

1 Corinthians 5

Introduction

Sexual immorality is obviously nothing new. Paul had to deal with the church's response to this in the first century church in a way that is helpful for us today. Paul's position on dealing with overt and unrepentant sin may seem harsh. However, he sought to balance this approach as you will see in his follow-up letter to them in 2 Corinthians. In this study I hope we will discover a balanced and helpful approach to this important issue.

Study Notes

Immorality Defiles The Church (Verses 1-8)

v.1 Actually Reported - Most likely this report had come as had the other issues of concern from Chloe's household (1:11). This verse conveys the idea that this issue of sexual sin was commonly and openly known.

Sexual Immorality - This is the Greek word "porneia" and is a general term for any form of sexual sin. In Leviticus 18 there is a comprehensive listing of the type of sexual behavior that was outside of God's design for the human race.

Among the Gentiles - In this verse the form of sin is said to be incest. Even though the Roman culture was known for its openly immoral sexual behavior, even they had laws against incest. The ancient writer Cicero had written that it was considered "an incredible and unheard of crime." The punishment was to be banished to an island in the Mediterranean.

Father's Wife - Because this does not say his mother but rather is a reference to his father's wife, it is possible that she was a step mother.

v.2 Puffed Up - The false spiritual pride that Paul had already dealt with (3:7-14) is also identified here in this issue. These believers had misapplied the teaching in regard to being saved apart from their deeds (Eph. 2:8-9) to the point where they took pride that they accepted this sin in the church family as a proof of their embracing the doctrine of grace. This misguided view of grace is also dealt with by Paul in Romans 6:1-7.

Mourned - Jesus said "blessed are those who mourn" (Mt. 5:4). His statement referred first to a sincere sorrow over one's own sin. However, this sorrow would then broaden to the sin and its tragic results in the lives of others. Paul does not call for a response of anger, revenge, or prideful showing of moral superiority but rather for a heart that is broken over the sin and its results. This sense of shared responsibility for sin as well as its shared results are often portrayed in the O.T. Examples include Ezra's, Nehemiah's and Daniel's prayers (Ezra 10:6; 9:6-15; Neh. 9:6-37; Dan. 9:4-19).

Taken Away - The importance of not allowing a corrupting influence to remain is based upon the nature of sinful influences that spread and affect others just as leaven spreads in dough (v.6-7). Furthermore, the scripture indicates because of the interconnectedness of God's people (a body, 12:12) one person's sin can bring tragic consequences upon the whole. Examples include the trouble Achan's secret sin brought upon the entire Israeli army (Joshua 7) and the teaching where the sexually immoral were to be separated from God's people lest the promised land would vomit out the entire nation of Israel (Lev. 18:24-30; 20:22-24).

v.3 Present In Spirit - Paul wanted the authority that he had as an apostle to be recognized as apart of the basis in being able to bring judgment in this matter. There is some evidence that the Holy Spirit may have enabled Paul to

be aware of the proceeding and to be involved in it in the realm of the Holy Spirit (Col. 2:5; 2 Kings 5:26; 6:12). Regardless of this possibility he was obviously there in the sense of his attention and concern for the matter.

v.4 In the Name - This was a commonly used term to refer to the character, the authority and wishes of the person in whose name you came in. Thus, in this situation the matter was to be approached in harmony with Jesus, as if He was presiding over the meeting.

The Power - The decision to be taken was to be implemented on the basis of Paul's and Christ's authority (v. 3-4) as well as enforced with the power of God to bring about the ability in the lives of those in sin to be restored to a genuine relationship with Jesus.

v.5 Deliver - "Paradidomi" (Gk.) This was a word to describe handing someone over for punishment in response to a judicial sentencing.

To Satan - This action seems to refer to the fact that the scriptures teach there are ultimately only 2 kingdoms in the world, God's and Satan's (Acts 26:18; 2 Cor. 4:4; Gal.1; Col. 1:13). If a person is not under the protection of God and His Kingdom he becomes a target for Satan's destructive power. Paul believed that giving a person who was a believer over to Satan would be the best way to humble an unrepentant believer so that they would return to the Lord. Paul also used this method of dealing with unrepentant workers in the Lord's work (2 Tim. 1:20).

Destruction of the Flesh - This seems to refer to the process of purging this believer of the desires of his fallen nature. Paul makes reference to the need of dealing with the "flesh" as believer in Galatians 5:13-24; and Romans 7:5, 18, 25; 8:3-8.

v.5 Spirit May Be Saved - Paul indicates in 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 that it was his desire that these measures would restore this person. Here Paul is making this aim quite clear. He hopes that when Satan's destructive forces are unleashed this person will repent and seek life in the Spirit.

In the Day - This refers to the second coming of Christ and the subsequent judgment of God, for both believers and non-believers (1 Cor. 3:12-15; Rom. 14:3-4; Rev. 20:11-15).

v.6 Your Glorifying - These believers were boasting because they believed by not dealing with this sexual immorality they were supreme examples of God's grace. However, as Paul had already stated (v.2), they were actually doing the opposite of what would bring honor to God and His gospel.

