

1 Corinthians 5:1-8  
Ezekiel 36  
Psalm 126

“Judging by the Power of the Lord Jesus”

Mar 16, 2014

Today we are looking at Paul’s teaching regarding excommunication in 1 Cor 5.

Ezekiel 36 provides a helpful backdrop  
in reminding us of the importance of communal holiness.  
Israel polluted the land through their idolatry and sexual immorality.  
They “profaned my holy name” –  
and God says that he will *vindicate* his holy name –  
first by driving Israel out into exile,  
and then by restoring Israel –  
cleansing them from their idolatries,  
sprinkling them with clean water,  
giving them a new heart and a new Spirit.

Hebrews 10 will connect this to baptism –  
suggesting that what God promised Israel in Ezekiel 36  
is what he has done in Jesus Christ.

Baptism joins us together in a new community – a new family –  
because God has brought together one new family in Jesus Christ,  
bringing Jew and Gentile together in one new humanity –  
a holy temple where God dwells.

Of course, there is both an already and a not yet in the Gospel.

We have already been restored –  
and yet, not everything is as it should be.  
In the final restoration, there will be no sin –  
and the whole of the new humanity will dwell together in perfect harmony –  
but for now, we both rejoice that God has restored Zion,  
and we pray that God will bring that glorious restoration.

Just like in Psalm 126!

Sing Psalm 126  
Read 1 Cor 4:14-5:13

### **Introduction: The Power of the Kingdom (4:14-21)**

<sup>14</sup> *I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children.*  
<sup>15</sup> *For though you have countless<sup>[b]</sup> guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.* <sup>16</sup> *I urge you, then, be imitators of me.* <sup>17</sup> *That is why I sent<sup>[c]</sup> you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ,<sup>[d]</sup> as I teach them everywhere in every church.* <sup>18</sup> *Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you.* <sup>19</sup> *But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power.* <sup>20</sup> *For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.* <sup>21</sup> *What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?*

Eugene Peterson points out that our culture treats pastors like the court jester:

“It encourages me to maintain my orthodox creed;  
it commends me for my evangelical practice;  
it praises me for my singular devotion.  
All it asks is that I accept its definition of my work  
as an encourager of the culture’s good will,  
as the priest who will sprinkle holy water on the culture’s good intentions....  
But if I, even for a moment, accept my culture’s definition of me,  
I am rendered harmless.  
I can denounce evil and stupidity all I wish  
and will be tolerated in my denunciations as a court jester is tolerated.  
I can organize their splendid goodwill and they will let me do it,  
since it is only for weekends.”

(Peterson, E. H. (1989). *The contemplative pastor: returning to the art of spiritual direction* (Vol. 17, pp. 23–24). Carol Stream, IL; Dallas; Waco, TX: Christianity Today; Word Pub.)  
quoted at <http://www.totascriptura.com/2014/03/11/the-pastor-as-harmless-as-the-court-jester/>

It would appear that the Corinthians were thinking of Paul as a court jester.

He talks big, but what can he do?!  
All he can do is talk!

“Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me!”

Paul says in 4:20:

“The kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.”

What is the power of the kingdom?

The word translated “talk” is *logos* – usually translated “word.”

The word translated “power” is *dunamis* – from which we get our word “dynamite.”

The kingdom of God is not in “logos” but in “dunamis” – not in “word” but in “power.”

What does Paul mean?

In a couple verses Paul will reveal his power – the power of the kingdom:

“When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present,  
with the power of our Lord Jesus,  
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.” (5:4-5)

Some might reply,

“but that’s just words”!

And Paul’s reply would be – no, that’s *not* just words.

That’s the power of the Lord Jesus.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the *power of God* for salvation,  
to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” Rom 1:16)

In the eyes of the world, the pastor *is* a court jester.

After all, declaring in the name of Jesus  
that this man is handed over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh,  
looks and sounds an awful lot like a civil court handing a criminal over for death,  
only nothing happens!

