

CHAPTER 5

In this chapter the apostle,

I. Blames them for their indulgence in the case of the incestuous person, and orders him to be excommunicated, and delivered to Satan (v. 1-6).

II. He exhorts them to Christian purity, by purging out the old leaven (v. 7, 8). And,

III. Directs them to shun even the common conversation of Christians who were guilty of any notorious and flagitious wickedness (v. 9 to the end).

~~481~~ 1 CORINTHIANS 5:1-6

A CASE OF GROSS CRIMINALITY

Here the apostle states the case; and,

I. Lets them know what was the common or general report concerning them, that one of their community was guilty of fornication, v. 1. It was told in all places, to their dishonour, and the reproach of Christians. And it was the more reproachful because it could not be denied. Note, The heinous sins of professed Christians are quickly noted and noised abroad. We should walk circumspectly, for many eyes are upon us, and many mouths will be opened against us if we fall into any scandalous practice. This was not a common instance of fornication, but *such as was not so much as named among the Gentiles, that a man should have his father's wife* — either marry her while his father was alive, or keep her as his concubine, either when he was dead or while he was alive. In either of these cases, his criminal conversation with her might be called *fornication*; but had his father been dead, and he, after his decease, married to her, it had been incest still, but neither fornication nor adultery in the strictest sense. But to marry her, or keep her as a concubine, while his father was alive, though he had repudiated her, or she had deserted him, whether she were his own mother or not, was incestuous fornication: *Scelus incredibile* (as Cicero calls it), *et prater unum in omni vitf*

inauditum (Orat. pro Cluent.), when a woman had caused her daughter to be put away, and was married to her husband. *Incredible wickedness!* says the orator; *such I never heard of in all my life besides*. Not that there were no such instances of incestuous marriages among the heathens; but, whenever they happened, they gave a shock to every man of virtue and probity among them. They could not think of them without horror, nor mention them without dislike and detestation. Yet such a horrible wickedness was committed by one in the church of Corinth, and, as is probable, a leader of one of the factions among them, a principal man. Note, The best churches are, in this state of imperfection, liable to very great corruptions. Is it any wonder when so horrible a practice was tolerated in an apostolical church, a church planted by the great apostle of the Gentiles?

II. He greatly blames them for their own conduct hereupon: *They were puffed up* (v. 2), *they gloried*,

1. Perhaps on account of this very scandalous person. He might be a man of great eloquence, of deep science, and for this reason very greatly esteemed, and followed, and cried up, by many among them. They were proud that they had such a leader. Instead of mourning for his fall, and their own reproach upon his account, and renouncing him and removing him from the society, they continued to applaud him and pride themselves in him. Note, Pride or self-esteem often lies at the bottom of our immoderate esteem of others, and this makes us as blind to their faults as to our own. It is true humility that will bring a man to a sight and acknowledgement of his errors. The proud man either wholly overlooks or artfully disguises his faults, or endeavours to transform his blemishes into beauties. Those of the Corinthians that were admirers of the incestuous person's gifts could overlook or extenuate his horrid practices. Or else,

2. It may intimate to us that some of the opposite party were puffed up. They were proud of their own standing, and trampled upon him that fell. Note, It is a very wicked thing to glory over the miscarriages and sins of others. We should lay them to heart, and mourn for them, not be puffed up with them. Probably this was one effect of the divisions among them. The opposite party made their advantage of this scandalous lapse, and were glad of the opportunity. Note, It is a sad consequence of divisions among Christians that it makes them apt to rejoice in iniquity. The sins of others should be our sorrow. Nay, churches should mourn for the scandalous

behaviour of particular members, and, if they be incorrigible, should remove them. He that had done this wicked deed should have been taken away from among them.

