

Iglesia de Carne

Studies in First Corinthians

Text

First Corinthians 5:1-13

Topic

Paul expresses astonishment at the arrogance of the believers in Corinth for tolerating the sexual immorality of a brother

Title

“Sex & the Audacity”

Several periods in history have been referred to as “the sexual revolution.” One was in the United States from the 1960’s to the 1980’s. The so-called “sexual liberation” it brought included things like:

- Increased acceptance of sex outside of traditional heterosexual, monogamous relationships.
- The normalization of contraception and the pill.
- Public nudity, pornography, premarital sex, and alternative forms of sexuality.
- The legalization of abortion.

The sexual revolution ushered in a more permissive society. A permissive society is one in which social norms become increasingly liberal, especially with regard to sex.

We are becoming increasingly permissive:

- According to a 2015 research study, in the early 1970’s premarital sex was accepted by 29%. It rose to 58% in the period between 2010 and 2012.
- Attitudes towards sexual activity among two adults of the same sex also changed: Accepted by less than 20% before 1993, it rose to 44% in 2012, and 56% for the generation born after 1982.

On June 26, 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a landmark ruling that granted same-sex couples a constitutional right to marry. The 5-4 decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* legalized gay marriage nationwide, including in the 14 states that did not previously allow it.

According to a recent article I read,

Kindergarteners and other elementary-aged students in California's public schools will be taught to reject "gender stereotypes" - such as about clothing, colors and toys - and to accept transgenderism as normative if proposed health guidelines are approved. There would be no opt-out option for parents.

One recommended book in the guidelines tells the story of a boy who wants to be a princess. Another recommended book teaches students there are at least 15 genders. That same book also tells children it's impossible to know if a baby is a boy or a girl.

To be accurate, a follow up article stated, "The California Department of Education approved controversial sex education guidelines for public school teachers... that encourage classroom discussions about gender identity and LGBT relationships, but removed five resources and books, including one that explains sex to students as young as kindergarten."

It's definitely permissive; but is it progressive? That's one of the arguments for permissiveness - that it is humanity making progress.

Blow the dust off of the 1934 book called *Sex and Culture*. Anthropologist J.D. Unwin found a universal correlation between monogamy and what he called a civilization's "expansive energy." A non-Christian, he insisted that he offered "no opinion about rightness or wrongness" concerning sexual norms.

Among the 86 different societies he studied, he not only found monogamy to be correlated with a society's strength, but came to the sobering conclusion that, "In human records there is no instance of a society retaining its energy after a complete new generation has inherited a tradition which does not insist on pre-nuptial and post-nuptial continence."

In other words, once a society abandoned monogamy and became sexually permissive, it began to degenerate.

First century Corinth was typically permissive and sexually immoral. That, however, wasn't the problem.

The problem was that the believers were even more immoral.

1Cor 5:1 (CSB) It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and the kind of sexual immorality that is not even tolerated among the Gentiles - a man is sleeping with his father's wife.

They were worse than the world. Thus Paul's focus is on **them** - *not* on the world.

The church must take a stand against permissiveness. We must decry sexual immorality.

But that starts at home - *not* outside. Our best efforts for biblical morality in society is to "Flee sexual immorality" ourselves (First Corinthians 6:18). God's will is for us to "abstain from sexual immorality" (First Thessalonians 4:3).

Along those lines, I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 Do You Have Zero Tolerance When It Comes To Sexual Sin In The Body Of Christ?**, and **#2 Do You Have True Tolerance When It Comes To Sexual Sinners Outside The Body Of Christ?**

#1 - Do You Have Zero Tolerance When It Comes To Sexual Sin In The Body Of Christ? (v1-8)

"I did not have sexual relations with that woman."

That's pretty much everything I remember about the presidency of Bill Clinton. He is infamous for redefining what constitutes having "sex."

If we are going to talk about sexual immorality, we need an understanding of what constitutes biblical morality with regards to "sexual relations."

It's simple, really. It's in the opening pages of the Book of Genesis, and verified by the reference Jesus made to marriage "in the beginning."

- God's gold standard for sexual morality is one biological male and one biological female - heterosexuals - in a monogamous marriage for as long as they live.
- God hates divorce, but has given biblical grounds that allow for divorce and subsequent remarriage in certain circumstances. They are infidelity on the part of your spouse, or abandonment.

God says of His standard, “Marriage *is* honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4).

We don’t really need long lists of behaviors that constitute sexual immorality. *Anything* and *everything* sexual that does not adhere to God’s standard is immoral.

The believers in Corinth were way short of the gold standard.

1Cor 5:1 (CSB) It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and the kind of sexual immorality that is not even tolerated among the Gentiles - a man is sleeping with his father’s wife.

Everyone knew about it - including nonbelievers outside the church. Their liberality wasn’t attracting them to Jesus.

