

COUNSELING CHURCH CONFLICT

FROM 1 CORINTHIANS 5:

“Purge the Evil Person from Among You”

Hannah Miller¹

INTRODUCTION

The word “purge” found in 1 Corinthians 5:13 is derived from the Greek word ἔξαιρω (exairo) meaning remove, drive away, to expel.² The word ἔξαιρω is only used once in the entire New Testament. The English Standard Version (ESV) defines ἔξαιρω as purge, whereas the New International Version (NIV) uses expel, the New American Standard Version (NASB) uses remove, and the King James Version (KJV) and New King James Version (NKJV) both use put away.³ This word is different from the beginning of the chapter, where, in verse two Paul says “Let him who has done this be removed from among you.” The word for removed in verse two is αἴρω (airo) which means to take up, take away, or lift up.⁴ This word is used commonly in the New Testament, around a hundred and one times. The word ἔξαιρω carries with it a heavier meaning as it is an imperative verb, meaning the listener is commanded to act.

¹ Hannah Miller is a Ph.D. student in Biblical Counseling at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. She works at Center City Church in Albuquerque, NM, and is an ACBC-certified counselor. Please contact jbsc@biblicalcounseling.com with questions for the author.

² Gingrich, Felix Wilbur, et al. *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 24. Nestle, Eberhard, et al. *Novum Testamentum Graece*, (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2015), 225-226. Mounce, Bill. “Bill Mounce.” *Ἐξαιρω*, <https://www.billmounce.com/greek-dictionary/exairo>. Blass, Friedrich Wilhelm, et al. *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 236.

³ These four versions were used as they are familiar to the author and versions many Christians appear to be familiar with.

⁴ Gingrich, Felix Wilbur, et al. *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, 4. Nestle, Eberhard, et al. *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 225-226. Blass, Friedrich Wilhelm, et al. *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 24. “Bill Mounce.” *Αἴρω*, <https://www.billmounce.com/greek-dictionary/airo>.

The first word in the passage, but second word mentioned here, *αἴρω* is a verb which is also a call to action. Twice in this passage the word removed, though different words are used for it, is required of the listener. They are to remove the sexually immoral person from among them. Removal is not a side note for this passage, but is the call given to the people of the church in Corinth. This passage is bookended with the call to remove.

While 1 Corinthians 5 may seem like a discussion of the idea of sexual immorality, Paul's central message of the chapter concerns the church's response to sexual immorality. What is the church going to do? Furthermore, what will the members follow and believe, and how will they live out their practical theology? Will the church follow in the shadow of Aphrodite, or will it purify itself and follow Christ? The sentence, "purge the evil person from among you," seems harsh and antithetical to the gospel, but it is there in black and white in the Scriptures. The church was given a call to purge someone from its midst, and hand them over to Satan. How is this a godly thing to do when believers are called to love well and draw people into the church? Why might purging be for the glory of God and the good of the saints? The church at Corinth struggled with these questions. There was confusion about what actual love and grace from Christ were, and how the church might best reflect that love and grace.

When Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, he was seeking to address church conflict there. First Corinthians 5 deals specifically with the sexual sin of a member, the pride of the church, and the purity of the church. The issues that the church in Corinth dealt with are issues that still plague the church two thousand years later. Although many churches keep their sexually immoral members in the flock because they consider it kind, loving, and accepting to do so, 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 states the opposite and issues a call for the church to instead purge those who call themselves Christians, but live sexually immoral lives. For allowing them to continue in the church provides opportunities for arrogance and boasting on the part of church members, destroys sincerity and truth, and confuses believers with unbelievers.⁵

⁵Diamant, Jeff, "Half of U.S. Christians Say Casual Sex between Consenting Adults Is Sometimes or Always Acceptable," Pew Research Center, August 31, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/08/31/half-of-u-s-christians-say-casual-sex-between-consenting-adults-is-sometimes-or-always-acceptable>.

DEFINING TERMS

There are a few definitions of terms that will be helpful before proceeding. The first is “sexual immorality.” Though this is a common term throughout the Scriptures, it is helpful to note that in the Greek, the word for sexual immorality here is *πορνεία* (porneia), meaning any sort of sexual immorality, i.e., any sex outside of the boundaries of marriage between one man one woman.⁶ This passage in 1 Corinthians 5 refers back to Leviticus 18:8, which states “You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father’s wife; it is your father’s nakedness.”⁷ This goes right to the heart of the slightly confusing wording at the beginning of 1 Corinthians 5, which states, “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.” Overall, scholars agree that what is meant in both passages is that the woman is the man’s step-mother.⁸ Both passages, Leviticus and 1 Corinthians, refer to the “wife of your father” and though it is still an incestuous relationship it is helpful to know that it is his step-mother and not his birth mother. He is committing sexually immoral acts with his step-mother and this is a known sin that is being tolerated by the church. Barclay states “A man had formed an illicit association with his own stepmother, a thing which would disgust even a non-Christian and which was explicitly forbidden by the Jewish law (Leviticus 18:8).”⁹

Another term that is helpful to define is “deliver” from verse five. The Greek word for deliver is the word *παραδίδωμι* (paradidomi).¹⁰ *Παραδίδωμι* means hand over, deliver, betray, or give over.¹¹ The church at Corinth is to hand over or to deliver the evil person to Satan.

