

Series on First Corinthians

By Doug Hamilton

Chapter Five: “The Strong Sin: Immorality”

- The Corinthians had many troubles among the church members.
 - They were being very divisive by boasting about whom baptized them instead of to Whom they were baptized into, i.e. Christ and the family of God.
 - They were exalting themselves on the different levels of knowledge that they possessed. They often judged another based on the ability to wax eloquently with their great speeches and words of earthly wisdom.
 - Some in the church were taking others in the same congregation before worldly judges to solve their disputes.
 - They were not showing each other the love of Christ for each other.
 - They had even neglected the gathering of funds for the work of the mission set before them.
 - They even taken up the practice of not having structure in their worship services. They were carrying out worship to God without decency and order.
- What Paul is addressing here and in other places in 1 Corinthians is the most prominent and flagrant sin among the Corinthians Christians. The sin is called immorality.

1 Corinthians 5:1-2 It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father’s wife. ² You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst.

What is Immorality?

- The Word English Dictionary defines immorality as: an immoral behavior, especially in sexual matters; licentiousness or promiscuity.
- The Greek word that Jesus used from the passage is *porneia* and is often translated *fornication*, *sexual immorality* and in one case as *unchastity*. They are synonymous and used with the idea of sexual impurity.
- The Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon identifies it as the following: “*illicit sexual intercourse, adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, intercourse with animals, sexual intercourse with close relatives, sexual intercourse with a divorced man or woman or metaphorically the worship of idols as incurred by eating the sacrifices offered to idols.*”
- The Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains defines it as “*fornication, sexual immorality, sexual sin of a general kind, that includes many different behaviors.*”

Applicably Defined:

Immorality is anything that is sexually impure and sexually immoral in the eyes of God. It is not just the simple acts of contact with another, but inclusive to all sorts of sexual immorality. It can

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apply to homosexuality, bestiality, necrophilia, pedophilia, incest, pre-marital sex, Internet porn, printed pornography, Harlequin Romances, cyber-sex, phone sex, dressing lewdly in public and trying not to avoid all appearance thereof. It is that which God has planned to be holy, not corrupted with worldliness and ungodliness. It must be taken as serious as it was intended by God.

Immorality powerfully damaged the people of God from the Old Testament.

- It pulled the genealogical line of Seth into prevailing wickedness with descendents of Cain (Gen 6:2).
- It led to the curse of the line of Canaan (Gen 9).
- It captured Lot and led to two of the most perverted groups of people called the Ammonites and Moabites. (Gen 19:30-38)
- It is what brought Judah to humility (Gen 38)
- It corrupted the Nation of Israel (Numbers 25:1).
- It nearly led to the annihilation of the Benjamites (Judges 19).
- It conquered Samson (Judges 16:1).
- It brought King David to his knees (2 Sam 11:4).
- It destroyed the lives of Amnon and Tamar (2 Sam 13).
- It was the highest act of treason of Absalom against his father David (1 Sam 16:22).
- It brought Adonijah to his death (1 Kings 2:17).
- It caused a civil war in Israel at the bidding of King Solomon (1 Kings 11:1-2).

Immorality was elevated to the front of the list in danger of the New Testament.

- It was singled out by Jesus as the only exception to divorce.
 - Matthew 5:32 "...but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."
- It was singled out by Paul as different from the rest of sins in that one is sinning against his own body.
 - 1 Corinthians 6:18 Flee immorality. Every *other* sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.
- It was also the named sin for which served as the example to the NT Christians in Jude 7.
 - Jude 7 "...just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.
- It was the sexual impurity and degrading passion of immorality (specifically homosexuality and lesbianism) which headed the largest list of sins of the New Testament in Roman 1:24-31.
- It was the first-mentioned sin of the list that hinders the Christian from being true imitators of God in Ephesians 5:3.
 - Ephesians 5:3 But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints;
- It was the first-mentioned sin of the list of fifteen named deeds of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21.

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- Galatians 5:19–22 “Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality,²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,²¹ envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these...”
- It was the first-mentioned sin of the list that the Christian is to die to in Colossians 3:5.
 - Colossians 3:5 Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.
- It was the first-mentioned sin in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10.
 - 1 Cor 6:9-10 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.
- It is the abstention of immorality that describes the will of God for sanctification of the Christian.
 - 1 Thes 4:3-5. For this is the will of God, your sanctification; *that is*, that you abstain from sexual immorality;⁴ that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,⁵ not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God;
- It was considered in the foremost ESSENTIALS for the early gentile Christians as prescribed by the Holy Spirit.
 - Acts 15:28-29 “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials:²⁹ that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell.”

