especially by the Passover. The church could learn a great deal about its call to holiness and sanctification by studying these great Israelite festivals.
9. The Christian community cannot “celebrate” the Christian life in a manner pleasing to God if it allows flagrant, impenitent sinners to continue in its fellowship.
10. God’s demand for sanctification and holiness by church members does not mean they are to withdraw completely from the world into monasteries and convents. Christians must have *contact* with the world but not *conformity* to it.
11. But toward those who are called brothers in Christ, if they continue in immorality, Christians are not even to have contact—socially or religiously!
12. While the church is not responsible to judge and punish the immoral or criminal people outside the church, it is clearly commanded by apostolic order to judge and discipline the immoral within the church.
13. The drastic measures ordered by the apostles concerning Christian discipline are designed first for the reclamation of the sinner; second for the integrity of Christ’s holy church.
14. Paul was as harsh with the Corinthian church for its arrogance and apathy, as he was with the perverted immorality of the sinning man. For the church to do nothing about persistent immorality is as sinful as to do the immoral act!

### APPREHENSIONS:

1. Why are sexual relationships between immediate members of a family wrong?
2. Is Paul correct in saying that incest was not even found among pagans?
3. What does Paul mean by saying the Corinthian Christians were arrogant?
4. What would Paul expect the church to do if they followed his instructions and “removed” the one who had done this sin among them?

5. How could Paul be absent from Corinth in the body but present with them in spirit to the extent that he would be judging the man?
6. Why did Paul equate excommunication with delivering someone to Satan?
7. What did Paul expect to be the result of delivering this man to Satan?
8. What is "destruction of the flesh"?
9. Why does Paul liken the Christian life to the Passover feast?
10. What is sincerity?
11. Why would Paul say it was all right for Christians to associate with the immoral men of this world and not all right to associate with immoral people who bear the name of brethren?
12. Is sexual sin the only sin demanding non-association when found in one bearing the name of a brother? What others? Does the church follow this apostolic doctrine?
13. How do you reconcile Paul's command here for Christians to judge one another, and Jesus' command (Matt. 7:1ff.) not to judge one another?

### A SPECIAL BRIEF ON CHURCH DISCIPLINE

"For if the message declared by angels (the Old Testament law) was valid and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" Heb. 2:2-3

#### A. Causes for discipline in the New Testament.

1. Refusal to repent of a wrongdoing to a brother, Matt. 18:15ff.
2. Being the instigator of dissensions and difficulties in the church, Rom. 16:17; Titus 3:10-11
3. Laziness in personal life, II Thess. 3:6
4. Preaching false doctrine, Rom. 16:17-18; II John 9-11
5. Immorality in a member, I Cor. 5:1-7
6. Anyone who is greedy, an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or thief, I Cor. 5:11 (I Cor. 6:9-10).

#### B. Purpose of discipline

1. To save the sinning member, I Cor. 5:5; II Cor. 2:1-11; Gal. 6:1-10; Matt. 18:15; James 5:19-20; Jude 22
2. To maintain the honor and authority of Jesus Christ
3. To preserve the purity and reputation of the church before the world (not absolute, for that is impossible in this world). When the church is compared to the world, it must be *different!* The church must not tolerate flagrant, impenitent sinfulness in any member.

## FIRST CORINTHIANS

### C. Method of discipline

1. By expression (teaching) and repression (disfellowshipping)
2. First, go to the brother in personal counsel (Gal. 6:1; Rom. 15:1; Matt. 18:15). It is divisive and schismatic to go to anyone else first.
3. This failing, take with you one or two elders so that evidence of sin and impenitence may be established by witnesses (cf. II Cor. 13:1).
4. This failing, a meeting of the church should meditate the problem and make a decision as a congregation. If the offender refuses to comply with the congregational decision, he should be disfellowshipped, excommunicated, "driven out," not even socialized with, having nothing to do with him (I Cor. 5:2, 13; II Thess. 3:6, 14; Titus 3:10-11; II John 10-11).

### D. Manner of discipline

1. Gentleness and humility must always characterize administration of any discipline (Gal. 6:1ff.; Col. 3:12-13; I Tim. 5:22, etc.)
2. According to the guidelines of scripture
3. Firmly, faithfully, without partiality, steadily and constantly
4. With wisdom and sound judgment; with clear thinking controlling one's emotions.