⁶ Douglas Mangum, and Josh Westbury, *Linguistics & Biblical Exegesis* (Ashland, OH: Lexham Press, 2017).

⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Bible.

⁸ W. H. Mare, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Romans through Galatians*, ed. F. E. Gaebelein, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), Vol. 10, 217: “The use of *gunaika*, literally ‘woman,’ graphically shows that it was the man’s stepmother.”

⁹ W. Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 52.

¹⁰ Gingrich, Felix Wilbur, et al. *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, 148. Nestle, Eberhard, et al. *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 225-226. Blass, Friedrich Wilhelm, et al. *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 614.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Around 50 A.D., Corinth had been destroyed and rebuilt as a trade city for Rome. The people were primarily Romans, Greeks, Asians, and Jews.¹² The main gods that were worshipped were Aphrodite, Athena, Apollo, Demeter, Kore, Hera, Poseidon, and Asklepios.¹³ Corinth boasted the temple of Aphrodite at Acrocorinth as its place of worship for its primary deity. This is significant, as the goddess Aphrodite is the goddess of “love, beauty, desire, and all aspects of sexuality.”¹⁴ Edward Adams, Senior Lecturer in New Testament Studies at King’s College in London writes, “the old Greek city of Corinth—known as the city of Aphrodite—had apparently gained a reputation as a centre for sexual promiscuity. Aristophanes coined the term ‘to Corinthianise’ (i.e., to fornicate) after the city’s renown for sexual laxity.”¹⁵ Aphrodite was also associated with the sea and since Corinth was a seaport, it follows that she would be the primary goddess that they would worship there. She was a goddess known for her illicit affairs and her ability to woo anyone she chose.

Strabo, a well-known and respected Greek geographer and historian, claimed that more than one thousand prostitutes served Aphrodite through sacred prostitution at her temple, which was filled with riches as a result.¹⁶ Though many question if this is entirely accurate, there is little debate that Corinth was a city filled with sexual immorality. Barbette Spaeth, who denies the accuracy of Strabo’s account, nevertheless concedes: “A close connection has long existed among sailors, ports, and prostitutes. Think of the famous ‘red light’ district of Storyville in New Orleans or, more locally, Strait Street

¹² Munn G. Lacoste. “The Historical Background of First Corinthians,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 3 (1960), <https://preachingsource.com/journal/the-historical-background-of-first-corinthians/>.

¹³ “Archaeological Museum of Ancient Corinth - Ephorate of Antiquities of Korinthia Archaeological Museum of Ancient Corinth - Ephorate of Antiquities of Korinthia.” Venerating Gods and Heroes – *Archaeological Museum of Ancient Corinth*, <https://www.corinth-museum.gr/en/museum/glancing-in-the-city-state-of-corinth/venerating-gods-and-heroes/>.

¹⁴ Mark Cartwright, “Aphrodite,” *World History Encyclopedia*, July, 1 2022, <https://www.worldhistory.org/Aphrodite/>.

¹⁵ Edward Adams, and David G. Horrell, *Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), cited as Aristophanes, frag. 354.

¹⁶ Simon Geoffrey Pembroke, “Mycenae,” *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, July 30, 2015, <https://oxfordre.com/classics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.001.0001/acrefore-9780199381135-e-4298?product=orecla>.

near the Great Harbour in Valetta, where at least from Crusader times sailors mingled with the local ‘ladies of the night.’ The connection was also clear in classic antiquity.”¹⁷ The practices of pagans were well-known as being sexually illicit. The practice of the day was that one’s religion did not prevent sexual promiscuity, but in fact encouraged it.¹⁸ This is important, because many of the issues might seem so obviously wrong to contemporary Bible-believing Christians, even if not in modern culture generally. However, the call that Paul was making must be seen in light of the context of the time. Paul knew that they were living in a hotbed of sin, and yet required righteousness from the church and called them to live differently from the pagans around them.

The church in Corinth must have been relatively new and filled with new believers.¹⁹ Yet, Paul is direct with them and the call that he gives the church at Corinth is the same call that the church must continue to obey today. This current age is filled with sin. There may not be temples filled with prostitutes

¹⁷ Barbette Spaeth, “Sailors, Sex, and the Cult of Aphrodite/Venus in Roman Corinth,” <https://classics.emory.edu/documents/samr-abstracts/Spaeth%20Abstract.pdf>. Valetta is the “seaport and capital of Malta, on the northeast coast of the island of Malta.” Heather Campbell, “Valletta,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Valletta>.

