



1 CORINTHIANS – FACT SHEET 6

Chapter 5:

Having spoken about the ideals of servant hood, Paul now deals with the reality of a 'work in progress' church. The visible witness of the church at Corinth is being eroded through open sin which, 'does not occur even among pagans' (vs1). The sexual immorality at the heart of the matter is summarised simply: 'a man has his father's wife' (vs1). The wording Paul uses would suggest that it probably was the forbidden and frowned upon act of a man entering into relations with his step-mother; forbidden both in Jewish (Lev 18:8, Deut 22:30) and even Roman law. Although shocking, Paul's focus is how the 'Church of God' (1:2) reacts to this. These 13 verses can be considered in four ways:

First – The need to **ACKNOWLEDGE** sin: 1-2:

Rather than a Godly, disciplined approach to the matter, the Corinthian Church appears to have done very little about the whole affair. There is an arrogance about the fellowship, '...you are proud!' (vs2) Paul states. Instead of Godly grief and mourning over this public disgrace, the Corinthians are far too focussed on the cosmetic gifts and new found freedom in Christ – happiness and not holiness appears to be their objective. Yet for sin to be dealt with, it has to be acknowledged, to be recognised; 'shouldn't you have...put out of the fellowship, the man who did this?' (vs2).

Second – The need to **ADDRESS** sin: 3-5:

Whilst the Church may well have been lapse in their thoughts and actions toward this glaringly obvious matter, the Apostle has been busy contemplating it; having, 'already passed judgment' (vs3). Although his Apostleship and authority were often questioned by the churches, the Corinthian church would have felt the full force of this in Paul's sombre and clear judgment. If they were not going to deal with the matter, Paul would – open and flagrant sin has to be addressed. Paul then reminds the fellowship that they are no ordinary gathering of people; but the very assembly of God. When they gather together, they do so, 'in the Name of our Lord Jesus' (vs4); with not only the Apostle present in spirit, but the very, 'power of our Lord Jesus' too (vs4). The Corinthians loved to see this power with the use of spiritual and public gifts – however, the Spirit of God manifests Himself no more powerfully then when He confronts and deals with sin. Thus it is in the power of the Lord Jesus, as His gathered people; that they are instructed to, 'hand this man over to Satan' (vs5). This is a rare phrase in scripture; and one that shows the seriousness of this particular matter.

This was no unconscious, sinful stumbling by a believer, striving to please God – but moreover a conscious, unbridled, pre-meditated rebellion. Even here, God's grace is emphasised; the purpose of the discipline being, 'that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord' (vs5). Spiritual discipline should always have our salvation interests at heart. Although bringing shame on God's people, the pain of being separated from them in this public way, would serve as both a witness to the watching world and as a source of saving discipline for the individual.

Third – We see the AFFECTS of sin: 6-8:

Paul then warns the Corinthians of the potential impact of not dealing with such open sin within and amongst God's people. Liking such evil and sinful activity to yeast, Paul warns the church of its corrupting and prolific affect, for, 'don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough' (vs6). 'Leaven' is often used in scripture as a symbol of corruption, something to be gotten rid of, before it spreads (Gal 5:9). And so in order to protect the purity of the 'batch' at Corinth, they must, 'get rid of the old yeast' (vs7) and become, 'a new batch without yeast – as you really are' (vs7). This 'become what you already are' theology is a common scriptural theme. God's people could be commanded to, 'take possession of the land...I have given you' (Deut 9:23). Paul then reminds the people that they are a redeemed and delivered people; no more signified than in the celebration of Passover. The church would have been familiar with the original Passover narratives (Exodus 12/Lev 23). This ceremony included the production of 'bread without leaven', signifying the haste of the Exodus of the people of God. Prior to the unleavened bread being prepared, God's people of old would painstakingly sweep out the room, clearing it of any leavened bread crumbs – for their unleavened dough must not be contaminated. With this picture in mind, being familiar with the transfer of its whole significance onto the Lord's supper, the Corinthians are reminded of their need to be equally diligent, 'for Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed' (vs7). Thus as they continue to celebrate, to 'keep the festival' (vs8), referring to the subsequent Feast of Unleavened Bread following Passover (Lev 23); they must do so with 'sincerity and truth' (vs8).

Fourth – The ANTIDOTE to sin: 9-13:

In verses 9-13, Paul goes back to the route of the problem, stemming from a misunderstanding from an earlier letter. This letter, within the providence of God had not been preserved; it would appear so for good reason – for God's Word is clear. So the Apostle sets out to clarify his position; for although he had written to them requesting that they did not, 'associate with sexually immoral people' (vs9); in verse 10 he clarifies the instruction, 'not at all meaning the people of this world' (vs10). If that were the case, they, 'would have to leave this world' (vs10), against the very prayerful request of Jesus Himself (John 17:15). Paul clarifies the matter in vs 11, stating his earlier instruction to apply, 'to anyone who calls himself a brother'.

God's people are to 'become the pure batch they are'; and firm, Godly discipline is the true antidote to sin. Just in case the Corinthians are tempted to develop a grading system of sins, Paul then refines the call for purity; for it is not just sexual immorality that spoils the 'batch of God', but greed, idolatry, swindling, slandering, drunkenness. These sins that involve sex, money, possessions, drink and the tongue (vs11) – need to be sifted out. The emphasis must always be made on the objective of Godly discipline, the salvation of individuals. In addition, the difference between pre-meditated, 'proud' and open rebellion and a striving yet falling short, must temper one's approach. The ultimate judgment of course is God's and we must let Him, 'judge those outside' (vs12); whilst paying careful attention amongst ourselves to 'become what we already are'. Paul's final instruction to, 'expel the wicked man from among you' (vs13) is taken from Deuteronomy, where such action would be needed with those who had infiltrated the ranks of those saved through the Passover and subsequent exodus (Deut 13:5, 17:7, 24:7, 22:21). Equally, God's people today must ensure that their public and private witness is preserved, remembering they have been delivered through the ultimate act of Passover – the Cross.

For further study:

What do the following verses (and passage context) say about 'discipline'?

Deuteronomy 8:5, Psalm 94:12, Proverbs 1:7, 1 Corinthians 11:32, Hebrews 12:6, Revelation 3:19

Further Reading/Bibliography:

The Holy Bible,

1 Corinthians (Morris, Tyndale),

The Message of 1 Corinthians (Prior, IVP)

1 Corinthians, A Shorter Exegetical & Pastoral Commentary (Thiselton, Eerdmans).

"Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your Word" Psalm 119:18