

The message of the church to the world has got to be one of consistency and holiness. In the words of the Apostle John, “if we say that we have fellowship with Christ, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth. Truth is not only something that we are to confess, with our mouths, we are also to live it by the life decisions that we make.

This brings us to the second problem at Corinth. It was a problem of sexual immorality. It was such an outrageous sin that it was not even one that was practiced by the heathen. A man had married his stepmother. That is what the idiom implies. It was an outrageous crime of incest, forbidden by the law of Moses, and forbidden by the laws of nations.

The problem was not so much that the sin had occurred in Corinth—for there will always be sins in the church,—the problem was that it was tolerated, and had become a scandal that was spoken of everywhere.

James tells us that where there is envy and strife there is also confusion and every evil work. The flesh always produces the same things, the things that are labeled the fruit of the flesh in Galatians 5. Where there is strife and envying and the party spirit that we have seen in Corinth, it is not at all surprising to find other more gross sins. But let us look at the words.

- Vs. 1. The sin was a public one, and a scandal. The rule of private admonition does not apply in the case of public notorious sins, and Paul does not follow it.
- Vs. 2. They were puffed up. Pride is a most intoxicating thing. It leaves people bereft of judgment, and they tolerated this outrage—Pride numbs the moral sense, especially where there is a party spirit, for we tend to excuse gross sins in members of our party, and overly condemn faults in those of contrary parties. We are not to be enablers of other men’s sins. Very often where there is drunkenness, sexual immorality, and other gross sins, there are those who are enablers, who make excuses and give permission to the guilty. Here, the whole church at Corinth had become enablers. It was a great fault on their part, and Paul will straighten them out.
- Vs. 3-5. Paul gives them instructions: Although he is an apostles of Jesus Christ, yet he does not have authority to judge the matter; it is the duty of the church to judge in the matter. Paul is not wishy-washy about the matter—he has already made a decision—it is not binding on the church, for they must take their own action—but Paul tells them what is the right thing to do. They are to meet as if Paul were present—he is present in spirit—that is, their proceedings would be the same as if he were present. They would be meeting under the authority of Jesus Christ, who has given the keys of the kingdom to the church, and therefore their proceedings would be legal and authoritative.

They would put the man out of the communion of the church. The church is under the authority and protection of Jesus Christ; those outside the church are in the kingdom of the devil, as Paul tells us in Ephesians 2. The purpose of this action is to bring the man to repentance, that he might be saved in the day of the Lord. This is a means that God has given to the church. Ultimately this is so that the message of the Gospel will be backed up by the actions of the church. The church has the right to decide its own membership, according to the instruction of Christ in the Scriptures.

- Vs. 6-8. The church is involved in a spiritual feast. The figure is the Passover; unleavened bread representing sincerity and truth. The kind of bread doesn’t matter in the Lord’s Supper, but it should be common bread. The Lord is not speaking of the Lord’s Supper here, but is speaking of the worship of the church, under the figure of eating the Passover feast.

Malice and wickedness disqualify us for worship. Jesus said, leave your gift at the altar and go make peace with your brother, and then come and offer your gift to God. Men become lifted up with pride, excuse their malice and wickedness, and think that God will excuse their sins. Jeremiah 7:9-11

- 9 Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not;
- 10 And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?
- 11 Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen *it*, saith the LORD.

The church has a responsibility to purge out the malice and wickedness. This is one of the marks of the true church. If the church is indifferent to crimes within their own midst, they will cease to be a true church.

Vs. 9-10. These verses show that the church’s discipline is not for the purpose of the people of God being “holier than thou,” and that Christian people are too good to mingle with sinners. The Lord specifically forbids this attitude. We are in the world, and being in the world means we are mingling with sinners. We are not to “go out of the world.” Sinners are everywhere, so we might as well get used to it.

The problem was not that the man was a sinner, but that he was a criminal with respect to the laws of the church, professed to know Christ, and messed up the message of the church.

- Vs. 11. Here are the sins that especially merit excommunication. We do not have any choice about this, but are obligated to do it, if we are to be a church of Jesus Christ.
- a. Sexual immorality: Marriage is honorable in all, but sexual crime is to be not named among us, nor be tolerated. Notice that I said “crimes” and not “sins.” We live in a promiscuous and loose age, but we are to raise the standard and keep our own house in order.
 - b. Covetous: Trying to gain the possessions of others. Not the desire of the heart, for no one can know that.
 - c. Idolater: Worshipping other Gods. We do not worship in idol temples. Paul will have more to say about these things as we continue through this book.
 - d. Reviler or a railer. This is one who is a mischief maker with his tongue. God hates those who sow discord between brethren. This is why our constitution says that especially the contentious are not to be tolerated. This is the sin of pride and arrogance, unwilling to live under the government of the church; speaking of evil of authorities, and making mischief by tale bearing and evil-speaking.
 - e. Drunkard: This is an indulgence of the flesh that is always associated with idolatry. The drunkard is lifted up with pride and refuses to accept the world that God has given him. He wants to live in an altered consciousness—this would also include drug abuse. In our modern day we have the additional problem of drunken driving, which endangers life and property. We are to be sober, godly people.
 - f. Extortion: This adds force to covetousness. This is a form of a word related to the ravening, or the voracious, merciless attack of wild animals. Such people are not to be found among us.

Note: These are crimes against the church. These are actions which are rooted in sins, but are overt, extreme actions that bring the church into disgrace, and by which it loses moral authority. We are

not to discipline for sins, for who shall escape; but we are to discipline for crimes, that our message does not become muddied.

To eat: do not take the Lord’s supper with them. They might be Christians, but they are not to be counted as Christians until they get their act together. Church discipline cannot remove the elect from God’s purposes of grace and mercy, but it can clean up the message that the church gives to the world.

Vs. 12,13. The church is not to try to root up the tares, that is, those that look like the wheat. But we are to root out those that look like weeds in the kingdom of God. Our authority extends only to the church; not to the world. Nor does our authority extend beyond the church, as if we are to try to root sinners out of the world.

In the Reformed Church in the US, there are several actions permitted to us: Rebuke, exhortation, simple dropping from membership; erasure, which is a stronger action; suspension from the Lord’s Supper; deposition from office, and excommunication. This is by the command of Christ, and the church is disobedient if it does not do these things.

Of course, these actions are not congregational actions, but are actions taken on behalf of the congregation by elders that have been chosen to give good government to the people of God.

God bless you.