¹⁸ Adams and Horrell, *Christianity at Corinth*. Adams and Horrell agree that Strabo may have been exaggerating and that the particular instance of the one thousand prostitutes was before the modern city of Corinth was established: “Corinthian letters often assume the correctness of these representations and apply them to the Corinth of Paul’s time, depicting the city as a particular hotbed of sexual license and vice. (This image of Corinth also lingers on in popular perception and preaching.) Prostitution was certainly practiced in first-century Corinth (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:12-20), but the service was hardly exclusive to this city in the Greco-Roman world: the lewd graffiti from brothels in Pompeii and the city’s erotic art are obvious examples that attest otherwise! In all likelihood, then, Paul’s Corinth was no more sexually promiscuous than any other cosmopolitan city in the empire” (8). In essence, while it is not easy to say exactly what Corinth looked like, the overall consensus does seem to be that it was not a city known for purity. The Corinthians may not have been as bad as some have claimed them to be, and it is concerning that many preaching on Corinth have not verified Strabo’s claims. However, what seems to be the crux of the issue is that sexual immorality was commonplace.

¹⁹ Mare, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 207: “Paul views his skill as an expert builder as being possible only through the grace of God. As an expert builder (cf. Proverbs 8:30), one who knew God’s plan for the building of his church (Ephesians 3:7-10), he had laid the doctrinal foundation of “Jesus Christ and him crucified” (2:2; cf. Isaiah 28:16; Acts 4:11; Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:6). He acknowledges that others, such as Apollos, also build on this foundation of Christ. Then he gives a warning: Every builder—Paul, Apollos, and whoever works for God—must be careful how he builds. The shift in thought is now from the worker to his work.” 1 Corinthians 3:10: “According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it.”

worshipping a goddess who stood for sexual immorality, but current culture demands denying Christ in the name of the acceptance of sexual immorality and sinful identities. As Solomon said, there is no new thing under the sun.²⁰

THE CALL OF THE CHURCH

What is the call of the church, and of the biblical counselor, in response to sexual immorality in the church? The church and the biblical counselor are to uphold the Word of the Lord, to counsel the erring member into repentance, and to uphold the purity of the church. The purity of the church here depends on the purity of Christ and the purity of the members. Christ is pure, but the members may be in a different category.²¹ Will they submit to the Word of God or will they need to be handed over to Satan? How does the church position itself so that it can stand before Christ saying that it has handed someone over to Satan? The wording here seems harsh, unloving, unkind, even hateful, but this is the call. If this call reflects the desire of Christ, then it must reflect His character. So how is giving someone over to Satan a Christ-like call?

ARROGANCE AND BOASTING

One of the issues Paul addresses in this letter is the arrogance and of boasting on the part of the church members. In the first verse of 1 Corinthians 5, Paul states that he is writing about the sexual immorality among them—of a man committing sexual immorality with his father’s wife. Verse two states “And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.” Then, in verse six he states, “Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” They are boasting over their sin, and it is a sin that Paul states is one that not even the pagans tolerate.

The arrogance and boasting of the church appear to come from their notion

²⁰ Ecclesiastes 1:9

²¹ Hebrews 7:26, 1 Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 4:15, 1 Peter 2:22.

that they are being kind and loving by tolerating this man's sin. Schreiner states, "possibly, they are proud because of a perverted view of grace and tolerance, such that they think that any reproof of behavior would contradict the free grace of Christ."²² *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* states "Paul again alludes to the pride of the Corinthians. This time it was a pride that, rather than cause them to mourn over the shocking sin, allowed them to tolerate such a sinner in the congregation."²³ They feel morally superior to the pagans, prideful, because they are tolerating an abhorrent sin, and not only that, but they are teaching the church to pervert the grace of Christ. To tolerate is to love. The New Daily Study Bible (NDSB) states:

Shocked as he was at the sin, Paul was even more shocked by the attitude of the Corinthian church to the sinner. They had complacently accepted the situation and done nothing about it when they should have been grief-stricken. The word Paul uses for the grief they should have shown (*penthein*) is the word that is used for mourning for the dead. An easy-going attitude to sin is always dangerous. It has been said that our one security against sin lies in our being shocked at it.²⁴

They should have been mourning as if the man were dead because of his sin. This man was so known by his sin that news of his deeds had made its way four hundred miles to Paul in Ephesus.²⁵ The church was not only apathetic about the sin, but they were also boasting. Perhaps this is how Paul heard of it.

The church at Corinth believed that their tolerance was reason for boasting and arrogance, but this is something that Paul calls them out for more than once.²⁶ They confused the love of Christ and were proud of sin. Guzik stated "As bad as the sin itself was, Paul was more concerned that the Corinthian Christians seemed to take the sin lightly, and they were unconcerned (have

²² Thomas R. Schreiner, *I Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 109.

²³ Mare, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 217.

²⁴ W. Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, 52.

²⁵ "Letters of Paul to the Corinthians," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Letter-of-Paul-to-the-Corinthians>.

²⁶ 1 Corinthians 4:18; 13:4

not rather mourned) about this behavior.”²⁷ Their arrogance and boasting were concerning because it was a sign that they were taking the sin lightly. They did not view it as damning to the individual, but as a badge of honor of their own goodness. That arrogance and boasting meant that they were not handling the sin of that member.²⁸ Moreover, they were celebrating this sin.

The sin affected the entire church. Paul states in verse six, “Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” The lump here is the church.²⁹ The leavening here is evil.³⁰ They were boasting when the entire church was being affected by evil. Paul is admonishing them to cleanse the church, to not allow the evil to corrupt the whole church. There was confusion over removing that member since they thought what they were doing was loving, but in actuality it was corrupting the church.