It's like a court jester enacting a mock trial!

Sure, with Ananias and Sapphira, they fell over dead when Peter pronounced judgment.

But Paul's not talking about doing that!

Sticks and stones can break my bones but words can never hurt me!

So you got excommunicated?

So what!?

If there is no God, and if Jesus is *not* Lord,

then "we, the people" are King,

and I am a court jester entertaining you with my performance on weekends.

Seriously, in that case, you're not getting your money's worth!

But if Jesus *is* Lord,

and I am a herald of King Jesus,

then *that means* that my words carry the weight of an ambassador –

one who speaks on behalf of the King –

and the verdict of the elders is the verdict of Jesus.

Paul says that the kingdom of God does not consist in talk – it is not "in word" –

but in *power*.

As Anthony Thiselton has put it,

"Power," for Paul, "has to do with the *effectiveness* of the gospel in life." (373)

That's why Paul has sent Timothy – "to remind you of my ways in Christ,

as I teach them everywhere in every church." (4:17)

Paul is not requiring anything of the Corinthians beyond what he requires of every church.

Christianity is not a "weekend" religion.

The kingdom of God is not just something we talk about in order to make us feel better.

The kingdom of God has been established in the cross and resurrection of Jesus.

And if Jesus is King,

and you are citizens of his kingdom,

then your lives should reflect his rule.

Every hour of every day is *kingdom* time –

since your life is to reflect the humility of the cross in the way you interact with others.

In your work, in your studies, in your daily life,

the way that you work and interact with others is *kingdom* time

as you reflect on what it means to love God and love others around you.

Changing dirty diapers and chasing toddlers around the house  
(or driving teenagers all over Michiana) is *kingdom* time –  
as you deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus!

Paul's way of life – his cross-shaped pattern of humility and suffering for Christ –  
is to be the pattern for our lives as well.

Discipleship – following Christ – is costly.  
You can no longer follow your own selfish desires.  
You must deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus.

So what do we do when someone in the community seriously deviates from this pattern?

In chapter 5, Paul abruptly changes his tone.  
Paul had said in chapter 4, verses 1-5,  
that in matters related to the Corinthian dispute over Paul, Apollos, and Cephas,  
no one should judge “before the time, before the Lord comes.”  
In all matters related to “the purposes of the heart,”  
the Lord Jesus will judge at the final day.

While Paul is talking about a particular dispute over pastors in chapters 2-4,  
the same principle could be applied to many other things:  
do parents send their children to public school, private school, or home school?  
do citizens vote for Republicans, Democrats, or third parties?

Paul has urged the Corinthians that they all “agree, and that there be no divisions among you,  
but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment” (1:10)

But by now it should be clear that one of the “same judgments”  
that Paul wants them to agree on  
is that there are some things where we shouldn't pass judgment!

The unity of the church should not be confused with the *uniformity* of the church!  
To have the mind of Christ (2:16) and accept the things of the Spirit of God (2:14)  
means that the diverse parts of the body should all work together in harmony.  
We don't have to agree on everything!  
But there are some things where we must agree.

### **1. Sexual Immorality in the Church – Christian Freedom Is Not License (5:1-2)**

*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.<sup>2</sup> And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.*

In 4:19, Paul had spoken of “these arrogant people” who despise Paul's spiritual authority.  
Now in 5:2 he uses the same word to brand the whole Corinthian church.  
You are puffed up – you are full of yourselves!

You seem to think that freedom in Christ means license!  
“Christ has set us free from sin – therefore, we can do whatever we want!”  
“Free from the law, O blessed condition, I can sin as I please, and still have remission!”  
Only this is worse! This is saying that sexual immorality is *not sin!*

Paul’s word for “sexual immorality” (*porneia*)  
refers to any form of unlawful sexual relations.  
Adultery, fornication, incest, homosexual relations –  
everything outside of proper marital sexual relations –  
fit under the general category of “sexual immorality.”