III. We have the apostle's direction to them how they should now proceed with this scandalous sinner. He would have him excommunicated and delivered to Satan (v. 3-5); *as absent in body, yet present in spirit, he had judged already as if he had been present*; that is, he had, by revelation and the miraculous gift of discerning vouchsafed him by the Spirit, as perfect a knowledge of the case, and had hereupon come to the following determination, not without special authority from the Holy Spirit. He says this to let them know that, though he was at a distance, he did not pass an unrighteous sentence, nor judge without having as full cognizance of the case as if he had been on the spot. Note, Those who would appear righteous judges to the world will take care to inform them that they do not pass sentence without full proof and evidence. The apostle adds, *him who hath so done this deed*. The fact was not only heinously evil in itself, and horrible to the heathens, but there were some particular circumstances that greatly aggravated the offence. He had so committed the evil as to heighten the guilt by the manner of doing it. Perhaps he was a minister, a teacher, or a principal man among them. By this means the church and their profession were more reproached. Note, In dealing with scandalous sinners, not only are they to be charged with the fact, but the aggravating circumstances of it. Paul had judged that *he should be delivered to Satan* (v. 5), and this was to be done *in the name of Christ*, with the power of Christ, and in a full assembly, where the apostle would be also present in spirit, or by his spiritual gift of discerning at a distance. Some think that this is to be understood of a mere ordinary excommunication, and that delivering him to Satan for the destruction of the flesh is only meant of disowning him, and casting him out of the church, that by this means he might be brought to repentance, and his flesh might be mortified. Christ and Satan divide the world: and those that live in sin, when they profess relation to Christ, belong to another master, and by excommunication should be delivered up to him; and this in the name of Christ. Note, Church-censures are Christ's ordinances, and should be dispensed in his name. It was to be done also *when they were gathered together*, in full assembly. The more public the more solemn, and the more solemn the more likely to have a good effect on the offender. Note, Church-censures on notorious and incorrigible sinners should be passed with great

solemnity. Those who sin in this manner *are to be rebuked before all, that all may fear*, ^{<518>}1 Timothy 5:20. Others think the apostle is not to be understood of mere excommunication, but of a miraculous power or authority they had of delivering a scandalous sinner into the power of Satan, to have bodily diseases inflicted, and to be tormented by him with bodily pains, which is the meaning of the *destruction of the flesh*. In this sense the destruction of the flesh has been a happy occasion of the salvation of the spirit. It is probable that this was a mixed case. It was an extraordinary instance: and the church was to proceed against him by just censure; the apostle, when they did so, put forth an act of extraordinary power, and gave him up to Satan, nor for his destruction, but for his deliverance, at least for the destruction of the flesh, that the soul might be saved. Note, The great end of church-censures is the good of those who fall under them, their spiritual and eternal good. It is that their spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus, v. 5. Yet it is not merely a regard to their benefit that is to be had in proceeding against them. For,

IV. He hints the danger of contagion from this example: *Your glorying is not good. Know you not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?* The bad example of a man in rank and reputation is very mischievous, spreads the contagion far and wide. It did so, probably, in this very church and case: see ^{<472>}2 Corinthians 12:21. They could not be ignorant of this. The experience of the whole world was for it; *one scabbed sheep infects a whole flock*. A little leaven will quickly spread the ferment through a great lump. Note, Concern for their purity and preservation should engage Christian churches to remove gross and scandalous sinners.

^{<487>}1 CORINTHIANS 5:7-8

CHRISTIAN PURITY

Here the apostle exhorts them to purity, by purging out the old leaven. In this observe,

I. The advice itself, addressed either,

1. To the church in general; and so purging out the old leaven, that they might be a new lump, refers to the *putting away from themselves that wicked person*, v. 13. Note, Christian churches should be pure and holy,

and not bear such corrupt and scandalous members. They are to be unleavened, and should endure no such heterogeneous mixture to sour and corrupt them. Or,

2. To each particular member of the church. And so it implies that they should purge themselves from all impurity of heart and life, especially from this kind of wickedness, to which the Corinthians were addicted to a proverb. See the *argument* at the beginning. This old leaven was in a particular manner to be purged out, that they might become a new lump. Note, Christians should be careful to keep themselves clean, as well as purge polluted members out of their society. And they should especially avoid the sins to which they themselves were once most addicted, and the reigning vices of the places and the people where they live. They were also to purge themselves from malice and wickedness — all ill-will and mischievous subtlety. This is leaven that sours the mind to a great degree. It is not improbable that this was intended as a check to some who gloried in the scandalous behaviour of the offender, both out of pride and pique. Note, Christians should be careful to keep free from malice and mischief. Love is the very essence and life of the Christian religion. It is the fairest image of God, *for God is love* (^{GRS-1} 1 John 4:16), and therefore it is no wonder if it be the greatest beauty and ornament of a Christian. But malice is murder in its principles: He that hates his brother is a murderer (^{GRS-1} 1 John 3:15), he bears the image and proclaims him the offspring of him *who was a murderer from the beginning*, ^{GRS-1} John 8:44. How hateful should every thing be to a Christian that looks like malice and mischief.