SINCERITY AND TRUTH

²⁷ David Guzik, “1 Corinthians Chapter 5,” *Enduring Word*, 9 May 2019, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/1-corinthians-5/>. Emphasis original.

²⁸ A.C. Thiselton, “The Meaning of Sarx in 1 Corinthians 5:5: A Fresh Approach in the Light of the Logical and Semantic Factors,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 26 (1973): 204-27. Thiselton states, “Paul’s censure relates not primarily to the man in question, but to the fact that the community seemed pleased with the situation, ‘You are arrogant (***). Ought you not rather to mourn?’ (v. 2). The RSV rendering “arrogant” is less satisfactory than the NEB’s words ‘And you can still be proud of yourselves!’ The self-styled ‘spiritual’ men at Corinth (not perhaps without some mixture of motives) wished to parade their new-found freedom as a bold testimony to their eschatological status. Might not some of the ‘strong’ have regarded with something akin to awe a man who unashamedly displayed a ‘freedom’ which went beyond the ordinary man’s wildest dreams? He would be neither the first nor the last of those spiritual enthusiasts who raised themselves above the mundane level of everyday questions about ethics” (11).

²⁹ Mare, “1 Corinthians,” 218: “That the church should allow such sin as that in the Corinthian church to go undisciplined would affect the attitude of the entire Christian community toward sin—‘a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.’ The church is to get rid of the old yeast—‘the sin that so easily entangles’ (Hebrews 12:1).”

³⁰ Schreiner, in *I Corinthians*, states, “Such boasting is more than a little ironic since they are tolerating obvious transgression in the church. In verses 6-8 Paul lays down from the feasts of Passover and Unleavened bread an Old Testament foundation for his perspective. Here he picks up the notion that all leaven was to be removed from houses during Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread and that nothing leavened should be eaten (Exodus 12:14-20; 13:6-7). Hence, leaven stands for what is evil and corrupting, and if one allows a *little yeast* (lit. ‘a little leaven,’ CSB) in a lump of dough, it will pervade the whole (so also Galatians 5:9; cf. Matthew 16:6). Paul’s main concern, then, is not the individual offender but the potential for sin to spread in the church.”

In verses six through eight Paul is speaking of the leaven leavening the whole lump, and in verse eight he states, “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.” In correcting their thinking about allowing evil into the church, Paul asks them to replace the leaven of malice and evil with sincerity and truth.

Concerning sincerity, one definition is “the quality or state of being sincere: honesty of mind: freedom from hypocrisy.”³¹ Paul was calling them to be sincere, to be honest, free from hypocrisy and filled with truth. The call for sincerity was in direct contradiction to the way they were living. He was asking that they no longer be hypocrites who practice the opposite of what they were supposed to be preaching, and to replace malice and evil with sincerity and with the truth.³² Truth here is straightforward: he wants them to practice the message of the Scriptures.

The church that allows the leavening of evil to continue will destroy the sincerity and the witness of truth in the church. When a church allows sin to grow and fester, the church itself becomes known by the deeds of the erring member. Such as the pastor caught in an affair or looking at pornography. Pastoral scandals are always tied to the church where they were serving. Their witness of sincerity and truth is forfeited by their sin. Many churches have been destroyed and their witness demolished by the sin of the few. One need only think of the many pastors whose sexual immorality brought their churches to ruin.

THE FOUR CALLS

Paul addresses their arrogance and boasting, and calls for sincerity and truth, and part of that call is the reality of separating the erring member.

³¹ MW Collegiate Dictionary (11th Ed.) s.v. εἰλικρίνεια (eilikrineia), *sincerity; purity of motive.* SHORT Lexicon defines it the same.

³² Kevin DeYoung, *The Lord’s Prayer: Learning from Jesus on What, Why, and How to Pray* (Wheaton IL: Crossway, 2022), 17: “Too often, Christians think of hypocrites as people who do one thing but feel another. But that’s not hypocrisy. Hypocrites publicize one set of beliefs but live by a different set of beliefs.”

There are four calls given to cast out the straying member. In the second verse, Paul states, “let him who has done this be removed from among you.” In verse five, Paul says, “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.” Then he calls them to cleanse the lump, when, in verse seven, he states, “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.” As indicated above, they are to live out of sincerity and truth instead of malice and evil, which means not only correcting their behavior of boasting and arrogance, but also handing over the straying member. Lastly, in verse thirteen he tells the church to “Purge the evil person from among you.”

The first call, to remove the member, is just that: he is to be removed from the church. Leeman states:

[W]hen a church excommunicates someone, it hands him over to Satan (1 Corinthians 5:5). That is, it removes its affirmation that the individual belongs to God’s kingdom, where God’s redemptive authority rules. It declares instead that the person must belong to Satan’s kingdom, where Satan rules (Matthew 4:8-9; John 12:31; 14:30). And the church has no more authority over the excommunicated member than it has over any other non-Christian in Satan’s realm.”³³

The man is acting like a pagan, so he is to be treated as though he is a pagan and removed from the church.

