**“Repentant or Repugnant”**

*Being the Church –* 1st Corinthians 5

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As we study “Being the Church” we are asking God to show us how to be the church that honors and pleases Him and operates according to His Word.

 We are studying 1st Corinthians to help us do that.

Paul wrote the letter while he was in Ephesus to “the Church” he planted in Corinth, addressing some of the problems reported to him about what was happening back in Corinth.

This is an authoritative letter to “The Church”. “Church” is a translation of the Greek word “*ekklesia”*, which is defined as “an assembly” or “called-out ones.” In our study of “Being the Church” we can learn from this letter and address the same issues we see in our church.

**1 Cor. 4:20 *”For the Kingdom of God is not just a lot of talk; it is living by God’s power!”***

***Not just talk…***

***It’s LIVING by God’s Power!***

* Anyone can quote the Bible.
* Anyone can give a sermon.
* Anyone can talk about God and Jesus.

But it is not always representative of the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God is LIVING by GOD’S POWER.

*“Let’s make it our priority to Live in His Spirit and experience His Kingdom, and not just talk about it.”*

### This week’s chapter, 1st Corinthians 5 is an infamous chapter in this epistle because Paul deals very directly with specific sin that is going on, and being tolerated in the Corinthian church. This chapter and several of those that follow show that this church is in dire need of correction and repentance. What’s interesting is that Paul waits for (what we call) chapter 5 to deal with this issue in this letter. He spent the first 4 chapters encouraging them, warning them about divisions, and exhorting them to walk in the Spirit and not in their own resources.

### Also, in spite of the reputation they had for evil and tolerating sin, Paul began this letter with very positive and affirming words toward the Corinthian church;

*“5 For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge—****6****God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you”*

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*“7Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.****8****He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

**Now we see in this very short chapter, the issue that needs to be addressed.**

**1st Corinthians 5:1-13 “**It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father’s wife. **2**And you are proud! Shouldn’t you rather have gone into mourning and have put out of your fellowship the man who has been doing this? **3**For my part, even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. As one who is present with you in this way, I have already passed judgment in the name of our Lord Jesus on the one who has been doing this. **4**So when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, **5**hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.

**6**Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? **7**Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. **8**Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

**9**I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— **10**not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. **11**But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.

**12**What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? **13**God will judge those outside. “Expel the wicked person from among you.” < >

These words can come across as very harsh, condemning and merciless. It could seem that what Paul is saying is that anyone who is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler should be thrown out of the church, and handed over to Satan. In fact many puritanical churches through history have built their policies of legalism and church discipline predominantly from this chapter.

But if that were true it would be in direct contradiction to many other verses in the Bible that speak of God’s kindness, mercy, grace and forgiveness, including;

**Gal. 6:1** “If someone is caught up in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently.”

**Matt 18** - “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.”

**Rom. 2:4** “…God’s Kindness, leads us to repentance”

Either Paul is showing favoritism to some of the churches by offering them grace and mercy, while being legalistic and overly judgmental to the Corinthians, OR there is something more to this than we are seeing.

First let’s look at who he’s writing to. This is not about those on the outside, this is specifically directed to those who are “among you”.

This is intended to the group of believers at the core of the Corinthian church. Those that make up the leadership and most respected members.

When you study church dynamics. There is a common approach in observing people’s level of growth and participation in church.

**Crowd – Congregation – Core**

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Normally when someone joins a church, they are part of the “crowd”. In other words they have not yet fully committed themselves to that particular local body.

Once they decide that they want to be part of the church they become more involved and become a regular member of the “congregation”

As they grow in the areas of maturity and participation, they soon become those who regularly serve and take on leadership roles and become part of the “Core”.

 The idea is that all will move inward toward the center, as others continue to come in initially as part of the Crowd, then the Congregation and then the Core.

That’s how churches grow.

In the case of the church of Corinth who Paul was writing to. He was directing his letter to those at the core. Much of the letter was instruction for church leadership and guidelines for conducting worship and ministry. His language and fatherly instruction showed that he considered himself a leader of leaders. He made it clear that he was *not* writing to those outside the church, his message was specifically to those inside the church, particularly at the core of this church.

NOTE: This does not mean that the instructions and wisdom of the entire letter cannot be applied to everyone in all churches everywhere, but at certain times when Paul is writing in specifics, it helps to remember who he is specifically writing to.

**1st Cor. 1:2** “To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints.”

He is writing to whom he calls “to the church, specifically those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, and more particularly those who are called *to be* *saints.” (gr. hagios - consecrated to God, holy, sacred)*

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These are those at the Core of the Corinthian Church. What they said and did was of great consequence. Which is why Paul is so strict, direct and demanding.

What were the three main messages in this chapter?

There was very serious sin taking place (possibly incest) and it was not only tolerated, but celebrated. These people were proud about being accepting of a sin that was so bad, even godless people (pagans) would not tolerate it.