II. The reason with which this advice is enforced: *For Christ our passover is sacrificed for us*, v. 7. This is the great doctrine of the gospel. The Jews, after they had killed the passover, kept the feast of unleavened bread. So must we; not for seven days only, but all our days. We should die with our Saviour to sin, be planted into the likeness of his death by mortifying sin, and into the likeness of his resurrection by rising again to newness of life, and that internal and external. We must have new hearts and new lives. Note, The whole life of a Christian must be a feast of unleavened bread. His common conversation and his religious performances must be holy. *He must purge out the old leaven, and keep the feast of unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.* He must be without guilt in his conduct towards God and man. And the more there is of sincerity in our own profession, the less shall we censure that of others. Note, On the whole, The sacrifice of our Redeemer is the strongest

argument with a gracious heart for purity and sincerity. How sincere a regard did he show to our welfare, in dying for us! and how terrible a proof was his death of the detestable nature of sin, and God's displeasure against it! Heinous evil, that could not be expiated but with the blood of the Son of God! And shall a Christian love the murderer of his Lord? God forbid.

✠ 1 CORINTHIANS 5:9-13

CHRISTIAN PURITY

Here the apostle advises them to shun the company and converse of scandalous professors. Consider,

I. The advice itself: *I wrote to you in a letter not to company with fornicators*, v. 9. Some think this was an epistle written to them before, which is lost. Yet we have lost nothing by it, the Christian revelation being entire in those books of scripture which have come down to us, which are all that were intended by God for the general use of Christians, or he could and would in his providence have preserved more of the writings of inspired men. Some think it is to be understood of this very epistle, that he had written this advice before he had full information of their whole case, but thought it needful now to be more particular. And therefore on this occasion he tells them that if any man called a brother, any one professing Christianity, and being a member of a Christian church, were *a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer*, that they should not *keep company with him, nor so much as eat with such a one*. They were to avoid all familiarity with him; they were to have no commerce with him; they were to have no commerce with him: but, that they might shame him, and bring him to repentance, must disclaim and shun him. Note, Christians are to avoid the familiar conversation of fellow-Christians that are notoriously wicked, and under just censure for their flagitious practices. Such disgrace the Christian name. They may call themselves *brethren in Christ*, but they are not Christian brethren. They are only fit companions for the brethren in iniquity; and to such company they should be left, till they *mend their ways and doings*.

II. How he limits this advice. He does not forbid the Christians the like commerce with scandalously wicked heathens. He does not forbid their eating nor conversing with the *fornicators of this world*, etc. They know no better. They profess no better. The gods they serve, and the worship they render to many of them, countenance such wickedness. “*You must needs go out of the world* if you will have no conversation with such men. Your Gentile neighbours are generally vicious and profane; and it is impossible, as long as you are in the world, and have any worldly business to do, but you must fall into their company. This cannot be wholly avoided.” Note, Christians may and ought to testify more respect to loose worldlings than to loose Christians. This seems a paradox. Why should we shun the company of a profane or loose Christian, rather than that of a profane or loose heathen?

III. The reason of this limitation is here assigned. It is impossible the one should be avoided. Christians must have gone out of the world to avoid the company of loose heathens. But this was impossible, as long as they had business in the world. While they are minding their duty, and doing their proper business, God can and will preserve them from contagion. Besides, they carry an antidote against the infection of their bad example, and are naturally upon their guard. They are apt to have a horror at their wicked practices. But the dread of sin wears off by familiar converse with wicked Christians. Our own safety and preservation are a reason of this difference. But, besides, heathens were such as Christians had nothing to do to judge and censure, and avoid upon a censure passed; for *they are without* (v. 12), and must be left to *God's judgment*, v. 13. But, as to members of the church, they are within, are professedly bound by the laws and rules of Christianity, and not only liable to the judgment of God, but to the censures of those who are set over them, and the fellow-members of the same body, when they transgress those rules. Every Christian is bound to judge them unfit for communion and familiar converse. They are to be punished, by having this mark of disgrace put upon them, that they may be shamed, and, if possible, reclaimed thereby: and the more because the sins of such much more dishonour God than the sins of the openly wicked and profane can do. The church therefore is obliged to clear herself from all confederacy with them, or connivance at them, and to bear testimony against their wicked practices. Note, Though the church has nothing to do with those without, it must endeavour to keep clear of the guilt and reproach of those within.

IV. How he applies the argument to the case before him: “*Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person, v. 13. Cast him out of your fellowship, and avoid his conversation.*”