

Exegetical Notes – 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

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Introduction: Having dealt with the issue of divisions within the Corinthian Church, chapters 1-4, he now turns his attention to issues within that church that are not being handled correctly by them. In his letters, Paul often gives lists (see 1 Corinthians 5:10 & 11). These lists are suggestive, not inclusive. Other items might be included in these lists. Paul's intent is give suggestions not to prepare a list of every item which should be part of the list.

1 Corinthians 5:1-13

Verses 1-2

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father's wife. ² And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have gone into mourning and have put out of your fellowship the man who has been doing this?

- The first issue that Paul addresses with the Corinthian congregation is the handling of sexual immorality. Apparently, there was a man who was part of this congregation who was having sexual relations with his stepmother. The text refers to the woman as "his father's wife," not his mother. Apparently, the father of the man in question remarried and the man was involved with this woman. It is unclear if the man's father was alive or dead.
- Paul is appalled by this situation. He claims that not even pagans, non-Christians, would tolerate such behavior.
- But Paul says that the Corinthians were proud that such a man was numbered among them. Proud that they were so loving that they could forgive this man and tolerate his behavior. They were not defending the man's behavior. They were proud of their own benevolent behavior. They did not condemn him for his sin; they tolerated it without comment. Worse, the Corinthians were agreed that tolerating gross sexual immorality was the correct behavior for the church.

- Paul says that, in this, they are entirely wrong. He says that they should have confronted the man's immoral behavior and, if he did not repent of it, put him out of their church.

Verses 3-5

³ For my part, even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. As one who is present with you in this way, I have already passed judgment in the name of our Lord Jesus on the one who has been doing this. ⁴ So when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, ⁵ hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.

- Paul boldly declares his lack of approval for the way the Corinthians have handled this matter. He tells them that he has “passed judgment” on this man. The man's behavior condemns him. He openly defies the word of the Lord. Therefore, his behavior must be exposed.
- Paul says that the man should be “handed over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh.” The man must not be allowed to continue to live in error thinking that his immoral behavior is acceptable to God and that a Christian can persist in openly defying the word of God. If he is not confronted, the man will continue to live in theological error. He does not have the mind of Christ. If he is shown his error, he may repent of it and draw close to the Lord.

Verses 6-8

⁶ Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? ⁷ Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸ Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

- Using the way yeast works through dough, Paul explains that tolerating sinful behavior works its way through the church. If the church does not judge and condemn immoral behavior, others will think that that behavior is acceptable among the people of God. They will conclude that they may behave in that way, too. Thus, immoral behavior of various kinds will infest the body of God and destroy the temple of the Lord.
- Christians must live to please God. They must not follow immoral practices.

Verses 9-11

⁹ ***I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—
¹⁰ not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. ¹¹ But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.***

- Paul says that he wrote to the Corinthians about how to deal with persons practicing sexual immorality in his letter. There was apparently a letter written to the Corinthians by Paul before he wrote 1 Corinthians. We do not have copies of this letter. It is referred to by scholars as the previous letter. In this letter, Paul addressed this issue.
- His concern was how Christians were to deal with sexually immoral behavior among Christians. He acknowledges that the church exists in the midst of the people of the world and that the behavior of those people outside of the church will be immoral and unfair. The church cannot withdraw from association with worldly people.
- However, Christians must be different. They must “put to death their worldly nature” (see Colossians 3:5-17). Among Christians, there must be no hint of sexual immorality, greed, idolatry, or slander. They must not get drunk, and they may not cheat others.
- Christians must avoid association with those who say they belong to Christ but display behaviors which deny their devotion to Christ. This is for the sake of the immoral person, so that they will repent, but also for the sake of the Christian, so that they will not be infected by sin.

Verses 12-13

¹² ***What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? ¹³ God will judge those outside. “Expel the wicked person from among you.***

- Paul’s opinion is clearly stated. He is not saying that the church should be judging people who do not know Jesus Christ as Lord. God will bring those people to conviction about sin and judgment of sin in His own want and time. However, a person who claims to be a follower of Jesus Christ and openly defies the word of God must be confronted by the church. If that person will not repent, he must be expelled from the church.

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