

## **ECCLESIOLOGY 101**

### **How the Local Church Lives and Breathes**

#### **Part 10: The Hard and Heartbreaking of Responding and Relating to Scandalous Sin**

##### **1 Corinthians 5:1-13**

Tonight, we're in our 10<sup>th</sup> installment in a series that is taking a street level, organic look at what the Bible has to say about the way the local church lives and breathes.

I've titled tonight's study: The Hard and Heartbreaking Response to Scandalous Sin within a community of believing men and women.

**1 Corinthians 5:1–13 (ESV) 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. <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. <sup>6</sup> Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? <sup>7</sup> Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. <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. <sup>9</sup> I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— <sup>10</sup> not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. <sup>11</sup> But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. <sup>12</sup> For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? <sup>13</sup> God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."**

There is no way we can process this apart from the groundwork laid in the first nine studies beginning with how the men and women within a community view and relate to God's appointed pastoral leadership; the depth of relationship **connected by** and **built around** the **shared experience** of gathered prayer and gathered worship. We can't begin to process this apart from **understanding** the reality that saving faith in Jesus makes us spiritual siblings in Jesus, and how the reality of that forever relationship involves *brotherly love* — a love that shares space in our lives, shares resources (emotional, material and spiritual) — a *sibling love* that is intimate and transparent. We can't begin to process this apart from genuine *brotherly love* in the hearts of men and women in a community who present themselves to God as a living sacrifice and exercise their gifts to help *bear burdens* and *restore* broken lives as.

**There is a divine rationale** that drives this hard and heartbreaking work (and by the way — if we ever find it easy — if we ever do it without our hearts breaking — WE are WRONG!)

A community of believers is stunningly beautiful when it is a living breathing expression of the heart and mind of Christ. Biblical community is a truly powerful and compelling witness to how real Jesus is.

The Holy Spirit inspired those words written by Paul to that 1<sup>st</sup> century community of believers to protect them (and us) from internal decay. Tooth decay creates intolerable bad breath. When tooth decay progresses you might have great things to talk about — but people can't listen because they can't bear the stink. Cancer of the internal organs causes **systemic damage that** in turn causes the beautiful external complexities of the human body to dis-integrate.

Here in **1 Corinthians 5** Paul singles out and deals with one specific sin.

DON'T MISS THIS — This hard, heartbreaking work of dealing with scandalous sin is one of the most essential functions and responsibilities of community. It's actually a litmus test of the shared faith of community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century **because** faith in Jesus that creates community (our common union),

*operates by love* — love that is so courageously selfless that it is willing to deal with a brother or sister involved in *scandalous sin* (in this case sexual sin).

There is a portion of this action that involves the community gathered as a whole — but I want us to look at the portions of this that have to do with the way individuals within a community respond to *scandalous sin* — and particularly, sexual sin.

**QUOTE: Albert Mohler** — *“The decline of church discipline is perhaps the most visible failure of the contemporary church. No longer concerned with maintaining purity of confession or lifestyle, the contemporary church sees itself as a voluntary association of autonomous members, with minimal moral accountability to God, much less to each other.”*

In 21<sup>st</sup> century church culture there are tons of people who talk about community — but they believe no one has the right to intrude into their personal space when it comes to sexual sin.

**Here's the challenge** — Community (our community) will be informed by the heart and mind of Jesus in Scripture, or it will be informed by broken, fallen culture.

This passage in 1 Corinthians 5 is incredibly relevant to real community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 1<sup>st</sup> century Corinth, sexual immorality was an accepted fact of life for the common person in Greek culture. Greek culture could matter-of-factly say: “Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of the body, but wives to bear us legitimate children.”<sup>1</sup> But fallen culture stood in opposition to the heart and mind of Jesus concerning sexual behavior. Pagan religions saw no value in sexual purity. It wasn't hard for a Corinthian to think you could be religious, yet still act any way you pleased when it came to sex. THAT is why the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to tell the community of believers in Corinth about the hard and heartbreaking work of dealing with scandalous sin and sinners.

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<sup>1</sup> Guzik, D. (2013). *1 Corinthians* (1 Co 5:2). Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik.

Within the culture of the average community of believers it is rare for a person to willingly self-disclose their struggles with sexual sin. Paul is not talking about taking this action in dealing with a person who desires to live a sexually pure life yet finds himself or herself struggling with sexual sin. I believe that person falls into the category of **Galatians 6:1-2**.

Paul is talking about how a men and women within a community of believers are to respond when full-blown surrender to and involvement in ongoing sexual sin is discovered (or-disclosed). When such sin is brought into the open there is a way we're to respond to that person — a way to relate to them.

**1 Corinthians 5:1–13 (ESV) It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you,**

**sexually immorality** is the ancient Greek word “porneia.” It broadly refers to all types of sexual activity outside of marriage (including homosexuality)

**and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife.**

A brother within the church in Corinth was having an on-going sexual relationship with his stepmother (his father's wife). The woman wasn't even addressed — telling us that she must not have been a Christian.

*<sup>12</sup> For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? <sup>13</sup> God judges those outside.*

HERE'S OUR PROBLEM — When it becomes known that a brother or sister in a community of believers is involved in ongoing sexual sin that person will quite often pull out the “You can't judge me” card. And at that — brothers and sisters are paralyzed. Because **fallen culture has made it clear** that

no one has any right to tell anyone what good or bad — right or wrong when it comes to sexual behavior. And above all, **no one** has the right to use the **S** –

**word..... SIN.** Instead they're to **celebrate** and **tolerate any** kind of sexual behavior — and to **NOT** think and act **that way** makes you a HATER.