When he said it wasn’t “even tolerated among the Gentiles,” it means that in their sexually immoral secular society, incest was considered deviant.

I want to pause briefly to discuss the city of Corinth. We always hear that there were over a thousand male and female prostitutes in the Temple of Aphrodite. Not exactly. Turns out, that was true of what historians call “Old Corinth,” *destroyed two centuries before Paul was writing.*

Another historian writes:

The size of the Roman temple of Aphrodite... ruled out such temple prostitution; and by that time she had become Venus - the venerated mother of the imperial family and the highly respected patroness of Corinth - and was no longer a sex symbol.

Don’t misunderstand: Corinth was exceedingly wicked, and sexually immoral; a seaport filled with vice. But if we appeal to history, we need to fact check. (And, yes, I’ve been guilty of perpetuating this incorrect info).

A man was having sexual relations with his step-mother. We don’t know if the father was out of the picture; or if they both were having sex with her. The father and the woman were not believers, or else they would have been included in the recommended discipline.

Nonbelieving Corinthians would not “tolerate” incest; the church did, and it was out of arrogance.

1Co 5:2 And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.

Maybe they thought tolerance would show God’s grace. It did not. Instead of arrogance, they ought to have “mourned” for the man, and disciplined him for his own good.

How could Christians be so far off? We have what we call a Judeo-Christian heritage. When I was growing up in the 60’s and 70’s, it was *The Wonderful World of Disney* - not *Masters of Sex* or *Californication*. There was a biblical standard in our society adhered to by nonbelievers by which sexual immorality was judged.

Corinth had no such prior standard. They were pagan through-and-through. It was expected for a man to have several concubines and a mistress as well as a wife. Fornication and adultery were normal to them.

1Co 5:3 For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed.

One way Paul was “present in spirit” was by the inspired letter they were reading. Gordon Fee writes, “He probably... thinks of the reading of the letter in the gathered assembly as the tangible way in which the Spirit communicated his prophetic-apostolic ministry in their midst.”

He didn’t need to be there to “judge” the “deed,” because it was well-known to all. Which is also why Paul cut right to the chase without taking any disciplinary steps leading up to expelling him.

1Co 5:4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,

That sounds pretty official. The assembled church had both the authority and the “power” in Jesus to discipline a sinning member. With Paul’s letter, they were told what to do.

1Co 5:5 deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Paul was describing the two realms of life:

- The world outside the church is where Satan prowls about; where he is ruler; where his principalities and powers, and rulers of darkness, dwell. It is where lives are ruined.
- The church is the place of light and life. It is replete with Holy Spirit power to be changed into the image of Jesus. It offers spiritual protection.

It's hard for us to understand the gravity of being put out of the church. Today when believers sin, if their church starts to deal with it, they simply go next door to another church that either doesn't know them, or doesn't care to get involved. Or they stop attending church altogether with little to no remorse. Often they retain their Christian friends; or their Christian friends overlook the sin.

According to one source, 200,000 free citizens and 500,000 slaves populated first century Corinth. The one and only church is estimated to have been under 200 believers. On one website, I counted 150 churches in Fresno. Get the picture?

The "destruction of the flesh" relates to the desired effect of being put out of the church.

One commentator wrote, "though the old sin nature is dead, having been crucified with Christ, the flesh lives on, having been "educated" in sin by the old nature, the devil, and the worldly culture around us."

The incestuous man would be made to see that his behavior was carnal, so he could put to death the things of his flesh.

It was also a warning that he could be headed for a premature death. In the First Century, God was killing a few believers in churches.

"That his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" looks forward to the discipline resulting in repentance and restoration - getting him back on the path of reward when he sees Jesus.

1Co 5:6 Your glorying *is* not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

First let me say this (and this was new to me): "Leaven" is different from "yeast." Yeast was not plentiful in Bible times; but beyond even that, yeast is considered to be fresh and wholesome.

In contrast, “leaven” consisted of keeping back a portion of last week’s dough, allowing it to ferment, then adding it to this week’s. It would eventually become corrupted.

One scholar speculated the following:

Although the Old Testament does not expressly specify, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, as well as being a religious celebration, was probably a health provision. Because of the fermentation process, which week after week increased the dangers of infection, the Israelites were commanded once a year to purge their homes of all leaven. During the Feast they would bake only unleavened bread, from which dough they would then start up the process again after the Feast. Thus in the New Testament leaven became a symbol of the process by which an evil spreads insidiously in a community until the whole has been infected by it.

The “old leaven” was the incestuous man. They were a “new batch of dough,” in danger of spiritual contamination. Great illustration.

1Co 5:7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

Knowing Jesus is like a perpetual Feast of Unleavened Bread. We need not be contaminated.