Now, it’s really important to see that a “sexually immoral person”  
is someone who has engaged in sexually immoral acts.

Jesus says in Matthew 5:27-28, that the one who looks at a woman with lustful intent  
has already committed adultery in his heart.  
But what goes on in your heart cannot be judged by man.  
What goes on in your heart will be judged by God  
(and that should frighten you more!!).

Paul’s concern here in 1 Corinthians 5-7 is with outward actions.  
Obviously inward attitudes are invariably at the root of outward actions,  
and Paul wants to help train the Corinthians to develop the right sort of inward attitudes.

But the church can only judge outward actions.  
Of course, when I say “outward actions” I don’t mean just the sexual act itself.  
Sexual immorality includes all of the outward actions that lead up to it.  
In our day that would include going to “gentlemen’s clubs” –  
whether the physical location,  
or the private version – internet porn.  
No Christian should be seeking to commit adultery in his or her heart.  
Having a strip club in your home is *not* a godly thing.

The problem in Corinth is that a man has his father’s wife.  
First, we should make clear that this is not his mother.  
His mother either died, or was divorced, and his father remarried.  
Now his father has died, and so the man married his father’s second wife.  
I can see how this could happen.  
The father probably married a young woman – around the same age as his son –  
they became close, then the father died,  
next thing you know...  
(I had a friend once who was in that situation – 1 Cor 5 was really helpful to him!)

And some might say, “what’s wrong with that?”  
Paul replies:  
“of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans.”

Why does Paul appeal to Gentile law or custom?

After all, Leviticus 18:8 deals explicitly with this situation:

“You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father’s wife;  
it is your father’s nakedness.”

Why doesn’t Paul appeal to Moses?

Does Paul think that the Mosaic law does not apply anymore?

Plainly not – because later in 1 Corinthians he will appeal to the Mosaic law  
as providing general principles that should guide the church.

Rather, I would suggest that Paul is using a very basic principle of persuasion:  
start with the broadest argument – and only get more particular if necessary.

“Pagan” is not a good translation in verse 1.

“not tolerated among the nations” – the *ethnoi*.

Paul is appealing to a sort of “natural law.”

This is so engrained on the corporate conscience of humanity

that *no one* thinks that it’s okay to sleep with your father’s wife!

The Mosaic principle from Leviticus – not uncovering your father’s nakedness –  
has to do with not mixing seed.

Your father went in to her –

and you are your father’s seed –

therefore if you go into her,

then you are mixing your seed with your father’s seed.

And that’s mixed up!

The nations may have given a different rationale –

matters of honor, inheritance – or just the “ick” factor!

But in a world where women often died in childbirth,

there would have been many situations where a man’s teenage son  
might be tempted to fall for his father’s second wife.

Most provisions against incest are oriented around the preservation of domestic harmony.

They were not designed for “genetic” reasons.

Rather, the reason why you may not marry your sister – or your father’s wife –

is because the *possibility* of sexual relations between you  
would interfere with the *proper* relationship that you should have.

If you have two adopted children, who are genetically unrelated to each other,  
could they marry each other?

No!

They are now brother and sister and so there should not be even the slightest hint  
of any other sort of relationship in the future.

In the same way, any woman whom your father marries is off limits to you.

The Corinthians appear to have thought that their “freedom in Christ”

meant that the old Mosaic regulations were irrelevant,

and since Jesus is King – therefore Roman custom is irrelevant as well!

But Paul disagrees.

The Christian community should not be characterized by sexual immorality.

The way of the cross calls us to a life of self-denial, not self-gratification.

And, what is more, the church needs to do something about sexual immorality *by Christians*.

Next week we'll see that Paul clearly distinguishes between believer and unbeliever.

We expect unbelievers to live immoral lives –

so we do not judge them for it.