21<sup>st</sup> century Christian community is facing the same challenges in responding to sexual immorality as the 1<sup>st</sup> century community in Corinth.

### **LET'S WALK IT THROUGH —**

There are certain things about this case that we need to note as we consider the issues of how we're to respond a person in full blown sin.

**1.** This case was an acknowledged situation which had no need of proof. This was not a matter of gossip or of hearsay. It could be translated: *"It is reported actually and factually."*

**QUOTE: John Owen** — *The accused must admit to the sin. If not, the sin must be "clearly proved" so that the accused cannot deny it. In short, there must not be any doubt as to the individual's guilt in the matter.* <sup>2</sup>

Paul would never have brought up something like this if it had simply been a rumor.

**2.** This was not a questionable sin. There is behavior that falls under the category of *questionable*; behavior that some might call sin, while others might not. It is quite possible for you to have a very strong opinion of what someone should or should not do. For example: Can a Christian drive a Ferrari? There was a time when I emphatically thought that anyone who did that was a materialistic sinner. Or, can a Christian smoke cigars? Just because you wouldn't or couldn't DO a particular thing, or OWN a particular thing, does NOT make it sin. My opinion, your opinion, does not define an action as sinful. Only the Word of God can do that.

The reason Paul had to instruct the Corinthians to deal with this brother is because his conduct was without question "sin." This was a glaring sin — so scandalous that it was actually recognized by the pagan world as being wrong. His

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<sup>2</sup> Yuille, S. (2010). John Owen and the Third Mark of the Church. *Puritan Reformed Journal Volume 2*, 2(1), 218.

particular form of sexual sin was FORBIDDEN in the Old Testament Scriptures, and was such a horrible sin that it was not even tolerated in pagan Greece.

If a thing is condemned in the Scripture it doesn't make a bit of difference what your opinion is, or how many people are practicing it. It makes ZERO difference how fallen culture paints — defines it — values it and celebrates it. If the Word of God calls it sin, there is no other way one can look at it.

That man's brothers and sisters within the community of believers in Corinth did NOTHING.

**How should we respond** when a brother or sister within community is without question involved in unrepented sexual sin?

Paul gave 3 specific instructions for the church to follow.

### **1. Mourn Over Their Sin**

**Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.**

**1 Corinthians 5:2 (NLT)** You are so proud of yourselves, but you should be mourning in sorrow and shame. And you should remove this man from your fellowship.

**1 Corinthians 5:2 (The Message)** ..... Shouldn't this break your hearts? Shouldn't it bring you to your knees in tears? Shouldn't this person and his conduct be confronted and dealt with?

Shocked as he was at the sin, Paul was even more shocked by the attitude of the Corinthian Church to the sinner. They had accepted and tolerated the sin when they should have been grief-stricken.

When marriages and families are being wrecked by unrepented sexual sin or sexual practice some might be sadly indifferent — others might be out right angry because of the self-destructive behavior and/or how that behavior is destroying others.

**Mourning** is the word used for mourning over the dead, perhaps the deepest and most painful kind of personal sorrow possible.

Indifference towards sin is always dangerous!

*“Our one security against sin lies in our being shocked at it.”*

*“Men must see the infinite beauty of holiness and the infinite damnability of sin.”*

**This response** is not a question of being critical and condemning; it is a question of being wounded and shocked. No Christian can take a casual view of sin because it was sin that crucified Jesus Christ. But, instead of mourning, they were boasting about being so “open-minded” that even a person living in unrepented sexual sin could be a member in good standing!

Whenever a Christian brother or sister is living in unrepented in sin it’s time for the community of believers to mourn and to seek to restore him.

## **2. Judge and Purge the Sin.**

The church was to gather together and expel the offender.

Note the strong words that Paul used to instruct them:

**<sup>2</sup> Let him who has done this be removed from among you.**

**<sup>13</sup> God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”**

We’ve never had to do that with before the whole of Metro. Those who refused to repent of their ongoing sexual sin have always left Metro before that happened.

***v.5 deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.***

What does it mean to deliver a man to Satan? It does NOT mean to deprive him of salvation, since it is not the church that grants salvation to begin with. When a Christian is in fellowship with the Lord and with the local church, he enjoys a special protection from Satan. But when he is out of fellowship with God and other believers, he is “fair game” for the enemy. God could permit Satan to attack the offender’s body so that the sinning believer would repent and return to the Lord.

This is crucial to preventing spiritual decay within a community.

**1 Corinthians 5:6–7 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? <sup>7</sup> Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened.**

The man’s unholy life was like a cancer in the body that needed to be removed by drastic surgery.

### **3. Don’t Keep Company with them**

**1 Corinthians 5:9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with (keep company with) sexually immoral people—**

This relates to the person who names the name of Jesus and was either removed from Metro in a public way — or walked out of Metro to continue in his or her sinful behavior.

I know there are people in Metro who have in the past or are right now dealing with the latter. It is so hard and so painful.

WHAT DOES not to associate with / keep company with MEAN?

The sense of the phrase is *don’t get involved with — don’t be in the mix of their life*. It doesn’t mean walk the other direction when you see them. It doesn’t mean that you can’t have a conversation with them. But it DOES mean that you don’t become a part of the mix of their life — you’re not involved with their life in the way you used to be. Friendly, kind, but not friend.



That is part of the pain intended to wake them from the delusion of their sin. Don't spare them that pain because you can't stand the pain of not being intimately involved with their life.

This passage is for the good of the church and the good of the sinner. **2 Corinthians** indicates that this man did repent and was restored to fellowship. THAT is the heart of the matter!