

Expel the wicked man from among you! (Part 1)

(1 Corinthians 5:1-5)

Among the reported problems of the Corinthian church was their failure to correct one of their men who had taken his step-mother as wife. Paul addresses both how to deal with the man and their failure to correct.

I. Paul points to the sins, individual & corporate (5:1-2)

1. One man's sin of sexual immorality: In particular this man was committing incest by living as man and wife with his step-mother, a public act of immorality even condemned by the pagans around them.
 2. The church's corporate sin of pride:
 - a. Their pride may have been in themselves, their supposed intellectual and spiritual possessions (ch. 1-2), or their freedom in Christ (cf. 6:12; 10:23). But it is more probable that Paul was correcting their pride in tolerance. It better fits the counteractions of grief and expelling the sinner and the concept that their "boast" (v 6) was allowing continued sin (yeast) in their midst.
 - b. Instead of pride they should have been filled with grief like mourning for the dead.
 - c. Their pride and failure to discipline was the greater problem which is seen as Paul addresses the church rather than the man and spends more time on their wrong thinking and actions.
- How we deal with a problem can establish or demonstrate a pattern which has greater consequences than an individual sin might have.

II. Paul presents the immediate, corrective action needed (5:3-5)

Paul tells the Corinthians that the man should be put out of their midst (v 2; cf 11, 13). His expanded explanation of this (vv 3-5) is a difficult text to translate and interpret. If we assume that the Corinthians knew of Jesus' teaching as recorded in Matthew 18:15-20, then these verses probably formed a foundation for their understanding of what Paul meant. Paul taught like Jesus that a sinner who did not respond to correction was to be expelled by the church (Mt 18:15-17).

I believe that the Corinthians here in this chapter would have understood Paul to say that he had already passed judgment upon this man as if he were present although physically he was absent (v 3), that in verse 4 he was referring to their conscious gathering as believers – in the name of the Lord – with the promise of the Lord's presence (as in Mt 18:20), that he was agreeing with the action that he was calling them to take (as in Mt 18:19) and that the very power of the Lord was with them to accomplish His purposes (cf Mt 18:18-19).

Four features of the action which Paul prescribed impress upon us its seriousness.

1. *The certainty of his personal judgment:* What he heard was sufficient and he did not delay. For Paul this judging was in a totally different category of that against which he had warned previously.
2. *The weightiness which Paul attributes to the process:*
 - a. Gathering "in the name of the Lord." implies both a special purpose and authority.
 - b. They were to act jointly, as a Body, together with Paul.
 - c. They were reminded that the power of the Lord was with them to accomplish the action which they should take.
3. *The very nature of the expulsion: "hand this man over to Satan."*
 - a. This at least includes the expulsion of the man from the church. Consider how vv 3-5 appear to be a development of v 2, the repeated command in verses 9-11 ("do not associate ..."), and the summary in v 13 "expel the wicked man".
 - b. It may be more than expulsion and something for which we, too, might be responsible.
 - 1) The Corinthians are called to do this although the apostles did do similar things. Paul did hand Hymenaeus and Alexander over to Satan (1 Tim 1:20). Ananias and Sapphira died (Acts 5:1-10). Elymas was blinded (Acts 13:8-11).
 - 2) Handing the man over to Satan probably included an essential consequence of expulsion. The benefits of a defined, active relationship within a local body of believers would be lost, including perhaps the loss of the protection against the schemes and attacks of Satan through mutual prayer, encouragement and edification, the protective ministry of leadership (Hebrews 13:17), and the restraining influence of the Spirit (cf Mt 5:13 and 2 Th. 2:7).
 - 3) By expelling someone there may also be a conscious commitment of the person to the discipline of God who we know uses Satan to accomplish His own purposes.
4. *The consequence and its ultimate significance:*
 - a. The consequence toward which it moves, is the destruction of the flesh (literally), which probably means here the sinful nature as NIV translates. When Satan is given his way with a person, and there are no restraints upon the temptations and devices which he can use, then sin will run its full course and life will eventually become bankrupt. The response of the person will show their true nature
 - b. This will hopefully be followed by the salvation of the spirit on the day of the Lord, remembering though that salvation is by grace through faith and not by works or suffering.

This man professed to be a believer but it may have been pretense. Paul was cautious and did not say that the man was not a child of God, although he put it in doubt. Similarly we need to exercise caution and not give false assurance. Our response to people should be according to their profession not our speculations.

Expelling an unrepentant sinner has the purpose of restoration. It is not consignment to everlasting doom. It is also a matter of faith on the part of the church that God will work repentance in a heart in the manner that He has chosen and better than we think we could by our means. It is not easy and it is certainly serious, but are we willing to risk the eternal destiny of someone by failing to do what God has said?