

The Corinthians Must Deal With the Sexually Immoral Man, for His and Their Sakes

1 Corinthians 5:1-5

This portion comes at the following point in the outline.

- II. Paul's response to reports of division (1:10-6:20).
 - A. A church divided, internally and against Paul (1:10-4:21).
 - B. Sexual immorality and litigation: how Paul's authority, the gospel, and the wisdom of God apply to real issues (5:1-6:20).
 1. The incestuous man (5:1-13).
 2. Litigation against each other (6:1-11).
 3. Sexual immorality with prostitutes (6:12-20).

Introduction

The next three sections are related to the apostolic authority that Paul has stressed in the previous section, particularly in relation to the "arrogant" of 4:18 (see 5:2 and 5:6).

First, he has heard of a man who is involved in an immoral relationship with his stepmother, and the Corinthians are tolerating it! He insists on disciplining this man because of the magnitude of the necessity of holiness within the church.

Verses

¹ It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. ² And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

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

Questions

1. General.
 - a. What are your initial observations, thoughts, or questions about the passage?
 - b. How would you briefly describe the passage?
 - The first of three specific issues in which Paul exhorts with apostolic authority, because of the Corinthians' arrogance, is a case of sexual immorality between a man and his stepmother. He addresses the Corinthians' attitude about it, and insists with certainty and authority that they remove the man from the church, for their good and his.
2. Specific Verses.
 - a. Paul expresses astonishment in verse 1. What's going on, and why is it shocking?
 - A man in the church is involved in continued ("has") sexual immorality with his "father's wife," or stepmother. They are tolerating something that even the unsaved pagans would not, and toleration of sin is sinful.
 - b. 1) What do you believe Paul means in verse 2 when he says that the Corinthians are "arrogant." 2) What should their attitude be? Why? 3) What does he admonish them to do?

- 1) This connects back to 4:14-21, particularly 4:18-21, where Paul says that some are arrogant, thinking he won't come to deal with the church's issues. That arrogance is also being manifested in the church being ok with this sexual immorality. Possibly they are thinking that because of their superior knowledge, that they are free from moral constraints, or they were boasting in their freedom and in the tolerance of grace (Ro. 6:1). Their arrogance is shocking and sinful in light of this horrible sin (Le. 18:8 - You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife; it is your father's nakedness.).
- 2) To the contrary, Paul says that this should deeply grieve them, for they are "affirming" the man's sin, and thus sinning corporately. This sin has dramatic effects on the individuals, and the church, as he will stress in verses 5-6.
- 3) He admonishes them to "remove" the one involved in the sin from the church. This seems to assume the process of Matthew 18:15-20, but also imply the necessity of the leadership doing what is necessary.

c. What is Paul's message in verse 3?

- Though he's not there (see 4:19-21), he is "present in spirit." They can count on Paul's approval, and the presence of his influence. This, and his apostolic authority, permit him to make the judgment that this person must be disciplined.

d. Paul outlines how the Corinthians are to approach this situation in verse 4. What does he tell them to do, with what specific elements?

- They are to assemble in the name of the Lord Jesus. This is to stress that Jesus is the Lord of the church, and what they are doing is under his authority and will. There is also the element of Paul's spirit being present, again stressing his approval and authority. Additionally, this procedure carries the power of Jesus. He is present and working in and through a church that seeks to obey and honor him.

e. Then, in verse 5, Paul tells them what to do. 1) What is it? 2) What does it mean? 3) What is the purpose?

- 1) They are to "deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh."
- 2) This could mean that in the excommunication, they are sending this man out to Satan's "realm," the world. The "destruction of the flesh" then could refer to the consequences this man is going to face, whether he's truly a believer or not. But John Piper suggests, based on 1 Ti. 1:20 (Among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.), Jo. 2:6 (And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life."), and 2 Co. 12:7-10, along with the phrase in verse 4, "the power of our Lord Jesus," that the handing over to Satan is under God's control to use Satan however God designs in his sovereignty to rescue this man, so the "destruction of the flesh" would be the process of getting rid of the man's sin to save or rescue him.
- 3) Either interpretation could fit with the final phrase, "so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord," as Paul is expressing hope that this man (besides the church also benefiting from this) may eventually be brought to repentance.

3. Final thoughts and application

a. Do you have any final observations, comments, or questions?

b. How do you think you can apply the truths of this passage to your life?

- This speaks to our view of the magnitude of sin, particularly sexual sin, personally, and in the church. It is so incredibly harmful and destructive. It also reminds us of the necessity of obeying and trusting Jesus for the sake of the church and the individual.