The second call, which very much goes along with the first, reiterates from verse five that the man is to be delivered over to Satan. Handing someone over to Satan is a call for their redemption. After all, the latter half of the verse states, “so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” It is an act of unwavering love for the one who is marked by their lack of repentance. There are several ideas of what the phrase “hand over to Satan” means, but the most compelling seems to be that this was similar to God handing Job over

³³ Jonathan Leeman, *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 84.

to Satan.³⁴ It was not a call for the man's death, but a call for him to follow God. Now Job was known as a righteous man and the man in 1 Corinthians is not, but the idea that they are handed over for the glory of Christ and for sanctification (whether initial or progressive) follows.

The third call, to "cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened" has been explained in part above, but here the emphasis is the second part of that verse which says, "For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed." The call given to cleanse the lump is given in the context that Christ has already been the sacrifice and has made them clean. They are unleavened because they are redeemed and yet need to continue in the progressive sanctification that Christ granted them through His blood.³⁵

³⁴ Robert E. Moses, "Physical and/or Spiritual Exclusion? Ecclesial Discipline in 1 Corinthians 5," *New Testament Studies* 59, 2 (April 2013): 172–91, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688512000288>. Moses discusses if what is meant in this passage is physical or spiritual exclusion. He argues that the main two ideas concerning the phrase "hand over to Satan" are 1) "some scholars argue that 'handing over to Satan' is a death sentence; Paul expects his sentence to result in the man's death" (174) or 2) that "Paul alludes to the book of Job throughout his letters. He offers direct quotations from Job in Romans 11:35 (Job 41:11) and 1 Corinthians 3:19 (Job 5:12-13)... Thus, if we can detect a strong echo of Job 2:4-6 in 1 Corinthians 5.5, we may be on safe grounds to look to Job as a possible background for our interpretation of 1 Corinthians 5" (183). Moses presents an excellent linguistic understanding of the challenges between the Greek and Hebrew texts. When explaining the possibility of Paul meaning death, Moses references Tertullian, *On Modesty* 13-14; E. Käsemann, "Sentences of Holy Law in the NT," *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969 [1957]) 66-81; R. Kempthorne, "Incest in the Body of Christ," *NTS* 14 (1968) 569-70; H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 97; C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (HNTC; New York: Harper & Row, 1968) 126-7; R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (2 vols.; Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2007 [1951-55]) 1.233; V. G. Shillington, "Atonement Texture in 1 Corinthians 5:5," *JSNT* 71 (1998) 39. G. Forkman speaks of death in "both the physical and ethic-religious meaning," see (*The Limits of the Religious Community: Expulsion from the Religious Community within the Qumran Sect, within Rabbinic Judaism, and within Primitive Christianity* [Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1972] 146), and S. D. MacArthur speaks of "a slow death which involves physical suffering," see ("Spirit" in Pauline Usage: 1 Corinthians 5.5', *Studio, Biblica* 3 [ed. E. A. Livingstone; JSNTSup 3; Sheffield: JSOT, 1978] 251).

³⁵ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 114. Schreiner states that "Paul's appropriation of the Old Testament here is quite fascinating and instructive. The Passover deliverance of Israel points forward to and is fulfilled in Christ's Passover sacrifice by which he delivered the church of Jesus Christ from God's wrath. The removal of leaven during the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread points forward to the need for believers to cleanse evil from their lives, Unleavened bread—that is, evil in the congregation—reveals that the church is not living in the light of Christ's sacrifice. Here we see the relationship between the indicative and the imperative in Paul's thought. The indicative (Christ's sacrifice) is the basis for the imperative, but the indicative certainly does not

They have the ability, through the sacrifice of Christ, to cleanse the lump.

Lastly, the call is given to “purge the evil person from among you.”³⁶ This call is both ominous and blunt. The call to purge is for the protection of the church. This call is given in light of verses nine through twelve in which Paul explains that the church is not to judge the ungodly, for God will do that, but is to judge the godly, those who claim a part in Christ.³⁷ They are to remove this person from their membership, because though he is claiming to know Christ, he is living in a way that is antithetical to that claim.

Four times Paul tells the church they must be rid of that member. They must purge him from their congregation. While the topic of church membership goes beyond the scope of this essay, church membership is the church putting its stamp of approval upon someone that the church believes is saved and elders committing to keep watch over their souls (Hebrews 13:17). That person’s life should be lived in such a way that reflects their belief in Christ.³⁸ The following section will deal with how Paul explains the difference between the believer and the unbeliever and how the believer is to relate to each.

BELIEVER OR UNBELIEVER

Discerning believers from unbelievers and what to do with that information is vital for the life of the church. Paul spends the last section of 1 Corinthians

cancel out the need for the imperative. If the imperative is not carried out, it calls into question whether one has truly experienced the indicative.”

³⁶ This is a direct quote from Deuteronomy 13:5.

³⁷ Mare, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 220. According to Mare, “Here Paul teaches that though it is logical for the church to exercise spiritual discipline over members in its fellowship, it is not for the church to judge the present unsaved society. By the Greek expression *tous exō* (“those without”) the apostle means those outside the church’s communion or fellowship. The words *tous esō* (“those within”) means those within the church’s fellowship. Paul now concludes (v. 13) on the basis of the preceding argument that the wicked man who had married his stepmother must be put out of the church. This he commands by quoting somewhat loosely from Deuteronomy 22:24 (a context of adultery) and from Deuteronomy 24:7 (a context of stealing). The strengthened form of the negative (*ouchi*, ‘not’) used with the indicative verb in a question expects a positive response: ‘Are you not to judge those inside [the church]?’ ‘Yes’ is the expected reply.”

