**THE CALL TO MAINTAIN THE PURITY OF CHRIST’S CHURCH**

5 1It is actually reported that there is fornication among you, and the kind of fornication that does not even exist among the Gentiles, [namely,] that someone has his father’s wife. 2And you are arrogant! Should you not rather be grieved, so that he who has done this thing might be removed from your fellowship? 3Though I am not present physically, yet being present by the Spirit, I have already judged him who has done this thing, just as though I were present [with you]. 4When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, [I exhort you,] by the power of our Lord Jesus, 5to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of his sinful nature, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord Jesus.

6Your boasting is not good. Do you not realize that a little leaven leavens the whole batch [of dough]? 7Get rid of the old leaven, so that you may be what you are—a new batch of unleavened dough. Since, indeed, our Passover [lamb], Christ, has been sacrificed; 8let us observe the Feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

9I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with fornicators. 10I was not referring to the people of this world who are fornicators, or who are greedy, or swindlers, or idolaters. If that were the case, you would have to leave the world. 11But what I meant when I wrote to you is that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a [Christian] brother, but is a fornicator, or who is a greedy man, or an idolater, or a slanderer, or a drunkard, or a swindler. With such a person, [you ought] not to have fellowship. 12What do I have to do with judging those who are outside [the church]? [But] do not [even] you yourselves judge those who are within [the church]? 13God will judge those who are outside [the church]. Remove the wicked man from your fellowship. (1 Cor. 5:1-13)

**Introduction**

The Montblanc fountain pen is considered by many people to be the Rolls Royce of writing instruments. The Montblanc fountain pen has the reputation of being the world's finest fountain pen.

For eighty years the Montblanc fountain pen had an outstanding reputation for quality. But when the latest edition of this world-class fountain pen sprang a leak, purchasers of these $300 pens were not happy. It seems that after eighty years of using nothing but the finest quality parts in the manufacture of their pens, the Montblanc company permitted some parts made of inferior material to be used in their pens. The use of inferior parts resulted in fine cracks appearing in the pens, and the cracks allowed the ink to seep through and caused the pens to leak.

If such had happened to the ordinary, run of the mill pen, people would have tossed them away without much fuss—but they expected more from a Montblanc pen. Because it is in a class by itself, the Montblanc pen has a reputation to uphold; it cannot afford to be like any old pen, because it is not any old pen, it is a Montblanc! (POWER, 2/3/91, p. 8.)
There is an application of this illustration to the church of Jesus Christ. Because we have been called to be holy unto God, we cannot afford to live like the world; we are no longer a part of the world, we are a part of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, and as such we are called to be holy.

Many times we are prone to tolerate sinful conduct, when in fact we should be grieved by it and, when necessary, take action to remove it from our lives and from Christ’s church. Because we have been called to be holy unto God, we must be faithful to maintain the purity of Christ’s church.

I. Let Us Maintain the Purity of Christ’s Church,
... by Grieving Over Conduct that Scandalizes Christ’s Name (5:1-2,6)

In verse 1 the Apostle Paul confronts these Corinthian Christians with the fact that he has received the report of immorality being practiced in their midst. Literally, he writes, “it is generally heard;” i.e., it is a matter of public knowledge, everyone is aware of the immoral conduct being practiced by one of the members of the church—the whole community knows about it. Here was a scandalous blot on the reputation and the witness of Christ’s church, the church that is called to be holy like our Lord.

Indeed, here was a form of immoral conduct not even practiced among the Gentiles: a certain man “has his father’s wife,” (i.e.; he was living in an adulterous relationship with his stepmother.) The apostle will make clear that neither this nor any other form of sinful conduct may be tolerated in the life of the Christian and in the church of Christ: “But what I meant when I wrote to you is that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a [Christian] brother, but is a fornicator, or who is a greedy man, or an idolater, or a slanderer, or a drunkard, or a swindler. With such a person, you ought not to have fellowship” (1 Cor. 5:11.)

Paul is not only shocked by the immoral conduct of this individual member of the church, he is also appalled by the attitude of the church itself: “And you are arrogant!” (vs. 2.) By tolerating, and thereby condoning, this immoral conduct and lifestyle, the church was arrogantly holding the law of God in contempt.