But we expect believers to live according to the way of Christ –

so if professed Christians are guilty of sexual immorality,

then the church needs to do something about it.

That's Paul's point in verse 2,

where he rebukes them for their arrogance,

and says that they should have mourned –

they should have been saddened enough *to remove him*.

The presence of public sexual immorality in the church

should have had some effect on their corporate life together!

*And* their public, corporate mourning should have had a purpose:

“in order that the one who has done this be removed from among you.”

The ESV doesn't quite capture that aspect of what Paul is saying –

but it's clear from Paul's language

that he is very disappointed that the Corinthians' public response

was to go along as though nothing was wrong.

It's important to say up front that this is a situation of *unrepentant, continual sin*.

If he had slept with his step-mother once, and then repented,

that's a different story.

I once sat in with a session that had to deal with two different cases of sexual immorality.

The first was a single woman who had slept with her boyfriend the previous week.

She knew that what she did was wrong, and so she immediately repented

and came to us, confessing her sin.

The second case was a divorced man who had met a woman in a chat room,

arranged to meet frequently for four months at a local hotel,

and only came to us because he got caught.

Both cases were ostensibly the same sin (fornication),

but the circumstances were so different as to require very different judgments.

We admonished the single gal privately,

encouraged her to make arrangements to avoid similar circumstances,

and prayed with her.

The end.

The divorced man, on the other hand, had dishonored the Lord's Table for 4 months.

He had come regularly to communion with a smiling face and a wicked heart.

So we required him to come before his congregation and publicly repent –

and we suspended him from the Table for 4 months.  
He had to come to church – but he could not partake of communion.

He needed to see what Paul says later in chapter 6, verses 13-20,  
“The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord,  
and the Lord for the body.  
And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.  
Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?  
Shall I then take the members of Christ  
and make them members of a prostitute? Never!  
Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute  
becomes one body with her?  
For, as it is written, ‘The two will become one flesh.’  
But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.  
Flee from sexual immorality.  
Every other sin a person commits is outside the body,  
but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.  
Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you,  
whom you have from God?  
You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.  
So glorify God in your body.”

Notice how Paul talks about the purpose and practice of church discipline in verses 3-5:

## **2. “Deliver This Man to Satan” – the Purpose and Practice of Church Discipline (5:3-5)**

<sup>3</sup> *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.* <sup>4</sup> *When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus,* <sup>5</sup> *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.*

This is challenging for us moderns in lots of ways!

It is probably best to capitalize Spirit in verse 3.

Paul is saying that he is present not bodily,  
but because of the Spirit that unites them.

And “as present” he has pronounced judgment with and for the community.

But how can Paul pronounce judgment?

He refused to pass judgment on their dispute in chapters 2-4.

But now he pronounces judgment *in absentia* regarding this case!

Notice that Paul does not name the individual.

He hands down a “hypothetical judgment.”

Assuming that the facts in the case are as presented to him,  
he declares the verdict.

The Corinthians have been so divided over trivial things

that they have abdicated their right judgment on important things.



But Paul's verdict must be embodied.

The Corinthian church must give it flesh and blood.

When they are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus –

in other words, in the corporate service of worship –

“and my spirit is present with the power of the Lord Jesus”

again reflecting the Holy Spirit's work in uniting the people of God –

Paul is spiritually present with the Corinthian church –

And in this worship service,

they are to hand this man over to Satan.

This is the language of the court room, after the verdict has been pronounced,

when the judge hands the prisoner over to the magistrate for punishment.

This is the public sentencing of the condemned.

And the sentence is a death sentence:

“deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh,

in order that the spirit may be saved in the Day of the Lord.”

You may have noticed that I left out the personal pronouns.

The ESV says “for the destruction of *his* flesh,

so that *his* spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.”

But the Greek is more ambiguous.

And I think that it is ambiguous for a reason.

In every excommunication, the flesh is destroyed so that the spirit may be saved.

