

1st Corinthians 5:

Ian Gibson (February 2014)

Ch1-4: Deal with spiritual weakness & failure, divisions & contentions among them.

Ch5-6: Deal with moral weakness & failure, relating to the believer's body, the sin of fornication.

The NT repeatedly teaches that such immoral practice as fornication is completely incompatible with the holiness of God & His assembly & with the preservation of Christian testimony (see Gal 5v16-21, Eph 5v3-12, Col 3v5-10, 1st Thess 4v1-3, 1st Cor 6v9-11).

But saints of God in assembly fellowship can be overtaken by such sin, requiring appropriate assembly discipline, to preserve the purity & holiness of God's assembly, and for the good of the offending believer, with a view to their ultimate spiritual benefit & restoration.

The teaching in ch5 is curative in character; how an assembly is to act in response to a known case.

The teaching in ch6 is preventative in character, in relation to the believer's body.

Ch5 is teaching that an assembly must act in such matters, for unjudged sin will mar the holiness of the assembly, and seriously compromise knowing the presence & power of God (see Joshua 7 re Achan's sin).

1st Peter 4v17: "**judgment must begin from the house of God**" and "**if first from us**" (JND)

We learn here in ch5 that public sin within God's assembly demands public repudiation.

v1-2: The Problem

The matter was "**reported commonly**", a universal report widely circulated in the community around.

It was the sin of fornication, incestuous in character; even among ungodly Gentiles, where fornication was widely practiced, such would have been considered shameful.

Under OT law, this would have been judged by both parties being put to death (Lev 20v11).

It is the sin of Reuben (Gen 35v22), which had grave consequences (see Gen 49v3-4, 1st Chron 5v1-2).

Also the sin of Absalom (2nd Sam 16v22), based upon the counsel of Ahithophel.

The problem was compounded by the wrong attitude of the Corinthian assembly (v2).

The matter should have produced sorrow in their heart, a collective attitude of mourning before God, they should have been broken down & humbled. Instead, they were proud & "**puffed up**"; that inflated attitude of self-superiority had resulted in the divisions described in ch1-4, and a divided assembly is a weak assembly.

They should have considered God's interests, and desired that God Himself might have intervened to take away such a person from them, in order that the assembly be preserved in purity.

There needs to be that collective assembly conscience about sin, and then the assembly as a whole judges the matter & seeks to bring about the correct discipline collectively.

v3-5: Apostolic Instructions

Paul was bodily absent, "**but present in spirit**", having himself "**judged already**" (contrast with Col 2v5).

Paul instructs them of the need for a gathering of the whole assembly for implementing discipline.

They were to act with divine authority & power, i.e. "**In the Name ... with the power of the Lord Jesus Christ**" (v4). The assembly acts in light of what heaven has already determined (see Matt 18v18).

The solemnity of the discipline – **“To deliver such an one unto Satan”** (v5).

1st Tim 1v20 **“Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan”**; clearly a matter of personal apostolic discipline in response to propagation of blasphemous teaching.

Here at Corinth, moral sin invoked the same apostolic judgment & action, with Paul present in spirit (v3-4).

The principle behind this apostolic act would still apply, in the matter of putting away from the assembly, depriving the person of the privileges & blessings of assembly fellowship.

Within the sphere of local assembly fellowship, Satan has diminished power, because the assembly is the place of the Lord’s presence, and the dwelling place of the Spirit of God (see 1st Cor 3v16).

Believers in assembly fellowship are thus afforded very real divine care & a hedge of protection.

To be placed back into the sphere of the world, where Satan is permitted to rule & operate, the individual believer is more exposed to all the malign attention & accusations of the wicked one.

The purpose of the discipline – negatively, **“for the destruction of the flesh”** (v5), i.e. to destroy the activity & outworking of the sinful flesh. The offender is brought to appreciate the awfulness of their sin, to recognise the evil propensity of the flesh, bringing them to true repentance and to utterly cease from such fleshly activity.

The purpose of the discipline – positively, **“that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus”** (v5), i.e. for the person’s spiritual restoration, in view of that future day of review & reward at the judgment seat of Christ.