The apostle explains that the appropriate attitude of the church should have been that of grief: “Should you not rather be grieved ... ?” There should have been deep sorrow and mourning over the present state of affairs: a grieving that the holy communion of the saints was being violated; and that the honor of Christ was being scandalized; and that the whole purpose of God was being ignored and even defied. Note that Paul expects that the entire church should exhibit a spirit of grief; a spirit of grief that will lead to the necessary action, with the congregation supporting its leaders and expecting them to carry out their responsibility to maintain the purity of Christ’s church.
Paul emphatically declares that the church’s “boasting” with regard to this matter is “not good” (vs. 6.) The church’s complacent and even arrogant acceptance of this blatant violation of God’s law is not good. This attitude displayed by the Corinthian church may have resulted from a mistaken and perverted view of Christian liberty; note the apostle’s admonition in 1 Corinthians 6:12-13,

> Everything is permissible for me—but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible for me—but I will not be mastered by anything. 13... The body is not meant for fornication, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. (1 Cor. 6:12-13)

It appears that the Corinthians were extending their Christian liberty beyond its intended bounds and limits and, consequently, were violating the moral law of God. The Corinthians understood that the Old Testament ceremonial law, which prohibited the eating of certain foods, was no longer applicable in the New Testament era; but they wrongfully thought that the moral law of God likewise was set aside and no longer applicable—this is an erroneous view, one which the apostle will address and correct in no uncertain terms.

There comes the warning: “a little leaven leavens the whole batch [of dough.]” The toleration and acceptance of sinful conduct within the body of the church has the effect of spreading like a spiritual leaven (or cancer): it breeds further violations of God’s holy law; it breeds a general contempt and disregard for that holy moral law; and it produces a deterioration and numbing of the church’s moral sensitivity.

Let us maintain the purity of Christ’s church, by grieving over conduct that scandalizes Christ’s name. If we grieve over our own personal misconduct and deal with it before God, that will contribute greatly to the purity of Christ’s church—formal church discipline is not needed where self-discipline is diligently practiced.

II. Let Us Maintain the Purity of Christ’s Church,  
... by Taking Action Against Scandalous Conduct (5:2b-5, 9-13)

We are well aware of the fact that the church is a community of sinners, but we must recognize and appreciate the fact that we are a community of repentant sinners—we must not be a community of practicing sinners. We may not condone and tolerate the continued practice of sin in our personal lives nor in Christ’s church, especially when such conduct is public and of a scandalous nature.

In verses 3-5 the Apostle Paul indicates what action he has taken in this present matter—action the Corinthian church is to carry out. Paul has passed judgment against the offender, (there has been a judicial decision based upon the commandments of God): “Though I am not present physically, yet being present by
the Spirit, I have already judged him who has done this thing.” The Apostle Paul must render this judgment because the church failed to do so; consequently, this case and the apostle’s judgment becomes a precedent and guideline for future cases.

As an apostle of the Lord Jesus, Paul was granted a special ability to spiritually participate in the church’s assembly and render decisions that would set the precedent for the church in the future. This unique spiritual experience and ability granted by Christ to His apostles in this formative stage in the history of the church was no doubt similar in nature to the experience granted by the LORD to the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel describes his experience of being spiritually transported from Babylon to Jerusalem by the Spirit of God in order to observe first hand the things that were being done by the people of Israel:

In the sixth year, in the sixth month on the fifth day, while I was sitting in my house and the elders of Judah were sitting before me, the hand of the Lord Jehovah came upon me there. 2 I looked, and I saw a figure like that of a man. From what appeared to be his waist down he was like fire, and from there up his appearance was as bright as glowing metal. 3 He stretched out what looked like a hand and took me by the hair of my head. The Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and in visions [given] by God he took me to Jerusalem, to the entrance to the north gate of the inner court, where the idol that provokes to jealousy stood. (Ezek. 8:1-3)

The Corinthian church is called upon to carry out the judgment passed by the Apostle Paul:

When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, [I exhort you,] by the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of his sinful nature, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord Jesus … Remove the wicked man from your fellowship. (1 Cor. 5:4-5, 13b)

The precedent was being set to guide the church in situations where formal discipline is required: a judgment was made—a judicial act of discipline was pronounced; it was made in the name of Christ, the Head of the church, and on the basis of His Word; and it was made by the authority of Christ—this was not merely an act by men, it was an act commissioned by Christ and supported by the divine authority of Christ.