³⁸ Gregg R. Allison, “The Membership of the Church,” *The Gospel Coalition* (blog), accessed August 20, 2022, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-membership-of-the-church/>.

5 covering this issue. He states in verses nine through thirteen:

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy or swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 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. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. Purge the evil person from among you.

Paul's main point seems to be that there are to be two distinct groups. There are believers inside the church, and those outside. The church is to judge those inside the church, through church discipline, and God will judge the world for its faithlessness to Him.

One of the important things to note here is that Paul is not talking of any believer who has ever been drunk, or greedy, or swindled and so forth. He is identifying character here. What is the person known by?³⁹ Schreiner states “Actually, Paul does not list the sins but the persons: the sexually immoral, those who are greedy, and so on. The reference to the persons may be significant, indicating that the people to be avoided are characterized by the sins mentioned. The list most certainly focuses on activities and not motivations.”⁴⁰ Those who are characterized by their sin are to be purged by the church.⁴¹ Paul says they are not even to eat or to share a meal with such a

³⁹ This is a reference from Matthew 7:15-20, as Christ is warning against false prophets, and is speaking of how each person is known by the fruit they produce.

⁴⁰ Schreiner, *I Corinthians*, 115.

⁴¹ Peter Orr, “1 Corinthians 5: Why It Is Necessary and Loving Not to Associate or Eat with Certain ‘Christians,’” October 1, 2018, <https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/1-corinthians-5-necessary-loving-not-associate-eat-certain-christians/>. Orr asserts “We need to be clear on what Paul says. He tells the Corinthians not to ‘associate’ (5:9, 11) with someone who ‘is named a brother [or sister]’, but who is actually ‘a sexually immoral person or a greedy person or an idolater or an abusive person or a drunkard or a dishonest person’. In fact, they are not even to ‘eat’ with ‘such a person’ (5:11). Paul speaks not about someone who lapses into these sins but someone whose *identity* is actually marked by one or more of these behaviours so that they can actually be labelled ‘a greedy person’ or a ‘drunkard’. That is, they engage in habitual, systemic,

one.⁴²

The act that he is calling them to is ultimately an act of love and not of hate, and a fruit of the spirit by denying the works of the flesh.⁴³ Much as a parent will correct an erring child for their good, so the church must correct members for their good and for the glory of Christ. Dale Johnson states in his book, *The Church as a Culture of Care*, “The Bible teaches that the church is responsible to God to steward the duties and authority he has given to us. The church, with Christ as its head, has been granted authority in the sphere of the human soul, by which to redeem, restore, heal, cleanse, and grow in purity—in a nutshell, to care for souls.”⁴⁴ The church is called to act rightly out of the granted authority over the human soul.

Since the responsibility of the church is to care for souls, that includes the hard part of removing ones who call themselves brothers but are known by their sin. By cleansing the lump, through purging the evil person, the church is acting in love. The church must distinguish between the believer and the unbeliever as an act of care for both the believer and the unbeliever. For the believer, keeping the church pure is a blessing and helps them not be drawn astray into sin. For the unbeliever in the church, confronting them with their sin is a great act of love. The church must seek to present members before Christ pure and holy, not filled with tolerated sin.⁴⁵ James 5:19-20 states, “My

unrepentant sinful behaviour. The Christian who gets drunk and repents or who commits an act of dishonesty and repents is not in view. This is a person, rather, who has two competing identities—they may be known as ‘brother or sister’ but their behaviour identifies them as an unbeliever. Genuine Christian believers, Paul says, are not to associate with such people.”

⁴² Mare, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 220. According to Mare, “Here Paul teaches that though it is logical for the church to exercise spiritual discipline over members in its fellowship, it is not for the church to judge the present unsaved society. By the Greek expression *tous exō* (“those without”) the apostle means those outside the church’s communion or fellowship. The words *tous esō* (“those within”) means those within the church’s fellowship. Paul now concludes (v. 13) on the basis of the preceding argument that the wicked man who had married his stepmother must be put out of the church. This he commands by quoting somewhat loosely from Deuteronomy 22:24 (a context of adultery) and from Deuteronomy 24:7 (a context of stealing). The strengthened form of the negative (*ouchi*, ‘not’) used with the indicative verb in a question expects a positive response: ‘Are you not to judge those inside [the church]?’ ‘Yes’ is the expected reply.”

⁴³ Ephesians 5:13-26.

⁴⁴ T. Dale Johnson, *The Church as a Culture of Care: Finding Hope in Biblical Community* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2021), 16.

⁴⁵ Romans 6:13.

brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.” The reward for both the brother who wandered and the one who brings him back is great. If they are unrepentant, as stated in Matthew 18, they must be purged from the flock for their sake and for the sake of the other sheep.