A Little Leaven - Just as a small amount of leaven will spread throughout an entire loaf of bread, the destructive influence of sin in a local church can become just as pervasive.

v.7 Purge Out - Paul refers here to the Passover celebration that included a thorough search of their home to remove the smallest particles of leaven. Leaven here is seen as a type or picture of sin in the life of the individual believer as well as the local body they were apart of.

New Lump - This refers to the believer as he is in Christ - a new creation.

Christ Our Passover - Having used an aspect of the Passover as an illustration on the need to purge out sin he amplifies it's us by also applying it to Jesus. Just as the Jews removed leaven from their homes at the time of the sacrifice of the Passover lamb, so too Christians are to remove sin because our Passover Lamb, Jesus, died for our sins.

v.8 Keep the Feast - Paul further uses the Passover analogy by saying that just as Jesus kept the requirements of the Passover Feast so we are now to have the same diligence in how we live our daily lives.

Malice - This is an attitude of bitter animosity.

Wickedness - This refers to the actions that result from an ungodly heart.

Sincerity - The proof of a sincere and genuine believer will be the desire to put away sin.

Immorality Must Be Judged (Verses 9-13)

v.9 I Wrote - This refers to a prior letter that has not been passed down in the scriptures.

Not To Keep Company - Paul had warned them to not have fellowship with sexually immoral people and it seems they had interpreted that to refer to nonbelievers.

v.10 Covetous - This refers to the sin that propels a person to desire and seek what belongs to another.

Extortioners - This refers to those who through dishonest business practices steal from others.

Idolaters - This is replacing God with other things including false gods and goddesses.

Out of the World - Paul points out that it is ridiculous to apply this principle of removing sin in a world that is fallen and under the power of Satan (Eph. 2:1-2; 2 Tim. 2:26 ; 2 Cor. 4:4).

v.11 A Brother - This issue of dealing with the removal of sin is not to be directed to the world but the Body of Christ.

Reviler - This refers to a person who is harsh and abusive with his words.

Drunkard - This refers to a person who is addicted to alcohol. This would of course today also refer to drugs.

Not Even to Eat - Paul says you are sending the wrong message of condoning sin if you fellowship with supposed believers who are living in open defiance to God's Word. The only time this would require some modification is in family and business relationships. In these situations we need to make clear that interaction is not in any way an acceptance of their sin but simply a respect for the relationship that is due parents, children, employees and employers. Therefore, there is the rightful duty, as an example, to show biblical respect for a parent even if the parent is not someone you can fellowship within spiritual matters.

v.12 Who Are Inside - Paul again makes clear that it is the believers responsibility to judge matters of sin in the church.

v.13 Who Are Outside - Those who are not believers are not to be our focus of judgment, they are not within the realm of our sphere of responsibility in the Kingdom of God.

God Judges - The Judgment of the behavior and life of the unbeliever falls under the job description of God ultimately, not the church.

Therefore Put Away - This is the final conclusion of Paul's argument. Take action in dealing with sin. This of course needs to be balanced with Paul's later command to seek restoration to the church of this same person who is now being asked to leave (2 Cor. 24:11).

Truths Applied

The need to realistically deal with those we fellowship with who are in unrepentant sin requires great wisdom and care. To be overly harsh could create a feeling of rejection and hopelessness that Satan could use to overwhelm a person and force them to further harden their heart. To be overly tolerant could convey to a person that their sin is of no concern to God and does not need to be dealt with. As you work through these questions, be open to a balanced approach that will produce the highest good for all.

Q&A

1. Paul exposes the source of the Corinthians' over-extended tolerance for sin as being rooted in pride. In our own time it is

common for some Christians to see their tolerance for sin as a virtue to be proud of. Review your study notes for verses 1-2 and then describe what you see as the reasoning behind those who hold this view of undue tolerance.

2. Paul sees a much more helpful response to this sinful behavior to be mourning and the enforcement of church discipline. Review the reference verses in your study notes for "mourned" and "taken away." Then explain why this is a better response to sin if you really care about the person who is in bondage to sin.

3. If sin is not properly dealt with Paul warns that it will act in the same way leaven does within dough. How do you believe you could responsibly deal with sin in the life of fellow Christians without becoming harsh or hurtful toward those who are struggling with sin.

4. In 5:9-13 Paul restates his advice to break off fellowship with the man who is living in sexual immorality. In Paul's next letter to them he advises them to forgive and reinstitute their relationship with this brother who had been living in sexual sin (2 Cor. 2:3-11). He bases this advice on making sure Satan did not use this situation against them or this brother who was in sin. What do you believe Paul was most likely thinking would be Satan's desired use of this situation to cause them spiritual harm?

Conclusion

In our own day we face many of the same cultural issues that Paul faced among the Gentile believers at Corinth. It is to the glory of God that people are coming to Christ from lives that may have been involved in all forms of sexual sin. How we deal with it is extremely important. In dealing with practical lifestyle issues of new believers we must pray for wisdom in using a balance of instructions, discipline and forgiveness. Make it your prayer and goal to find this in your fellowship with your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. In His Grace,
Bob Caldwell