The judgment rendered is described in the following terms. The offender was to be “delivered to Satan.” That is to say, the protective covering of God’s grace was removed from the man, (this was done by removing him from the covenant community of the church,) allowing him to be exposed to the attacks of the devil in an unprotected state. Up to this point there has been no repentance in the
man’s life, thus he is now being given over to the course of life he has adamantly chosen to pursue and is being allowed to face the consequences of his choice.

The offender was being delivered unto Satan “for the destruction of his sinful nature.” The purpose of this act of discipline in consigning the offender to unprotected exposure to the attacks of the devil was intended for the destruction of “his sinful nature,” (literally, “the destruction of the flesh”—“the flesh” representing the connection with this present sinful world.) The awful experience of being released to the clutches of the devil would hopefully have the beneficial effect of producing repentance in the offender—such is the desired result of his experiencing the awful tyranny of the devil and being deprived of the gracious presence of the Lord. The ultimate desire of this act of discipline is “so that his spirit may be saved on the Day of the Lord Jesus.” The purpose and the desired goal of this disciplinary action was the final salvation of the offender’s spirit or soul—the hope is that the state of experiencing the tyranny of the devil and being deprived of the blessed presence of the Lord would cause the offender to repent and return to the Lord asking His forgiveness and seeking reconciliation with Him.

When is the church to administer such a degree of discipline? Based upon this present passage of Scripture, some guidelines would include the following: First, it should be administered at those times when the particular sin is public; the sin is known to the church and to the community at large, and is bringing a blot upon the entire congregation and upon the name of Christ. Second, it should be administered at those times when the particular sin is especially scandalous; when there is present within the congregation a very clear and shocking violation of God’s moral law. Third, it should be administered at those times when the particular sin is persistent; there is no repentance on the part of the offender.

Note that in verses 9-11 the Apostle Paul gives instructions concerning a more informal type of discipline that is to be employed by individual Christians personally when the situation demands it. We are instructed not “to associate with” (or, “fellowship with”) a man who professes to be a Christian, but is persistently practicing such sins as fornication, greediness, idolatry, slander, drunkenness, or deceitful business practices. The purpose of this withdrawal from fellowship with such a one is to avoid learning his ways and to make him aware of the wrongness of his sinful conduct, note Ephesians 5:11, “Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.”

Let us seek to maintain the purity of Christ’s church, by taking action against scandalous conduct when such action becomes necessary.

III. Let Us Maintain the Purity of Christ’s Church,
... by Living in Accordance with Christ’s Holiness (5:7-8)
In verse 7 the commandment is given: “Get rid of the old leaven, so that you may be what you are—a new batch of unleavened dough.” “The old leaven”—the attitude that tolerates sinful conduct and the presence of sin—must be discarded, so that we may become in everyday life what we have become by virtue of being united to Christ by faith, namely, holy unto God.

As Christians, we have a new identity in Christ, we have become a new creation in Christ, and now we are called to bring our everyday conduct into conformity with that new spiritual identity:

... view yourselves as being dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 
12Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. 13Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. (Rom. 6:11-13)

In verses 7c-8 Paul connects this illustration of the unleavened dough to the Passover meal, (at which time unleavened bread was eaten,) and presents the spiritual significance of that Old Testament sacrament. He informs the church that our Passover Lamb is Christ, and He has been sacrificed. Therefore, it is now time to partake of the Passover “meal”—that is to say, it is now time to hold spiritual communion with God, (the Old Testament Passover meal was eaten immediately after the Passover lamb was slain, and the meal was a spiritual communion between the L ORD and His people.)

How are we to partake of this spiritual “meal,” that is to say, how are we to hold communion with the L ORD? We are not to partake of this communion with “the old leaven;” there is no place in our new Christian lives for the continued practice of sin, note 1 Peter 4:3, “you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry” (1 Pet. 4:3.) We are certainly not to partake of this communion with “the leaven of malice and wickedness.” The only proper and possible way to partake in this sacred spiritual communion with God is with “the unleavened bread of sincerity [or, purity] and truth.”

Let us seek to maintain the purity of Christ’s church, by living in accord with Christ’s holiness. As noted earlier, formal church discipline is not needed where godly self-discipline is diligently practiced.

Conclusion

We are very prone to tolerate sinful conduct, when in fact we should be disturbed by such conduct, and when necessary, take action against it. Because we have been called to be holy unto God, we must be faithful to maintain the purity of Christ’s church.