In *The Church as a Culture of Care*, Johnson states:

I realize that churches are full of sinners, who can and do sin against each other. Far too many churches have a culture that has harbored or hidden the carnage of sin, instead of being a haven of restoration from sin’s destruction. But that doesn’t mean we should dismiss the necessity of the church. Instead, we need to repent and return to the purposes and design God established in order to see true restoration.⁴⁶

The church has the ability to be a “haven of restoration” or lead sinners to an eternity separated from Christ. The calling that Paul presents in 1 Corinthians 5 is filled with his deep desire for the church at Corinth to not only understand that sexual immorality is wrong, but that the church must require righteousness. The church is not after perfection, but rather the progressive sanctification in the life of its members.

The discussion about judgement, in verses 12-13, is in the context of believers versus unbelievers. Paul states that those inside the church may, and perhaps must, judge those inside the church, but they are not to judge those outside the church. Those outside of the church are to be judged by Christ. One of the roles of the church is to be a willing participant in the discipline and restoration of those living in a broken world.

AN ACT OF LOVE

The act of purging one who calls themselves brother but is caught in a life characterized by unrepentant sin is an act of love. Matthew 18:15-20 is the

⁴⁶ Johnson, *The Church as a Culture of Care*, 4.

most commonly cited passage on church discipline and states “What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray.” There is much rejoicing in heaven over that restored sheep. On the other hand, there ought to be mourning if that person refuses restoration. As verse two of 1 Corinthians 5 states “Ought you not rather to mourn?” Purging for the sake of the soul of the unrepentant sinner must be viewed as an act of love by the church and one in which the church willingly partners with Christ.

BIBLICAL COUNSELING

There are two aspects of 1 Corinthians 5 that is relevant for biblical counseling. The first is that of counseling the man caught in sexual immorality.⁴⁷ The second is the counsel given to the church. The biblical counselor must be willing to proclaim even the hard parts of the Word of God, such as handing someone over to Satan. Jay Adams states, “to encourage counselees to follow their feelings rather than to obey the Word of God is to side with Satan, to solidify the original problem, and to elicit the complications that come from further sinful behavior.”⁴⁸ The same is not only true for the feelings of the counselee, but of the counselor and of the church. All three must be willing to submit to the authority of Scripture instead of the feelings that rise in hard situations.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Guzik, “1 Corinthians 5 - Confronting Immorality in the Church,” *Enduring Word Bible Commentary*, 2018, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/1-corinthians-5/>. Scholars agree that it can be presumed that the woman with whom the man was having a sexually immoral relationship was not a believer. If she was, she would have been included in the need for purging, but as she is not addressed, there is a general agreement that she could not have been a believer, and thus, under the judgement of God instead of the church.

⁴⁸ Jay E. Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual: The Practice of Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 121.

⁴⁹ Robert W. Kellemen, *Scripture and Counseling: God’s Word for Life in a Broken World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 21. Kellemen states that “The Word of God is sufficient. All we need for life and godliness, for salvation and sanctification has been given to us in the Bible. This doesn’t mean the Scriptures tell us everything we need to know about everything or that there is a verse somewhere in the Bible that names all our problems. The Bible is not exhaustive. But it is enough. We don’t have to turn away from God’s Word when we get to the really hard and messy stuff of life. The Bible has something to say to the self-loathing, the self-destructive,

Counseling the man caught in sexual immorality is about either correcting his ignorance and helping him to understand his sin, or pleading with him not to live in rebellion against Christ. This was true then and continues to be true now. The biblical counselor will seek to work with the brother (or sister) caught in sexual immorality for the sake of their soul. If that brother is unwilling to submit to the church, go through counseling, and repent, then they must be handed over to Satan. Jay Adams states “church discipline is not only required and necessary to the good order of a church that bears Christ’s name, but it is the source of peace in the church leading to learning and every other good thing. God is honored by church discipline, rightly administered, and is greatly dishonored by its absence.”⁵⁰ Biblically counseling the erring member in cases similar to those in 1 Corinthians 5 would most likely start publicly, as the man’s sin was known even beyond their city. For example, Paul is not writing to them from Corinth, he is writing from Ephesus which is over three-hundred miles away from Corinth.⁵¹ The biblical counselor would explain the process of church discipline to the counselee, the ramifications for the counselee, and call for repentance. If there is no willingness to repent then that person must be taken through the remaining steps of church discipline and ultimately purged from the church.

Counseling the church requires preparing the church to receive the repentant man back into the flock or to purge him through church discipline if he is unrepentant.⁵² As with the church in Corinth, the church of this era must willingly follow Scripture and purge the member. Very few churches in America are willing to do this. Mohler states, “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

and the self-absorbed. We do not need to be afraid to preach and counsel from the Word of God into the darkest places of the human heart.”

⁵⁰ Jay E. Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, Jay Adams Library (Grand Rapids, Mich: Ministry Resources Library, 1986), 18.

⁵¹ “The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians)” *Spark Notes*, accessed October 8, 2022, <https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/newtestament/section7/#:~:text=There%20is%20a%20general%20consensus,of%20Ephesus%20in%20Asia%20Minor>.