Immorality in the Corinthian Church Family

- In this particular case, it was a man in the church family that had taken his own stepmother for a sexual partner. This was something that was clearly spelled out in the Law. *Leviticus 18:8 ‘You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father’s wife; it is your father’s nakedness.* They were told this because the inhabitants of the land for which the Israelites would dispossess were deeply entrenched in the most immoral practices of them all, for the sin of the Ammorite had become complete (Genesis 15:16).
- This was also something that was not even acceptable among the Roman community. “But such a liaison was also banned under Roman law—in particular, the *lex Iulia de adulteriis* introduced by Augustus between 18 and 16 B.C. The punishment for such activity was exile to an island.” – Arnold, C. E. (2002). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Volume 3: Romans to Philemon*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- With this in mind, a man that was sleeping with his step-mom not only was committing the immoral sin of adultery and incest, but also fornication. This was all three rolled into one. The greatest dysfunction was that the “moral” people of the church had decided to not say nor do a thing concerning such a hideous act.

Three Views to be successful against Immorality

- 1) Exercise congregational discipline against it.

1 Corinthians 5:3-5 For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present.⁴ In the name of our Lord

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Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ *I have decided* to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

- Paul does something intriguing in this passage. Even though he is not a member of that congregation, but the Body of Believers in general, he personally exercises church discipline against the immoral man that has done such an exercise in public unrighteousness. Because the congregation refused to take a stand against such a horrendous act, he was left with the decision to personally disfellowship the man. He did the same in *1 Timothy 1:20 Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme.*
- This is called spiritual peer-pressure. We must be willing to personally shun the bad behaviors of our Christian peers. If we see something immoral, then say something out of love to them. If they refuse to hear you, then test your opinion by trying to build a consensus with a couple other reasonable and respectable Christians in the congregation. If they hear the facts and agree, then all three of you say something about it. If the immoral person does not agree, then build an entire congregational peer group and let them weigh in on it. If the immoral person still does not agree, then send them on the way, having already disassociated from the congregation already. This is called church discipline and is spelled out in Matthew chapter 18.
- We really do not love someone until we love their soul. We really do not love their soul if we refuse to rescue their soul from immoral behavior. If we refuse to attempt to rescue a soul from immoral behavior, then be prepared for the next step to follow.

2) Stop the spread of immorality in the Church.

1 Corinthians 5:6-8 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? ⁷ Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are *in fact* unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. ⁸ Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

- Paul condemns them for not rejecting such behavior by a member of the church. In fact they are actually boasting about it. This is likely a boasting about how tolerant of a people they have become. They are so “open-minded” that their brains have fallen out.
- Paul told them to clean out the leaven from the lump of dough. This is obviously a reference to Passover of Exodus chapter 12, for that was the night that the people of Israel were to purge their homes of yeast so as to eat the bread of haste. They were in an incredible hurry to get out of Egypt and had not time to wait for the dough to rise. In this case:
 - A. the leaven is the sin of acceptance of immorality. They were to flee it, not embrace it.
 - B. the lump is the local church family. They were to not have any yeast nearby for fear that it would contaminate the whole. We cannot control the leaven in someone else’s house, but we can in our own.
 - C. the reason for the “unleavening” is because Christ, the Lamb of God, gave Himself as our Passover, so that we might die to Him and live to God.

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- We as the church are not to celebrate in our immoralities, but celebrate because we have been forgiven of our sins, inclusive to the immoralities.

3) Leave immorality in the world.

1 Corinthians 5:9-13 I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; ¹⁰ I *did* not at all *mean* with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. ¹¹ But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. ¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within *the church*? ¹³ But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.

- Too many times in the church, and I am guilty of it as well, we spend more time trying to make the world pure instead of encouraging the church to be pure. The reality is that God will judge the world; we are to judge the church.
- There is a great contrast between the world and the church. The world does not like being influenced to the higher levels of morality, for they are constantly lowering the bar. The level of moral depravity in our country today is great compared to yesteryear. It is sad, but it is reality and the way of the world.
- When we become a Christian, it is with the understanding that we are being called out of the world and into the marvelous light of God. We take on Christ and the higher standards wherewith we have been called.
- In the area of morality, we are not going to really make a big difference concerning the way of the world. Twenty years from now, there will be far worse morality than there is today. LEAVE IMMORALITY IN THE WORLD!!! They can have it! It is all theirs. God will be sending them the bill in the form of judgment. Judgment of natural consequences and eternal consequences after that. Focus rather on what is going on in the church family. Encourage those that are living immorally to put those sins away. Encourage them to live pure lives that cater not to own sensuality, but our spirituality.

If we will just focus on these three steps, then we will be able to fight immorality with the greatest of success. If we neglect it, then sin crouches at the door, desiring to master us. There is much more on immorality in this series, but this should suffice us until the next lesson.