

Expel the wicked man from among you! (Part 2)

(1 Corinthians 5:6-13)

Among the reported problems of the Corinthian church was their failure to correctly deal with a sexually immoral man within the church. Having pointed out both the man's sin and the church's pride (vv 1-2), he calls them to serious, decisive action: rid this man from your midst and hand him over to Satan (vv 3-5). But their pride and the resultant failure to discipline was a greater problem which Paul now continues to address.

III. Paul addresses the more significant problem using the figure of yeast (5:6-8).

The Corinthians were tolerating sin and were proud of it. Such a boast was not good.

1. A challenge to learn from the figure: sin tolerated is sin that spreads (5:6b).

Yeast was used in the Bible both a figure both for sin and for its characteristic spreading throughout dough. Both are present here. The yeast/sin was specifically the sexual immorality and the proud tolerance of it as well as sin in general. Like yeast sin would spread. (E.g., see Proverbs 22:24-25.)

2. A command them to live according to the figure: get rid of sin in order to live as we really have been made.

God commanded the practice of the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread to remember how He had brought Israel out of the bondage of Egypt through the ten plagues. The Passover lamb (or kid) had been sacrificed to protect them from the judgment of the last plague. The unleavened bread reminded of the speed of their departure and picture the purging of sinful ways which should take place.

The Passover was a picture given by God to illustrate the deliverance from the bondage of sin which Jesus provided by His sacrifice on the cross. The bread without yeast was a reminder that sin should be left behind as we become one new man in Christ, a new "batch of dough" without sin.

3. A clarification of our life: we have been freed from the bondage of sin in order to live in purity and truth.

The reason we are "a new batch" is found in the sacrifice of Christ, the purpose of being "a new batch" is to live a new life. Cf. Ephesians 2:8-10. Our life as believers should not be characterized by sin but by purity in motives and purity in action.

→ For the sake of the purity of the church, sin is not something which we can afford to tolerate, neither in our personal lives, nor in the life of the church. Toleration generally leads to greater toleration, individually and corporately. (Cf. Romans 1:21-32.) Like yeast, it will spread and infect the entire body.

IV. Paul calls them to practice the important distinction between the church and the world (5:9-13).

Believers form a "new lump of dough", the church, which is distinct from the world. The practice of this distinction had to be clarified and misunderstandings corrected.

1. Christians *may associate* with the unbelieving sinners of the world.

Paul corrects a misunderstanding from an earlier letter. It would be impossible to remain in the world and not have contact with the "sinners" of the world. We should not be "of the world" (John 17:14, 16) but never-the-less have been left in the world.

→ The monastic movement was an attempt to withdraw from the world, but even believers today think they must withdraw totally from the sinful people around them. But Jesus ate with sinners and Paul allowed invitations to eat in the homes of heathens (1 Cor. 10:27). Neither Jesus nor Paul tells us not to associate with the world.

2. Christians *should not associate* with professing believers who continue in sin.

a. The context explains how "not associating" should look. 1) They were to expel (vs 13) or remove the man from their midst (vs 2). An outsider could tell if the one belonged to them or not. 2) Association cannot be more but rather less than what we would have with unbelievers. 3) Even eating – ordinary, social fellowship – is severely denied.

b. The action (disassociation) is focused on those who call themselves Christians but who continue in sin. There is a profession of faith in Christ and unrepentant, continuance in sin. Certain sins are listed here but others are mentioned or implied elsewhere (cf. 6:9-10; 2 Thes. 3:14; Rev. 21:8). Paul seems to focus on observable character traits.

→ Two guidelines in light of the purposes of discipline may help in the day-by-day application. 1) Will others by reason of our association connect us together as "Christian"? 2) Will the sinner experience the loss of benefits that come as being a part of a local body of believers?

3. Christians have specific, limited responsibility in regards to judging.

The world and the church are distinct. Believers have clear responsibility to the judge in the church but not in the world. God will judge the world. Blurring the distinction between the world and the church tends toward tolerating sin in the church and attempts to change the world.

Paul concludes, applying it practically: the Corinthians were to expel the wicked man from among them.

Why don't churches practice discipline in this fashion? We might suggest some reasons, though none are excuses: 1) There may be a lack of Biblical knowledge. Either they were not taught, or they were taught wrong. 2) There may be a lack of faith. More than knowing what the Bible teaches, one must act in faith upon it and trust God to work. 3) There may be attitudes which "choke" the believer and prevent yielding the fruit of obedience: caring about our reputation, not wanting to alienate those who could give financially to the church, or liking sin similar to that which should be judged in others.

Discipline can be good. God disciplines those he loves (Prov. 3:11). We also should be motivated by love – for God and for people – and let the expression of love be determined by God.