⁵² It is outside the scope of this particular work to explain why a counselor should be a church member and actively involved in the church. For this paper, the assumption will be that there is a general familiarity with biblical counseling and the theology that guides it.

minimal moral accountability to God, much less to each other.”⁵³

There has not been much written on church discipline specific for sexual immorality in the past few years and it appears that the reason why is because those claiming to be Christians no longer believe in purity.⁵⁴ A study by Pew Research stated, “Half of Christians say casual sex – defined in the survey as sex between consenting adults who are not in a committed romantic relationship – is sometimes or always acceptable.”⁵⁵ The study goes on to discuss how rates are climbing of those who claim to be Christian condoning sexual immorality. Along with that, a study by Lifeway Research reveals that fifty-five percent of respondents said that “a member has never been formally disciplined as far as I know.”⁵⁶ Over half of church pastors said they have never practiced church discipline. Furthermore, “more than 8 in 10 Protestant senior pastors say their church has not disciplined a member in the past year. More than half say they don’t know of a case when someone has been disciplined.”⁵⁷ The church needs to restore church discipline. This is one of the greatest tools of redemption and love that Christ has given to the church, but it is a neglected tool. The neglect of this tool is also why purging someone may seem too harsh. If barely any churches practice church discipline at all, it is doubtful the command to purge someone will be followed. This all seems harsh towards the church if that church has not participated in church discipline, but what is loving only seems harsh when there is an unwillingness to be obedient.

CONCLUSION

Sexual immorality is a common issue. It was so for the church at Corinth, for

⁵³ Al Mohler, “Discipline: The Missing Mark,” in *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life*, ed. Mark Dever, (Washington DC: Center for Church Reform, 2001), 43.

⁵⁴ Jeff Diamant, “Half of U.S. Christians Say Casual Sex between Consenting Adults Is Sometimes or Always Acceptable,” Pew Research Center, August 31, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/08/31/half-of-u-s-christians-say-casual-sex-between-consenting-adults-is-sometimes-or-always-acceptable/>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Bob Smietana, “Churches Rarely Reprimand Members, New Survey Shows,” Lifeway Research, April 5, 2018, <https://research.lifeway.com/2018/04/05/churches-rarely-reprimand-members-new-survey-shows/>.

⁵⁷ Bob Smietana, “Churches Rarely Reprimand Members, New Survey Shows.”

the people of Corinth, and it is a common issue today.⁵⁸ Few people maintain the boundaries of sexual purity. Yet (even with a rapid decline) two-thirds of Americans claim Christianity as their religion.⁵⁹ There are many statistics one could look at, but the reality is clear: sexual immorality is rampant and is permitted in the church.⁶⁰ The denial of the Word of God and the boundaries that Christ set in place for His glory and for the good of the church is what has led to arrogance and boasting, the destruction of sincerity and truth, and the unwillingness to purge evil from the church.

If someone desires to truly participate in biblical counseling, they must be part of a body that practices church discipline. If someone desires to follow Christ, they need to join a church that will follow Scripture in its entirety instead of just the parts that are appealing. The church is not to conform to this world, but help to transform people into the likeness of Christ.

The church today appears to keep the sexually immoral in the church. There is a lack of church discipline across the board and sexual immorality is now actively accepted. It is considered loving and kind to be accepting. The pride of the Corinthians appears to be the same pride that permeates the church today. The call that 1 Corinthians 5 gives is to purge the church of the sexually immoral and that is the same call today. To some it may appear obvious that the church is not to keep the sexually immoral within the fold, but when one looks at the statistics of sexual immorality and acceptance of it

⁵⁸ Lawrence B. Finer, “Trends in Premarital Sex in the United States, 1954–2003,” *Public Health Reports* 122, 1 (January 2007): 73–78, <https://doi.org/10.1177/003335490712200110>. According to Finer, “By the exact age of 20 years, 77% of individuals had had sex, and 75% had had sex before marriage; 12% had married. By exact age 44, 99% of Americans had had sex, 95% had had sex before marriage, and 85% had married. At that age, 3.3% had abstained until marriage, and 1.3% had neither married nor had sex.”

⁵⁹ “In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace,” Pew Research Center, October 17, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>. In this article, the authors noted that “[There] are roughly 23 million more adults in the U.S. than there were in 2009 (256 million as of July 1, 2019, according to the Census Bureau). About two-thirds of them (65%) identify as Christians, according to 2018 and 2019 Pew Research Center RDD estimates. This means that there are now roughly 167 million Christian adults in the U.S. (with a lower bound of 164 million and an upper bound of 169 million, given the survey’s margin of error).”

⁶⁰ The author of this paper found no sources on the statistics of sexual immorality in the church, but the previously mentioned research done by Pew Research states that half of those who claim to be Christians find sex outside of marriage acceptable.

among professing Christians, the lack of biblical standards becomes apparent. What should seem obvious is covered with pride and confuses the church with the world.

Regarding the sexually immoral woman, Proverbs 7:27 states, “her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death.” The church must choose if it is on the side of Christ and following His Word in its entirety, or on the side of Satan, supporting sin, and unwilling to purge evil from its midst. The call is not just to purge, but to do so because one is whole-heartedly pursuing Christ.