There is a super-duper important principle in this verse; or I should say, behind Paul’s thinking in this verse. It is this: **Be what you already are.**

They weren’t *becoming* “a new lump” by works over a period of time. They already were a new lump, because of the “sacrificed” Jesus - the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world.

Too much of Christianity is people trying to become better on their own through various methods and programs sold in Christian bookstores. What is missing is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

- You ARE crucified with Jesus; you ARE raised from the dead in Him; you ARE seated with Him in the heavenlies.
- You HAVE everything you need for godly living.
- You ARE able to deny the flesh. You ARE able to yield to the Spirit.

The application of “Be what you already are” in Corinth was to be the unleavened lump they already were by judging and removing the sin in their midst.

1Co 5:8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth.

Simply put, stay unleavened; but if you find leaven in the lump - mourn, and remove it.

I’m not going to go into a talk about church discipline. This text doesn’t really give details; it simply acknowledges that churches have both the authority and the responsibility to discipline.

The incestuous man was put out of the church to be exposed to the world. Too often the modern believer chooses on their own to be exposed to the world.

We are called upon to reveal to nonbelievers the gold standard for sexual morality. Be what you already are.

#2 - Do You Have True Tolerance When It Comes To Sexual Sinners Outside The Body Of Christ? (v9-13)

Whether you ought to be tolerant or intolerant depends upon how you understand the words. This quote will help:

The original definition of tolerance and the way in which the word is used now are quite different. Originally, tolerance meant to acknowledge that others have differing beliefs and accept that it is their right to do so. In this way, Christians are to absolutely be tolerant. Recently, tolerance has come to mean accepting that those other beliefs are true - something Christians absolutely cannot do.

Paul suggested a general level of tolerance towards sinful nonbelievers in order to give them Jesus.

1Co 5:9 I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people.

1Co 5:10 Yet *I* certainly *did* not *mean* with the sexually immoral people of this world...

There is what scholars call a “lost letter” that Paul wrote prior to this one. He gave them wise counsel that was misunderstood. He assumed they’d understand he was talking about keeping company with believers.

1Co 5:10 Yet *I* certainly *did* not *mean* with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.

We should not “go out of the world” by isolating ourselves. We’re all part of the Great Commission.

It’s too easy for us to overlook that the people around us are not saved. We expect them to be honest and kind and respectful when it is not human nature, and when they have not the indwelling Spirit.

1Co 5:11 But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner - not even to eat with such a person.

This is not meant to be an exhaustive list - although it hits a lot of things. Christians living in sin must be approached differently from those not living in sin.

For one thing, it ought to make us mourn for them. It’s pretty hard to keep company with someone if you are weeping openly over their choices.

Some have interpreted “not even to eat with such a person” as excluding them from the Lord’s Supper - but that can’t be it. If they’ve been put out of the fellowship, there’s no opportunity for them to partake.

No, this has to do with our personal relationships with believers in sin. I certainly do not have all the answers. Here are a couple of thoughts:

1. We must begin to see the sinning saint as someone headed for destruction, needing to be helped. The help they need is to be made aware of how heinous sin is both to them and to others they claim they love.
2. When we do encounter them, we ought to urge them to repent. That’s really all there is to talk about if a believer is living in open sin.

But won’t that drive them away? Well, if you mean that they will be out in the world instead of enjoying the fellowship of believers, yes - and that’s a good thing according to these verses.

1Co 5:12 For what *have I to do* with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside?

They had the wrong posture towards “those... who are outside” the church. Of course nonbelievers will be sexually immoral idolatrous covetous reviling drunken extortioners. **THEY NEED JESUS!**

We should think of ourselves as First Responders, sent to save them by the Gospel. A firefighter who rolls up on a traffic accident doesn’t determine who the drunk driver was and then ignore him or her, leaving them to die. It’s not theirs to judge.

1Co 5:13 But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "PUT AWAY FROM YOURSELVES THE EVIL PERSON."

We judge inside, not outside, of the church. That can mean putting them out into the realm of the world, no longer associating with them - not even over a meal. I would add: *Unless it is to mourn and seek their repentance.*

I’ve heard and read many Bible studies that speak of homosexuality in a way that goes beyond the Bible into hate speech. I’ve never heard believers committing adultery spoken of in such a manner. The church, in general, has become permissive of certain sexual sins.

Christians ought to do everything we can to legislate biblical sexual morality in our society.

We must always be aware of the fact that nonbelievers who oppose us are already condemned and perishing. God is not willing they should perish but, rather, that they repent. They need the illumination of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel we share with them.

The real message in our text is that we are empowered to live-out God’s gold standard in this wicked and perverse generation. We are called upon to be more truly tolerant of nonbelievers than we are of believers.

Be what you already are - vessels which contain God the Holy Spirit. Thereby “flee sexual immorality” and show the world the way of truth.