Paul expresses his extreme displeasure about not only the sin, but that those who are considered the spiritual leaders were not at all upset by this, in fact they were proud of it in some way. *(Maybe they took pride in being considered accepting, tolerant and liberal and not traditional or legalistic.)*

V. 5 “hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.” !?!?

This is a hotly debated verse in church circles. It often raises a lot of questions about church policy. It seems odd that it would be the practice of any church to “hand people over to Satan”.

I believe that the key to understanding this verse is found in something Paul revealed in *verse 1*. The unrepentant shameful sin that this man was engaging in, was something that - *“even pagans do not tolerate”.*

If that’s true, he was finding refuge in a church who were in effect protecting him from what the “pagans” might do to him if he was given over to them. It’s possible that a certain type of *“street justice”* would have occurred.

Paul says (V.4&5); *“when you are assembled…and the power of our Lord Jesus is present,****5****hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved…”*

This basically means, that if this person is unrepentant and determined to engage in this shameful act, it’s better that he do it among those under the influence of Satan, rather than among those seeking the presence of the Lord Jesus, even if he is suffers severe consequences in the flesh.

This could mean he is beaten, injured, or killed among the pagans, but hopefully that he faces severe consequence for his actions so that he recognizes the severity of his sin and turns from it.

V. 6 “Don’t you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough?

This is why the unrepentant sinner needed to be removed. When making Matzoh, you cannot have any yeast (or leaven) in the dough. If you do it is ruined, it becomes plain bread and is no longer Matzoh.

Yeast is a single-celled organism. When it comes in contact with dough, it eats up some of the carbohydrates, which are made up of sugar, and spits *(burps)* out carbon dioxide bubbles. That’s what makes bread rise. Once that happens, it is no longer Kosher for Passover. It also keeps multiplying and reproducing itself until it is baked. Yeast is symbolic of sin, which is why Paul uses it in this analogy.

In the case of the Corinthian church. Paul knew that this sin, and the tolerance of it would begin to multiply in others, unless it was stopped.

Also, as they “*were assembled…and the power of our Lord Jesus was present”. That’s very important, but that means* they would not experience the fullness of the blessing of what God had for them because this issue would quench the Spirit and taint the environment.

*Imagine trying to start a campfire on a cold night camping in the woods with some friends. Everyone is trying to find stuff to burn to put in the fire. Some found twigs, some found paper, a couple good logs, one even had some lighter fluid and matches, but one of the campers kept putting Potassium bicarbonate (fire extinguisher solution) on the fire you were trying to start. You’d probably never get it lit until you got rid of the Potassium bicarbonate (and perhaps the friend as well).*

But what about my original question? Doesn’t this action of dealing with sin seem to be in direct contradiction to other verses in the Bible that speak of God’s kindness, mercy, grace and forgiveness, including;

**Gal. 6:1** “If someone is caught up in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently.”

**Matt 18** - “Jesus answered, “I tell you, [to forgive] not seven times, but seventy-seven times.”

**Rom. 2:4** “…God’s Kindness, leads us to *repentance*”

When dealing with issues of sin, *repentance* is the key.

There is a big difference between a repentant heart and an unrepentant heart.

A sinner who defends their sin, is proud of it and actually does not consider it a sin – is unrepentant.

One who recognizes their sin, shows remorse, confesses it as a sin and asks forgiveness, is repentant.

The Greek word for repentance is Metanoia, the Biblical definition is “a change of mind”.

The change of mind will always result in a change of perspective and usually a change of behavior as well.

**The man who was engaged in the sin with his father’s wife in verse 1 remained repugnant not repentant.**

*\*\*Meaning, he not only continues in it, he felt there was nothing wrong with it.*

If he had been repentant than any of the verses we just read would have applied.

**Gal. 6:1** “If someone is caught up in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently.”

*(He would have been restored)*

**Matt 18** - “Jesus answered, “I tell you, [to forgive] not seven times, but seventy-seven times.”

(he would have asked for forgiveness and received it)

**Rom. 2:4** “…God’s Kindness, leads us to *repentance*”

*(he would have responded to God’s kindness (prevenient grace) and that would have led to his repentance and restoration.)*

God is not in the business of trying to catch people in their sins so that they can be thrown out of the church and handed over to Satan, He wants everyone to be delivered from their bondage, so they can be set free and fully experience the presence of the Lord Jesus in their lives and in their churches.

**2nd Peter 3:9** “The Lord…is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

Regardless of our sin, whether it’s something seemingly small or as shameful as that of the Corinthian man, God wants us to come to repentance so that he can forgive and restore us. That’s why Jesus died, and it’s what we remember when we take communion.

David, whose sin was even worse than that which we just read about, understood God’s mercy and forgiveness for those who come with a contrite heart. Let’s make his prayer, our prayer as we prepare our hearts…

**Psalm 51:17** “The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit,
A broken and a contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise.”