And yes, we hope and pray that *his* spirit may be saved.

But you do not know that this will be the result for *him*.

When the church excommunicates this man –

handing him over to Satan – expelling him from the Kingdom of God

and returning him to the kingdom of darkness –

it is a spiritual death sentence.

The one who is handed over to Satan is no longer a part of the people of God.

He belongs to Satan once again.

(This is why you only do this for *really* serious sins!

And *only* when they categorically refuse to repent.)

But you do this for the destruction of the flesh –

hopefully his flesh – his old Adamic ways –

but at the very least,

so that these fleshly practices will no longer contaminate the church.

Remember what Paul said in 3:17,

“If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.

For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.”

Paul now says that when sexual immorality is allowed to flourish in the church,

that heaven will leaven the whole lump of dough.

And so the church may not celebrate such behavior –  
but (if the behavior continues) we remove it from the body of Christ.  
In this way the flesh will be destroyed and the spirit saved in the day of the Lord.

And all this is supposed to happen in the worship service!

Nowadays people tend to resign their membership and run away from the church.  
But there was a time when it was a regular occurrence.  
Records of the Church of Scotland indicate that in many 17<sup>th</sup> century parishes  
you could have discipline announced every week!

Every week there would be *someone* sitting on the stool in front of the pulpit,  
to be rebuked publicly for their sin  
(fornication, brawling, public drunkenness, etc.)  
Serious sins might get you six weeks on the stool!

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the stool had not yet been forgotten.  
That was why Charles Finney's "anxious bench" was such a potent image.  
Finney encouraged people to come sit on the "anxious bench" in the front of the church  
if they wanted to be saved!  
He was calling them to identify themselves as sinners –  
to put themselves in the place of those who were ashamed of their sin.

The transformation from the stool to the anxious bench reveals much about the modern mind.  
We don't want someone else to put us on the stool.  
If we can self-identify as sinners, then we are so much better than those sinners *out there*!

But Paul says to the church that it is *our responsibility* to deal with sin –  
not only individually, but also corporately.

### **3. "Cleanse Out the Old Leaven" – Christ, Our Passover (5:6-8)**

<sup>6</sup> *Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?*

Paul refers back to the Feast of Unleavened Bread –  
which was celebrated in connection with Passover.  
For 7 days the Israelites were supposed to remove all leaven from their homes.  
Leaven is not inherently evil in the OT.  
The bread used with the free will offerings together with the peace offerings  
could have leaven in it.  
Rather, the principle of leaven illustrates how something tiny and practically invisible  
can *radically* alter something much larger than itself.

If you have one bad apple in a bushel,  
soon the whole bushel will be rotten.  
One little kudzu plant in 1876 has spread over the whole southern United States  
now expanding at a rate of 150,000 acres a year!

Paul says *don't let it keep spreading!*

<sup>7</sup> *Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened.*

What does he mean by this?

I know that this sermon has focused a lot on *judgment* –  
because that's what Paul focuses on in this passage!  
But in verse 7, Paul reminds us of the *good news*:

*For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.*

Tonight we'll be looking at the feasts of Israel – the sanctification of time –  
and how Christ *is* our Passover.

Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away our sin.

You *really are* unleavened.

The old leaven has been removed from God's house by the death of Jesus.

Jesus has cleansed his church.

You are no longer who you once were!

As we'll see in the next chapter –  
“such were some of you!”

But you are no longer the old, unkind, immoral person that you once were.  
You have been made new in Christ.

<sup>8</sup> *Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

It will not do to *pretend* that the house is clean.

If there is leaven in the dough,  
then the dough will start to rise!  
We cannot hide from God!  
Truth will out!

Therefore, let us celebrate the feast – with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

It's not that the church is perfect!

It's not that sin doesn't happen here.

It's that we repent.

And we forgive – because we have been forgiven ourselves!

[Bob Taylor and Michael Duryea and Matthew and Julie Smith]