In this particular case, there was repentance leading to his restoration (see 2nd Cor 2v5-8).

V6-8: Doctrinal Explanation

Their attitude of **“glorying”** in self was not at all appropriate.

“Know ye not ...”; 10x in 1st Corinthians, used by the apostle with heavy irony; they were not wise in spiritual & divine things.

The sin is equated with moral leaven, and **“a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?”**

Leaven surreptitiously permeates, to corrupt the whole (see also Gal 5v9 re doctrinal leaven).

To tolerate the sin would have a detrimental effect on the whole testimony & character of the assembly.

In v7-8, spiritual teaching connected with the Feasts of Passover & Unleavened Bread.

These 2 feasts are always inseparably connected (see Exodus 12-13, Lev 23v5-6, Matt 26v17).

Passover was entirely fulfilled at Calvary, v7 **“For even Christ our Passover is (has been) sacrificed for us”**.

The following 7 day feast of Unleavened Bread is fulfilled spiritually in the holy & unleavened lives of believers, as a consequence of being in the good of Calvary’s redemption, i.e. v8 **“Therefore let us keep the feast ...”**.

We are called to a complete life of holiness; a redeemed people are to be a holy people.

The Israelites had to scrupulously purge their houses of all trace of leaven; i.e. v7 **“Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, (according) as ye are unleavened”**. We need to be exercised to maintain holy lives, so that our state corresponds with our standing, so that our practice is consistent with our position, and so that the assembly of God retains that **“unleavened”** character.

NT passages that call upon us to be a holy people:

1st Corinthians 3v17: The need for holiness based upon the holy character of the assembly as the inner temple of God, where divine Persons dwell & are worshipped. Ps 93v5 "**Holiness becometh Thy house, O Lord, for ever**".

1st Corinthians 5v7-8: The need for holiness based upon the holy character of Christ's sacrifice.

Wherever the sacrificial work of Christ is acknowledged, then evil must be put away; His death demands an unleavened state, the character of the assembly needs to be preserved as an unleavened lump.

1st Peter 1v15-16: The need for holiness based upon the holy character of the God who has called us.

In v7-8, "**the old leaven**" equates with the old sinful nature generally, which can be expressed actively with behaviour motivated by "**the leaven of malice and wickedness**".

But with salvation & new creation, we are to be "**a new lump**", and there is to be expressed "**the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth**", lives of genuine inner pureness & living out the truth outwardly.

V9-13: Assembly Responsibility

JND renders v9 '**I have written to you in the epistle ...**', suggesting it is this epistle of 1st Corinthians.

When these Corinthians had received the epistle & read it, i.e. v11 "**But now I have written unto you ...**", then it would be true that Paul would have written to them "**not to company with fornicators**".

Paul qualifies this in v10, "**Yet not altogether ... for then must ye needs go out of the world**".

God does not intend us to live behind walls, with absolutely no contact with the unbelievers of this world.

Paul details the kind of sins demanding excommunication from the assembly fellowship; "**not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner**" (v11). This is not necessarily an exhaustive list, but reminds us of the high standards that are associated with God's assembly.

With such who are put away, social contact may need to be withdrawn, "**with such an one no not to eat**", if there has been no true repentance (see also Matt 18v17).

There is a collective assembly responsibility to implement the discipline, and elders would need to advise the assembly as to what level of interaction with the offender would be appropriate.

In v12-13, we are only responsible for judging those within the circle of assembly fellowship (NB 1st Peter 4v17). We can leave the judgment of those outside of the assembly to God.

So their responsibility was "**Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person**" (see Deut 17v7).

Under OT law, the punishment was death, i.e. irreversible, leaving no room for recovery or restoration.

But under grace, there is always the intention of repentance & recovery & full restoration.

The reasons & purpose of such a grave act of assembly discipline:

1. That the offender cease from future wrongdoing, be brought to confession, repentance, and full restoration.
2. To preserve the holiness of the assembly, as "**the inner temple of God**" (ch3v16).
3. To preserve effective testimony relative to the world outside and vindicate the Name of the Lord.
4. To prevent spiritual dearth & to preserve blessing & glory for God.